

# Using Digital Counterstories as Multimodal Pedagogy among South African Pre-service Student Educators to produce Stories of Resistance

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**Abstract:** While digital storytelling has entered higher education as a vehicle to reflect on issues of identity and difference, there is a paucity of research framed by a critical perspective unpacking underlying power structures in the classroom. This study reports on an ongoing project in a South African pre-service Teacher Education course in which final-year students reflected in the form of digital stories on the notion of difference and how it affected their journey to becoming a teacher. Drawing on theories of resistance, counterstorytelling and multimodality, five of these digital stories, students' reflective essays and discussions in a focus group were analysed to investigate types of resistance in students' narratives, their perceptions of the functions of counterstorytelling, and what multimodal analysis of these stories could tell us about the relationship of students' identities, their choice of modes and their learning. Results of the study showed students' intent to develop so-called 'counterstories', defined as stories that challenge social and racial injustice, which are usually not heard in education. Students also perceived telling of counterstories as useful to building communities among marginalised students, acting as model stories, providing an alternative window into the world of students of colour and a space for healing. While only one story could be defined as portraying 'transformational resistance', carrying the highest potential for social change, others were important documents of disadvantaged students' fight for survival, and might well challenge some of the existing power structures in their classroom. Multimodal analysis of the stories revealed contradictory elements, highlighting the difficulty for students to resist dominant discourses, but also showing the increasing (conscious or unconscious) emotional audience manipulation evidenced in production of digital stories by the more privileged students. We suggest that engaging students in multimodal analysis of their own stories could facilitate a nuanced conversation on consciously and unconsciously held beliefs and assumptions, as well as an awareness of themselves that may lead to questioning the dominant discourse they have been socialised in.

**Keywords:** digital storytelling, counterstories, multimodal pedagogy, multimodal discourse analysis, social justice education, higher education, South Africa

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## 1. Introduction

After nearly 20 years of independence, the effects of the deeply unjust and divisive history of Apartheid can still be felt in South African higher education (HE) classrooms. Since 1994 South African HE has undergone major transformations, driven by the twin imperatives of racial transformation and pressures for efficiency (Department of Education, 1997). However, the 2008 Ministerial Committee into Transformation and Social Cohesion in Higher Education drew a dire picture of the state of the South African HE context, confirming the pervasiveness of race and racism in people's lives and a lack of student engagement across racial, social and cultural backgrounds (Soudien et al., 2008).

This situation makes it important to engage educators and learners in a conversation about difference and inherent power structures that are attached to specific students' backgrounds. Young (2003: 349) claims that avoiding difficult topics in education is 'a reflection of a societal denial that cultural factors matter and that such things as sexism, racism, and White privilege exist'. One way to overcome this resistance to engaging critically with students' historically situated and culturally mediated lived experiences is the telling of stories (Aveling, 2006). Digital storytelling, the process of developing a first-person narrative combining voice, sound and images into a short video (Lambert, 2010), has entered HE as one vehicle of facilitating students' engagement across difference (Kobayashi, 2012; Walters et al., 2011; Sleeter and Tettegan, 2002).

However, there is a paucity of studies which explore digital storytelling from the perspective of critical pedagogy, concerned with issues of power and oppression in education (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 2006). This study, which is set in the School of Education and Social Sciences at a large South African University of Technology, aimed to address this gap and add to the small but growing body of knowledge on use of digital storytelling for facilitating the telling of critical stories, or counterstories - defined as stories that challenge social and racial injustice and which are usually not heard in the classroom (Delgado, 1989; Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Solorzano and Yosso, 2002).

Framed by theories of resistance, counterstorytelling and multimodality, this study is guided by the following research questions:

- What are the functions of these counterstories in the South African context?
- What types of counterstories/stories of resistance did students decide to tell?
- What can a multimodal analysis of students' stories tell us about the complex relationship between the choice of modes, their identity and learning?

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Critical storytelling and counterstories**

Storytelling in critical pedagogy aims to give voice to normally silenced people and subjugated knowledge, in order to provide 'a way to communicate the experiences and realities of the oppressed, a first step on the road to justice' (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 2006:21). Storytelling is valued as a means for expressing and documenting experiential knowledge (Delgado, 1989) about the particular experiences of those at the margins of society (Lynn, 2006).

Within critical storytelling are two types of stories: stock stories and counterstories. Stock stories, also called master narratives or majoritarian stories (Rolon-Dow, 2011), generate from a legacy of racial privilege, from stories in which racial privilege seems natural. They maintain this privilege and 'carry layers of assumptions that person of positions of racialized privilege bring with them to discussions of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of subordinations' (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002: 28). Counterstories, on the other hand, 'challenge social and racial injustice by listening to and learning from experiences of racism and resistance, despair and hope at the margins of society' (Yosso, 2006: 171).

Counterstories are stories of resistance. Resistance theories emphasize students' agency to 'negotiate and struggle with structures and create meanings of their own from these conversations' (Solorzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001: 315). Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001: 316) differentiate between four different types of student oppositional behaviour: (a) reactionary behaviour, (b) self-defeating resistance, (c) conformist resistance, and (d) transformational resistance. Figure 1 outlines the four types and their relation to social justice and social oppression. Transformation resistance is characterised by both a desire to critique oppression and motivation to fight for social justice, and as such shows the highest level of student agency.

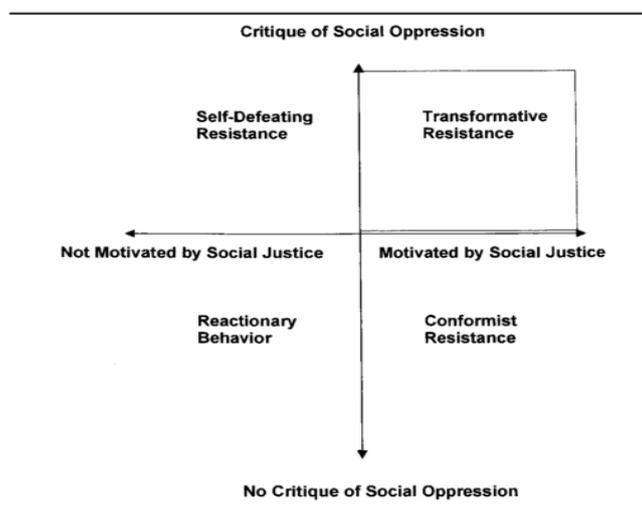


FIGURE 1 Defining the Concept of Resistance

**Figure 1:** Defining concepts of resistance, from Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001: 318).

Counterstories thus have distinct functions for the marginalised group telling these stories: they build community, challenge perceived wisdom, open up new windows into the reality of those living at the margins, and teach others that another reality can be constructed which is richer than the one we are living in (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002). Furthermore, Yosso (2006) and Delgado (1989) refer to the potential of healing through the communal hearing of counterstories. As stories of resistance, however, they also aim for social transformation (Solorzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001; Delgado, 1989) to shake dominant groups, the story listeners, out of their complacency, rattle their worldview and provide a means of ‘overcoming otherness, of forming a new collectivity based on the shared story’ (Delgado, 1989: 2438).

## 2.2 Multimodal pedagogy and critical digital storytelling

Vasudevan (2006: 208) maintains that not only are different stories needed, but also different ways of telling these stories: ‘the call for counterstories intersects with the possibilities of multimodal composing wherein new digital technologies can be used to create not only new kinds of texts but also new kinds of spaces for storytelling and story-listening’.

Multimodal texts consist of different kinds of multimodal meanings. A number of design elements feature in the multi-literacies theory, namely linguistic, visual, audio, gestural and spatial meaning. These design elements are essentially employment of multimodal discourse. How multimodal social semiotics get integrated and incorporated into formal as well as informal learning environments is seen as multimodal pedagogies: ‘Pedagogic processes can be understood as the selection and configuration of the semiotic resources available in the classroom’ (Stein & Newfield, 2006: 7).

Multimodal pedagogies are a way ‘to describe pedagogies which work across semiotic modes’ (Stein and Newfield, 2006: 9), and focus on ‘mode as a defining feature of communication in learning environments’ (ibid.). All communicative acts within a classroom can be viewed as multimodal, and students are seen as resourceful, creative and critical thinkers with the capacity to make individual meaning of multimodal messages. However, students interpret and deal with various modes differently, according to their differing cultural identities and histories. Most importantly, ‘in multimodal pedagogies, there is a conscious awareness of the relationship between modes, learning and identity’ (Stein and Newfield, 2006: 10). This means that students and educators make conscious and unconscious decisions about what modes might serve which situation better.

In this study the question is posed as to what extent students in this digital storytelling initiative acted consciously when relationships between modes, learning and identity were activated, as Kress and van Leeuwen (2001: 30) suggest:

[D]iscursive practice in a multimodal environment consists of the ability to select the discourses which are to be 'at play' on a particular occasion, in a particular text ... But more than that, communicational practice consists of choosing the realisational modes which are apt for the specific purposes, audiences and occasions of text-making

Students as well as educators need to exercise adaptability and flexibility to oscillate between the most appropriate modes in all interactions. The authors see this particular action as one of the most important aspects of media production. Media consumption alone does not allow the development of critical media literacy in students. Kellner and Share (2005) highlight the importance of embedding critical media literacy into teaching and learning, both by analysing media culture as products of social production and struggle and teaching students to be critical of media representations and discourses. They also stress the importance of learning to use multimedia as modes of self-expression and social activism:

We strongly recommend a pedagogy of teaching critical media literacy through project-based media production...for making analyses more meaningful and empowering as students gain tools for responding and taking action on the social conditions and texts they are critiquing (Kellner and Share, 2007: 9).

Digital storytelling, a multimodal pedagogy, has gained increasing interest as a tool for engaging 21<sup>st</sup> century learners in HE. This study is heavily influenced by the digital storytelling model developed by the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS) at the University of Berkeley. The digital storytelling model promoted by the CDS has as its main objective to fight for social justice by giving marginalised groups a voice.

The CDS sees digital storytelling not as an individual process, but foregrounds the importance of communal sharing of stories in a story circle (Lambert, 2010). Their model of creating digital stories is specific and involves a 3–4-day workshop in which participants develop their stories collaboratively. The communal sharing of stories is the main element in the process of digital storytelling, which they call story circle.

There are plenty of examples where digital storytelling has been used to explore issues of difference among students (Kobayashi, 2012; Sleeter and Tettegan, 2002; Walters et al., 2011); however, few studies are underpinned by a critical pedagogy perspective and even fewer focus specifically on the telling of counterstories.

Rolon-Dow's (2011) account of using digital storytelling with coloured high school students in the United States of America is one example of its use for telling counterstories. She argues from a critical race theory (CRT) perspective and analyses digital stories in terms of stock stories and counter-narratives, with a particular focus on stereotypes and micro-aggressions. She concludes that 'digital storytelling in combination with a CRT framework, can provide a window into understanding the ways race operates in the lives of youth and the micro-aggressions that students of colour face in today's educational contexts' (2006: 170). Another example is Vasudevan's study on African American adolescent boys, who through the medium of a digital story authored counterstories: 'new selves that challenged what they asserted as negative assumptions from other adults in their lives' (2006: 209). However, there is a distinct gap in the literature on the use of critical digital storytelling in HE and in particular in the South African HE context.

### **3. Context of the study**

This study is set in the context of South African pre-service teacher education in the School of Education and Social Sciences in a University of Technology. Students in this course are differently positioned in terms of gender, age, race and language and come from highly diverse economic, social and cultural backgrounds.

The particular site of this study is a course entitled 'Professional Studies' run in the second semester of the 2012 academic year. As the last assignment of this course final-year students developed reflective teaching portfolios in the form of a digital story. Students attended weekly workshops and were guided through the process of creating a digital story. The brief for the digital stories was to reflect on one critical incident they encountered in their teaching practice in which they experienced or witnessed difference, and how this impacted on their own teacher identity

The final digital stories are short (3-5 minutes) digital movies, based on a written script of a maximum of 500 words, including digital images, which are either created by the student him-/herself or sourced from the Internet. A background sound provides ambience. For examples of digital stories produced in this project see <http://www.youtube.com/user/cputstories>. A final screening completes the digital storytelling process.

#### **4. Methodology**

Participants in this qualitative research study were drawn from the 62 students who produced digital stories as part of their Professional Studies course in the 2012 academic year. Of these 62 stories, five were purposively selected based on their narrative, which addressed issues of power and privilege. These five students were also invited to participate in a focus group discussion, which took place after the final screening. It is important to note that we see counterstories as not only focusing on racial privilege but also privilege that is based, for example, on gender or class (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002).

Data analysis of the written narratives, reflective essays and one focus group interview was done deductively (Maxwell 2008), whereby relevant data were mapped to the constructs found in the literature review, such as the functions of counterstorytelling. The digital stories were analysed by way of multimodal discourse analysis following Jewitt and Oyama's (2001) social semiotic approach to analyse visual resources.

Theorists agree that multimodality describes the practice of using a collection of modes to communicate a message in contemporary society (Jewitt, 2010; Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001; Flewitt 2006). Baldry and Thibault (2006) define multimodal discourse analysis as the way in which different semiotic systems such as language, gesture, music and movement, are described and analysed in relation to each other in a certain instance. Jewitt defines multimodality as approaching 'representation, communication and interaction as something more than language' (2010: 1), while Baldry and Thibault (2006: 1) state that a multimodal perspective 'may well encourage a critical rethinking and reformulation of the relationship between texts and society'.

This study was concerned with the narrative of conquering disadvantage, representational meaning and how the above narrative is expressed in a multimodal form, particularly through visuals and sound, interactive meaning by eliciting emotion and reaction from the viewer, and compositional elements, where meaning is also conveyed and added by placement within visuals, narrative and the timeline. The paper relates how these decisions impact on the ultimate meaning, derived from analysing the narrative, representational, interactive and compositional meaning as part of a multimodal analysis toolkit.

If one considers that multimodal social semiotics and multimodal pedagogies challenge the 'logocentrism' of traditional 'human communication' to include all forms of communication (Stein and Newfield, 2006: 9), it becomes evident that the form of communication should be continually considered. Human communication is not static; rather, it changes and moulds constantly within society and in terms of individual use. Both students and lecturers are creators of meaning. Keeping in mind who the audience may be, they choose their means and methods of communication from their store of available resources. At issue here is the historical shaping of these resources of communication within a social space, and how students within multimodal contexts deploy these.

The reasoning for the use of multimodal discourse analysis of research data lies within this holistically orientated analysis of meaning. Only by understanding the sum of the parts (instead of analysing components separately) can meaning be derived.

Ethical clearance was sought through the Research Committee of the School of Education and Social Sciences at the institution. Three of the five students allowed us to publish their stories as part of this study, and consequently we used their real names (Rafiq, Gina and Sibongile). The remaining two students' names were changed for reasons of confidentiality (Vanessa and Lebogang).

## 5. Students' narratives

Sibongile's story (*Struggle for a better life*) is about the plight of a black South African woman ('I am a female, a mother, a teacher, a wife') who doesn't want to accept the limiting expectations that others have for her. Growing up in a 'remote village, where nobody knew anything about politics', she wants more than to get married and have children. Although she has excellent matric results, her hopes of entering HE are quickly dashed when she realises that her status as a 'black and poor' woman prevents her from studying. In time she gets married and has children, but never gives up her dreams and aspirations, and eventually is accepted into the Teacher Education programme. Here she finds people that help her see herself in a different light, and she turns into an inspiration for her family and friends, modelling the possibility to better yourself: 'not allowing anybody anymore to tell them what is possible and not possible for a black person in this country'.

Her story may be seen here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmDq8Rst\\_6w&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmDq8Rst_6w&feature=youtu.be)

Lebogang's story (*Striving towards my success*) talks about the challenges of black learners educated in rural communities, with limited funds and resources and the difficulties of multilingual education. She has a strong sense of what she deserves 'a quality education' and resents her parents for not being able to provide her with a better education, but one that had to rely on 'live imagination and determination'. She decides to move to Cape Town to enter University, but finds courses full and her self-confidence waning. However, at the teacher training college she meets a representative of SASCO, one of the South African student unions, who helps her find a place at in the Teacher Education programme. She paints a different picture of SASCO, which is often criticised for being 'trouble-makers' and only interesting in striking or 'toyi-toying'. Her experience with SASCO foregrounds its core business, namely facilitating underprivileged students' access to HE.

Rafiq's story (*Against the Tide*) is an account of a young coloured man's rebellion against one of his tutor teachers during teaching practice. This teacher abuses his position of power as vice principal to neglect his teaching duties, letting the student teachers 'babysit his learners while he was busy with other school and personal responsibilities'. Fuelled by his passion for his learners and his wish to return to them their 'hunger for learning', Rafiq decides to defy the teacher and reports him, being fully aware of the power structures in place and possible repercussions for himself and the learners.

His story may be seen here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MO-cYpxGHuM&feature=c4-overview&list=UUm3GeRbRnpn-pkOTtaHSyOg>

Vanessa's story (*Breaking free*) is a young coloured woman's account of coming to terms with sexual abuse. Fuelled by 'anger, guilt, hate and shame', for a long time her only way of dealing with her experience is silence. However, slowly she learns to open up and speak about what happened to her. She realises that by keeping silent she gives her molesters power and continues to let them control her life, which is a life of self-hatred and self-harm, hiding the true Vanessa 'behind a façade'. Opening up and telling her family and close friends about what happened to her and how she feels about it allows her to regain a sense of worth and personal

strength: 'the more I spoke about it, the stronger I became'. Voicing her story to a larger crowd during the screening process is an act of liberation and healing.

Gina tells a story (*Swept under the rug*) about her raising awareness of the privilege of being white, and how to come to terms with this privilege in this new South Africa. Being confronted with learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and comparing their lives to her own, some of the unquestioned truths of her privileged upbringing with 'white schools, white beaches, white friends', so often 'swept under the rug', start to crumble, and feelings of pity and guilt wash over her. However, she recognised that these feelings, although in need of acknowledgement, will not take her further as she struggles to find ways of living with her white privilege among her mostly unprivileged learners without 'being down-trodden, but aware of it, not in a guilt-ridden, defensive way, but rather in a positive, constructive way'.

Her story may be seen here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v7oVORI9GYQ&list=PLe5oHsfrWAnRFpFOgFccYrdiNb4V1KAB3I>

## **6. Findings and discussion**

The focus of this study was to explore the interplay of counterstorytelling and multimodal pedagogy in a pre-service Teacher Education course in the form of five digital stories. We discuss them below according to the three research questions guiding this study, namely: 1) the functions of counterstories as identified by students in a South African context; 2) the types of resistance in these narratives; and 3) what a multimodal analysis can reveal about students' relationships between modes, learning and identity.

### **6.1 Purpose and function of counterstories**

Students address various issues of power in their stories, challenging accounts that justify 'the world as is' (Delgado, 1989: 2421), telling stories of resistance against dominant discourses (Solorzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001). These stories are examples of 'personal narratives' (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002: 32), recounting individuals' experiences with various forms of racism, classism and sexism, and how these forms of oppression intersect (Solorzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001). Four of the five stories are told by students of colour from formerly disadvantaged communities, namely Sibongile (black African female), Lebogang (black African female), Rafiq (coloured male) and Vanessa (coloured female). The fifth story is produced by a white female student, Gina, who comes from a formerly advantaged background.

Counterstories are by definition stories that are not usually told (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002), and facilitate the building of communities among marginalised students (ibid; Solorzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001). This emerges strongly in students' comments. For example, Lebogang explains that for her the digital storytelling project provided a safe space for telling 'untold' stories that are usually not revealed due to 'insecurities and fear of consequences'. Similarly, Vanessa emphasises that the digital storytelling project gives her a platform to 'voice her story', a story of sexual abuse, something that is usually not encouraged:

When I started voicing my story to people I think I was 19 or 18 when I finally spoke up and a lot of people – most of the people I spoke to, told me not to say anything ... We have so many stories to tell and I think we all just needed a platform. Each one just needed a platform and in these four years we did so much talking in front of each other and so many orals and presentations, but what really mattered to us personally we didn't have a platform to air it.

Another function of counterstorytelling is the building of communities among marginalised students (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002; Solorzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001), and in the students' reflections we find evidence of this. Lebogang mentions students get to know each other in different ways and get to know what

really matters to particular students through this project. Vanessa describes the strengthening of her class community through the digital storytelling project:

Because of all the stress of the years we just lost each other. We lost ourselves and this just kind of brought us back together and reminded us who we were and what we meant to each other.

During the screening of the stories, these stories also act as model stories for other students – a window into a world that is different from what they expect, modelling possibilities for life other than the ones they usually hear about or experience (Solorzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001; Delgado, 1989), as Sibongile explains:

I think as a person you are not just in gender or your colour. You are much more ... and you are allowed to be outside the box. Your role is not only limited – from being a girl child to being a mother or a woman, a wife ... you can be much more than that and you can choose if you want to have children or don't want to have children. It's not something that should be expected of you and if you cannot fulfil it you are made to feel bad about it because even if you have children or you don't have you still have – you are much more than what the society puts in a box ... you can be anything.

By sharing these counterstories students realise that they are not the only ones facing specific challenges, as Sibongile continues to explore:

Ja, because you think, 'No man, you are the only person who is going through this' ... other people are happy and they're not facing the kind of problem that you are having. So when you talk together you see 'Oh this is not only me. We are all like this'.

By telling counterstories there is potential for healing (Delgado, 1989; Solorzano, Ceja and Yosso, 2000). Students experience the sharing of these often painful stories and offering of their vulnerability to their peers as liberating and healing. Gina expands on how '*Swept under the rug*' helped her come to terms with the feeling of guilt that comes with being white in South Africa: 'I didn't want to feel that guilt anymore but I wanted to express it, and now that I have actually expressed that guilt I don't feel it so much anymore.'

In similar fashion Vanessa describes '*Breaking free*': 'I wanted my story to feel uncomfortable for me because I'm breaking free from my conformity and free from my silence.'

## 6.2 Types of resistance in counter-narratives

Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) argue that there are multiple strategies of student resistance, some more overt than others. While in some of these narratives students decide to actively resist dominant discourses, other's resistances might be more subtle and silent in an attempt 'to prove others wrong' (ibid: 319). For example, Rafiq sees himself as having strong morals and values, and this pushes him to publicly defy his tutor teacher. This teacher abuses his position of power as vice principal by neglecting his teaching duties. Rafiq decides to report him to the school authorities, as he explains:

Everyone at the specific school that I spoke to about this incident or about this specific person ... They always just said 'Oh it's a teacher who has been here for years and it's not going to change', and because coming back to role models and values ... I couldn't just stand by and leave it ... I went against the tide. Something that I guess not all people will do because it's inconvenient.

Sibongile, on the other hand, tells a story of her silent but stubborn rebellion against the view that as a black woman:

You are not just a human being ... you must be put in a certain box and you are expected to act in a certain way ... Even if it's against your convictions or your personality but because you are a woman people are expecting certain things from you.

She tries to find a way to go against these expectations, and while meeting some of them (such as getting married and having children) she hangs on to her dream of empowering herself through university education, and when finally achieving this, proclaims proudly:

Today I am not just a teacher; I am an inspiration to others, to my family and friends, who all have gone back to institutions of learning, not allowing anybody anymore to tell them what is possible and not possible for a black person in this country.

Whether openly or silently, the students' stories are a critique of social oppression. However, their focus on social justice is not equally strong. While Rafiq's story is about his fight to better his students' lives by openly attacking established power structures, Sibongile, Lebogang and Vanessa's stories are what Yosso would call 'resilience stories', placed at the intersection between conformist and transformational resistance (Yosso and Delgado Bernal, 2001). These are stories about students' own survival in dominant structures, about the strategies they employ which 'leave the structures of domination intact, yet help the students survive and/or succeed' (Yosso, 2000: 181).

This points to the multi-layeredness and complexity of privilege and oppression in the South African classroom: in this case it allows Rafiq an agency, as the only male in this group, to openly fight an oppressive system, an agency that is seemingly less accessible to his female colleagues. However, even if the other stories are not stories of open defiance, giving voice to these stories of survival and critical hope in a society where students from previously disadvantaged racial backgrounds continue to struggle to overcome internalised feelings of oppression and unworthiness may start to challenge and corrode some of the power structures in their classroom.

### **6.3 Relationship of multimodality, identity and learning**

Multimodality implies that the combination of different modes will result in different meanings. As an example, the background sound of digital stories can alter the meaning of a digital story. This makes it important to analyse the various modes/modalities incorporated in a digital story, such as the narrative, narration, images and sound, but also transitions and animations, for their either complementary or contradictory meaning, and how their individual modalities make up the bigger picture (Kress & Van Leeuwen 2001).

Students reported that the multimodality helped them express their stories, as Lebogang explains: '... [using] images, sounds and music ... made it easier for one to express him-/herself as it made the whole project to be fun and real'. Students are proud of the creativity and individuality that their digital stories afforded them, as Rafiq's comment shows:

My friends and family know me for being slightly different. You will notice in the video, ranging from the music that I used in the video to colour. ...The colour of the pictures or the type of pictures that I used. It's all there for a reason.

What can a multimodal analysis tell us about students' conscious and unconscious socioculturally embedded beliefs and assumptions that are usually hard to grasp? What can it tell us about the complex relationship of students' choice of modes, their learning and their identity?

The following section provides a short analysis of the narrative, representational, interactive and compositional meanings that were used as part of a multimodal analysis toolkit to code and analyse particular elements in the stories.

### 6.3.1 Narrative

All five stories deal with difference and disadvantage. Lebogang and Sibongile's stories centre on race and financial disadvantage and their personal journeys of overcoming poverty and disadvantage, while Vanessa's story deals with sexual abuse of children. Rafiq also comments on the youth, and particularly teachers and their obligation to teach optimally. One can look at Lebogang, Sibongile and Rafiq's stories as a continuum of the same narrative (racial privilege/disadvantage), while Vanessa's touches a parallel narrative (sexual abuse). Gina's story is part of the first group, but is borne out of an outsider's perspective, where she discusses her own bind; how would she correct wrongs and make a difference in the current South African educational environment, while she obviously emerges from the advantaged point of view due to her own privileged racial background? This bind can be seen in her title: while the other four stories reflect a positive narrative progression in the title, Gina's *Swept under a rug* retreats into a negative space by reflecting on hiding an existing narrative and the injustice that this entails.

### 6.3.2 Representational meaning

Two stories, Lebogang's *Striving towards my success* and Sibongile's *Struggle for a better life*, have the firmest of a concrete representational meaning. They follow a literal narrative with the unfolding of actions in a sequential pattern. The other three are classified more towards a conceptual narrative of an emotional journey, where actual events take a back seat to an emotional progression of events. For the last three the realisation of dreams is not about physical survival, but leans more towards attitudinal change and making a difference towards the emotional needs of their future students.

### 6.3.3 Interactive meaning

In this category one can make three distinctions. *Striving towards my success* and *Struggle for a better life* are notable in that the distance is generally kept further from the viewer. Images show this in that close-ups and intimate framings are minimal. The viewer is kept at a third person narrative distance, with offers images on a non-emotional level. Points of view are rarely used to convey emotion or additional action. Although the majority of images fall into the demand category, their level of engagement is lowered because of the distance kept from the viewer.

As in the semiotic speech analysis domain, one can distinguish between four different approaches of interaction, or what the originator of the image means, namely statements, questions, demands and offerings. A demand image would imply some reaction from the viewer; to take a stand about an issue, or so on. The subject in the image would typically talk straight into the camera or towards the viewer, eliciting a response. The next three stories, *Breaking Free*, *Against the Tide* and *Swept under the rug*, use distance and point of view effectively throughout the stories to convey emotion and to draw the viewer closer into engagement. Contact values, or how much weight a certain image implies, are effectively used on a demand level to elicit emotional engagement by the viewer. An established use of contact and distance can be detected in order to keep the viewer's buy-in and to pace the story. Points of view are effectively used to convey very difficult portrayals of emotion. So would a bird's eye view, for instance, convey a feeling of disconnect and distance, while an extreme low angle would elicit a feeling of inferiority and inadequacy.

### 6.3.4 Compositional meaning

It is within this last category that the five stories polarise into three further categories. *Striving towards my success* and *Struggle for a better life* show information values accurately and literally. Information values here refer to any way of conveying a certain emotion by way of image quality, placement, use of colour or angle and level of eye contact (for instance), that would influence or manipulate the value that a recipient would ascribe to that communication. They do not seem to manipulate the space to convey sophisticated layering of

emotion. No intention is found to manipulate saliency of elements within certain contexts, and modality generally leans towards reality.

*Breaking Free* and *Against the Tide* show a sophisticated use of framing to emphasise elements that can effectively convey complex emotion. In *Against the Tide*, for instance, the author particularly chose close-up images to elicit sympathy and emotion. There seems to be a definite rhythm in use, coinciding with the general rhythm of the spoken narrative. Framing is done mostly consciously in order to complement emotional concepts, while some elements are deliberately isolated to accentuate and complement the script. Modality is consistently manipulated in order to illustrate emotion.

*Swept under the rug*, however, leaps out in this last category of meaning. Apart from a significantly bigger variation of image, the information value within the corpus of images seems to be manipulated to a level where not only emotion is effectively conveyed, but it also includes irony, multiple narrative levels and a sophisticated connotational use of object in image. This more established use of image combined with sophisticated verbalisation of emotion and concept seems to be a double-edged sword. Because of its obvious sophistication, these images and skills in compilation could convey a sense of ingenious manipulation, and as such translate as a degree of dishonesty.

## **7. Conclusion**

Drawing on theories of resistance, counterstorytelling and multimodality, this study set out to explore five pre-service teacher educators' perceptions on types of resistance, functions of counterstorytelling and what a multimodal analysis could tell us about students' relationship between modes, learning and identity. These five students told different stories of disadvantage and oppression, based on students' race, gender, age, economic and hierarchical status. The particular set-up of this project in a highly diverse classroom allowed the hearing of stories that are usually not told, and proved a useful way of unearthing these resistance stories (Solarzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001). In telling these stories students constructed their own counter-realities (Delgado, 1989).

Findings show that students perceived the telling of counterstories as useful to building communities among marginalised students, acting as model stories, providing an alternative window into the world of students of colour and a space for healing, confirming that the functions of counterstorytelling as established in the American context are also valid in the South African context. Listening to these counterstories seemed beneficial for students identifying with both privilege and disadvantage, as other authors such as Opperman (2008) or Benmayor (2008) have found; they argue that not only marginalised students felt empowered and gained from the process of sharing and listening to 'counterstories', but privileged students equally benefitted and experienced transformation, allowing them to understand their own realities in more meaningful ways.

However, only one story could be classified as a 'transformational resistance story', with the greatest potential for social change (Solarzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001). This raises important questions about what we as educators could do to improve students' agency to tell more stories that are 'political, collective, conscious, and motivated by a sense that individual and social change is possible' (Solarzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001: 320).

The multimodal element of this project appealed to students and allowed them to tell often painful stories in different modes, expressing their individuality and creativity in various ways. A multimodal analysis of the digital stories showed the extent to which individual modes allowed for a meaning-making that differed from and exceeded what would be possible through single or fewer modalities (Hull & James 2007).

However, it also revealed how students' complex relationships of identity/privilege impacted selection of modes and learning. Their stories differ significantly in the degree of emotional manipulation of the audience

through conveying of their digital stories' representational, interactive and compositional meaning. Sibongile and Lebogang's (both black female students, and in the South African setting among the most disadvantaged student groups) developed the most straight-forward stories, with a firm, concrete representational meaning following a literal narrative, keeping their distance and in general with low manipulation of audience response. The other three movies by coloured and white students (in relation to their peers more privileged in the South African classroom) show a more sophisticated approach in using, for example, distance and point of view to elicit an emotional response by the audience.

Gina's story, *'Swept under the rug'* (by the only white student among the five) stands out among these students' stories. Her established use of image combined with sophisticated verbalisation of emotions and concepts may lead to what Joe Lambert from the CDS calls an 'exaggerated tug on emotions', which can be read as dishonesty (Lambert, 2013: 58). It also shows her bind as a privileged white student reflecting on her own privilege and finding a way to engage from this position of privilege with her mostly less privileged students. While Gina's written story is a story of rebellion against white people's silence around their racial privilege, her pictures tell a different story of racial stereotypes. This resonates with Rose Brushwood's (2009) study, in which she analyses the tension between the written script and the images her participants selected for their stories, which were both 'undermined and enriched by various ruptures, contradictions and gaps that emerge through the juxtaposition of sound and image' (ibid: 212). She argues that it is specifically this juxtaposition which can show us our 'unconscious and its ambivalences and resist the often tidy confines of our conscious telling' (Milner, cited in Rose Brushwood, 2009: 212).

Engaging students in a multimodal analysis of their own stories could facilitate a nuanced conversation on consciously and unconsciously held beliefs and assumptions, which is otherwise difficult to achieve. This awareness of themselves may represent a first step for students to start questioning the dominant discourse they have been socialised in (Noel, 1995). Although the findings of this study are preliminary and this is research in progress, they indicate that bearing in mind the possibilities and challenges of multimodality, this type of multimodal pedagogy could suitably complement the telling of counterstories.

Particularly in this setting, in which students from highly diverse backgrounds created 'new kinds of spaces for storytelling and story-listening' (Vasudevan, 2006: 208), one question remains: What impact did this project have on the students listening to these stories? Delgado (1989: 2415) argues that social change can only happen when dominant groups join the marginalised in their fight for social justice. Have these stories managed to shake students identifying with privilege out of the complacency of dominant stories? Similar to other studies (e.g. Rolon-Dow, 2011), we acknowledge the need to explore the use of these to engage students and their community in a conversation around issues of oppression and privilege that can lead to social change, in order to place this pedagogical intervention firmly in the context of social justice education.

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