

The Art(s) of Human Centred Education

Chapter Nine: Inclusive Pedagogical Approaches to Human Potential in South African Arts Education Through Meta-Research Lenses

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Introduction

In the framework of the South African Government's inclusive policies, the Education White Paper 6, Special Needs Education (Department of Basic Education [DBE] 2001), provides regulations to better accommodate learners and students with special needs and disabilities. In the context of transformative, inclusive processes applied by the higher education institutes in the democratic South Africa, university students' involvement in community matters has gained momentum (Council on Higher Education (CHE) 2010). To this end, personal commitment of educationalists became a matter of high importance. Inclusive research on human strength and capabilities is an important issue worthy of recent attention within the frameworks of human rights campaigns and globalisation. Regarding the limitless possibilities of human potential, relevant demonstrations—often individually initiated—are brought to the fore by people with limited abilities who apply unconventional means of action for self-justification. Their almost superhuman efforts, aims and final astonishing achievements, whether physical or mental, never cease to amaze and evoke wonder: such as Stephen Hawking; the South African Oscar Pistorius, who, though now notorious, was an IAAF 2012 Olympic winner; and Musa Motha, who achieved Britain's Got Talent's first-ever group Golden Buzzer in 2023, among certainly many others.

Educationally, the inclusive viewpoint of the present research concentrates on the human potential and capabilities, focussing on two distinctive interconnected aspects: the one, external, concerns the collective, sociocultural context, as a powerful factor able to embrace every human being in an ideally harmonious and equally shared co-existence. The other, internal, refers to human nature, unique in its multifaceted and complex aptitudes and capacities. In the context of inclusive research methodologies, both aspects should be engaged in a continuous, interdependent interaction, as each completes and substantiates the other. In other words, any pedagogical plan or educational project aimed at mainstreaming the employability and entrepreneurship of differently abled persons (Sefotho 2017), no matter how well structured in theory, may fall short in practice without individual and collective awareness, acknowledgement and support from society. Furthermore, in my (Raïta Steyn) opinion, any educational strategy, design or programme aimed at supporting social awareness and consciousness regarding this issue, no matter how efficient, requires continuation. Further action is essential, as is the involvement of key stakeholders in adjusting the education system accordingly and socially indispensable.

Contextual framework and problem statement

White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System is a policy document released by the South African Department of Education in 2001. This policy outlines the government's strategies and frameworks to transform the education system in South Africa to better accommodate learners and students, regardless of their barriers to learning. The target was to create an inclusive education system that supports the diverse learning needs of all students and safeguards the right of every child to receive quality education. In this policy document, notably, relevant provisions and principles of the South African Constitution, on inclusivity, representativity, human dignity, equality, freedom, non-racialism and non-sexism' (CHE 2022; South African Human Rights Commission [SAHRC] 2016), and the right to further education had been repeatedly revisited, discussed and reconsidered **for**

many years (author's own emphasis).

Consequently, an analytical report, published by the CHE (2022) with reference to the progress and challenges of transforming South Africa's higher education system, reflects the problematic of reformative policies. Notably, in the same paper (CHE 2022: 5), the term *disabled* is also mentioned in the following context: 'The National Plan [NPHE, 2001] also proposed that the participation rate in higher education should be increased in the long-term to address both the imperative for equity and the changing human resource and labour needs...'. To this end, the plan 'proposed that the participation rate should be increased by recruiting workers, mature students, particularly women and the **disabled**' [author's own emphasis], and 'students from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries as part of the SADC Protocol on Education'. (CHE 2022: 5). The report also highlights areas that need further attention, such as addressing historical inequities, enhancing access 'for people from under-represented groups', and modifying curricula to meet present-day needs (CHE 2022: 5–6).

As for Arts Education, in the context of the current subject matter (Creative and Visual Arts), the University of Pretoria's modules align with The South African National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), of the Department of Basic Education (DBE 2011). Divided into two main components, theory and practical, the University of Pretoria's policy supports community engagement in undergraduate programmes as strongly as possible, particularly at the fourth-year undergraduate level. 'Human rights, inclusivity, environmental and social justice' can be also well served through art education by '... infusing the principles and practices of social and environmental justice and human rights as defined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa'. (DBE 2011: 5).

Inclusive social transformation through arts education

Methodologies and approaches

It is for the above-mentioned reasons that I (Raïta Steyn) have adopted my

arts education courses to include projects that address issues concerning disadvantaged and marginalised groups through an action-based research approach. In fact, my initiative materialised as early as 2018 through the multifaceted research project entitled *'We' and the 'Others'* (Steyn 2022). Based on established human and African philosophical principles, particularly on the concept of *ubuntu* (that is, shared humanity and collective learning) (Ewuoso and Hall 2019: 96–98), the project assists a community to mature culturally, morally and rationally, by means of action-based approaches (Lewin 1946; McNiff 2002). Since research on socio-cultural awareness about the human capability or incapacity—subject to definitional viewpoint—has not been sufficiently noticeable, the awakening of collective interest through cognisance is particularly pertinent, both locally and internationally. Due to the human potential for creativity, especially using multisensory approach (Chang et al. 2022; Steyn 2019), I believe, Arts Education can play a crucial role in terms of space and time in promoting and generating *knowledge* through the application of the following principles.

Knowledge through awareness

With the aim of promoting socio-cultural awareness and empirical knowledge through arts education, this study employs three case studies as a relevant pedagogical paradigm. In line with the *meta-research* methodology, the approach questions both implicit and explicit questions, highlighting how historically and culturally established “trues” once turned into collective concepts, continue to play a destructive role by perpetuating harmful stereotypes. Regarding the origin, development and acceptance of such stereotypes as given truths, earlier established theories and research approaches often shaped by personal perspectives, even in history, have often been accepted as neutral or factual. This has led from a socio-cultural viewpoint to the entrenchment of one-sided opinions and irrational collective concepts.

Knowledge through factual information

Within the framework of postmodernism, as articulated by Jencks (1989) and with the principles of *meta-history* research (Sansaridou-Hendrickx 2005: 255–273), views, theories and research methods concerning past events must be critically revised, and where necessary, enhanced or replaced with more inclusive perspectives. Consequently, broader conceptualised viewpoints and approaches, innovative, in my opinion, and inherently more flexible, can be emphasised to accommodate human diversity in a natural and adaptable manner. As in *meta-historical* writing, scholarly research should not be viewed as a pursuit of absolute truth, but rather as a quest for interpretative forms shaped by diverse modes of human expression. These include narratives, literary works, chronicles, artworks as well as hand crafts and oral traditions in terms of customs, rituals, storytelling and supernatural beliefs (Sansaridou-Hendrickx 2005: 255–273). Within this broad range of expression forms, the application of a *meta-research* approach (Ioannidis 2018), based on diversity and integration of perspectives and multisource information, can thus provide fertile ground for significant interdisciplinary exchange.

Knowledge through rational judgement

In this context, although sociocultural inclusion through education remains a complex and multi-layered endeavour for many educationalists and researchers (Mpu and Adu 2021), the related problems it presents can be solved, and obstacles overcome through the critical prism of *meta-research*. For the realisation of this humanly justified vision, the following factors should be seriously considered and accordingly fulfilled: a) provision of resourceful inclusive curricula and b) analogous teaching training with contextualised instruction. Scholarly, I built my contextual and historical framework on meta-research approach; educationally, in my case-studies, I expanded empirical knowledge through different pedagogical strategies. Kurt Lewin's (1946) foundational action-based pedagogy model, addressed social problems through a cyclical process of *planning, acting, observing* and *reflection*. This research approach was further

developed by McNiff (2002), who emphasised *reflection-in-action* and the importance of dynamic teaching/learning interactions as a reciprocal process of giving and receiving. Due to the diversity and pedagogical value of the three selected case studies, I applied the pattern as a knowledge exchanging process by organising my action-based research approach into the following stages: *preparing empirical exposure*; *learning by doing*; *learning by thinking* and *learning by teaching*—aligned with the ubuntu principles of shared humanity and mutual respect (Ewuoso and Hall 2019).

Case study A: The art of mouth painting: Empirical knowledge by creative participation

This case study focused on quadriplegic mouth painting workshops which took place locally on two occasions, at the Humanities Education Department in early 2022 and again in 2023, and once internationally. The latter took place in October 2022 at the Theatre Department of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUT), Greece, as part of an on-going educational exchange programme between the two respective universities.

The use of the (human) mouth as a tool for artistic expression is, broadly speaking, not a matter of personal choice, but rather a profound struggle between limited physical ability and boundless mental potential. In this case, a mouth substitutes the essential manual function, with facial muscles trained to perform their maximum capacity. Strangely enough, society has established a well-defined space for this form of artistic expression, though it is often constrained within the narrow thematic boundaries of “landscape” and “still-life”. These stereotypical associations, rooted more in sympathy for physical limitation than in genuine artistic appreciation, need to be refuted through an action-driven educational methodology. Thus, in reflection of the *Ubuntu* philosophy, ‘I am because we are’, individuals should be recognised not as objects of charity, but as equal participants in a shared community. As such, this action-based approach seeks to confront and disrupt entrenched collective stereotypes from an inclusive, socio-educational perspective, grounded in knowledge generated through active participation and structured as follows:

Stage 1: Preparing empirical exposure—Identifying stereotypes

As action research involves active engagement in real-world experiences, the planning phase focused on creating opportunities for meaningful exposure of all participants and awareness to the subject matter. To this end, a practical painting demonstration by mouth painters themselves was organised for the Art Education student-teachers (University of Pretoria 2023). As Chang et al. (2022) suggest, when educational processes are professionally handled and pedagogically guided, they can stimulate the creative potential of students, including those with disabilities. In practice, the initial sessions began with an introduction by the mouth artists, who shared their personal narratives and the life circumstances that led them to pursue art. Their demonstration revealed both artistic innovation and the distinctiveness of their personal styles. In this way, the planning phase laid the foundation for challenging societal stereotypes about disability and artistic value.

Stage 2: Learning by doing

The action research continued by exercises where student-teachers applied the guest-artists' instructions. Noteworthy is the response of the student-teachers who accepted the presented challenge with curiosity, wonder and even humour, yet with eagerness to participate. Once ready, student-teachers had the opportunity to try mouth painting techniques and create their own artworks by imitating the mouth painters. Under the constant guidance of the expert mouth painters who shared their empirical knowledge throughout the creative process, student-teachers, besides awareness of "the other", hopefully enhanced their empirical knowledge by exploring different ways of creativity.

Stage 3: Learning by thinking

The interactive discussions that followed the painting sessions, centred on overcoming physical challenges and exploring the potential of

unconventional artistic methods, proved pedagogically significant. Through narration, expression, comparison and above all, a deepened understanding of diverse human experiences, the mouth painting activities revealed new perspectives. As an observer, I noticed that the students, who were typically confident in their artistic abilities, surprisingly showed hesitation—as they were less in control—while others who usually struggled in art skills, excelled. The latter group’s self-confidence was notably boosted, as all student-teachers were required to begin from scratch, working with a technique entirely unfamiliar to them.

Stage 4: Learning by teaching

Practical, experience-based knowledge rooted in the South African context was spread internationally through a student exchange programme initiated by mutual agreement between the University of Pretoria and the AUT in 2021. As part of the ongoing project ‘We and the Others’, which began in 2019, a South African postgraduate art education student contributed to the project’s goal by spreading knowledge through awareness. The student’s engagement, situated within the framework of cross-cultural and inclusive arts education, included a discussion on the challenges faced by mouth painters and a short demonstration of alternative painting methods. This phase facilitated mutual exploration of different worldviews and promoted a shared understanding of how the arts can enhance humanity. The endeavour concluded in an exhibition organised by the South African student in the foyer of the University of Thessaloniki, featuring the AUT drama-students’ works. In addition to their creations using the mouth-painting technique, the works also addressed broader issues of social awareness.

Case study B: ‘Vision’ in visual arts: Artistic inclusion through shared acknowledgement

Policy ideals versus practical realities?

The visual arts CAPS document emphasises ‘equal educational opportunities’, ‘inclusivity’ and ‘social justice’, particularly through a call

to be ‘sensitive to issues of diversity such as ... disability...’ (DBE 2011: 5). However, these inclusive pan-humanly engaging policies can be challenged under a careful critical view, due to a contradiction between the ideal of an all-embracing inclusion and the reality of a limit-setting exclusion, noticed in the definition of visual arts aesthetics in the CAPS (DBE 2011: 8), stated hereby:

Visual Arts covers a broad field of creative practice that involves the hand, the eye, the intellect and the imagination in conceptualising and creating two-dimensional and three-dimensional artworks, objects and environments which reflect the aesthetic [my emphasis], conceptual and expressive concerns of individuals or groups.

As an arts educationalist, based on personal empirical knowledge, I felt directly the “indirect” nuance of the exclusivity in the above official statement. Motivated, therefore, by the distance between the ideally planned curriculum and its realisation and in line with my ongoing project, ‘We and the Others’, I planned a four-staged educational task, realised through an action-based approach.

Case Study B was centred on the concept of “*Vision*” in visual arts, by applying it on learners at a South African special school for the visually impaired and blind and fourth-year students-teachers. As part of their community engagement project, the aim was to challenge my arts education student-teachers’ perception that visual arts is exclusively “visual”, with its emphasis on aesthetics, and to showcase how tactile and auditory senses are equally important in both making and experiencing art. I consider my initiative as a response to the official definition of Visual Arts in the CAPS (DBE 2011: 8):

The subject Visual Arts is about self-expression and offers learners a way to engage meaningfully with, and respond to, their world. It provides opportunities to stimulate and develop learners’ intellect, engaging their creative imagination through visual and **tactile experiences** [my emphasis] and the innovative use of materials and technology in realising their ideas.

Preparing empirical exposure—Identifying stereotypes

The first phase intended to break down fixed assumptions through direct exposure to the subject matter, and factual insights, thus, laying the groundwork for meaningful experiential learning.

In preparation for exposing fourth-year arts student-teachers to the school for the visually impaired, I first asked them to complete a class activity reflecting on what they knew about the topic. It became evident that to most of the students' assumption, all learners attending a "blind" school were completely blind. Other common assumptions were that the school followed a curriculum different from CAPS, one designed specifically for the visually impaired. As such, many students believed that learners did not partake in the "visual arts" component of the subject creative arts in the intermediate and senior phases, due to its perceived reliance on aesthetic and visual engagement. As planned on their arrival at the school, the student-teachers attended a special lecture presented by the school psychologist and occupational specialist. They were introduced to the school's demographics and the range of impairments catered for, including blind learners, partially sighted learners and those with multiple disabilities. Physical causes associated with blindness were also openly discussed such as glaucoma, cataract, tunnel vision, prematurity, infections, childhood blindness, trauma, even albinism-related visual impairment. For some, the albinism condition seemed an unfamiliar issue. However, due to the importance of albinism, I included it in my research list and dedicated my third case-study to albinism.

Learning by doing—Ubuntu values of collective humanity

In the second phase after the presentation, the student-teachers were placed into pairs, one of which was blindfolded and led by their partner through the school passages to briefly experience what it feels like to be blind. The exercise was brief as it aimed to evoke sentiment of empathy through direct exposure to the core of the subject matter: physical limitation versus human potential. After this experience, the student-teachers went to the Grade 9 creative art class to meet learners engaged in tactile creations.

To gain insight into their personal perspectives, the art students first observed, then interacted with the blind learners while creating tactile artworks using materials such as clay, fabric and textured papers. Mabovula (2011) reminds us that the classroom becomes a platform where ideas are shared by community members in real-life contexts, a notion that is clearly reflected in this phase of the project, where blind learners and students-teachers engage in shared learning through tactile artmaking. Indeed, as an observer, I noted the following: the blind learner would draw something, and the teacher would outline it for them using a glue gun or a sewing wheel. The learner would then follow the raised contour lines and “colour” the drawing using various tactile materials. I also witnessed how partially sighted learners assisted blind learners with their artworks. This stage reinforced the students-teachers’ responses to the lived experiences of “others”, grounded in the understanding that learning is not isolated, but occurs in community and dialogue, affirming every participant’s humanity.

This experience, in my opinion, resounds the *Ubuntu* philosophy, which encourages collective creativity over individual mastery. In support of this, Vandeyar and Mohale (2022: 7) argue that Ubuntu philosophy-supported pedagogies transform classrooms into collaborative and inclusive spaces. Teachers are encouraged to facilitate group dynamics and promote learning as a “communal entity” advancing collective effort rather than individual achievement-focused endeavour. This approach is particularly relevant for twenty-first-century skills, as it supports learning through collaboration, inclusivity and adaptability.

Learning by thinking an introspection

As part of their practical task, the student-teachers were given a questionnaire asking them to post-reflect on their experience at the school for the visually impaired. “*What did I learn at this school*” but also, “*How does this visit change how I relate to others?*”. It encouraged a deeper awareness within the artistic and educational process. In the effort to refute stereotypical exclusive concepts suggesting that visual arts can only be pursued by the visually abled, visually challenged learners have indeed contributed by creating artworks that drew on ‘their **creative imagination** through visual

and **tactile experiences** and the **innovative use of materials**’ as stated in the CAPS (DBE 2011: 8) [author’s own emphasis]. The participating art students’ feedback also emphasised the importance of sensory experiences. The students’ views align with the approach the internationally acclaimed blind artist, John Bramblitt applies in his works. Bramblitt started painting after having lost his eyesight and learned to distinguish between colours through tactile sensations. By developing a unique method of feeling colour while creating his artworks, ‘he was discovering various pigments, trying their textures, and learning a haptic way to feel the differences in color’ (Bramblitt and Tate 2012: 102–105; Wołczyńska 2018). Bramblitt’s use of spatial vision instead of colour vision validates his human ability and shifts the focus from human limitation to artistic innovation.

During an observation at LUCA School of Arts in Ghent, Mühleis (2015), while reflecting on the inclusion of visually impaired and blind students, contests established models of art education. Instead of focusing on formal visual rules like shaping the “perfect circle” for life drawing, Mühleis aligns with more contemporary pedagogical approaches, which emphasise personal expression and conceptual depth. According to Mühleis (2015: 138), ‘contemporary art is not about a static whole, but about a perceivable coherence, a coherence that is not necessarily fixed by a line, but can be marked by an open horizon’. The strength of Mühleis’s approach ‘lies in viewing disabilities as a source of motivation in developing other capacities, rather than considering them as shortcomings in human existence. “Disabled” people, thus, should be regarded as differently-abled persons to partake in the development process locally and globally’. (Steyn and Sefotho 2021).

Learning by teaching—Ubuntu as knowledge sharing

Beyond embodying *Ubuntu* principles, the reflective introspection also encouraged student-teachers to reconsider what the CAPS (DBE 2011: 7) document on inclusion emphasises: ‘Inclusivity should become a central part of the organisation, planning and teaching at each school. This can only happen if all teachers have a sound understanding of how to recognise and address barriers to learning, and how to plan for diversity.’ In alignment

with the CAPS document and based on the student-teachers' experiences, the art education student-teachers began planning an inclusive exhibition that would serve as a shared platform, showcasing artworks from both the art education students and the blind learners. The students were tasked to create artworks that could be experienced through any sense other than sight, such as hearing, smelling or touching. The exhibition itself was an interactive hub of visually impaired learners and adults, student-teachers, parents and colleagues. To deepen the inclusive ethos, blind music performers were invited to contribute through live performance. This exhibition, motivated by the *Ubuntu* philosophy, "*I am because we are*", actively supported the project's transformative aim of inclusivity, realised through collective understanding and reciprocal participation.

Case study C: Horrors of albinism: Awareness through knowledge

The theme of this case study is different because it entails complicated, problematic issues which go beyond an arts educational approach in an institutionalised environment. The related irrational prejudices, stereotypical concepts and inhuman, victimising practices require a multifaceted, transdisciplinary involvement and dynamic approaches, as the subject matter involves historical, social, cultural, religious, civil and even judicial awareness. However, I believe, the role of education based on humanity can inspire other fields of specialisation to engage with similar endeavours.

During the visit to the visually impaired school, the student-teachers noticed that many learners had the condition of albinism. In the discussions related to the visit, I remarked how little the art education students knew about the condition, cause and sociocultural consequences. This realisation inspired me to involve art students further with my case study C, Horrors of Albinism. I aimed at combating the stigma and discrimination that individuals with albinism experience in South Africa. Conducted in partnership with the Molepo Theatre group and the Western Cape Albinism Foundation of South Africa, the study included a series of workshops, seminars and exhibitions locally and internationally, designed to increase

awareness about albinism and promote *ubuntu* through social inclusion.

Preparing empirical exposure

To raise awareness about albinism, I began with the basic question: *What is Albinism?* Etymologically, the term refers to the “absence of pigments” (albin-o/ism), derived from the Latin “albus”, and the Greek “αλφός” (alphós) had been, incorrectly, associated with white leprosy. Meaning, the term “white” is characterised by colourless skin, yellowish-white hair and eyes with pink or blue irises and deep-red pupils (Kimbassa 2016; Merriam Webster 1981: 49). Due to its typical features, albinism often attracts negative attention that leads to social stigma. To further prepare the art students for the next stages of the project, a relevant discussion and foundational information were provided to help conscientiously contextualise the subject. Since the existence of “albinism”, as a condition, can be traced in *religious, historical, mythological* and *literary* sources in terms of description, interpretation, collective convictions and concepts, the art education students could critically disseminate factual information and by relevant discussions to challenge misconceptions, destructive stereotypes and irrational prejudices, hopefully in South Africa and beyond. Indeed, ‘traditional beliefs surrounding people with albinism are greatly embedded in the mythological and the supernatural’ (Steyn 2022: 8) and in our contemporary period, studies on “modern” beliefs about albinism continue to reference traditional and mythological “truths”. As such, horrific superstitions surrounding people with albinism still influence Africans to the point where bodies or body parts are being sold, as they are believed to ‘carry good fortune’ (Steyn 2022: 8). A recent case related to superstitions involves six-year-old South African girl Joshlin Smith who, while not a person with albinism, was very fair-skinned and ‘was allegedly sold to a traditional healer for her eyes and skin colour’ (eNCA 2025).

As Steyn (2022: 6–7) explains:

Concerning *albinism*, there are two kinds of ‘sources’ of information to be considered in Africa. As illustrated in the Old Kingdom of Kongo history, the one covers traditional beliefs, often incorporating

superstitions interconnected with religions, magic, and the supernatural. The other ‘sources’ concern stories and presentations of albinism in popular literature, paintings, and other creative and performing arts forms. These two kinds of ‘sources’ should not be confused with the scientific observation and studies on albinism, especially if definitions are still connected with non-scientific notions.

Learning by doing

To “educate through demystification” I organised for the play, *Mama, I Want the Black That You Are*, to be performed at our university. My role as educator was to show the students how the performing arts can be a powerful tool to teach and raise awareness about albinism and the semantics surrounding it. Written and produced by Arthur Molepo, the play, sponsored by the Department of Arts and Culture, was based on real lives of people with albinism. The three main characters, a mother, a father and a girl with albinism, present a deeply unsettling, yet revealing narrative. Under pressure from the elders, the mother has her new-born child with albinism killed, an act driven by oral traditions and harmful cultural norms. Overcome with grief, she later saves and adopts another new-born baby girl with albinism. The girl’s stepfather then rapes after learning he is HIV-positive, believing that he would be cured. The stepfather eventually arranges for her to be sold. The main character, Regina Mary Ndlovu, herself a person with albinism, embodies both the humanity shown to her by her mother, and the barbarity of her father who exploits her, all within the context of deep-rooted societal prejudice (Department of Arts and Culture 2018; Molepo 2019).

Hereby, I present the characters to illustrate the points which became subjects of discussions relevant to the subject matter. The mother, both as a woman and victim, stands up for her own and her child’s rights, symbolising strength and resilience. The father, inhuman in his actions and decisions, along with the elders who exercised their power through stereotypes, reflect the absurdity of such beliefs and practices. Finally, the girl with albinism embodies the lived reality of what individuals with the condition go through.

Noteworthy is the effect the play had on spectators as a solid artistic

creative work, in terms of plot, acting, realism and universal meaning. The actress who performed the character with albinism, herself with the condition, strengthened the aspect of “reality” both humanly and artistically. The message has been clear: despite their victimisation, arts open the way forward to them to rightfully claim their place in society.

At this point of *Learning by doing*, I find it proper to mention the case of Salif Keita, the internationally acclaimed Malian songwriter and singer known as the “Golden Voice of Africa”. Despite Keita’s noble origins, he was rejected by his own family and socially ostracised by his Mandinka community because his albinism was seen as a sign of bad luck. However, strengthened by his artistic potential, Keita transformed his suffering constructively by founding the Salif Keita Global Foundation to protect and empower others with albinism and to fight the injustices they continue to face in Africa.

Learning by thinking

To deepen the students’ rational thinking, I invited Regina Mary Ndlovu to speak directly to the art education students. This led to discussions on “human rights”, “social justice”, “inequality”, “race”, “gender” and “other factors” as emphasised in the CAPS (DBE 2011: 5). As part of the discussion, students engaged in a controversial conversation that questioned who is considered Black and who is white. In the play, if one’s identity is defined by skin colour, the child with albinism does not belong anywhere. This line of thinking aligns with the title of the play, *‘Mama, I want the Black that YOU are’* (Molepo 2019). Kimbassa (2016: 18) confirms that in Southern Africa, the social identity of a person with albinism, that is, ‘too white to be Black’ or ‘Black in a white skin’, is mainly caused by politico-historical facts. Influenced by past apartheid laws, national identity was defined by skin colour, thus, manipulating social classification and position in the collective consciousness. Accordingly, Baker (2007: 74) challenged the concept that ‘all Africans are Black’, as albinism is not defined either as Black or white. However, both features exist in the absence of pigmentation in the African definition of the condition as “albino skin”.

Learning by teaching

As part of this initiative, Narcisse Kimbassa, researcher and representative of the Western Cape Albinism Foundation of South Africa also engaged in an online session with the students. Kimbassa addressed the stigma surrounding albinism and stressed the necessity of community-based awareness and support networks. This highlighted the importance of collaborative, constructive activism promoted mainly through education that supports human empathy and dignity. As prescribed, the student-teachers created artworks that expressed their personal viewpoint on the experiences of individuals with albinism. They were also expected to address collective concepts and stereotypes around albinism. Artistically, they could include relevant narratives and visual material. Alongside informative details related to albinism and the atrocities associated with the condition, their artworks were displayed in spaces open to public view.

The artworks were also taken to Greece to be displayed in an open exhibition at AUT. In the framework of the established collaboration and the interest expressed by the arts education department regarding the subject matter, a University of Pretoria student with albinism, Success Ndlovu, participated as a guest speaker for the Greek students, to convey (in English) his personal views about the condition to an international audience in Thessaloniki (RThess 2022). During the discussion the so called “Blonde Angel” case was brought to the fore, in which a fair-skinned Roma child was wrongly assumed to be a victim of human trafficking in Greece (Bonvoisin 2014). The widespread misunderstanding regarding the parents and their child demonstrated two highly destructive misconceptions at the same time: firstly, authorities and society explained the light-coloured features of the child compared to the dark skin of the Roma parents, incorrectly. Secondly, their social marginalisation in some countries caused by their distinct traditions and culture was misconstrued (Marushiakova and Popov 2016). This case points at racism, because in Europe, the condition is less noticeable compared to African socio-cultural context, where albinism is visually prominent. Indeed, for many students in Greece, the contextualisation of the issue on an international level was an enhancement to world viewing.

The above experience, based on visual material (photo and video graphic, media information), engaging panel discussion, artistic creations and theatre performance, have manifested the importance of visibility and real-life testimony in spreading knowledge through awareness and refuting prejudices. Locally, the participants in the project, Regina Mary Ndlovu, Narcisse Kimbassa and Salif Keita have, in their own right, each played a vital role in that effort. Their participation is an example of how human potential, showing talent, advocacy and resilience, can flourish even under the most challenging circumstances.

Conclusion

This chapter forms part of the broader research project, “We and the Others”, which seeks to promote a more empathetic and inclusive society through arts education by recognising difference as an essential dimension of human potential.

All three case studies highlight the transformative potential of recognising diverse human abilities and the limitless possibilities that emerge when persons’ talents are acknowledged through action-based approaches. Pedagogically, the case studies have demonstrated that planning, ideally human interaction, should be more realistic if classes were considered microcosmos of communities where learners need an educationally supportive environment to practice interdependency and less individual-centred approaches. Explaining concisely:

Case study A, *The Art of mouth painting*, has demonstrated how art, based on empirical knowledge and active interaction, is an educational tool to instruct inclusive participation. Aligned with the *Ubuntu* philosophy, learning through practice should be applied not individually as an isolated act but as part of a shared endeavour, sometimes shaped by non-traditional methods, such as using the mouth to create.

In Case study B, to challenge ‘Vision’ *in visual arts*, the art education student-teachers visited a school for learners with visual impairments. Their exposure to the core of the issue deepened the student-teachers understanding of art as something intrinsically human, which, through acquired skill and encouraged imagination, can overcome physical

limitations. This alternative approach, I believe, broadened the student-teachers' perspectives and strengthened their willingness to approach art in different, sensory-based ways too.

In Case Study C, *Horrors of albinism*, student-teachers were faced with the shocking realities that individuals with albinism continue to live with, due to concepts rooted in harmful superstitions, misconception and ignorance. Pedagogically, the experience firstly highlighted the value of scholarly verified factual information, that is, the constructive role of history; secondly, by confronting these issues via arts-based education, student-teachers acknowledged the struggle for survival, as persons with the condition, but also their human potential to grow and succeed especially through arts. The current study illustrated how empathy, critical thinking and creative interaction as teaching tools can motivate social change.

Internationally, the participation of South African students in Greece draws special attention to the importance of collaboration in the arts education programme at the University of Pretoria beyond the South African borders. Through their involvement and sharing of socio-cultural experiences, both Greek and South African students were exposed to different practices and views. Through their artworks, they expressed a broader worldview and appreciation for diversity. This research, motivated by the *Ubuntu* philosophy, was grounded in an action-oriented methodology that supports arts education as a dynamic pedagogical tool to unlock human potential and promote socio-cultural inclusion.

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