MA Visual Art (Art Education)

1. Introduction

The Master's in Visual Arts (Art Education) at Stellenbosch University is based on critical citizenship, globalisation studies and art education frameworks. Such frameworks are not only complex, but increasingly socially salient, especially in societies like South Africa, in which citizenship is not yet a term of equality. Therefore, it is vital that research in the field of education be stimulated that centres these frameworks, to allow new ideas to filter into common pedagogic practice. Citizenship education has the potential to 'ensure that citizens are creative and critical' (Johnson & Morris, 2010,78), which can benefit developing societies. As an academic programme that requires original research, the Master's in Visual Arts (henceforth MAVA) (Art Education) seeks to fulfil this aim.

The MAVA programme was motivated by a need to harness the critical social power of art. The programme is based on the belief that the creative and critical practice of teaching and generating art is instrumental in creating an imaginative and socially conscious citizenry. It takes as a starting point the unequal social relations of South African society and, within the educational context, the dominance of Eurocentric theoretical and intellectual paradigms that perpetuate inequality. It sees the field of creative arts as fertile ground upon which to consider and contest the boundaries of social inclusion. This article critically assesses and reflects on the master's course in a South African context characterised by social divisions.

2. Background of the MA Visual Arts (Art Education)

The MAVA (Art Education) started in 2012 as an extension of the Visual Communication Design undergraduate programme, which I started teaching in 2006. After incorporating critical citizenship into the undergraduate programme, I realised that many students wished to continue their studies in this direction, and therefore designed the MA course accordingly. It made sense to combine my own experience in design teaching with the new knowledge that I gained in education: I have an honours degree in Information Design (University of Pretoria), a Master's in Visual Arts (Rietveld Academy, Amsterdam), a second master's in Adult Education (University of the Western Cape), and obtained my PhD in Curriculum Studies (Stellenbosch University) in 2012. My PhD investigated the incorporation of critical citizenship into my undergraduate programme, and that knowledge and experience formed the basis for the development of the MAVA (Art Education) programme.

3. Teaching and learning philosophy and approach

The motivation behind the programme's design is a need to harness the critical social power of art toward socially just and/or decolonial aims. In an era of globalisation, art educators need to restructure curricula to reflect the current needs of our societies. With South African society and higher education institutions still steeped in the legacies of apartheid and colonial domination, social inclusion and access remain unequal and challenging to rectify. Anti-coloniality and decoloniality create pathways to exploring the past and the politics of resistance, as well as stimulate learning experiences where colonial history is (re)presented from the perspectives of colonised peoples (Dei 2006,1). Anti-coloniality can illuminate how knowledge is socially rooted and politically disputed, thus leading to greater insights about subjectivity, position, location and history (Dei 2006,3). Recommendations of the Task Team for the decolonisation of the Stellenbosch University Curriculum (Stellenbosch University 2017,2) explain how Western knowledge systems still dominating at universities preserve dehumanising discourses, producing socio-economic injustices and exclusions. To counteract this, the report emphasises the need to deconstruct knowledge and focus on authentic African knowledge production appropriate for an African university. The recent Khampepe report on racism (Khampepe 2022) has made similar suggestions for curriculum redress.

The master's programme's purpose is to develop inroads to greater collaboration between educational practitioners, intellectuals, artists, cultural activists, students and communities. The aims of the MAVA (Art Education) programme are as follows:

- To create socially conscious graduates who would be able to practise as qualified art educators, and to further engage established educators in the transformative potential of art.
- To promote responsiveness to a South African and African context within academia and school curricula
- To develop partnerships between the University and surrounding schools and educational initiatives through both the curriculum itself and the professionals qualified through the degree.

As in many developing economies, the hard sciences and disciplines like finance and economics tend to take precedence over the social sciences in general, and the arts in particular. The instrumental value of the former disciplines and the professions they generate falls in line with the logic of capitalist development and national growth. However, strong arguments have been made for the importance of the 'softer' sciences, particularly for establishing Africa as an epistemological centre point in its own right, as opposed to simply injecting northern theory into an African context (Adesina 2006,2; Nyoka 2013,5-7). Art has power, and can make critical and regenerative contributions to society.

The programme attempts to contest hierarchical understandings of knowledge and cultural production in several ways. Firstly, Western theories are challenged in critical dialogue with African scholarship, emphasising the contributions of southern and indigenous voices. Coursework sources therefore include theorists working within anti-colonial and Afrocentric paradigms, such as Freire, Abdi, Bhabha, Bhattacharyya, Biko, Dei, Mamdani, Ramphele, Reddy, and Waghid. Secondly, the generation of new, emancipatory theories is prioritised. Research traditions too often rely on extractive research practices that exploit Africa as a data site for Western theorists (Nyoka 2013,7; Dei & Kempf 2006,2). The master's course instead asks students to produce new ideas that are critically situated. Relatedly, the programme aims to challenge the artistic 'canon' and the scope of inclusion within 'art' as a discipline. The gaps between institutionalised ideas about art and the real-life practice of art and creative expression are questioned in relation to apartheid's social divisions and the dominance of Eurocentric epistemologies. Finally then, the inclusion of experiential education strategies into the course, such as reflexive and practical exercises, asks students to consider art education within real global and national contexts. This is based on the Freirean idea that formalised education and lived experience must inform each other in socially just pedagogies (Freire, 1983). Both established educators and recent graduates are encouraged to register for the course, providing experiential and cultural diversity and highlighting a multiplicity of real-life applications for course material.

Through the curriculum design and student admission, the programme hopes to uncover and address the blind spots implicit in its own institutional embeddedness, and to draw connections between diverse experiences that might provide a more nuanced understanding of South African reality. This programme therefore fits within the Department and the Faculty's transformation and social justice goals and planning.

4. Description of the programme
The modules included in the programme total 180- credits and include: 'Teaching and Learning Theories' (15 credits), 'Art Education and Citizenship' (15 credits), 'Art Education and Globalisation' (15 credits), 'Research Methods in the Arts' (15 credits), 'Service Learning (Art Education)' (30 credits) and the thesis (90 credits). Students can follow a full-time one-year or a part-time two-year programme. Students are assessed based on theoretical assignments, service learning work, and a written thesis. The theoretical assignments and service learning components together form the coursework, totalling 17 assignments. This format allows students opportunities to receive feedback after each assignment.

Among these assignments, two practical tasks and the service learning component require students to identify problems in their work/learning environment. These practical tasks oftentimes serve as the pilot studies for students' larger thesis projects. All research done in the programme must receive approval from the Research

Ethics Committee and is rated low, medium or high risk. Most students' research falls within the medium-risk category, because they often conduct research with human participants in schools or other educational institutions. Some studies fall into the low-risk category, for example if students focus on their own artistic practice. The thesis component of the programme comprises the largest number of credits (90) and is supervised by me, sometimes with the help of a co-supervisor. The word count for the thesis is approximately 20 000 words. The thesis is examined by an external examiner from another university as well as an internal examiner from our department. Students must submit a final Turnitin report with their thesis.

5. Foundational theories in the coursework
Of the five modules in the course, the first four ('Teaching and Learning Theories', 'Art Education and Citizenship', 'Art Education and Globalisation' and 'Research Methods in the Arts') consist of the main body of theory. The last module ('Service Learning (Art Education)') and the thesis project require more practical application. In 2022, more anti-colonial and decolonial theories were incorporated into the citizenship module. Although pure theory is valued, tasks encourage students to engage personally to ensure maximum relevance and retention. I now shortly discuss the modules.

5.1 Teaching and Learning Theories
The module provides a foundation for current and future art educators in pedagogic practices, and offers new insights into educational theory and the role of the teacher. Developing a critical attitude toward the relationship between education and society is prioritised by encouraging students to interrogate the effectiveness of current teaching practices, and to decide how they personally would like to approach the teaching process. The first task asks students to consider their own identity and reflect on the consequences thereof in teaching and learning situations, which is important in teacher education to 'discern the construction of their selfhood in relation to larger social structures and epistemological dynamics' (Kincheloe, 2005,1–2). According to Hatton & Smith (1995,33), autobiographical reflection facilitates a kind of problem-solving that reconceptualises critical relationships between pre-existing beliefs and new knowledge, allowing educators to consider how they are never neutrally engaged in learning situations. The second task requires critical comparison of three major perspectives of human learning, namely constructivist, phenomenographic and socio-cultural. By comparing their distinctive features, students can practice what Marton and Trigwell (2000,381) call discernment, deciding for themselves where they would place their own outlook, and considering the benefits and limitations of variations. Finally, the third task expands from the second to engage with the four additional, alternative orientations of experiential learning, namely psychoanalytic, situative, critical cultural and enactivist perspectives (Fenwick, 2001,vii). Fenwick (2001,55) explains how a 'careful comparison of theoretical frames is needed to help researchers and educators better understand and name the various processes occurring as experiential learning and constitute their own roles relative to these' processes in moral, sensitive ways'.

5.2 Art Education and Citizenship
Citizenship education and art education theories are interweaved in this module to consider how both position individuals within society. The social and cultural significance of the humanities is engaged through prescribed readings by Apple and Gandin, Nussbaum, and Atkinson and Dash. The previous module's learning theories are thus expanded and considered in direct relation to citizenship and the role of art. The first task asks students to consider the function of art in society socially, personally and politically, and discuss the history and significance of 'citizenship' as a contested concept in Africa. The second task examines 'social justice' and 'critical pedagogy', engaging state authority and exploring how 'art compels us to seek in ourselves the authority by which we are obliged to one another' (Schmidt & Martin, 2006,12). The third task examines South Africa's turbulent educational history and its struggles to instate an appropriate sense of citizenship. It asks students to consider the tensions between official and popular conceptions of citizenship in relation to socio-economic rights, and consider the 'shifting nature of the divisions' (Enslin, 2003,73). The final two tasks grapple with institutional transformation, the hidden curriculum and living citizenship. The changes in education after apartheid and some of the shortcomings of these changes are considered, as well as persisting challenges. Students are asked to provide their own critical response to Apple's (1973) writings about the hidden

curriculum, and address how learning design reproduces ideology in relation to their own practice. The final task incorporates a practical assignment, where students must engage with participants in a teaching environment and consider how these participants experience and conceptualise citizenship. A written reflection is submitted after the practical is completed, comparing theoretical perspectives with the intuitive knowledge of the students' participants.

5.3 Art Education and Globalisation

Educational practices are influenced and perpetuated by global trends. Giddens (1999,1) illustrates globalisation well when he says, 'the global spread of the term is evidence of the very developments to which it refers'. This module prescribes literature such as Held and McGrew's global transformations and Delacruz' globalisation, art and education, to consider the 'global' in relation to art education. The first two tasks explore global cultural production and global citizenship, prompting students to question how knowledge is constructed and legitimised in relation to North/ South divides. As Akena (2012,600) writes, 'in order to understand a social phenomenon, such as knowledge, we must study the social circumstance within which the knowledge has been conceived and born'. The third task progresses from here to consider neo-colonialism in relation to postcolonial, decolonial and anticolonial frameworks. The fourth task foregrounds an African perspective on globalisation in educational development. Theories by Bhabha, Bhattacharyya and Moffatt are used as critique of Eurocentric 'development agendas' and related back to reforms in the South African education system. Finally, students complete the second practical task of the course, in which they must design a strategy to investigate what globalisation means to participants who experience many of the social changes identified in literature, but who possibly understand them in different (non-academic) terms. The aim of this task is to create greater awareness of the interconnectedness of social and global changes, and to uncover different ways of understanding change and cultural specificity.

5.4 Research Methods in the Arts

This module was added in 2020, after I realised that students' undergraduate programmes did not sufficiently address research methodologies. It is important for students, as researchers, to understand a variety of research perspectives. Undergraduate art study mostly requires theoretical and arts-based research, but rarely deals with empirical methodologies, like case studies or participatory action research. This module thus equips students with skills and knowledge of the main approaches taken in art education research, to support them in their thesis project design. The four approaches to research presented in the module are a) empirical research; b) practice-based research; c) post-empirical research; and d) theoretical research. Students engage with important concepts like the interpretive paradigm, inductive/deductive approach, epistemology/ontology and ethical considerations. After completing this module, students can select one of the methodologies discussed to suit their research. If they wish to choose an alternative method, such as grounded theory, students are supported by supervisors to do any extra study necessary. Participatory action research has proved to be popular choice for art educators who have taken the course, perhaps due to its ability to integrate art practice, theory and social justice education.

5.5 Service Learning

This module requires students to complete a three-week service learning component at a school or non-governmental organisation. As part of their employment, they must work with learners, students or employees (depending on where they do their service learning) to identify a problem. They must then write a reflective, critical essay on how the problem was investigated and/or resolved. A letter of proof from the employer or school is required to complete the module. This module is predicated on Johnson and Morris' (2010) framework for critical citizenship education. Students are asked not only to grapple with the problem using theory and practical intervention, but also to reflect critically on the entire process. The self/subjectivity is an important part of a critical citizenship framework, as teachers recognise their own citizenship in relation to that of their students (Johnson & Morris, 2010).

6. Student feedback

It is not always reliable to take student reflections at face value, but I have still found their feedback to be one of the best ways to improve my curriculum. I usually ask students for feedback after they graduate, considering that they might feel freer to give feedback without the burden of passing the course, or the fear that their feedback might influence the lecturer's perception of them and therefore their marks. As a white woman, incorporating critical citizenship and decolonisation into my course opens space for students to have difficult conversations, but it has also allowed and often forced me to grow as a person and a lecturer. Below, I present and discuss some of the anonymous quotes from students who completed the programme in the last five years.

6.1 Reaction to the question: What were the best aspects of this course?

Students consistently express their renewed criticality about knowledge in relation to Western dominance and decoloniality:

> …the course allows one to more intentionally re-evaluate African systems of thought and the impact of Western influence on how education systems here are modelled, which may have been ignorantly overlooked.

> I think a greater awareness of this course is needed within the Visual Arts Department. Also, as far as possible, to be introduced to more African theory or writings alongside global or 'known' theorists.

> Here […] I will also add, learning or re-learning ways and perspectives about art and education, even within my studies in Visual Art at Stellenbosch University. Much of which is modelled on Western frameworks or tradition, which I am glad to have had the opportunity to rethink.

The literature discussing these issues is mostly contained within the 'Citizenship' and 'Globalisation' modules: interestingly, the two modules that incorporate practical application tasks. As mentioned, these issues are highly relevant in contemporary South Africa, which may be one reason students respond so strongly to them. In fact, many students design their thesis projects based on one or both of these concepts. I believe the inclusion of practical application exercises enables students to, as Akena (2012,600) argues, develop more holistic perspectives because they are asked to engage directly with the social circumstances surrounding knowledge production. The course takes inspiration from Freire (1983) by asking students to link knowledge and knowledge production to their real life.

Relatedly, students often express appreciation for the practical exercises, saying for example:

> [the best aspect was] the linking of theory with practical experiences within working environments.

> I really enjoyed the tasks that prepared me for the thesis.

> I found that the design of the course allowed room for personal interpretation and application.

They also often link these tasks to their own experiences and the institutions they work or study at, much like the earlier reflection that noted '…even in my studies in Visual Art at Stellenbosch University'. Below is a reflection that touches on all of the above themes:

> The learning content significantly challenged my perception and personal biases as a privileged white South African female [critical of dominance in knowledge production]. I have been able to deeply and significantly apply the learning I received from the course modules into my teaching curriculum and learning methodologies within a visual communication HE context [practical application]. The learning material has positively impacted the design school's overall teaching methodology and content within the curriculums significantly [link with own institution]. Furthermore, the applied learning from this course encouraged the academic institution to

reflect upon their restructuring current policies where a greater approach to transformative learning can take place.

Although students often share that the course has positively impacted their teaching and their institutions, it is of course quite difficult to measure this qualitatively. However, their feedback does appear to indicate and increased discernment, as Marton and Trigwell (2000) would call it, in that they are more equipped to consider their own practices in relation to the institutions they work in, which hopefully influences their future teaching praxis.

6.2 Reaction to the question: What aspects of this course need to be improved?

Students often request the inclusion of even more practical application and collaborative learning into the course:

> *Perhaps, more collaborative ways of exploring what the course aims to teach or impart, which is more practical.*

> *Additional multimodal modules learning approaches would be great to include in the course structure. At the time that I completed the course content, decoloniality was not part of the curriculum and I would encourage this integration. The application of how to apply frameworks [and] methods of learning within the classroom.*

It is significant that the second student above mentioned decoloniality: knowing that traditional university curricula are based on a European model that privileges traditional lectures and essays, the inclusion of practical tasks and experiential learning can be one way to challenge these practices and explore new possibilities for higher education (Manning & Massumi 2015). The positive response to the practical components is heartening, but at the same time highlights the challenges of designing a curriculum that balances rigorous theoretical engagement with practical application.

Students also sometimes comment that the workload of the course is difficult to manage, especially those who already work full-time as teachers.

The programme is certainly very intensive, with a large amount of reading and tasks as well as a thesis. The option to choose whether to complete the course over one or two years attempts to allow for students who are working to have more time to complete the course, but it is still quite a heavy course load. The hope is that the theory learnt in the programme will nevertheless filter down into students' own educational practices.

Students also sometimes request further support with academic skills, like structuring the thesis and writing journal articles, for example:

> *Greater step-by-step application workshops on how to structure a master's thesis. Understanding the framework on which the thesis rests, how to establish a research question and how the data is gathered and methods in analysis, learning about the numerous qualitative methodologies that can be applied.*

> *I found the process of getting the article edited and published to be more difficult than expected, especially when working as a full-time teacher. More assistance would be appreciated.*

Students are encouraged to publish an article from their thesis after they graduate. But, as the comment by a student shown above shows, it is increasingly difficult to get articles published and it takes extra time from a supervisor to facilitate such a process. While the library and postgraduate office do offer courses for thesis writing and publication, students must sign up for these courses independently. The library's courses are not hosted throughout the year, and often have limited space, which may make it difficult for some students to

sign up in time. Additionally, the course load may discourage students from signing up for extra workshops, and timing may be difficult for students working full time. However, some students have mentioned that they appreciate the frequent contact times and feedback built into the course.

8. Conclusion

While student feedback notes that the course is challenging in terms of workload, they also share positive responses toward the course content and its impact on their own teaching practices, which aligns with the aims of the course. Student feedback indicates an awareness of Eurocentric knowledge, and a sensitivity toward the importance of practical application in pedagogical practice.

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