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Towards empathetic design for social change: An autoethnographic reflection on teaching and learning practices in a communication design project

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Abstract

Ubuntu philosophy is based on the premise that *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person because of other people). Ubuntu emphasises empathy, respect, and sensitivity as core tenets. Ubuntu principles are part of the teaching philosophy of Design for Social Change (DSC) that we use in our visual communication design course at a university of technology in South Africa. This teaching philosophy seeks to find solutions that will not only foster aesthetically pleasing and functional creative outputs from students but will also address the root causes of social problems and empower communities to create change that is enduring and sustainable.

As academics, we co-created a three-month mental health awareness campaign project with students. This process forced us to question how much Ubuntu and DSC philosophies we were really practising in our teaching. In the project, students reflected on their experiences of learning during the COVID-19 pandemic; we listened and began to realise that we were not as socially aware and empathetic to students' COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 pandemic emotional traumas as we initially imagined.

This paper is an autoethnographic examination of the impact of our socio-cultural positions on our teaching practices as visual communication design lecturers. We critically reflect on our experiences during this project and analyse our diverse backgrounds and their impact on our ability to connect with students and student experiences of learning in a COVID-19 pandemic context.

We conclude that visual communication design solutions are powerful tools for social change and promoting design activism but that academic socio-cultural contexts may stand in the way. Design projects promoting social change should also embrace intentional, collaborative teaching. Lecturers should consider projects that disrupt their own personal bias as this has an impact on their ability to connect with students and their experiences of learning.

Keywords: Collaboration, communication design, social change, teaching and learning.

Introduction

Design is a powerful tool that can guide and influence society (Herland 2021). Within the field of communication design, both academics and designers have a responsibility to be sensitive to socio-economic issues and empathetic design in order to foster communication that will impact society (Tu, Zhang & Zhang 2021). The teaching philosophy known as Design for Social Change (DSC) advocates a better world for all humanity, and highlights the critical role design and marketing educators play by becoming and developing social change agents. The role of educators as agents of social change is

affirmed by authors such as Shea (2012) and Souleles, Ferreira and Savva (2019), who highlight the role educators play in contributing to the development of future-ready students.

The South African Council on Higher Education (CHE) report emphasises the importance of good teaching in creating conscious students, fostering learner-centred dialogue and reflecting on social context (Leibowitz et al. 2017). DSC is a transdisciplinary field that focuses on social issues and aims to achieve collective goals rather than consumerist objectives (Souleles 2017). South African design educators should contribute more extensive literature on teaching practices to cultivate students' sensitivity towards social issues, thus promoting an awareness of values and beliefs on topics that factor in the complexity of intersections between ecosystems, such as the cultural, social, political, economic and technological context (Savva, Souleles & Ferreira 2019; Costandius & Botes 2018; Butera et al. 2020).

This paper aims to contribute to this broader conversation by exploring individual and collective experiences, challenges, and insights obtained through the three months of a class project for a communication design course focused on mental health. The reflection process is encouraged by researchers such as Gorski and Dalton (2019) who argue that it is essential for lecturers to constantly evaluate and reflect on their teaching and learning approach as applied in the classroom and in projects. Reflection on past projects is important because it helps to chart a different path for future projects. This paper will, therefore, follow a reflective autoethnographic methodology to assess how far Ubuntu principles and other pedagogy were used during our mental health project with students.

Methodology

This paper deploys an autoethnographic reflection of teaching practices by design and marketing lecturers in a mental health design project focusing on social awareness and change. In concrete terms, the authors explore their individual and collective experiences, challenges, and insights in the project. A qualitative autoethnographic approach was selected because it focuses on the creative analytic practice of reflecting and writing (Done et al. 2011). Autoethnographic writing is an introspective and self-reflective process that engages in reflection and reflexive thinking (Roy & Uekusa 2020). We examine our personalities, preconceptions and biases and how these affect and shape our subjectivity regarding cultural and social dimensions that impact intercultural communication (Gorski & Dalton 2019).

We selected a creative analytical practice (CAP), informed by Boluk, Muldoon and Johnson (2019) who argue that this form of writing shifts from the traditional writing style and explores alternative writing forms in storytelling (Done et al. 2011). This approach is multifaceted and complex and is influenced by contextual observations through creative means (Berbary 2010; Boluk, Muldoon & Johnson 2019). Techniques used in creative analytic research include sharing experiences through storytelling and figurative descriptions. By applying this method, we aim to connect with the reader and provide a deeper understanding of our analysis (Boluk, Muldoon & Johnson 2019). The autoethnographic narrative provides a holistic and interpretive understanding of the processes and experiences of the mental health project under discussion. The paper further explores and unpacks our lived experiences and the cultural nuances we encountered during the project.

Design for social change

The concept of DSC encompasses a broad range of activities that focus on social issues and aim to achieve collective and social goals, rather than consumerist objectives (Souleles 2017). Souleles, Ferreira, and Savva (2019) also suggest that there are other closely related terms, which are relevant, including public-interest design, social impact design, design for social advocacy, socially responsive design, transformation design, human-centred design, social entrepreneurship and design activism.

Design and the design thinking process have the potential to change lives and the power to challenge and solve problems creatively. For example, collaboration with organisations such as IDEO Design Thinking and the ArtCenter College of Design are examples of how design creates meaningful change (ArtCenter College of Design 2023). The ArtCenter College of Design has been in partnership with the non-profit organisation (NGO) Designmatters since 2002. The partners realised the importance of creating social change through collaborative transdisciplinary design thinking solutions that focus on social justice, sustainable development, public policies, health, and social entrepreneurship (ArtCenter College of Design 2023).

Academics for social change

Lecturers should promote change at a societal level in order for them to become agents of social change (Butera et al. 2020). This also embraces the complexity of creating future-ready graduates who will tackle jobs and solve social problems that have not been predicted (OECD 2018). To be a future-ready design graduate means being equipped to face technological disruption from the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), artificial intelligence (AI), and the metaverse that opens a 3D virtual world (Chloe 2022). Even though such technological developments are ongoing and have the power to change lives, Behari-Leak (2020) also reminds us that we live in an unequal world and that social disparities such as poverty and unequal access to education create a gap, which means that some members of society are always playing catch-up. Future-ready design graduates are therefore tasked with being able to responsibly use technology and design thinking for a more socially just world (Behari-Leak 2020).

To impart future-ready skills to students, lecturers are expected to evolve in line with changes, which require continuous academic development. Vocational teacher training programmes can assist academics to keep abreast of teaching and learning techniques, which in turn can improve the student experience. Many researchers recommend such programmes as valuable catalysts for assisting lecturers to become change agents who play a critical role in driving transformative and social change (Bourn 2016; Novelli & Sayed 2016; Purcell, Henriksen & Spengler 2019).

Becoming a social change agent is a personal developmental journey. Alvin Toffler, writing in the 1970s, already predicted the impact of rapid technological change on the widening gap between those with resources and those without, and he emphasised that people who cannot adapt, those who are not willing to relearn, unlearn and learn, will be left behind (Toffler 1970). The notion of relearning and unlearning resonates with how we define the importance of constantly going through a self-reflective and reflexive process for personal and professional growth.

Reflection

The idea of reflection was introduced by philosopher and educator John Dewey, who published *How we think* in 1933, but over the years, reflection has been modelled in various ways. Hoa and Tuán (2019) address the process of stimulating student reflection, and discuss two main dimensions of reflection models: the iterative dimension and the vertical dimension. The iterative dimension, drawn from authors like Schon and Boud, emphasises knowledge in action, experimentation, and reflection (Hoa & Tuán 2019; Herland 2021). Boud's model involves returning to experiences, paying attention to feelings and re-evaluating outcomes. The vertical dimension involves different levels of analysis and synthesis, and requires more critical thinking (Hoa & Tuán 2019). Dewey's original model emphasises thinking, which in turn influenced Freire's critical pedagogy and Mezirow's transformative learning model (Rennick 2015).

Hoa and Tuán (2019) evaluate various models and highlight how Mezirow's model divides reflection into habitual action, deliberate action/understanding, reflection and critical reflection. Hatton and Smith's model, however, divides reflection into description, descriptive reflection, dialogical reflection, and critical reflection to create new knowledge in action (Hoa & Tuán 2019). By contrast,

Moon's model divides reflection into noticing, making meaning, creating meaning, working with meaning and transformative learning (Tur, Marín & Challinor 2017; Hoa & Tuấn 2019).

Lecturers can strategically design and facilitate transformative learning in the classroom by utilising teaching and learning practices, such as experiential learning (Costandius 2012; Lawson 2017), critical pedagogy from scholars such as Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux (Giroux 2010) and problem-based learning by Howard Barrows (Tawfik 2015). These pedagogies can assist in framing students' inclusive self-reflective outlook.

Reflexivity

The above-mentioned pedagogies and the process of self-reflection inform personal transformation (Mezirow 1997). Critical self-reflection and reflexivity are able to assess preconceived assumptions of one's inherited habits, which have been accumulated, acculturated, and perpetuated through our beliefs, socio-cultural, economic, political, and educational systems (Mezirow 1997; Wilson 2014; Herland 2021). Critical thinking forms a key part of reflexivity, and so reflexivity as a skill for researchers and lecturers involves developing techniques to question their attitudes in an outward-looking manner while examining the ramifications of what they have discovered through the larger context of their research or within the classroom setting (Wilson, Janes & Williams 2022).

The definition of self-reflexivity is the ability to reflect on individual experience as it occurs (McDougle & Alexander 2023). However, this must not neglect the emotive experiences that can be generated throughout the self-reflective and reflexive process (Herland 2021). This requires becoming self-aware of one's own biases and assumptions, which can be uncomfortable and may evoke emotional responses at a meta-level (Nagata 2004; Wilson 2014). The act of engaging in a process of self-reflection and self-reflexivity is important for personal growth, learning, and development. It involves taking a critical and honest look at one's own thoughts, feelings and actions, and considering how these contribute to our understanding of the world around us.

As a tool, self-reflective and reflexivity processes can contribute to transformative learning by communicating with others; in this case, the communication was with students and between colleagues. This process allows us to gain insights into our own beliefs and biases (Wilson 2014), and to identify areas where we may need to make changes in order to improve ourselves and our relationships with others.

Ubuntu

Recognising the interconnectedness of humans with the goal of forming a better world for all starts with understanding one's shortcomings and strengths (self-reflection) and being reflexive, thus gaining an awareness of one's preconceived assumptions and biases. The proverb *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (Nguni) translates as 'a person is a person because of other people', and sums up the philosophy of Ubuntu. It reflects the need to express compassionate humanity to others so that they reciprocate (Higgs et al. 2000). Ubuntu thus creates a community that navigates relationships on the base of mutual understanding and respect.

Ubuntu is also defined as an act of *becoming* in relationships of empathy in order to better serve and reach common goals and promote social cohesion (Dowdeswell & Hoobler 2022; Waghid 2020). The humility in treating others with dignity (*seriti* in Setswana) and respect does not take anything away from who you are; in fact, it edifies one's humanity as we were not meant to live in silos (Waghid 2020; Le Grange 2021).

The idea of cultivating empathy through Ubuntu in our design classroom environment is relevant to the creation of social change agents who have the ability to place themselves in others' shoes. It entails an attitude of promoting diversity of thoughts, which includes embracing indigenous knowledge systems and practices and exploring ethical, collaborative projects that have the power to address and solve social, economic, health, environmental and sustainability issues for all.

Teaching pedagogies

Who are we

We are lecturers at Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) in the Department of Visual Communication. We specialise in the fields of graphic design [Tsholofelo (Mothusi) Matome] and marketing [Tumishang Sekhu]. As academics, we understand the role we play in fulfilling the mandate of TUT's mission of contributing to social and economic transformation through curricula engagement and learning experiences. Most of the students in our classrooms are Black and come from cities, townships, and villages across southern Africa. As a result, we are cognizant of how these differences impact student learning and we strive to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Our teaching philosophy embraces transformative learning, which involves making a personal choice based on acquiring knowledge and experiencing a particular phenomenon that also involves emotions (Hoa & Tuán 2019). We believe that a student-centred approach is beneficial in design education because it allows students to engage, collaborate and take ownership of their learning experiences (Butera et al. 2020). Our teaching philosophy is rooted in social constructivism, with a focus on promoting social change through integrated design and marketing strategies that address socio-economic issues. We strive to create a student-centred environment that values cultural diversity and fosters critical thinking. We also believe that learning should be an active and collaborative process with meaningful transformations both inside and outside the classroom (Kim 2001; Kim, Raza & Seidman 2019).

Lecturer 1 [Tumishang Sekhu]: *In the Graphic Design (NATED) phased-out course, my marketing module enables the design students to understand specific target audiences in order to design communication that is effective. In addition, marketing strategies are taught that challenge design students to push beyond their technical expertise to develop a broader understanding of social issues affecting consumer behaviour. My approach in class is to challenge students to research and debate economic, cultural, and ethical issues that affect marketing strategies and communication practices. The aim is to critically analyse and challenge the societal and cultural norms within which marketing communication operates. Such topics are introduced and implemented in class discussions, individual and collaborative projects, presentations, and feedback sessions.*

Lecturer 2 [Tsholofelo (Mothusi) Matome]: *As a graphic design lecturer who specialised in illustration and drawing modules for the Graphic Design (NATED) phased-out course, my task was to facilitate in students the creation of conceptually strong visuals that communicate through appropriate well-researched visuals aligned with the criteria or outcome of the brief. My task is not to create a one-size-fits-all approach but to structure an iterative creative process for students that lends itself to developing their own unique design style and way of thinking by using a student-centred constructivist approach. However, I also advocate for students to become critical designers who should not undervalue the power of design as a change agent. In addition, I also prefer that students first look for relevant inspiration within Southern Africa and Africa.*

Classroom discussion topics are selected not only for the achievement of aesthetic excellence but also to critically stimulate students' outlooks on various issues. I think students should be exposed to diverse perspectives, and education should challenge students to consider other realities outside those informed by their immediate backgrounds.

Lecturers 1 and 2: *We engage in constant brainstorming and debate sessions; our friendly debates often highlight how different our individual worldviews are and sometimes surprise us! When differences come up, this often leads to further discussion that may include the viewpoints of other colleagues and students. We both find it interesting how student opinions become even more expressive when articulated or expressed in their mother tongue or Kasi lingo (local slang). Although these opinions can range from funny to shocking, we allow mother tongue and Kasi lingo expression in our classes as it enriches our understanding of our students' thoughts, opinions and experiences,*

especially those thoughts expressed when they think we are not listening and are just talking to their peers.

By co-facilitating some of our projects, we have gained fresh appreciation for a culture of dialogue with students. Unfiltered student discussions assist in picking up certain key points that could potentially be formally integrated into classroom settings. For instance, marketing topics such as socially conscious consumer behaviours and ethics (Prendergast & Tsang 2019) can incorporate relevant socio-economic issues that provide better context and a better understanding of the topic at hand, thus playing a crucial role in nurturing students' awareness of societal issues (Boulocher-Passet, Farache & Popma 2017).

If we neglect to incorporate these dimensions into our marketing and design teaching and learning processes, we would be inadequately preparing our students (Boulocher-Passet, Farache & Popma 2017). This is one of the reasons why we intentionally try to stimulate students to reflect on their roles as South African citizens and critical thinkers, who hopefully will come to understand their role as critical designers and future leaders.

Our mental health project experience

Summary of the project

Title: Mental health awareness month campaign

Third-year Graphic Design (NATED) combined project: Marketing and Design Technique (photography, illustration, and drawing)

Summary of brief: The South African government has commissioned you to create a full-blown campaign for mental health awareness month that uplifts and encourages one to overcome mental issues.

Overall outcome: You are required to create an integrated communication campaign that creatively interconnects marketing strategies and design techniques and tools to professionally communicate the campaign.

Group work: At least five to six members in a group

Duration of project: Three months

Personal experiences of the project

Lecture 1: *This journey with the mental health project was deeply transformative for me. I had recently been in close contact with family members struggling with mental health challenges, which heightened my sensitivity towards students facing similar issues.*

I felt compelled to create a safe space for my students to confide in me and share their concerns and troubles. However, as an educator, I soon realised the limitations of my role when it came to counselling and therapy. I had to be mindful of the professional boundaries that restricted my direct involvement in students' personal lives. My primary offering was compassion and empathy, coupled with a strong recommendation that any students facing significant challenges seek assistance from trained professionals, such as the Student Support Services (SDS) provided by the university. As an educator, I have come to acknowledge the diverse challenges that our students face and the profound impact that the projects we choose can have on their lives. I believe that recognising and addressing these challenges with compassion is pivotal in creating a learning environment that supports students' mental health.

This project hit very close to home for me. Some of the conversations we had with students left me feeling deeply triggered, but I learned to separate my personal issues from my role in supporting our

students. This project created an invaluable space for students to not only reflect on their personal lives but also use their design talent to have a greater impact.

Lecture 2: *Growing up, my limited knowledge of mental health was that people get admitted to hospital and are given pills that make them sleepy. Such narrow perceptions of mental health were compounded by cultural stigma and ignorance. Due to the nature of my work, I have come to learn about and understand the far broader spectrum of issues that constitute mental health. Throughout the project, one-on-one discussion with group members revealed personal issues that students (voluntarily) shared with me. Conversations ranged from students admitting to being heavily medicated on anxiety and depression pills from a young age to some becoming reclusive and admitting to carrying their family problems on their shoulders. For me, this project highlighted not only how resilient students can be, but also how parents sometimes overshare their personal problems with their children. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic made me very sensitive and empathetic to students' mental states (Klusmann et al. 2023.) As a consequence, I have learned to take note of student behaviour and facial expressions in and outside of class.*

I had to also reflect on my mental well-being and we reminded each other as colleagues that it's important to accept limitations; we can only guide a student to a certain limit.

Lectures 1 and 2: *As agents of change, we actively engage in continuous constructive criticism to foster an environment that encourages unlearning, relearning, and ongoing learning (Toffler 1970). Moreover, we strive to evolve as 21st-century lecturers capable of navigating blended learning environments (Kim, Raza & Seidman 2019; Khahro & Javed 2022) and we address the topic of socio-economic disparities in our pedagogy.*

An article on the role of educators in a changing world (News24 2018) reminded us that "being an educator in South Africa requires you to become a police officer, nurse, social worker or a lawyer, etc. all rolled into one". Unfortunately, by playing these roles we end up carrying students' emotional burdens on our shoulders. The use of the word 'unfortunately' in this context highlights how our motherly roles (BoMma) can to some extent create empathetic affiliations with students, which result in us unconsciously carrying student problems with us outside of the academic space. This became especially apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic when we were confronted by socio-economic, physical and mental health issues that negatively impacted our work. To address these challenges, we found we had to set boundaries and adjust the power dynamic between ourselves and students. We reduced the direct interpersonal dimension and instead aimed to connect students to institutional support systems, such as campus health and academic services. By removing the emotional mother-child role, we found we were able to focus on building richer relationships based on Ubuntu and empathy, rather than implicit familial roles.

Our colleagues also reminded us of methods to reduce direct interpersonal involvement and place boundaries that are necessary to reduce academic and personal burnout (Fynn & Van der Walt 2023). Through this process, our mutual respect and interconnectedness with our colleagues grew; we came to understand that their humanity was connected to ours and that our mental well-being and the mental load of the teaching work were also their concerns. This is a key principle of Ubuntu, and shows Ubuntu in play.

Observations – before, during and after the project

In early 2021, we observed a concerning decline in student attendance. This was partly due to "coviding" (COVID-19-pandemic-related disruptions). We also encountered a more profound issue that surfaced when we began engaging on the mental health topic. Students struggled to address sensitive topics with tact, and negative stereotypical perceptions of mental health had taken root in the student community. For instance, some students believed that mental health issues were a "White people" problem or associated with *boloyi* (witchcraft). Although this particular course has been

discontinued, we realise for similar future project that sensitive issues or topics must be tackled in advance with students for better outcomes.

As the project progressed, we created safe spaces within our educational environment where students could address and break down stereotypes and engage in respectful and sensitive class and group discussions. There was a progressive shift in group dynamics, marked by increased respect and empathy through tolerance and better understanding. The use of mother tongue or Kasi Lingo in the project helped students to achieve a better understanding and create messages that were relatable to target audiences.

By the end of our project, we saw many positive outcomes: a significant improvement in class attendance, a remarkable level of openness among our students and a newfound ability to tackle sensitive issues. Most importantly, our students gained a deep appreciation of their role and responsibility as designers. We realised it would have been useful to bring in SDS to speak to the students before the project commenced.

We feel that the broad DSC approach we adopted helped significantly to foster a culture of lifelong learning where students are no longer just learning about design, but also gain insight into broader complexities of the human experience and their role in shaping a more compassionate and empathetic world. This underscores the value of the DSC approach allied with the philosophy of Ubuntu.

Key findings

Self-awareness as an Ubuntu principle

Self-awareness is a reflective and reflexive process that shapes one's thoughts, emotions, and behaviour (Herland 2021). Within a collaborative context, we all need to be careful about devaluing the opinions of others (Loh & Ang 2020). That is why we prioritise listening to understand and questioning for clarity. In addition, we realise the importance of being sensitive to how we articulate (verbally and physically) our opinions to students.

During the project, we realised that some students were proactive in becoming the glue that connects their group, thus bringing harmony and social cohesion, while others needed some support to reach this point. In addition, we found that preconceived ideas and biases could often be challenged in a group setting. In this context, there thus comes a time when students need to acknowledge their mistakes and humbly eat their pie, which takes a great deal of humility and self-awareness to accept shortcomings.

Diversity among students and lecturers

In critically examining our own experiences and cultural backgrounds, we realised that our personal circumstances might place us at a disadvantage in relating to students' everyday realities and perceptions. By taking the time to understand the cultural dynamics of our students, we cultivated a better appreciation of their diversity of outlooks. This also created a more tolerant environment for both students and colleagues, and it opened lines of communication that we found assisted us when navigating issues within team dynamics. Diversity plays an important role in group work, but we also found that certain students were letting down their teammates, so it became necessary to engage with them directly regarding their mental state and the impact it was having on their group.

Navigating diversity through Ubuntu

We found it very valuable to constantly remind students how their cooperation in completing group work is a symbiotic relationship that fosters life skills and lifelong relationships. In the group context, we found students were also able to share with each other about their personal challenges. This resulted in more empathetic interactions within the groups. Once again, this echoes the phrase:

umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu. For us, the philosophy of Ubuntu extends beyond the straightforward notion of humanity. It is an entire ethos and value system that has been culturally fostered through our heritage, and at times it even feels like an ethereal knowing of being and belonging to self and to others (Van Breda 2019).

Team support

Students who would normally be passive team players stepped forward and showed leadership skills at a time when some group members were not adjusting well to the transition of returning to campus and class on a full-time basis. During our discussions and presentations, we observed that receiving affirmation from their peers had a significant positive impact on student confidence in public speaking.

At present, we only provide students at first-year level with an introductory presentation on the functions of SDS. Given the high levels of stress we encountered in students at third-year level, we recommend that SDS should be re-introduced at the start of each year in future. This could include workshop sessions for students and lecturers focused on wellness and mental health.

As educators, we created a support group for staff that allowed us to support each other in times of difficulty. Some of our colleagues struggled with ill health while some had lost family members. The support given within the groups established a sense of togetherness that boosted the team's morality.

Conclusion

The process of exploring a mental health project and our experiences as educators have highlighted the importance of empathy, dialogue and continuous reflection in teaching and learning. We realise we have embraced blended learning environments and we are now able to acknowledge and understand the multiple roles we play as teachers in South Africa. As a consequence of this reflection process, we now strive to strike a better balance between supporting student development and maintaining professional boundaries.

The self-evaluation process confirms to us that educators play a crucial role in social change (Bourn 2016) and we realise we will benefit in future from a component of ongoing and integrated reflection to develop effective strategies for the design education we offer students. Reflecting on our positive experience of working together and blending our two subject fields leads us to advocate transformative learning collaborations in a variety of vocational fields. This requires the development of co-teaching practices and transdisciplinary collaborative projects that are tailored to the social needs of South African students.

Furthermore, through our self-assessment we have recognised the significance of Ubuntu philosophy in design education, with an emphasis on human interdependence and interconnectedness. Examples of using Ubuntu philosophy in our practice include facilitating constructive debates in a collaborative environment. Our introspection showed that by embodying the Ubuntu principle, educators can naturally develop self-awareness and care for others; this in turn fostered our awareness of socio-economic, political and cultural issues, including respect for indigenous languages and practices.

In conclusion, our journey as educators and researchers has highlighted the importance of empathetic DSC that facilitates continuous professional development through reflexive and reflective processes. Unfortunately, the phasing out of the Graphic Design programme has meant that we could not fully implement lessons learnt in that programme, but our analysis of and reflection on this student project has served as a valuable lesson in the ongoing importance of acknowledging students' effort and motivating them to function as a cohesive group. Our self-evaluation has also made us appreciate our own need for training in how we approach issues such as mental health, for the benefit of our students and our own mental well-being, so as to make a positive difference in the lives of our students. We acknowledge that DSC requires personal commitment and hard work to create spaces for fostering constructive, disruptive, and respectful dialogue, even within the hidden curriculum of universities.

Our experience leads us to affirm our commitment to DSC as a way to strive towards and contribute to reimagining the future of design higher education in South Africa.

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