

‘... This apartheid story ... we’ve finished with it’: student responses to the apartheid past in a South African English Studies course¹

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Research on student responses to Critical Pedagogy frequently highlights their opposition to transformational agendas. This paper focuses on student opposition at a predominantly ‘white’ South African university to materials that represent the apartheid past. Engaging with the imperatives of transformation characterizing post-apartheid Higher Education in South Africa, and drawing on post-structuralist identity theory, the paper analyses contradictions in student discourses on the apartheid past. The paper concludes by considering the extent to which a focus on identity could contribute to dismantling opposition to Critical Pedagogy.

Introduction

Transformation of educational institutions has been high on the agenda in post-apartheid South Africa. In response, traditionally ‘white’ institutions have increased the participation of ‘black’² students previously excluded from their campuses or present only as small minorities. However, apart from addressing questions of equity, educational institutions have also been encouraged to revise their curricula, teaching approaches and institutional structures to meet the challenges of this new democratic society. Strongly autonomous in their governance, institutions have responded to the imperative for change in different ways, with greater or lesser adherence to elements of national policy. Thus, while interacting with national policy, individual institutions have, to a degree, constructed their own plans for transformation, underpinned by their own goals, values and visions of institutional culture. On a micro-level, moreover, individual departments within institutions have been evolving their own responses to policy changes by developing new teaching programmes and practices. In this paper, we reflect on one such teaching initiative and its complex positioning within a university that is forging an individualistic route through the altering landscape of Higher Education in South Africa. The teaching

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initiative took place in the first half of 2001 in a South African literature component of a first year English Studies course. The institution, referred to as Bergzicht University, is a 'Historically White University' with a sizeable majority of 'white' students and a language policy of Afrikaans as the official medium of instruction, except for, of course, in other language subjects.

Our paper forms part of a larger research project which focuses on students' responses at Bergzicht University to teaching materials, which address issues of social inequality, particularly racial inequality, in South Africa. In this article, we look specifically at how students responded to materials which mention South Africa's apartheid past. Because of the 'white' majority in our classrooms and the topic of this paper we focus on 'white' students' responses. This is not to say that we ignored the minority of 'coloured' students. While their responses did not contribute to the argument of this paper, their attitudes are reflected elsewhere in our research.

Our materials design and teaching practice were located within the frameworks of Critical Pedagogy and Critical Language Studies. We shall briefly revisit our own and other researchers' critiques of these frameworks to highlight some of the challenges that socially transformative materials and curricula may create in the classroom. Incorporating the work of post-structuralist identity theorists, the main body of our paper will analyse and interpret a central contradiction that we have perceived in student discourses on materials referring to South Africa's apartheid past, and the past's repercussions in the present: while students are often reluctant to remember South Africa's political past, and while they express the desire to 'move on', they are themselves grappling, frequently painfully, with the implications that the past holds for their identities as young South Africans. It is by probing this contradiction in their responses that we hope to find ways of enabling students to confront the past, and to engage with materials representing social inequality in the country and its institutions, without developing defensive or other oppositional attitudes which put a stop to creative and critical thinking in the present.

Critiques of critical pedagogy

We draw on the North American theorizing of Critical Pedagogy as aiming to develop students' knowledge of the self and social world, the way in which these are historically constructed and the power relationships involved. Such knowledge should act as a catalyst to bring about individual and social change. However, we are mindful of research on student opposition to critical pedagogy (Ellsworth, 1989; Britzman *et al.*, 1993; Janks, 1995; Granville, 2003), which critiques the assumption that revealing social inequalities to people will necessarily bring about change, whether personal or social. In analysing the tensions and difficulties that arose in her practice of teaching a course on media and anti-racism to university students, Ellsworth points out that this assumption ignores people's investments in particular social positions and discourses, and that these investments are not lightly given up:

As long as the literature on critical pedagogy fails to come to grips with issues of trust,

risk, and *the operations of fear and desire* around such issues of identity and politics in the classroom, their rationalistic tools will continue to fail to loose deep-seated, self-interested investments in unjust relations ... [our emphasis] (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 313)

Ellsworth (1989), as well as Britzman *et al.* (1993), argues that the post-structuralist retheorizing of identity should make educators question the possibility of achieving 'enlightenment' through rational discussion. Indeed, research on student opposition to critical approaches repeatedly highlights the need to understand and theorize the concept of identity in particular contexts as crucial to dismantling student opposition (Ellsworth, 1989; Britzman *et al.*, 1993; Janks, 1995).

Conceptions of identity/subjectivity

In our own research (McKinney & van Pletzen, 2002), we found that students and their teachers tended to start responding from essentialist identity positions when they encountered materials and discussions that challenged beliefs or views in which they felt strongly invested. It became our focus to find ways of deconstructing essentialist positions in the classroom, and of introducing discursive spaces in which both students and their teachers could explore the many private and political processes through which identities are constructed. When we speak of identities, we make use of the post-structuralist retheorizing of identity or subjectivity (Hall, 1992a, b; Weedon, 1997; Rattansi, 1999), which has recently come to dominate thinking on social identity. This involves regarding identity or subjectivity as produced over time in discourse, and thus as socially and historically embedded. It is always in process, multiple, and neither 'unified' nor 'fixed' (Weedon, 1997, p. 87). However, while we take the view that identity is multiple, not fully coherent, and not fully rational, we also argue that the way in which it is embedded in society and history counteracts purely relative conceptions of identity. Here, we agree with Rattansi who, in theorizing 'race' and racism, argues that identity is not free-floating, but is anchored or invested in particular discourses and positions (Rattansi, 1999, p. 102). In recent identity theory, therefore, we have found a dialogue between the post-structuralist de-centering of the subject and a renewed emphasis on the need to acknowledge the power of identity investments within sociohistorical contexts. This dialogue offers a way of countering essentialism, which is especially important in talking about 'race' and 'culture', as we have indicated above. In this respect Hall's notion of 'new ethnicities' is particularly useful, in that it exemplifies an anti-essentialist approach, while at the same time recognizing:

that we all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture, without being contained by that position ... We are all in that sense ethnically located and our ethnic identities are crucial to our subjective sense of who we are. (Hall, 1992b, p. 258)

Looked at in this way, the space in which a sense of identity takes root inevitably becomes a site of struggle, in that none of us comes from only one place, always responds to only one version of our history, is moulded by one experience and so forth.

While in this article we focus on *students'* responses and identities, our research in general is premised on the recognition that our own identities as teachers are enmeshed in the ways that discussions evolve in the classroom. This recognition informed alterations made to our course design and teaching practice, but because of space restrictions, an analysis of our own responses and identity positions will have to be dealt with in a subsequent paper.

Building on research that critiques Critical Pedagogy and links students' resistance to their sense of identity or to their experience of 'threatened identities' (Janks, 1995, p. 2001), we look in this paper at the shifting and often contradictory identities (Hall, 1992a; Weedon, 1997), which students generate for themselves in the context of Bergzicht University and South Africa in general. We argue, that despite their strong objection to encountering the past, political considerations are consciously and often painfully *present* to these students, and that their desire to dispose of the past is frequently a tacit acknowledgement of the past's continued presence in their lives.

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Research contexts and data collection

Bergzicht University can be described as a privileged institution historically linked to 'white', Afrikaans culture. It still has a majority of 'white' students, who mostly speak Afrikaans as a first language, but with an increasing number of English first language students and a minority of 'black' students (these are mainly 'coloured' students, while there is an even smaller minority of 'black' African students).³ We each taught one group of students in the first-year English Studies course. As part of the programme we taught a component on South African literature, a course developed and convened by two colleagues who were sympathetic to, but not part of, our research project. Ermien taught a group of 18 students, 14 of whom were Afrikaans first language and 'white', and four of whom were English first language (two 'white' and two 'coloured'). Carolyn taught 17 students, 14 of whom were Afrikaans first language (including two 'coloured' students), and three of whom were 'white' and English-speaking.

We used ethnographic methods to collect data, including participant observation, video-recordings of the classes we taught and interviews with a sample of students. Our data also included students' assignments and journals. In analysing our data we have taken a broadly ethnographic approach, focusing on what we experienced as critical moments in the teaching, and tracing specific themes and discourses which emerged and recurred.

Since, in previous years, we had found students resistant to the way in which various South African writers represent the country's past, we decided to frame the course by explicitly introducing the concept of representation (which is inevitably plural and subjective), and by illustrating how particular representations might threaten our own or others' sense of identity. By teaching the course in this framework, we hoped to enable students to assess critically whether representations stereotype or essentialize certain features of sociocultural existence in South Africa (whether their own or others'). We encouraged students to see South African stories

and poems as insider perspectives of South Africa. To introduce the concept of plural representation and to illustrate how various responses arise in relation to representation, we prefaced the literature course with three more general critical reading classes, which looked at outsider perspectives of South Africa, using as texts a promotional travel video on South Africa (Tekweni Television Productions 1998) which essentialized 'race' and 'culture' crudely, as well as extracts from four travel guides on South Africa, *The Lonely Planet*, *The Rough Guide*, *The Footprint Handbook* and the *Dorling Kindersley Eye Witness Travel Guide*. The data we discuss in this paper come from the third of these classes in which we set students the task of comparing, in small group discussions, how their university town, Bergzicht, is represented in the four travel guides. We also asked them to write about South African identity in their journals. We shall focus on how students responded to the mention of South Africa's past in the four guide entries on Bergzicht, as well as the relationship between their responses and the identities they constructed for themselves (and South Africans generally).

Of the four different guides, *The Rough Guide* and *The Lonely Planet* were fairly political in focus. In the entries on Bergzicht, these two guides were more critical than the others, making connections between the town, the ideological and intellectual stances of the university, and apartheid. The criticism that the *Lonely Planet* levels at Bergzicht and its environment is minor: there is a reference to the 'infamous "tot" system in the surrounding winelands whereby labourers' wages were [and sometimes still are] partly paid in wine', and a throwaway line at the end of the otherwise very favourable entry on the town, which reads 'Don't expect liberal attitudes, though' (p. 219). In the *Rough Guide*, about a third of the entry is critical, labelling Bergzicht a 'conservative place' and describing it as 'the intellectual engine room of apartheid', which 'fostered the likes of Dr H. F. Verwoerd, the prime minister who dreamed up Grand Apartheid' (p. 128). It also states that 'today, the white establishment still has roots firmly in the National Party, the Dutch Reformed Church and the Broederbond⁴ (p. 128).

Disposing of the past: 'we've finished with it'

Classroom discussion clearly reflected students' reluctance to talk about the country's apartheid past and their sensitivity about associating the past with the present. A number of students objected to the links made between the university town and the apartheid past, as well as the way in which the region is characterized as conservative in present day South Africa. In Ermien's class, the spokesperson for a particular discussion group (four or five students) responded as follows:

Annette⁵: ... *Rough Guide* informs us of the strong white African culture, Afrikaans culture, sorry, and mentions the politics involved *which we all feel is unnecessary to mention [fast]*.

Later in the discussion, when Ermien asked whether students felt that the historical connection between Bergzicht and apartheid politics should have been left out of the *Rough Guide*, the same student says:

...we felt uhm feel like you can write about it [i.e., the university town] being more white but you don't necessarily have to mention the apartheid history because it's *lo-o-ng go-o-ne* [slow and emphatic].

When Ermien later asks:

why do you think we would like to exclude certain kinds of material? [substantial pause]
For instance why would you want to exclude certain kinds of historical and political material?

There was a general muttering from students, 'It's in the past', and the same student elaborated:

...for example this apartheid story, *it's been a really big story for like ages and you like* [pause] *we've decided it's gone we've finished with it, to bring it up the whole time is just unnecessary* [clipped and fast]. (Tutorial 3, 26 February 2001)

Carolyn encountered similar attitudes in her class. In response to her question '... so you found the political message to be quite propagandist rather than real?' a spokesperson for one of the discussion groups (four or five students) said:

André: ... yeh you see the thing is uhm it's not apartheid years anymore and people need to move on from that and uhm now that they start bringing all that back all the time and throwing it back into, how can we move on if that's kept thrown back at them and back and back. (Tutorial 3, 26 February 2001)

In all these responses there are clear signs of evasiveness, discomfort and frustration. Annette's fast pace on two occasions gave the impression that she wanted to skip over uncomfortable material, while her drawn out and strongly intoned 'long gone' seems to illustrate how far removed and detached 'apartheid history' is from the present.

Later, she twice stresses that the past is a 'story', a 'story' that had significant power ('a really big story for like ages'), but a story nonetheless, and one which she wishes to declare obsolete with the help of strong rhetorical reference to a collective and inclusive first person agency: '*we've* decided ... *we've* finished with it'. André's words refer to an unidentified group of people who keep on bringing back the past, which is in itself largely undefined: '*they*' bring '*all that*' back '*all the time*', making it impossible for others to 'move on'. Considerable violence seems to be imaged in the incomplete phrase, 'they start ... *throwing it back into* ...' and in the repeated 'thrown back at them and *back and back*'. The nouns, pronouns and syntactic structures of agency and victimhood keep slipping in André's account: those who desire to 'move on' are signified both through the indefinite noun '*people*' and the definite first person pronoun '*we*'; those who frustrate progress are an undefined '*they*' or disappear in a passive clause, 'how can we move on *if that's kept thrown back*'; and the agents wanting to 'move on' become unspecified victims, their identity either suppressed in the incomplete idiom 'throwing it back into [*our/their faces?*]', or made indistinct in a third person pronoun: 'thrown back at *them*'. Despite the strength of André's allegation(s) and the intensity of his frustration, he seems to be unclear about whom he is identifying with and vague about who is assaulting whom with reminders of the past. While it is impossible to know what underlies this

indistinctness, and whether it is intentional or not, the emotive force of the utterance as a whole seems clear. Furthermore, although reminders of 'the apartheid years' are kept equally unspecified ('*all that*', '*it*' and '*that*'), André is clearly perturbed, suggesting that the past, and his own association with it, may have more substance in his mind than he cares to acknowledge. Likewise, the amount of energy that Annette expends on disposing of the past seems to belie the claim that it has really 'long gone' from her mind. We shall return to this paradox of denial and acknowledgement, suppression and remembering, at a later stage.

The discourse of optimism: 'being part of a dream and development'

For the moment, then, we want to draw attention to three attitudes towards the past, which we have found reflected in the extracts above and more broadly in our data:

- that students tend to place apartheid firmly in an historic past that they see as detached from (and therefore irrelevant to) their experience of the present;
- that they want to avoid confrontation with the apartheid past;
- that they have a strong desire to 'move on' to better things.

In keeping with this desire, students' responses often contained an optimistic representation of life in the 'new South Africa' and a strong urge to be part of it. At the end of the class described above, we asked students to respond to the following questions in their journal writing: 'How would you describe being South African?' and 'Do you think there is a collective South African identity?' Our aim was to give students the opportunity to formulate their own definitions, thoughts and feelings about being South African, as well as their own identities as South Africans. These were some of the students' written responses:

Deidré: ... We as South Africans believe to be the rainbow nation, to stand together and make one colour like the rainbow when you mix all the colours together...

Cathy: ... Personally, I claim my nationality with pride, and know that I am one of the few lucky people who have the unique experience of living in such a spontaneous, cosmopolitan, excitingly 'new' country. To be a South African makes me proud of the people who build it's nation and the uniqueness of our social situations...

Sonja: ... Being a South African means to be part of the 'Rainbow nation' and trying to build a better future for everyone. Also working on equality...

Stella: ... I think South Africa is an interesting country with a lot of potential. Being a South African gives you an opportunity (through hard work) to achieve your dreams and goals.

Being a South African is not being part of a specific group or culture, but being a South Africa[n] (to me) is being part of a dream and development.

In contrast to their reluctance to talk about the past, these students' language about the present and future is suffused with optimism and nationalist fervour: concepts like faith, hope, pride and enthusiasm abound, and the image of the 'rainbow nation', popularized by Archbishop Tutu and the mass media around the 1994

democratic elections, figures prominently. So does the idea of building a nation or the future. Although students do refer in their journal writing to the country's problematic past, as we shall show in the next paragraph, quite some effort goes into transforming the divisions of apartheid through popular and personal imagery: so, the people of South Africa 'stand together' to 'make one colour'; the previously divided country becomes 'cosmopolitan, excitingly "new"' and our 'social situations' are celebrated for their 'uniqueness'.

However, as we have argued in the case of students' disposal of the past, the discourse of optimism still seems to contain within itself a vivid reminder of the past. None of the students above express blind optimism about South Africa: they acknowledge the problematic past and the difficulties it creates in our society in the present. Deidré complicates her description of 'rainbow' solidarity by writing:

...in the early years we had apartheid and that placed a bad lable around our countrys name! But the big question is Has the issue of apartheid really been solved??

Cathy tempers her pride of her 'excitingly "new" country' by also describing it as a country 'slowly emerging from a history riddled with gross injustices and exploitations'. Sonja likewise alters the picture:

On the other side, South Africans are not all 'innocent' patriotic people. We experience a high crime rate and very much racism, which I think, will never end.

Like the students who wanted to dispose of the past and 'move on', these students' discourse of optimism links them in complex and problematic ways to the past, once again suggesting that they are aware, without being prompted, of aspects of the apartheid past in their present existence.

Threatened identities and the university context

The discourses discussed above express both a strong desire for a tolerant new South Africa, as well as an unsettling awareness of threats to the new dispensation. This split between desire and fear, optimism and anxiety, also plays itself out in the identities that students construct for themselves and speak from in the critical literacy classroom. We would argue that the context of Bergzicht University complicates their positioning as young South Africans in that its very strong historical links with 'white' Afrikaner politics and culture, in short, with a past now rendered highly problematic, pose questions about their present identities that are difficult to resolve. Continuing public debates occurring both locally and nationally about the University's unique Afrikaans identity in South African Higher Education make it difficult for staff and students not to be aware at some level or other of positioning themselves or being positioned in relation to this declared cultural identity, and its historical and present associations in the country. What frequently happens is that the University context calls up a complex of associations and discourses from the 'old' South Africa which sparks off anxious and defensive responses in students in sharp conflict with their desire for a 'new' South African identity.

On the whole, students were quick to object to critical representations of

Bergzicht in the travel guides. This may not seem surprising: they had just entered Bergzicht University and generally students invest at least part of their identity firmly in their chosen institution of learning. Having said that, we still found that students were exceptionally sensitive to the travel guides' representations, to the extent that they often expanded relatively slight references in the texts into full blown attacks on the town, the University or the country as a whole. In Carolyn's class, none of the students were prepared to defend the two travel guides which included critical references to Bergzicht. One student explained why he found the travel guide's criticism 'a bad idea':

André: ... you will teach the tourists [*inaudible*], and people in foreign countries, and apartheid years, it's a picture of violence and with apartheid you know and people being killed all over the place and violence and all that.

Carolyn: But do you get that from here? [*pointing to guide book entries; incredulous tone*]

André: No, but when they start mentioning politics and stuff people start thinking again really of all those pictures they have of violence and like...

This is the response of a young South African who clearly has a very vivid and traumatic picture of the past in his mind, which he connects in some way or other to his identity. We would suggest that this student feels threatened when he sees his place of learning, its cultural connections and his own identifications with the place, so strongly linked to the apartheid past.

In Ermien's class, a similar expression of anxiety about Bergzicht's associations with the past can be found pitched against a desire for the new, but in this case the student minimises and transforms the criticism, rather than expanding it into an attack. In his discussion group's report on the *Rough Guide's* representation of the town, he says:

Heinrich: ... the *Rough Guide* also starts out and talks about the scenery, the street frontages, the the vintage cafés the sidewalks, on the sidewalks the water, the little streams and then it gets a bit negative and talks about apartheid and that it was founded here and that this was a very Afrikaner [*slight pause*] drop [town, *exaggerated Afrikaans pronunciation, rolling the -r*]. I think why why he does that is to show the evolution of [Bergzicht] from those days to what it is now, today it's much more cross-cultural, there's much more cultures here, much more languages.

The student starts by elaborating on Bergzicht's tourist attractions and slips without signalling any change of emotion into the text's criticism of the place and the mention of apartheid which he finds only a 'bit negative'. His anxiety, however, and here we would argue that this is in response to a threat to Afrikaner identity and his identity as a Bergzicht student, seems to surface in his use of the word 'drop' (instead of 'town'), especially his caricature of the Afrikaans pronunciation which comes across as self-denigratory ('drop' has connotations of an isolated, backward place). Anxiety gives way to desire when the student ascribes particular motives to the writer which can neither be justified from the text nor from the reality of the present day town of Bergzicht, which remains mainly 'white' and middle class. He transforms the present day university town into a place of many cultures and languages firmly representative of the 'new' South Africa: it becomes 'cross-cultural'. At a later stage

in the discussion, it furthermore becomes evident that this student's awareness of the travel guide's criticism is registered far more strongly than it seems initially (and he is joined in this by other students in the class). He expresses the same fear as André that critical representation of Bergzicht may discourage people from going there and brand it as a symbol of apartheid:

You don't want to, you don't want to scare away, OK you say [*simulating the travel guide voice*], 'Bergzicht is a beautiful town and Dr Verwoerd lived there'. Everybody knows Dr Verwoerd, but you don't want to—now now the black guy wants to come and visit Bergzicht, he reads this and says, 'No, these people are very racist and so on, so I don't want to go and visit there',—you don't want to scare them away with it.

Menan, who has been trying to speak for a while, makes the leap, like André, from Bergzicht to South Africa in general:

Everyone associates, the outside world, everyone associates South Africa and apartheid and we must try and move away from that and the only way we can do that is by making people see it's not like that anymore, so why bring it up all the time because then they just believe on, it still exists, but it doesn't.

When André encounters the word apartheid associated with Bergzicht, he chooses to make the concept disturbingly present in his animated 'picture of violence' of 'people being killed all over the place'. He furthermore shows this picture emanating from a foreign viewpoint, from 'people in foreign countries', which echoes the past isolationist discourse of apartheid South Africa of the seventies and eighties. This suggests that the word apartheid for him becomes accusatory in the present, reviving the feelings of guilt and fear of isolation that were experienced by past generations of 'white' South Africans. The same fear of what the 'outside world' might think, and of isolation, is evident in the discourse Menan uses: 'Everyone associates, the outside world, everyone associates South Africa and apartheid'. The way in which students revive isolationist discourse around the use of the word apartheid shows that they both amplify and take very personally any criticism of Bergzicht, again suggesting that their identities as 'new' South Africans are threatened by cultural identities that they see imposed on them from the past, but which they nonetheless may feel some investment in.

To summarise, while students express a reluctance to engage with the apartheid past, they are extremely conscious of it and this uncomfortable awareness surfaces in their discourses. Their discourses furthermore shift between an optimism about the 'new' South Africa and a recognition of the legacies of the 'old' South Africa. Following post-structuralist theorising of subjectivity as discursively constructed, we would argue that these shifts between discourses reflect and perpetuate the multiple identities that students negotiate in classroom discussions of representations of their place of learning and country. The students seem to resist the positioning they perceive emanating from the *Lonely Planet* and *Rough Guide* texts of themselves as conservative, 'white' and, in some cases, 'Afrikaners'. These are all complex identity positions, in that they call forth defensiveness, but also dissociation. Thus while their sense of threat may derive from a particular ethnic association, such as 'white', or 'Afrikaans', they certainly do not want to be contained by these positions (cf, Hall,

1992b). The multiple positioning described above is reflected in students' use of conflicting 'past' and 'present', racialized and non-racialized, discourses in talking and writing about Bergzicht, their university and their South African identity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we would like to argue that this particular intervention contributed in a number of ways to our objective of creating discursive spaces in which students and their tutors could grapple with the multiple and contradictory processes of identification (and accompanying anxieties, hopes and fears), which take place in complex social environments such as Bergzicht University and a South Africa in transition. The session in itself deepened our understanding of the way in which past, present and future identities jostle one another in students' experience of their university and national contexts. Realizing and acknowledging that identity is a site of struggle and meaning-making helped us shift our perceptions of our students: instead of immediately trying to 'correct' or 'change' viewpoints that we regarded as 'resistant', we could allow them to voice their opinions and feelings over a period of time, constantly cross-referring and mediating between expressed positions. Our view of identity as essentially temporal and multiple means that qualitative individual change is impossible to pin down and measure. Such change takes place in haphazard, non-linear ways in relation to a multitude of experiences, rather than a single semester long university course. Thus, pedagogy for change, both of the self and of the social, may translate at the level of the classroom into aiming for moments of significant intellectual engagement in issues of social inequality and representation.

Our research has significant implications for understanding student resistance to critical pedagogy, and the relationship between identity and resistance. We have argued that in order to understand resistance and to work productively with it, we need to recognize and analyse what students are invested in, their hopes and dreams, and how they are embedded in the sociopolitical and historical moment in which they live. While the dominant view of resistance to critical pedagogy is that it is a problem that needs to be overcome, our research supports a more positive view, showing that such resistance does not necessarily prevent productive engagement. On the contrary, it can provide powerful teaching moments. While not part of a linear progression, resistance may be a necessary process for some students and may be the only way that they can engage with particular texts at particular moments. Our aim then should not be merely to overcome resistance, but rather to expand opportunities to engage with it.

Notes on transcription

For the sake of readability, we have transcribed classroom discussion using conventional punctuation. Emphatic speech, particular inflections and marked changes of pace have been indicated by underlining, with explanatory notes in square brackets.

Notes

1. The financial assistance of the National Research Foundation: Social Sciences and Humanities (South Africa) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are those of the authors and are not necessarily to be attributed to the National Research Foundation.
2. While we do not want to support the myth of 'race' as a biological category, our use of 'race' terms is unavoidable because of the continuing role that 'race' plays in organizing social life in South Africa. We signify 'race' as a social construct by using quotation marks.
3. In 2001 the undergraduate population on campus was 85.8% 'white' (71% Afrikaans first language speakers, 25% English first language speakers and some bilingual English/Afrikaans speakers) and 14.14% 'black' (11% 'coloured', 1.9% 'black' African and 0.99% Indian students). The student figures are unusual in South Africa where universities at present generally have a minimum of 50% 'black' students.
4. The Broederbond, a largely secret society open only to 'white' male Protestant Afrikaners during the reign of the National Party, was instrumental in securing political, social and economic power for its members.
5. Students' names have been changed.

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