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Decolonising Preservice Teachers' Colonialist Thoughts in Higher Education Through Defamiliarisation as a Pedagogy

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Abstract

The social, political, and economic inequalities embedded and reflected in all social life in South Africa continue to shape the higher education landscape of the country. Calls for the higher education curricula in South Africa to be transformed under the guide of decolonisation requires primarily a reform of the colonising spaces in which teaching in higher education takes place. Using a case study at a university of technology that explicates teaching and learning through the use of creative illustrations as a form and means of defamiliarisation, the authors show how spaces can be created to facilitate deliberative engagement and contestation regarding instances of colonisation in higher education and society. The authors conclude that defamiliarisation should be considered a possible pedagogical technique in higher education as a way of deepening students' social, economic, political, and cultural awareness in relation to identity, language, and hierarchies of power amongst students and higher education educators.


Keywords: decolonisation, defamiliarisation, higher education, pedagogy, teacher education

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Introduction

The social, political, and economic inequalities embedded and reflected in social life in South Africa continue to shape the higher education landscape of the country. Racial classification, labour displacement, slavery, and industrialised exploitation have all formed and, in various forms, arguably continue to form the cornerstone of a Eurocentric agenda in which systems of repression and exploitation have exacerbated inequity and inequality in South Africa. This has, in turn, been further exacerbated for centuries, as Nkomo (2000, p. 49) posited, by a diverse array of curricula, educational philosophies, and practices whose context corresponds in essence with that of the respective colonial powers, and in line with European and British philosophers and educationalists. It was the intensifying conflicts taking place within, and reflecting, a deeply fragmented society—a product of systemic exclusion and marginalisation of the majorities under colonialist policies—that culminated and resulted in South Africa’s democratically elected government of 1994. One of the primary aims of the newly elected government was to transform both its inherited social and economic structure and its inherited apartheid education system, including its higher education system (Badat, 2010, p. 4).

In a study conducted on indigenous education in Queensland, Australia, Phillips and Whatman (2007, p. 3) argued that the process of decolonising any higher education curriculum requires, in the first instance, attending primarily to the reform of those colonising spaces in which such teaching takes place before any specific transformation of the curriculum itself is carried out. What Phillips and Whatman’s (2007) study signifies is that new understandings can only emerge out of educators’ resistance to existing canonised colonial education practices and curricula. Through “‘uneasy’ critique and self-critique” within cultural interfaces, the foundation of curricula reform and renewal is established in wider educational and indigenous community contexts (Phillips & Whatman, 2007, p. 13). By implication, for educators in South Africa to address the increasing claims of indigenous African knowledge systems (IKS) as a means of assessing and resisting or transforming a colonised curriculum may be underscored by their willingness to engage in both the curricula and their pedagogies critically, self-reflexively, and imaginatively.

We argue that decolonisation, in educational terms, can be considered to include not only the study of the local, but seeing the local alongside ideas, perspectives, and texts from other continents, and would include introducing, or further exploring, participatory pedagogy and developing students’ senses of agency. In this process outdated, leftover colonisation-related institutional barriers to learning are addressed, and possible futures co-envisioned. This would involve a paradigm shift at the educational preservice stage and, in order to do this, we argue in favour of defamiliarisation as a means of transforming and renewing curricula in higher education.

In light of the aforementioned, we first explore how defamiliarisation as a teaching method could be used in a process of beginning to decolonise higher education curricula in South Africa and, second, the possible ways in which defamiliarisation may expand preservice educators’ critical perspectives. By way of a disclaimer, this article does not address the colonised aspects of the higher education policy in South Africa and institutional space but, instead, explores the interactive space, that is, what Gutierrez (2008, p. 152) referred to as a “third space,” a space which can, to some degree, be shaped by the participants in the curriculum defamiliarisation process.

Decolonisation in South African Higher Education

The South African government’s aim in redressing the social injustices inherited from the previous regime’s segregationist Christian national education system and ideology is manifested in its agenda of promulgation of numerous economic policies such as the Reconstruction and Development Programme of 1994, Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy of 1996, Accelerated Shared

Growth Initiative of South Africa of 2006, New Growth Path of 2010, and the recent National Development Plan of 2011, together with such education policies as the White Paper of 1996 (Department of Education), the South African Schools Act of 1996, and the Higher Education Act of 1997. Of specific interest to the current article is the White Paper of 1997 (Department of Education), which directed the state and its institutions towards reaching its social imperatives and goals in and through higher education (Badat, 2010, p. 4). This was premised on the assumption that the state and its social institutions' (universities, schools, and colleges) progressive substantive realisation would contribute immeasurably to the transformation and development of all education, including higher education, and thus to society (Badat, 2010, p. 5).

In its preamble, the Constitution of South Africa committed the state and its institutions to asserting the values of human dignity, equality, the advancement of human rights, freedom, nonsexism, and nonracialism (1996, p. 9). If it is a given that education institutions are the cornerstone of a democratic society for all citizens of a country, the Constitution of 1996 explicitly enshrined this by stating that all individuals are legally entitled to quality education irrespective of their race, religion, ethnicity, and culture. However, in spite of the enshrinement of these rights, the majority of the population remain systemically marginalised more than 20 years after the advent of democracy—in a system that, despite guaranteeing all citizens the right to equal and quality education, fails to deliver on these constitutional promises (Waghid & Oliver, 2017).

In light of the above, the Higher Education Act of 1997 declared the government's intentionality within higher education: first, redressing past discrimination, and ensuring representivity and equal access; second, providing optimal opportunities for learning and for the cultivation of knowledge; third, respect for, and the encouragement of, democracy, academic liberty, freedom of speech and expression, creativity, scholarship, and research; fourth, the pursuit of excellence, and the promotion of the full realisation of the potential of every student and employee, as well as a tolerance of ideas and an appreciation of diversity; fifth, responding to the needs of the population and of the communities served by the institutions; sixth, contributing to the advancement of all forms of knowledge and scholarship, in keeping with international best practices of academic quality; last, for higher education institutions to enjoy freedom and autonomy in their relationship with the state within the context of public accountability and the national need for advanced skills and scientific knowledge (pp. 1–2).

Despite the state's aspirations in transforming higher education, Le Grange (2016, p. 1) posited that impoverished university students are burdened in multiple ways: they are academically underprepared, financially hampered, and for some the culture of the university is significantly foreign. In fact, Le Grange (2016) argued, South African universities may be considered, and experienced by many students as, foreign institutions within an African context, largely, it may be argued, due to the attachment of these universities to neocolonialism. For instance, university research systems, according to Jacobs and Hellström (in Le Grange, 2014, pp. 1283–1284), have undergone three major developments over the last three decades: the capitalisation of knowledge, the shift from science systems to global networks, and the integration of academic labour into the knowledge economy. The need to Africanise and decolonise higher education, as Pillay (2015) postulated, is certainly warranted in addressing epistemic violence of colonial thought and colonial knowledge, meaning that African texts and perspectives are conspicuously absent in higher education curricula.

Defamiliarisation as a Pedagogy

In the context of, and in response to, the call for the decolonisation of knowledge, and of curriculum and pedagogy, we shift our attention to defamiliarisation as pedagogy. Defamiliarisation, as suggested in the early 20th century by Russian formalist Victor Shklovskij (1917/1965), would currently be taken

to mean engaging students in a particular heightened, critical and inclusive or participatory way in the study of, for instance, an African text (with a key social issue, one that is possibly relevant to students' own lives and experiences, addressed), in tandem with a text from another country's context which deals with similar issues and experiences—an idea taken up later by Phillips and Whatman (2007). Shklovskij (1965, p. 13) claimed that over time our perceptions of familiar, everyday situations become "stale, blunted, and automatised." Shklovskij (1965, p. 13) explained thus: "After we see an object several times, we begin to recognise it. The object is in front of us and we know about it, but we do not see it—hence we cannot say anything significant about it."

In light of this "automatisation," Shklovskij (1965, p. 2) postulated that "art removes objects from the automatism of perception in several ways." Shklovskij (1965), drawing on the seminal thoughts of Tolstoy (1897), submitted that using artistic techniques (in education) may assist one in making the familiar seem "strange." What Tolstoy (1897, as cited in Shklovskij, 1965, p. 3) inferred, is that for one to make the familiar seem strange is not to name the familiar object, "but instead describe an object as if [one] were seeing it for the first time." Using this lens, we argue that, in the main, the need to employ defamiliarising techniques in higher education may assist higher education educators in looking at familiar objects or texts with an exceptionally high level of awareness (Kaomea, 2014, p. 15). Having one's habitual response to the familiar in some way refreshed, or even subverted, may further assist one in finding more profound, complex, and nuanced meanings behind and within familiar texts, thus rendering such texts more consciously perceptible, not only to students, but also to higher education educators (Shklovskij, 1965).

According to this concept, for higher educational reform, defamiliarisation as a pedagogy would mean teaching, or guiding, students to look beyond dominant versions of history and entrenched or invested canons and move the focus towards an awareness of what is, or has been, omitted, not represented, and not accounted for, and relating to previously marginalised cultures and experiences. More specifically, one would broadly define this as the artistic technique of presenting to audiences common things in an unfamiliar or strange way. By implication, this would or could enhance one's perceptions of the familiar; more specifically, it could enable students to recognise cultural phenomena such as literary texts, or languages per se for that matter, as bricolage, which, in this instance, refers to translanguaging. What translanguaging denotes is the process of making do with the linguistic resources at hand, and tinkering the bits together, in the form of code mixing, code meshing and code switching all rolled into one.

Block and Corona (2014, p. 39) explained how "taking on board inter-categorical and intra-categorical complexity, for instance, allows us to see beyond the cardboard cut-out identities ascribed," to more nuanced conceptions of identity—instances of defamiliarisation. More specifically, defamiliarisation as a pedagogy through nexus (derived from *nectere* in Latin, which means to bind or connect), refers to a means of connection between members of a group or things in a series, a link, or a bond (Benvanot, 2015, p. 19). We aver that the term nexus, as an instance of defamiliarisation, is useful in relation to literacy and learning in general in that it indicates how literacy activities can act as a social nexus to develop a web of social relations via language. Literacy thrives when a state of connectedness—or nexus—of social relations among individuals, households, communities, and social institutions is forged, nurtured, and sustained (Benvanot, 2015, p. 12). Benvanot (2015) explained how a literacy nexus enables students to become part of a developing community and to integrate the public, private, and individual spheres of life with each other. In South Africa, with its history of oppression and superimposed past division and fracture along ethnic lines, these aims are particularly pertinent because it is well known that racial and social divides continue to govern our national and provincial school systems, and society as a whole.

Block and Corona regarded social class as a key construct and key mediator of our life experience (2014, p. 35):

Class always intersects with a long list of identity dimensions, such as gender, ethnicity, race, nationality, language and so forth. Indeed, it is one of the challenges of class-based research today, to work out exactly how these different identity inscriptions interact with class.

In light of Block and Corona's (2014) intersectional view, we submit that the principle of defamiliarisation as a pedagogy is thus not, in simplistic terms, African versus other, but could instead be described as an acute awareness of intersectionality (conversations about class, culture, gender, and race, across the globe and across these identity categories). Therefore, we maintain that defamiliarisation as a pedagogy shares congruences with the notion of the African concept ubuntu or humanness. Ubuntu, as Sindane (1994, pp. 8–9) suggested, "inspires us to expose ourselves to others, to encounter the difference of their humanness so as to inform and enrich our own." In this regard, ubuntu, like defamiliarisation, expounds the communal embeddedness and connectedness of a person to other persons (Higgs, 2003, p. 13). We suggest that this aspect of defamiliarisation is, or can be, dealt with in practice by opening up a variety of hitherto well-structured discursive spaces in which meaning is negotiated—in order to encourage equitable participation and inclusivity in higher education.

Defamiliarisation as an Interpretive Methodology

Shklovskij (1965, p. 9) claimed that

an image is not a permanent referent for those mutable complexities of life which are revealed through it, its purpose is not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object—it creates a vision of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it.

Defamiliarisation as an interpretive methodology therefore functions as a means of provoking one's thoughts by making the familiar strange and ambiguous in order to critically examine and uncover the hidden (social) meanings of students' social and cultural experiences of a colonised curriculum (Scholl, Janssen, Wimmer, Moe, & Flak, 2012, p. 69).

Defamiliarisation stems from both critical theory and literary theory of language that aims to disrupt the social practices that language underscores. There is an affinity between defamiliarisation and critical theory on the basis that literacy and conscientisation, or consciousness raising for transformative change, are two of the prominent aspects of critical theory (Kincheloe, 2007, p. 252). Freire (2005, p. 35) argued that literacy education could be used either for liberation or for domestication, which means that domesticating literacies teach literacy from the point of view or position of superior power, inviting false communication that preserves the status quo. We infer that defamiliarisation as an interpretive methodology, drawing on critical theory, uses consciousness raising through problem posing to oppose dominant power and transform oppressive situations, in other words, instances of colonisation (Freire, 1995, p. 8). Power, as Waghid (2014) postulated, furthermore needs to be decentralised to afford people the opportunity to make their own decisions in the pursuit of social justice. Defamiliarisation, with its roots in critical theory, may therefore serve to foster a critical capacity in students and in higher education educators as a way of enabling them, together, to resist oppressive or colonised power.

In light of the above mentioned, what we infer is that defamiliarisation may be a way of transforming the unequal power relations that influence people's social practices into more equitable relations amongst them (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 64). And as an interpretive methodology, it may be used in a process of critically interpreting and explaining social problems in order to challenge these unequal relations of power and dominance in a colonised society. This is because defamiliarisation functions in such a way as to enable students and educators to look beyond familiar, dominant narratives and, in so doing, cultivating in themselves and others critical reflection and deconstruction of taken-for-granted perceptions whilst creating spaces for students to have their voices heard within the higher education decolonised spectrum.

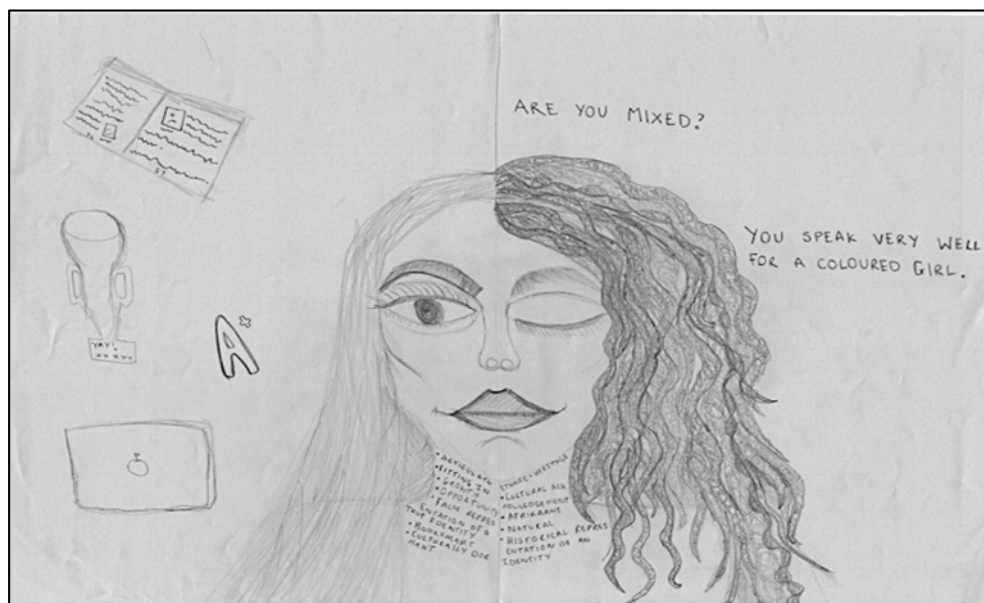
In this article, through a process and pedagogy of defamiliarisation, preservice educators' illustrations as Africans being taught in the English language as the medium of communication within a South African context, are critically examined as a means of looking beyond the initial impressions of the familiar text. In this regard, defamiliarisation as an interpretive research methodology is used to analyse critically the taken-for-granted perspectives on the preservice teacher education curriculum and, in the process, seeing the familiar rendered as strange. The article describes the ways in which the defamiliarisation activity has been presented to the students with the purpose of enhancing their critical awareness of the practices of defamiliarisation to elicit a critical response and, hopefully, to awaken their potential for teaching and learning in a critical, deliberative, and self-reflexive way—that is, learning together. It is hoped that learning about, and through a process of, defamiliarisation will encourage them to think and act positively towards the achievement of societal change and the process of transforming their colonised thoughts.

The specifics of the defamiliarisation activity that was designed by us entailed a creative illustration in which each individual student was required to illustrate her or his experiences of being taught in the English language as the medium of instruction at the university. Students were asked to submit to us their individual illustrations of how they experienced defamiliarisation in terms of content, mode of presentation, and classroom interaction, through a process of focusing on the experience of personal gain, or lack of benefit from the experience. This was followed by face-to-face focus group discussions of the creative illustrations with the two of us. The purpose of the discussion was to elicit higher cognitive responses to ascertain the students' lived experiences as African students within the decolonised spectrum. We thought that using focus group interviews with these preservice educators could further serve as a means of developing a critical awareness of their social and cultural experiences of being taught in the English language as the medium of communication at the university. The students' illustrations were analysed using inductive content analysis through the Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), Atlas.ti.

The sample population of this study was formed by the cohort of third-year Bachelor of Education, further education and training (FET) students. Through purposive sampling, the sample selection was made on the basis of recruiting participants who indicated their preference for, or interest in, contributing to the development of defamiliarisation activities in the broader South African education community. The sample population who indicated their willingness to participate in the project were ($n = 25$) students which constituted a total number of ($n = 5$) focus groups. Data were captured by audio recordings of students' focus group interviews with the two of us. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim for analysis. Care was taken to ensure that data were collected exclusively from participants who had signed and submitted informed consent forms. The participants were informed in class that their participation was voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. Also, ethical clearance was acquired from the faculty's ethics research committee, adhering to the ethical considerations of the study.

In this section, we present the key findings from our analyses of a sample of students' creative illustrations, together with the insightful comments from the focus group interviews with these selected students. This section also includes images of the illustrations from the sample of students selected.

Image 1 is an illustration done by Student A whose home language is English. Student A identifies herself as a young female depicted with two contrasting sides of herself within society as confirmed by her comments in the focus group interview:



It's [that is, the image] showing the two different sides to who I am as a person and I think and it represents a lot of other people.

Image 1 is portrayed as a representation of Student A's understanding of reality and a communication of her emotion within the two distinct contexts that she happens to find herself. In the one context, and on the left side of the young woman's face, is a representation of her identity within a particular social context in which the aesthetic nature of beauty, accompanied with makeup and light straight hair are illustrated. Student A's illustration of English as her home language is associated with words and phrases such as "articulate," "growth," "fitting in," and "book smart," which, in the illustration, are also accompanied with images of an award, an academic distinction, and a key which we infer to

be Student A's symbolic representation of the English language. This is further substantiated in a focus group interview with Student A:

So on the academic side where you kind of fit in with everybody, you know, you've got—okay I don't get As often, but anyway [laughter] . . . but you know, easier to use technology now because the schooling that I got, I was very advanced in terms of using technology, and using the Internet, I had lots of resources, trophies also, winning awards—I didn't do too much, and reading, so every day, and obviously your knowledge comes from books and because of that people kind of have this perception that you're very intelligent because of the way you speak, and the background that you have, you've got a knowledge of books.

What is interesting to note in the illustration are the phrases, “false representation of a true identity” and “culturally dormant.” The student may have used these words to signify how she sees herself falsely portrayed, either within her past academic secondary schooling, or within certain schools where she has served as a student teacher. The latter is confirmed by the student's comments in the focus group interview:

[So] on the one side you can see it's, you know, pretty make up and straight hair, and on the other side it's ethnic hair, totally natural.

In light of the aforementioned, we affirm that Student A's false representation of her identity, in combination with the aesthetic beauty, dialect, and academic merit, triggered a cognitive and social awareness of how she is portrayed in social contexts outside of the educational context. We infer that the right side of the young woman's face is represented as “natural beauty.” This is corroborated with words such as “natural,” “cultural acknowledgement,” and “ethnic heritage.” Two underlying questions are included on the right of the woman's face, namely, “are you mixed?” and “you speak very well for a coloured girl.” Student A may have used these questions to create an awareness of how she is perceived and confronted in her social context outside of the school due to the distinct identifying dialect that she may have developed as a result of her academic schooling career, which may be considered as “non-coloured” or associated with “whiteness.” This is vindicated by Student A's comments in the focus group interview:

As a coloured woman in South Africa, and especially in education, people assume that as soon as you are technical or you have some sort of mastery over the English language, that you couldn't possibly be from the same heritage as somebody else who is coloured but doesn't speak the same as you.

What emerges from this interpretation of the student's illustration is that the defamiliarising Image 1 created the space necessary for Student A to manifest her voice and emotion substantively, which is predominantly considered as a social construction (Abu-Lughod & Lutz, 1990; Dewey, 1922; Lasky, 2005; White, 1993). This is confirmed by Students A, G, K, and Q on their experiences of the defamiliarisation activity in their respective focus group interviews:

It challenged me to express myself in a way that I was not used to doing. I felt that doing this activity basically created a platform. (Student A)

My experience was that it required me to almost, to almost think about my thoughts—I think about what, how I see things, and what feelings do I have, and how I want the questions answered, or if I want the questions answered. It was like going through my

psyche and thinking, okay I have so much questions to ask, but who would I ask, it would be like some reflection—do I ask society, do I ask somebody, do I ask people. (Student G)

To me it was quite exciting. I know what to do, I know exactly what to do, but when at times I started to question because there I thought okay, drawing pictures without anything in words and phrases in your drawing, and trying to draw the picture so I can look at the picture and then understand. So it was a challenge but something that gave me lots of insight. (Student K)

I think it was also a good reflection for myself like to actually reevaluate what it is that I think of myself or see myself in this profession also, so I think that's why I drew, like a pathway, to explain that that was basically my journey of where I came from. Like we see—especially in English, it's very stagnant, we do everything according to the status quo, so as teachers you also need to evolve with the times that are changing. So you can think you're good by remembering that but you have to evolve also. (Student Q)

Student A's experience of various emotions through her illustration is inextricably interconnected, or intersects, with belief, context, culture, and power (Lasky, 2000). Defamiliarising Image 1 assisted Student A in further sharing in the focus group discussions a nuanced understanding of her identity within her social and cultural contexts. We infer from Image 1 that having afforded Student A the means of expressing and exploring her identity through illustrations, represented a means through which others (university students) could be made aware of Student A's sociocultural context and, more importantly, the complexities and nuances of her identity. This is vindicated by Student I and C's comments in the focus group interviews, respectively, regarding their experiences of illustrating as part of the defamiliarisation activity:

I felt that this er . . . helps your educators to come closer to understanding the students, the way we express ourselves reflects our psychology or psyche. So, if you have a drummed-up picture, if you have a simple picture, it reflects—sometimes reflects certain psychological flaws or benefits. (Student I)

I get to express myself and show you what I actually think. And oh, not only that, you get to in a way see my background and how I view the world. So I think it's different in that you get to see the other person's perceptive in drawing how they see things. (Student C)

What may come across as familiar to others (university students)—that is, one's identity in society—is a mere surface representation of what others perceive at face value without taking into consideration the social contexts that lead to the development of one's dialect, for instance. This is due to the fact that, according to Wertsch, Tulviste, and Hagstrom (1993), societies' ideologies and beliefs are always shaped by the cultural, historical, and social structures that are reflected in mediational tools such as art, language, literature, media, and technology. Hence, defamiliarising Student A's illustrations may have afforded her the means to disrupt her own thoughts regarding the often negative perceptions of herself and others within her social and cultural context, outside of her education context, regarding her distinctive dialect—as confirmed in her comments in the focus group interview:

[It takes you] out of your comfort zone, you [are] then able to come empathise with people who are out of their comfort zones and their pasts. (Student A)

This form of disruption is further corroborated by other students in the focus group interviews:

I would think that, uhm, with these exercises it would force us to think. Where, uhm, like for example if you do an essay you just start writing. Because you're not actually thinking

about the, what you're doing. But being—having to draw something, you needed to think about . . . it. (Student E)

I had to do something which I've never really done before and something that I'm not used to expecting, and then I think what it is, it was the emotional aspect of certain things. (Student I)

Uhm, it's interesting to be finding out different things about yourself as you're drawing, things that you never knew you'd be comfortable in saying so that's what I discovered about myself and I learned things about myself that I never knew before I did this so. (Student L)

First of all, like we were caught off guard, so like we didn't have time to brainstorm, which is something good because we're so used to our comfort zones. So now they suddenly give us a blank canvas and say do whatever you want to, and so I say why, what do I have to do, what's what the criteria, do I have to do this, is this a test? So I think we all live in a box. As well, our standard, what things should be like. (Student R)

Moreover, we aver that the illustration assisted Student A in critically reflecting on the need to disrupt her thoughts regarding the assimilation of her identity into the dominant western ideals of her school context.

Image 2: Student B

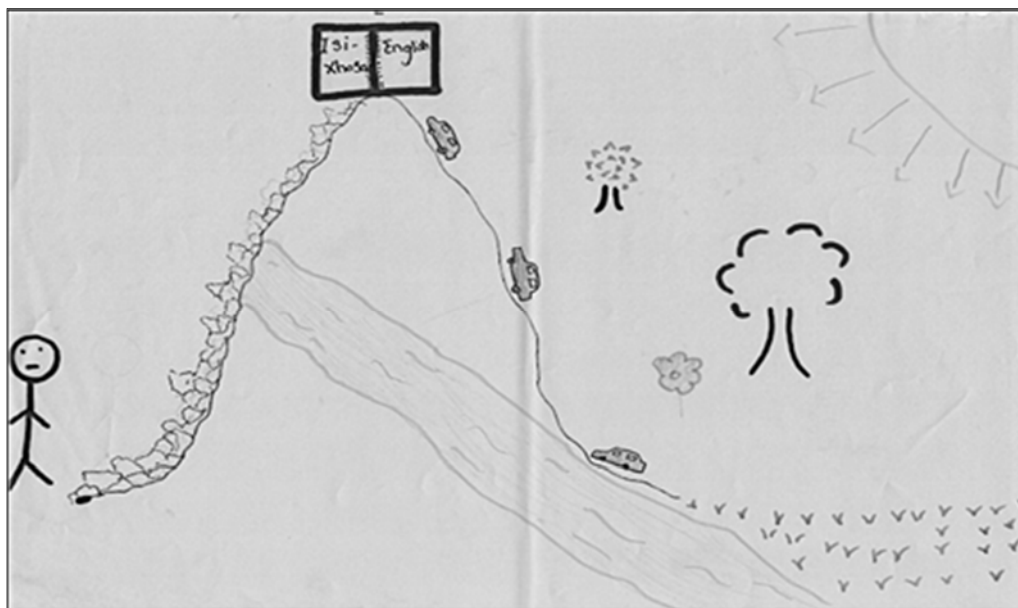
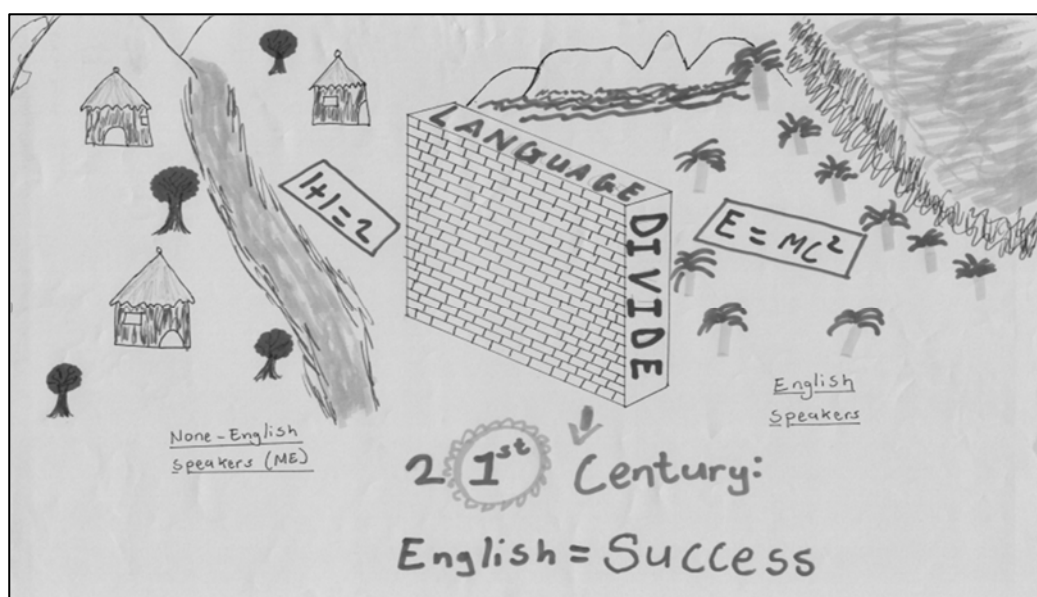


Image 3: Student C



Images 2 and 3 are illustrations done by Students B and C, whose home language is isiXhosa. In both images, Students B and C depict a barrier that, for them, hinders the attainment of success in contemporary society. In Image 2, the barrier to success is represented by a steep mountain for an individual (Student B) to climb uphill, accompanied with the words “isiXhosa” found on the left side of the mountain, and “English” found on the right side of the mountain. In Image 3, the physical barrier is represented by a brick wall accompanied by the words “language” and “divide.” Both Images 2 and 3 illuminate the students’ interpretations of the English language as a barrier to success, with the intention of communicating three contrasting and powerful messages. We infer the first message in terms of Student B and C’s elucidation of a colonialist construction of contemporary society, in that success is very much dependent on being attuned to a Western ideology according to which one must acquire an income to live a good life, accompanied with the desire for material wealth—which in Image 2 is represented by motor vehicles, and in Image 3 by a beach resort in an affluent area. Hence, from both images, it can be inferred that success is equated to economic and social wellbeing. This interpretation is further confirmed by Students B and C in a focus group interview:

[On] the other side, everything looks nice, the sun and trees and everything is green and nice, and there are hearts going up, which shows that people who knew English from a very young age, and they speak it every day, it’s easier for them when it comes to English. (Student B)

English [is considered] the course to success, which is the mind-set that we have . . . when I look at the people that were born speaking English, or born into the English culture, and look at them, and then they would seem [to me] privileged, hence why you see on one side of the wall there’s—you see the beach, and then there’s trees, it’s all beautiful. (Student C)

A second interpretation of Images 2 and 3 is that the two students have different understandings of their own identities. In Image 2, Student B sees herself as an isolated individual, which resonates with a kind of neoliberal Western ideology that determines one’s success as being very much dependent on the unique characteristics of the individual, as Higgs (2003) contended. This is further vindicated by Student B’s comments in the focus group interview:

So in my drawing it shows a picture of me and the things that I go through and how hard it is for me as I grew up speaking Xhosa throughout. So now I have to speak English and everything is in English, so here I have a picture of myself and it shows how hard it's been for me. And so I have a mountain, and here there are stones on the side, which shows that it hasn't been an easy journey.

The student's use of the words "myself," "I," and "me" positions herself as an "isolated" individual who faced challenges in her educational context from early childhood to adulthood due to her perpetual struggle in adapting to the English language in her academic schooling. The student's success in her academic schooling is very much linked to her inherent drive to academic success as a result of her characteristics as an "atomistic being."

In stark contrast to Image 2, Student C in Image 3 sees himself embedded within his own society as part of a group, which resonates with Mbiti's (1970, p. 108) elucidation of ubuntu within a communitarian understanding of the individual in African society in that "whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group and [that] whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual." In other words, it is the individual's drive to contribute to his or her economic and social well-being that would be to the betterment of his or her community. More specifically, it is the desire to better his or her own societal conditions and that of the community that drives him or her towards a perpetual struggle for the attainment of education as a result of the language barrier that often marginalises individuals whose mother tongue language is not English. This is confirmed in Student C's comments in the focus group interview:

It's easier for you to learn things because most—in education especially, things are taught in English, so it's easier for you to understand that.

The student further associates contemporary South African society's use of English as perpetuating a constant struggle for non-English speaking individuals in attaining success in society. This is confirmed by Student C's comments:

While on the other side [of the brick wall] it's more rural and the mathematical equation that side, this one is 2 meaning that you don't get . . . for you to get an education you need to work harder, and the education that you do get, you must struggle to get.

Student C uses the term "struggle" as a means of resisting the status quo of contemporary society through the English language as a means of advancing his economic and social wellbeing for the betterment of himself and his community. A third interpretation is that, in uncovering the hidden meaning behind Image 3, language is depicted as a barrier that excludes non-isiXhosa speaking individuals from experiencing the richness of African culture. Higgs and van Niekerk (2002, p. 42) purported that if (higher education) educators could start with the indigenous knowledge systems that provide the framework for their students' initial experiences, then (university) students would be encouraged to draw on their cultural practices and daily experiences as they negotiate new situations. Hence, defamiliarisation in this study as a pedagogical technique could be said to have assisted both Students B and C in depicting their lived experiences within the contexts that they are situated. Therefore, defamiliarising Student B and Student C's illustrations serves as a means through which we were able to ascertain those students' interpretations of both a colonialist identity and culture within contemporary South African society. Through defamiliarising Images 2 and 3, we infer that the two students' illustrations served as a means of critically self-reflecting on their own contexts within the discourse of culture, language, and power in a self-reflexive manner (Hooks, 2003). The latter is confirmed by Student C's comments in the focus group interview:

As soon as you can speak English and you are fluent in English, people expect you to be smart, or they have the idea that you are smart in some or other way. So being in a tertiary institution, when I look at other people, this is what I see, when I look at myself this is what I see on that side.

In other words, having integrated defamiliarisation through such a pedagogy and in this research study, afforded Students B and C a means to disrupt their own colonialist constructions of identity in which language, culture, and race are inextricably avoided among higher education educators and students in some higher education settings.

Image 4: Student D

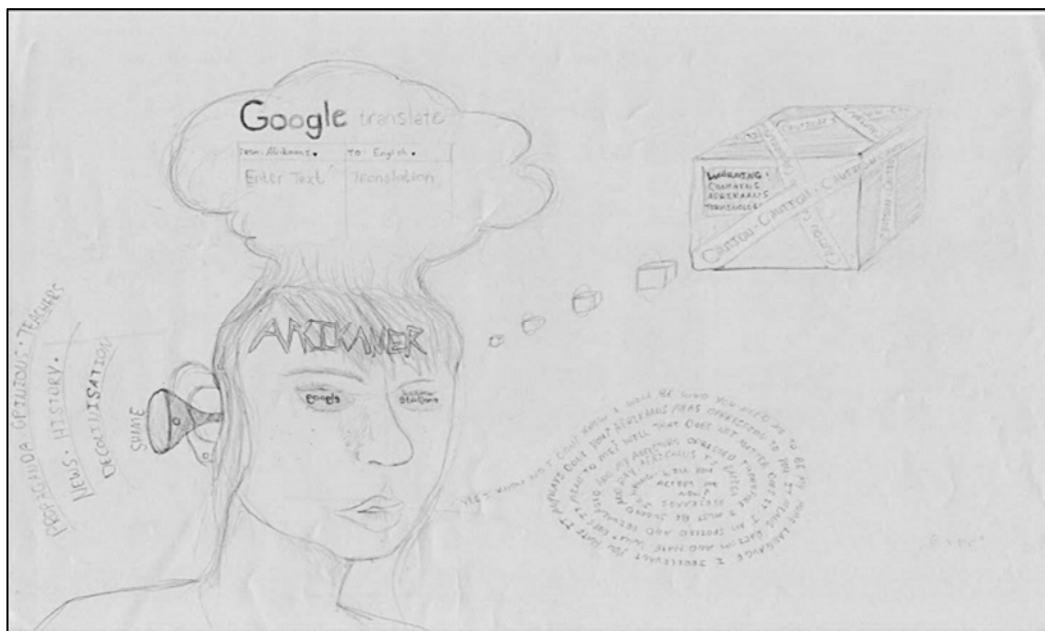


Image 4 is illustrated by Student D whose home language is Afrikaans. We infer four interpretations from Image 4. First, in the image Student D reflects on her experiences of language translation from English to Afrikaans, and from Afrikaans to English. This process and experience is portrayed as an internal struggle depicted by the student's illustration of a mushroom cloud. This is confirmed by Student D in a focus group interview:

So, I started with just a rough sketch of myself, and then I just thought of how many times in a day I have to use Google Translate to translate, not only from English to Afrikaans, but Afrikaans to English.

Second, in Image 4, the word "Afrikaner" is placed above the mushroom cloud in the image of the woman (Student D) which, when uncovering the hidden meaning behind the image may either signify how she (Student D) identifies herself in society, how society has "branded" her, or how she sees herself having been branded in society. Third, the thoughts of the woman in Image 4 depict an enclosed box with the sentence, "Warning Contains Afrikaans Terminology," and the word "Caution," which are used across the box as a means of creating a conscious alertness for Student D not to use Afrikaans terminology perhaps in the predominantly isiXhosa or English context that she finds herself in at the university. This is further corroborated by Student D's view or perception of this in a focus group interview:

So, my language [Afrikaans], I feel it is kind of like, when somebody speaks Afrikaans in a class, you get this uncomfortable feeling because, oh the people are going to get so angry because they're speaking Afrikaans, stop speaking Afrikaans. As Afrikaans is associated with apartheid era. (Student D)

The discomfort that Student D experiences is due to the fact that her experience of society's perception of Afrikaans is associated with the legacy of apartheid. In this regard, standard Afrikaans as a language is associated with colonialism in the minds of many nonwhite and non-Afrikaans speaking university students. Much of Student D's perception of how the Afrikaans language is portrayed, or perceived by others, is further linked to how she illustrates herself in the image as a "white Afrikaner" student. This is further corroborated in the focus group interview in which she explicates the following:

I am one of two noncoloured girls in the hostel, beyond black girls, you know, you have to tread on a fine line, and we are constant, I constantly get the feeling like I am judged for being the colour that I am, you know. [Students] just assume I am privileged, and get what I want and the language plays a big role in that. (Student D)

Certainly, the stigmatisation displayed towards the Afrikaans language in the mind of Student D is rooted in historical, political, and cultural significances in South African society. This is despite the fact that English is also considered a colonialist language. Fourth, Image 4 further indicates that the rhetoric around decolonisation is filtered down to students through "teachers," the "news," and "history." Student D in Image 4 uses the words "propaganda" and "opinion," which may suggest that, as a student, she is not able to express herself in and through her thoughts, and that much of the rhetoric regarding decolonisation emanating from teachers, the news, and the subject history in South Africa influences her opinion. This is explicated in the focus group interview with Student D:

Oh this is the type of stuff that influences you. Propaganda, opinions, teachers, news, history, decolonisation. It is basically like, what part of what you are saying is actually your own thoughts, you know, because not only do you have teachers and people telling you that this is wrong. You have either a teacher telling you that is wrong, but you don't really have the opportunity to express what you really think. You're just constantly been influenced by opinions of others, to formulate what you must say.

The above view, is further corroborated in Image 4 where the words "oppression" and "oppressed" can be seen being produced in the speech of the woman. Taking into consideration the fact that Student D was required to illustrate her interpretation as an African student learning in an English language as the medium of communication, Image 4 denotes a contrasting picture to Images 1, 2, and 3. Much of Image 4 delineates Student D's experiences in relation to the social, cultural, and historical underpinnings of contemporary South African society. Although Student D emphasises the struggle that she has with English terminology, the image overwhelmingly and lucidly depicts the association of the Afrikaans language with colonialism and oppression. We aver that, only if we are able to afford higher education students the means to critically reflect on their experiences of language use in society, are we then able to develop a curriculum that would be more attuned and acceptable to all South Africans, irrespective of race, religion, ethnicity, and culture, while taking into consideration the need to decolonise both university students' perceptions regarding language, history, and culture. Student D in this pedagogical activity and research study within a higher education context was afforded the third space, as Gutierrez (2008, p. 152) contended. This was a space in which she could illustrate her lived experiences as a white female Afrikaans speaking student in an English and isiXhosa speaking context, and represents a means by which Student D was able to share, through a visual representation a stereotypical misinterpretation on the part of many university students, of language, race, identity, and culture coloured by colonialism.

Discussion

From our interpretation of the data, it is clear that defamiliarisation as a teaching method assisted the students—and us as educators—in decolonising our thoughts and perceptions in the higher education context. Furthermore, we confirm from the data that defamiliarisation as a pedagogical technique succeeded in expanding the preservice educators' critical perspectives. We now offer our insights on the implications of this research on practices in higher education.

First, it is clear that the creative illustrations as a form of defamiliarisation created spaces necessary for the sample students to articulate their voices and emotions, which are considered a social construction (Abu-Lughod & Lutz, 1990; Dewey, 1922; Lasky, 2005; White, 1993), inextricably connected with belief, context, culture, identity, and power, as Lasky (2000) posited. In this regard, the creative illustrations were used as a means through which the students were able to explore and express their identities within their sociocultural contexts. We infer that this defamiliarisation conscientised the students through a process of problem posing, which was found to assist them in a process of becoming aware of, and consciously opposing dominant power, and in turn transforming oppressive situations, as Freire (1995, p. 8) submitted. Therefore, we consider that defamiliarisation in this study was able to begin to develop and foster a critical capacity in the students as a way of enabling them to resist the oppressive or colonised spaces that they encounter in both higher education and in society. The meanings that they constructed in language and in visual communication can be seen as a way in which these and other university students can be presented with the means of expressing their lived experiences of a colonised society. Moreover, we consider that the making of the illustrations offered the students, together with the higher education educators—in what should be seen as a collaborative process and pedagogy—opportunities for deriving a number of possible understandings of decolonisation in higher education.

Second, the creative illustrations afforded the sample students the means to disrupt their own thoughts regarding the often negative perceptions—their own and others—that some of the sample students (A and D) are faced with in their social and cultural context inside and outside of their school or university contexts. We aver that the process of making the illustrations, and then discussing them, assisted the sample students in critically reflecting on the need to disrupt their own thoughts regarding the assimilation of their (socially constructed, deficit) identities into the dominant Western ideals of society. Therefore, we maintain that defamiliarisation, as commensurate with ubuntu, encouraged and inspired the students to expose themselves to others (students in the class) and, in so doing, to encounter the difference and sameness of their humanness with others, thus informing and enriching their own humanity, as Sindane (1994, pp. 8–9) postulated. Therefore, we saw the defamiliarisation process in terms of expounding the communal embeddedness and connectedness of the students to each, other as Higgs (2003, p. 13) claimed. We suggest that this aspect of defamiliarisation has the potential to open up a variety of well-structured discursive spaces in higher education, spaces in which meaning can be negotiated with the purpose of encouraging equitable participation and inclusivity in higher education contexts.

Third, defamiliarising the sample students' (A, B, C, and D) creative illustrations served as a means by which we were able to explore and ascertain the sample students' interpretations of a colonialist identity and culture within contemporary South African society. We would claim that creative illustrations have the potential to serve as a means for university students to allow themselves to be open to critically self-reflecting on their own contexts within the discourse of culture, language, and power in a self-reflexive manner as hooks (2003) described this process. Moreover, we argue that defamiliarisation holds the possibility of affording university students the means to disrupt their own colonialist constructions of identity in which language, culture, and race are inextricably avoided in higher education settings. Through a process of "de-automatisation," where "art removes objects from

the automatism of perception in several ways” as Shklovskij (1965, p. 2) postulated, we argue that, having university students’ habitual responses to the familiar in some way refreshed, or even subverted, may further assist university students in finding more profound, complex, and nuanced meanings within and behind familiar texts. Through de-automatisation as we infer, such texts would be rendered more consciously perceptible not only to students, but also to their higher education educators.

Thus, we venture to claim that defamiliarisation can contribute positively towards decolonising students’ thoughts in higher education. We propose the need for teaching in higher education to include defamiliarisation as a pedagogical technique and, in so doing, assisting in cultivating equitable spaces for both students and higher education educators to decolonise the curriculum at universities substantively. More specifically, teaching in higher education through defamiliarisation holds the potential to cultivate in university students and higher education educators the capabilities to look at colonisation in society from a defamiliarised perspective with the desired aim of cultivating inclusivity and diversity. In this way, it is hoped that defamiliarisation would directly impact social and educational change in higher education. We suggest that defamiliarisation should always be considered an apposite pedagogical technique in higher education as a way of deepening students’ and higher education educators’ social, economic, political, and cultural awareness in relation to identity and power. This is due to the fact that cultural understandings, as espoused by Waghid (2016), have some affinity to people’s expanded political awareness and intellectual growth and alertness. Moreover, if university students’ capacities for learning and for critical reflection are cultivated through forms of defamiliarisation that highlight instances of colonialism, the possibility exists that higher education contexts can be shifted towards a more decolonised spectrum.

Concluding Remarks

We have argued that, in order for higher education institutions to decolonise and turn more meaningfully and fully to their role as discoverers and disseminators of knowledge, framing higher education curricula and modes of delivery needs to be underpinned by attention to defamiliarisation processes. The findings from the research described in this article showed that the illustrations—a form of defamiliarisation—created spaces necessary for students to articulate their voices and emotions, both of which are inextricably connected with, or intersected by, belief, context, culture, and power (Lasky, 2000). The findings further revealed that defamiliarisation afforded the sample students the opportunity to express their identity, more specifically in terms of sharing with others a nuanced understanding of their identity within contemporary South African society. The support this offers to the theoretical proposition in terms of disrupting habitual thoughts about identity assimilation, the barrier created by the English language for non-English speaking students, and the Western neoliberal ideologies that measure success in terms of the individualistic pursuit of wealth, was described and discussed in the previous section. Through the processes of defamiliarisation described, we infer that the sample students’ illustrations served as a way for them to self-reflect critically on these issues in terms of their own contexts within the discourse of culture, language, and power in a self-reflexive manner (hooks, 2003). The ways in which integrating defamiliarisation in this research study enabled these students to begin to disrupt their own colonialist constructions of identity, in which language, culture, and race are inextricably avoided in higher education settings, has been described—together with the opportunity it afforded them to illustrate their lived experiences in their social and economic contexts, and to share and interrogate society’s stereotypical misinterpretation of language and identity through the lens of colonialism. We would argue that the direction in which decolonisation of pedagogy at higher education institutions in South Africa is being nudged requires a general shift in the social and intellectual ethos prevailing at higher education institutions so that students may ultimately be better prepared to contribute to furthering the country’s economic, social, and political aims to the benefit of all. A curriculum underpinned by the

principles of defamiliarisation has the potential to invite students to begin to establish the kind of networks that could contribute to sustainable local practices through their, and our, ongoing search for multiple critical perspectives. Further research calls for the use of other mediational defamiliarising tools such as literature and literary texts, media, and technology in assisting higher education educators to disrupt and decolonise the higher education curriculum.

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