

Peer-reviewed article

Seeking relevancy and transformation: The journey of valuing agency at a South African film school

**Jenni Lynne
Underhill**

AFDA (The School for the Creative Economies)
Johannesburg, South Africa

jenniu@afda.co.za

Abstract

AFDA (The School for the Creative Economies) South Africa, has a consciousness – framed by the emerging landscape of decolonization – that storytelling needs to be more socially relevant than ever before. Student filmmakers find themselves at a crossroad of needing to capture characters that are relevant with a view to engendering diversity and transformation. This paper discusses the explicit need for integrating the skill of critical thinking, framed by academic argument, into the conceptual process of student film development. This is because the conceptual relevance of films has to be deepened and well expressed. In addition, the identities of characters have to be as authentic and as representative as possible. By teaching students critical thinking, and its integration into the creative process, AFDA believes that the end product will have succinct social/political meaning. AFDA has devised an innovative way to integrate student agency and research into the conceptual development stage of the student filmmaking process. This paper demonstrates how this is done and motivates how this type of approach enables promising results.

Introduction

Mbembe (2019) argues that if we do not rehabilitate reason we will not fix our broken world. Mbembe's thoughts centre on the dated praxis of academies and the need for rehabilitation, which he believes is possible in South Africa. However, in order for this to take place, he asserts that an overhaul and radical critique of the status quo of academies must occur. The issue, he maintains, is the atrophy of the mind in academies as well as an inability for reinvention of images, identities and of South Africa itself as a country. Mbembe (2019) further explains that what South Africa needs is to open up to itself; he calls upon South Africans to see ourselves clearly, not separately from others, both in relation to ourselves and to others. AFDA (the School for the Creative Economies) has taken up this notion to help frame the pedagogy of teaching film.

AFDA is a private higher education institute with four campuses across South Africa. It was established over 25 years ago and the original focus was teaching film, including subjects such as screenwriting, directing and production design. This has now extended to include television subjects, live performance, business innovation and technology for the creative economy. This paper focuses on film pedagogy.

AFDA is a part of the higher education milieu in South Africa in that it finds itself engaging with transformation and necessary systemic change. Our sense is that creative students are on the verge of reclaiming and owning filmmaking, framed by developing a perspective which can allow them to see themselves clearly, in order to fully express themselves in their student films.

Following this, then, our question is: how can we (i.e. the curriculum development team) assist students to arrive at this place of self-awareness and grow it with confidence? We feel that transforming student filmmaking has to do with creating a set of shifting mind-sets of both how film is taught and how films are conceptualised (i.e. the process of brainstorming, discussing, researching and debating the notions underpinning a film). Thus we take from Mbembe (2016) in that we think we need to teach students a logic of self-affirmation, to enable student ownership of their learning. We seek to realise this through teaching critical thinking, in our own context and, in so doing, guide students to learn to apply the tools of academic argument to allow for authentic, representative films.

Until recently at the institution, it was assumed that students engaged with research and critical thinking to conceptualize their films. However, in 2017 a study was conducted at AFDA on the Honours cohort of that year (Underhill, 2017). The findings of this research were that the undergraduate programmes, to an extent, lacked academic writing development – a common global tertiary teaching and learning challenge (Rose, 2008). Additionally, and more importantly, the 2017 research showed that critical engagement with central film themes and concepts was significantly lacking. This finding was based on the evidence that the concepts underpinning the student films were unoriginal, included several non-South African narratives, and lacked both socio-political depth and authentic representations of South African characters. We maintain that these criteria mostly provide the foundations of good student films. This is because we want students to make films that are relevant to South Africa and which tell students' stories.

Thus, we understand that we have to change the approach to how we teach conceptualization if we want to offer students a certain type of engagement with their filmmaking. We have accordingly begun a journey of self-interrogation as educators as we seek to reimagine our environment. We see that we have to create the social cultural conditions for students to be able to participate in their own learning in new ways. We realize that we have been inadvertently disallowing student voice to occur because of how our teaching is reliant on assimilation. Hollywood film examples (and films from other western countries) are mostly used as references with which to teach. It is evident that we somewhat expect our student filmmakers to embrace a certain kind of film content. Moreover, we see that we have to revisit what passes for excellence because that benchmark has not been set in South Africa (Mbembe, 2016). This paper explains what we have implemented as a result of our self-reflection and discusses the results we hope to glean.

The institution as an agent of change

Simon (1992) maintains that as a normative framework, self-realization presumes that a person in a social environment is confronted with individual choice. This choice is assumed to be an open structure of possibility in which one makes decisions. With regard to pedagogical practice, Simon (1992) asserts that teaching and learning must find ways of addressing, as well as enhancing, an individual's potential for the acquisition of skills and knowledge. This includes the exploration of the construction of multiple identities in the realm of choice.

Importantly, however, practice must also encompass the development of resources which enable students to challenge (or transform) the relations that structure the available opportunities from which to choose. I understand this to be the responsibility of educational institutions, in that opportunities for choice must be inherent in them. The alternative is a framework of pre-determination in which possibilities are shut out and different, opposing forms of life and humanity are denied (Mbembe, 2016).

With regard to AFDA opening these structures, teaching is currently an interrogation, using mostly Western knowledge constructions and Northern exemplars to teach film. Explicitly, the teaching of film at AFDA has meant the adherence to, and reverence of, Hollywood as a primary benchmark for filmmaking in terms of technical excellence and, importantly, also in terms of representation of people and communities. This implies that North American meta-narratives have largely been illustrated via Hollywood films over time. Subsequently, certain North American versions of the world may be exacerbated by the notion that: "Hollywood's motion pictures reach nearly everyone. Cinematic illusions are created, nurtured, and distributed world-wide, reaching more than 100 countries" (Shaheen, 2001: 5).

The issue is that this, coupled with certain meta-narratives, may result in the stereotyping of individuals or one-dimensional representation of groups of people. For example, during the Cold War, Hollywood films came to instil fear of the Soviets in countless films designed to justify the curtailment of communist expansion (Edwards, 2001). Also, post 9/11, the "enemy" was replaced by what Edward (2001:13) terms a "green" terror, which sought to imprint on audiences the unpredictable yet anticipated fear of Islamic fundamentalists.

The net result is that South African film students at AFDA are seemingly taught using a certain version of historical events which excludes their own country, its history and its people. This culminates in the application of these ideological models to enable an understanding of how meaning is constructed to sustain or subvert relations of domination – for instance Hollywood versus the potential narratives of South Africa. The problem with this is that legitimization establishes relations of dominance (Lather, 1991). These relations are sustained primarily because they are claimed as being justified and worthy of support. This claim to legitimacy, made in the reverence of Hollywood, is based on uncontested grounds expressed in certain symbolic forms (such as awards or global accolades) and representations of socially constructed human identities made to fit certain conventional, prescriptive moulds.

Moulding identities means creating them to allow for human organization and classificatory systems in which social/political meaning is produced. Social order is maintained by binary oppositions in the creation of insiders and outsiders (Hall, 1992). Woodward (2007) further explains that identity is often most clearly defined by difference, that is, by what it is not. Identities may be marked by polarization and by the marking of exclusion and inclusion i.e. insiders and outsiders, “us” and “them”. The marking of difference takes place both through the symbolic systems of representation and through forms of social exclusion (Underhill, Clarence-Fincham & Petersen: 2014). In sum, the identity of the outsider is produced in relation to the insider. This is significant, as in the Hollywood and other Western examples shown to our film students, they cannot readily recognize or identify themselves in the characters or narratives. Thus, they potentially fall into the ‘outsider’ or ‘them’ categories. The possible implication of this is the internalization that one is not worthy of representation, acknowledgement or acceptance. This is exacerbated by the fact that one’s country, cultures and histories are simply not represented.

Thus, for film students trying to conceptualize a film including their context, lived experiences and identities, they may struggle to justify why any of their concerns may be relevant to, or appreciated by, an audience. This is because social constructions affect individuals, in that they may be empowering or not. An ascribed identity can become a category that is imposed and people may feel they need to perform within the delineations of that identity. In addition, the ways in which people are represented can shape the ways in which people come to represent themselves (Hall, 1992). Thus socially constructed identities tend to define life in measurable terms, excluding notions of agency and subjectivity. This is a restricted view of human beings because it focuses on the repetitive and predictable invariants of people. To go against these invariants or to show new representations in films can be intimidating for our students.

We understand that students should feel that they can exercise agency and reclaim or reshape their filmmaking. We seek to help students to be openly critical and to resist imposed representation in exchange for determining agency and choice, with an emphasis on the fluid and ever-changing nature of identity. This means that we work to offer them the possibility that they no longer need to look to pre-existing, so-called normative models. Student filmmaking needs to shift from imitation to something novel and meaningful (Mbembe, 2016).

The idea of a meaningful film, as advocated by AFDA, is one that holds recognition of current, debatable, controversial and contested South African issues. They also are encouraged to be films that deal with the lives of students. This means that a meaningful film is one that expresses agency-driven

responses to film making. This includes what students value and care about. So-called 'good' filmmaking thus far at AFDA has, to an extent, meant that students have received the social/political problems of other places and tried to make meaning from them. It can be argued that these are imposed on the South African milieu, often with an incongruent fit. Odora Hoppers (2001) explains that this can be understood as a collective, perhaps unwitting, subjugation of local indigenous cultures, values and identities. It is not surprising then, that students may encounter a 'conceptual relevance gap' at the point of conceptualizing their own student-film. This means that students do not know whether they can, should, or should not make a film about their realities. Nor do they know whether their films will be accepted and liked.

The problem with a lack of conceptual relevance is that it is inextricably linked to emotional relevance. For instance, if an individual cannot identify with the characters of a film because they are so removed from the tangible reality of that individual as audience, then emotional relevance may be lost. To this end, I argue that there are further challenges facing student filmmakers around the notion of indigenous emotional relevance. A social constructivist view of emotions is that they are social, cultural practices and thus emotional expression is habitual to, and characteristic of, a cultural group (Wetherell & Maybin, 1996). The implication of this is that there are ways people should feel in certain situations. In other words, emotions can best be understood in relation to their social context. Feelings are social practices organized by stories that people enact and tell (Wetherell & Maybin, 1996). Moreover, feelings cannot be separated from thoughts or culture or collective interpretations of appropriate behaviour. Thus, if only certain types of behaviour are represented, then only certain emotional reactions can be expected. To this end, it seems that student filmmakers may experience an *imposed* emotional milieu because their reference points have been centred in Eurocentric or North American canons. These canons dictate how people should feel because their dominant systems, and arrangements of human existence, are often coupled with prescribed human emotions (Mbembe, 2016).

If students do not have the confidence to break down the above-mentioned social practices and norms that have been ascribed to them, then it follows that emotional relevance in their films may be somewhat diminished. This is important because the narrative of a film is told through characters' emotions and only when an audience connects with a character on an emotional level does the interaction become meaningful. The idea is that an audience responds viscerally to the characters and can intuitively take part in the character's emotional development and/or emotional change (Alderson, 2019).

Students thus need to recognize their experiences and their emotions as being valid. It follows that they need to understand their own subjectivity, and the subjective experiences of others, to conceptualize their films. As with emotions, it can be argued that subjectivity is governed by historically specific social factors and forms of power at work in a particular society. Subjectivity is formed by gender, race, class, age and cultural background. The forms of subjectivity open to us will variously privilege rationality, science, common sense, religious belief, intuition and emotion. Thus different discourses provide for a range of modes of subjectivity (Lather, 1991). This is what we want our students to grasp by engaging in critical thinking. We want to provide a new discourse to enable the process of contesting traditional, age-old power relations (Weedon, 1987).

Lather (1991) argues that while we are not authors of the way we understand our lives, and while we are subjected to regimes of meaning, we are also involved in discursive self-production. Recognition of discourses and plural meanings allows for more measure of choice on the side of the individual; and where choice is not even available, at least resistance is still possible (Weedon, 1987). To this end, in an attempt to break through hegemonic discourses (which rationalize practices of domination), counter-discursive storytelling must be made available so that people can use their stories as frameworks for reconstituting “new possibilities” (Simon, 1992:63). Simon (1992) also argues that the institution (in this case AFDA) is a public space, but the processes of thinking and feeling are private. However, within the protective space the institution offers, students may express doubt and fears and tell stories that they may not be willing to share publically until they are fully realized.

Simon (1992:64) further asserts that without this *supportive dimension* added to “being”, effective critical thinking and teaching become impossible. To this end, the institution acts as a kind of experimental breeding ground for ideas and the gradual exploration of student narratives. Students have the time, pedagogical structures and support to conceptualize and then make their films before they are viewed by external audiences. We want our students to undergo this process in a structured manner which is designed to integrate the issue of self-esteem mentioned above. Teaching and learning in a safe space encourages students to feel intrinsically worthwhile and that their stories are worth telling. This is the process of self-acknowledgment based on perceptions that one is known, accepted and liked. It is our intention to allow students to more readily realize that they have contributed to their own, and possibly others’, abilities to create meaningful films.

The method: linking academic argument and critical thinking to conceptualization of films

Following this, our aim is to introduce ‘Critical Thinking’ as a course to clear the way for students to see that filmmaking does not have to exist in a hegemonic paradigm. Rather, students are encouraged to think outside existing limits and jurisdictions set by previous pedagogies at the institution. Waghid (2002) explains that educators need to reconstruct knowledge. He argues that, to do this, individuals must be empowered in the transformation process, and that this is done primarily through the development of critical thinking in students. Our interpretation of this is that critical thinking becomes the vehicle for understanding and asserting agency. We further assert that teaching academic argument provides a structure for both understanding and applying critical thinking. Accordingly, we adopted and adapted a model of ‘critical thinking as argument’, or what Davies (2015:50) refers to as “the skills view model”. This model is designed to teach students to think critically by taking them through the processes of critical thinking as framed by the tenets of academic argument. Davies (2015) explains that this model has six characteristics of critical thinking to be taught. These are: argumentation skills, judgements, dispositions, actions, social relations and critical being. These are explained further below.

We relate to this model because we feel that academic argument (which we believe also embodies the other five characteristics mentioned above) is exemplified by critical dialogue with the self, texts and others. Brockbank and McGill (1998:57) write in relation to dialogue:

[that people's] existing assumptions about understanding, self and the world are challenged [and] learning becomes reflectively critical when the emergent ideas are related to the existing senses of knowledge, self and the world and a new understanding emerges.

Accordingly, the overall learning objective for 'Critical Thinking' as a course is to allow students to identify their own thinking by viewing it in relation to multiple views and opinions. We want students to understand their reasons for what they do and believe, to critically evaluate their own beliefs and actions, and to be able to present to others the reasons for their beliefs and actions (Cottrell, 2017). Importantly, we seek to guide students to see the boundary between themselves, their sources and their assumptions – with a view to enabling a healthy and generative creative process. In sum, we want to allow students to feel that they can freely pursue new knowledge of their choice into the conceptualization of their films (Mbembe, 2016).

'Critical Thinking' is run in the Bachelor of Arts Motion Picture Degree Programme from first to third year and is a compulsory, credit-bearing course. This subject is inextricably linked to the conceptualization phase of the filmmaking process, as each year-group is expected to produce a film. This is important, as recent research notes that critical thinking courses are best taught in an area of specific application rather than in a generalized way (Hansson, 2019). The main feature of the course is engaging with the notion of academic argument. The elements of academic argument are explicitly taught to students, for example, hypothesis, recognizing/acknowledging multiple views on a subject, understanding main ideas/claims, applying supporting evidence, evaluating evidence and forming opinions (Davies, 2015). These skills enable students to engage with sound decision-making, wherein multiple dimensions of an issue are explored.

The application of these skills readily serves as a partner to conceptualization. Students do not write traditional essays or assignments at AFDA. They do not have to answer long questions. Rather, they use academic argument to explain and rationalize their film concepts and creative choices. In this sense, our assessment is focused on thinking processes, such as acquiring and working critically with information (Ennis, 1993). The first step in the conceptualization process (at the beginning of the academic year and creative process) is for students to acknowledge one another by listening to one another and together seeking a problem that they wish to explore in their films (Manathunga, 2020). It is important to note at this point that students are required to make their films in collaborative teams. Teams are made up of students representing each of the film disciplines and thus replicate a real-life film crew. For example, there is one student responsible for screenwriting, another for producing, one for directing, one for cinematography and one for character styling, as well as others for several post-production disciplines.

As soon as a team (crew) has been formed, we give the students the phrase 'research problem' because we hope that, together, students will find something to explore that they are passionate about. This starts with discussion among students to appreciate what each individual values. We see this as encompassing both the judgment and disposition features from "the skills view model" of teaching critical thinking mentioned above (Davies, 2015:53). This is because students are encouraged to engage in critical dialogue as part of creating current South African citizenship as previously outlined. If we know one another's "life histories" as Manathunga (2020:103) asserts, then we can

work interculturally. This is a formalized procedure which occurs in tutorials. Tutors are facilitators working with concepts of judgment, as well as disposition, in that they help students uncover assumptions and allow students to consider other people’s reasoning, alongside their own (Cottrell, 2017).

From the start, it is explained to students how research and academic argument can help enrich their concepts. Students are provided with “concept proposal guidelines” which serve to scaffold their thinking and build their ability to construct argument. This is similar to a thesis proposal template in that sections include: research problem, readings (text and other platforms), resolution (findings) and conclusion. Students are tasked with filling out the templates together, reflecting on them and constantly adjusting them. Discussion and research allow students to explore why a problem exists, how it is to be investigated, as well as providing awareness of the constant developments/amendments that occur during conceptualization. This opportunity, we believe, is regarded as a dimension of the social relations part of the “skills view model” in that students may look at current, contemporary, societal challenges that shape their worlds collectively (Davies, 2015).

As mentioned above, students do not write academic essays as such, but treatments. A treatment is, in part, a description of how a concept will be explicated through the contributions of each discipline to the making of a film. At AFDA we teach that each discipline amplifies a concept. This means that each discipline is responsible for expressing a concept through their specialization, for instance, through production design, directing, sound, and so on. However, most importantly, the treatment is a justification of the overall film concept. This is much like an academic essay in which an argument is advocated and evidence is required to support a specific point of view. In this sense, students are encouraged to critically engage with their disciplines and use them as powerful means to communicate the messages of their films (Cottrell, 2017). This is a dimension of the action part of “the skills view model”, where students apply and use argumentation to express creativity (Davies, 2015).

The critical thinking courses are nuanced with myriad tasks and activities and thus they are too dense to fully describe here. However, I have selected key features to attempt to illustrate the main drivers in each year of study. In the Davies (2015) model critical thinking is scaffolded (see Table 1). This approach is reiterated by others such as van Gelder (2005), who advocates for a transition from low-level to high-level critical thinking skills. He also argues that critical thinking needs to be taught explicitly with application and/or practice.

Table 1: Critical thinking skills (Davies, 2015:54)

Lower-level thinking skills (“Foundation”)	Higher-level thinking skills	Complex thinking skills	Thinking about thinking
Interpreting	Analyzing claims	Evaluating arguments	Metacognition
Identifying assumptions	Synthesizing claims	Reasoning verbally	Self-regulation
Asking questions for clarification	Predicting	Inference making	
		Problem solving	

Davies (2015) asserts that the first level of his model is the lower-level foundation of critical thinking. The key areas of focus on this level involve interpreting, identifying assumptions and asking questions for clarification. Thus, at AFDA, the first-year students are taught to apply these skills to understanding social/political issues for the purposes of conceptualization. By using these skills students are steered away from emotional, impassioned, random or immediate reactions that may distract from meaningful conceptualization. In other words, because students are engaged in a creative process it may be difficult for them to *not* respond over emotionally.

The next level proposed by Davies (2015) is higher-level critical thinking skills which include analyzing and synthesizing claims, as well as predictive skills. Accordingly, in their second year of study, students engage in identifying relevant texts for their research problem. Students further tackle synthesizing texts and experience how an argument emerges from research. Subsequently, this translates to how students garner new insights. The important aspect emphasized at this stage of the student journey in second year is the interrogation of knowledge systems. This includes working towards the deconstruction of binaries and hierarchies between Northern and Southern knowledge (Manathunga, 2020:96). This is deepened in third year in the hope of capturing and telling South African stories – including perhaps newly formed hybrid identities and “fluid mobile identities that shift and change across time and space” (Manathunga, 2020:105).

These insights may then be linked to the resolution in student films. This resolution is hopefully conceptually relevant in that it has been deeply considered rather than hurriedly put together. A resolution in this context means how the concept will develop and how the conflicts in a narrative will eventually be solved. Students have to incorporate a research design in second year. This means that they work within a methodology to describe how they achieved a resolution of their problem. Through applying the correct methodologies, students learn that they can more readily solve problems through strategic thinking and planning. In other words, students work with the notion of process, that is, taking logical steps or actions to arrive at solutions. Snyder and Snyder (2008:96) emphasize that problem solving is at the heart of the critical thinking process and that students need to be taught to self-correct by asking, “Look at it again...what did we miss?” By the end of the second year of study students will have learned the skills of verbal reasoning, evaluating arguments, inference making and, as mentioned above, problem solving (Davies, 2015).

The third level for Davies (2015) is complex thinking skills. This links well to our third-year outcomes as by the third year of study, students formulate their concepts with even more rigor. Through research and academic argument they are required to discuss in detail the constraints (social/political/environmental) which cause their problem to exist. The goal in this exercise is to produce a work that is ultimately emotionally relevant and offers innovative insight into issues that are meaningful, not only to the students, but also to their communities and society at large. This adds to the dimension of social relations from the Davies (2015) model.

The third-year film is viewed as a culmination of the technical and conceptual skills the students have learned. We link this to Davies (2015), who describes the culmination of “the skills view model” as action – this involves the potential or actual commitment to action. He hopes, as we do, that students will, by the end of third year, have attained a “critical spirit” or “critical disposition” to use in their filmmaking (Davies, 2015:60). This is the “being” in “the skills view model”, as framed by a call to

action and critical being. It is our aim that once a student has undergone the whole process outlined here, they will reach a point of metacognition or “thinking about thinking”. Framed by metacognition, we also hope that the overall outcome of the model offers an individual the empowerment of agency (Davies, 2015:54).

Understanding student response and data collection

At the end of 2019, a survey was taken across the three years of study on the four AFDA campuses to gauge whether our ‘concept proposal guidelines’ template had assisted students with conceptualization. Three statements were put out to be rated and at the same time students were asked to comment. The statements were: (1) the concept proposal guidelines template helped me do research, (2) the concept proposal guidelines helped me to work better in a group, and (3) the concept proposal guidelines helped me create a good concept. The data gleaned from the survey was dense and relative to several aspects of our institutional reflection. So, for the purposes of this paper, I will focus on key third-year Johannesburg campus qualitative responses only.

In keeping with a qualitative approach I analysed the data as I collected it (Merriam, 1998). As I studied the data, I was able to broadly assess the reactions of the students to the templates, as well as their responses to working in a critical paradigm. I used a global analysis to help me obtain an integrated view of the data by structuring large passages of the analysed text. I looked for recurring patterns and common themes that cut across the data in order to present a descriptive account of the findings (Merriam, 1998).

Emerging from the data, several students referred to the way in which the ‘concept proposal guidelines’ had given them much-needed structure for conceptualization and assistance with group work. One student described the process as “... being the best system so far, giving us the freedom to speak about a topic and doing research and analysis”. This type of comment legitimized one of the crucial elements of the templates, which was critical engagement with topics of interest and a safe space in which to communicate. Students also referred to the ways in which the new process had given them the necessary confidence to engage with research and to use research to enhance the process of conceptualization. Additionally, a student noted “they were excellent and we were more prepared. It was also a good tracking sheet to see where we were going”. This comment is indicative of a process of constant reflection on a concept until the students were satisfied. Yet another positive remark to this end was “we took time to reach a concept we all thought would work”.

Whilst these observations and student experiences were very encouraging, there were also students in the cohort who did not feel fully engaged with the intended process, for example, one student wrote, “more precise guidance would have helped a lot”. Another student remarked, “I don’t think they are taken seriously enough by the whole group” and yet another maintained, “I felt that the group were not committed to equally contributing”.

This type of feedback is essential to us as we think about how to continue to teach the use of the ‘concept proposal guidelines’ as part of the ‘Critical Thinking’ module, and also how to maximize collaboration, as well as teamwork. As a starting point to making improvements, we realise that all staff need to be incorporated into the pedagogy unequivocally. Staff development is an integral part

of institutional transformation. As Snyder and Snyder (2008) note, one barrier that impedes the integration of critical thinking is that staff are not trained in critical thinking methodology, which means that they may lack information and have preconceptions about it. Thus this will be a focus for us going forward.

These insights gained from the student comments underpin further thoughts on how to teach argument to develop critical thinking for the emergence of student voice. Taking this work forward, we will involve staff in their own processes of valuing and sharing several knowledge bases. We realize that staff need to undergo a similar process to that of students. By this I mean one of self-actualization. Once this is in place, staff can significantly assist students to reshape and reform (Mbembe, 2016). This recommendation would be an important research trajectory following this paper.

Concluding thoughts

The results of our approach have yet to be fully realized in our student films as we still have much to trial as well as implement. However, we maintain that we have succeeded in introducing a culture of consultative intent, dialogue, interrogation and possibility. This is the first step in the evolution of student thinking, application of skills, and relevant response to context in fulfilling ways for both creatives and audience. This paper is limited to our preliminary institutional thinking and will be followed up through viewing and reflecting on the student films made in the future.

Manathunga (2020) has called for thinking that leads to possibilities which interrogate Southern time, place and knowledge. Mbembe (2019) has argued for reason in a broken world. If students can correspond reason with creative output in filmmaking, then I argue that a new kind of representation of South Africa will be encouraged to emerge, even further than it has currently done so in film. Teaching critical thinking framed by academic argument offers the possibility of widening views, discourses and individual value in our context. We have an opportunity to engage creatively and energetically with contested histories, geographies and epistemologies (Manathunga, 2020). It is now a matter of striving to offer a pedagogy of openness, shared consciousness and emancipation.

Funding sources:

No funding sources.

Acknowledgments:

This paper would not have been possible without the insights of Bata Passchier.

References

- Alderson, M. 2019. Connecting with Audiences through Character Emotions. *Writers Store*. Available: <http://writerstore.com/connecting-with-audiences-through-character-emotions/>. Accessed 20 February 2020.
- Brockbank, A. & McGill, I. 1998. *Facilitating Reflective Learning in Higher Education*. London: Open University Press.
- Cottrell, S. 2017. *Critical Thinking Skills: Effective Analysis, Argument and Reflection*. London: Palgrave.
- Davies, M. 2015. A Model for Critical Thinking in Higher Education. In Paulsen, M.B (ed). *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research Vol 30*. Chapter 2. Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Edwards, B. 2001. Yankee Pashas and Buried Women: Containing Abundance in 1950s Hollywood Orientalism. *Film & History*. 31(2): 13-24.
- Ennis, R.H. 1993. Critical thinking assessment. *Theory into Practice*. 32(3): 179–186.
- Hall, S. 1992. *Questions of cultural identity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hansson, S.O. 2019. Critical Thinking Editorial. *Theoria*. 85(1): 3-7.
- Lather, P. 1991. *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in the Postmodern*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Manathunga, C. 2020. Decolonising higher education: creating space for Southern knowledge systems. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in the South*. 4(1): 4 -25.
- Mbembe, A. 2016. *Decolonising knowledge and the question of the archive*. Lecture at WISER. Available: <https://wiser.wits.ac.za/system/files/Achille%20Mbembe%20-%20Decolonizing%20Knowledge%20and%20the%20Question%20of%20the%20Archive.pdf>. Accessed 20 February 2020.
- Mbembe, A. 2019. If we don't rehabilitate reason we will not fix our broken world. *Mail & Guardian*. 10 May. Available: <https://mg.co.za/article/2019-05-09-if-we-dont-rehabilitate-reason-we-will-not-be-able-to-fix-our-broken-world/>. Accessed: 21 August 2020.
- Merriam, S.B. 1998. *Qualitative Research and Case Study Application in Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

- Odora Hoppers, C.A. 2001. Indigenous knowledge systems and academic institutions in South Africa. *Perspectives in Education*. (29) 2: 73-85.
- Rose, D. 2008. Redesigning foundations: Integrating academic skills with academic learning. Reading Symposium, August 2008. University of Johannesburg. Unpublished.
- Shaheen, G. J. 2001. *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. Olive Branch Press: Northampton.
- Simon, R.I. 1992. *Teaching Against the Grain: Texts for Pedagogy of Possibility*. New York: Bergen & Garvey.
- Snyder, L.G & Snyder, J. 2008. Teaching Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills. *The Delta Pi Epsilon Journal*. 50(2): 90-99.
- Underhill, J., Clarence-Fincham J. & Petersen, N. 2014. Developing a mentorship programme at a South African university: emerging shifts in pedagogy and identity. *Education as Change*. 18(2): 1-15. DOI:101080/206.926828.
- Underhill, J.L. 2017. The Empirical Imperative - Building a Culture of Research in a Post Truth Paradigm. Presentation at SACOMM conference, 31-1 September. Grahamstown, South Africa.
- Van Gelder, T. 2005. Teaching Critical Thinking: Some Lessons from Cognitive Science. *College Teaching*. 53(1): 41-46.
- Waghid, Y. 2002. Knowledge production and Higher Education in South Africa: Towards Reflexivity in university teaching, research and community service. *Higher Education*. 43: 457-488
- Weedon, C. 1987. *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Wetherell, M. & Maybin, J. 1996. The distributed self: A social constructionist perspective. In Steven. R. (ed). *Understanding the self*. London: Sage. pp.219-277.
- Woodward, K. (2007). *Identity and Difference*. London: Sage.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>