Storytelling, belonging and identity in the graphic design classroom: A critical reflection

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ABSTRACT

In a diverse student cohort, learning can be designed to encourage belonging and celebrate identity in the classroom. However, in increasingly international student cohorts, international students can find themselves displaced, living and working in new environments, and might struggle to find their voice and express their heritage in the context of their studies. By designing curricula to encourage storytelling, educators can help students to find their voice and identity as designers, and create a space for safety, vulnerability, and belonging in the classroom. As such, this paper is situated in the context of graphic design higher education and takes the form of a critical reflection, comprising a self-evaluation of the use of storytelling in the classroom based on the author's teaching experience. Rhizomatic learning (Cormier 2008) is discussed in relation to its application in the context of a graphic design classroom and its relevance in a curriculum designed to support storytelling. The critical reflection follows Brookfield's (2017) model for critically reflective teaching and takes the form of a series of vignettes featuring student projects – part of an editorial design project run annually for final-year students in the BA Information Design programme at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. In addition to these vignettes, the critical reflection references a design research workshop run for students of MA Graphic Design at the University for the Creative Arts in the United Kingdom.

Keywords: Creative education; design education; belonging; critically reflective teaching; storytelling; rhizomatic learning.

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Introduction

This article takes the form of a critical reflection on teaching graphic design in the context of higher education and comprises a self-evaluation of the use of storytelling in the classroom based on my teaching experience. At the same time, I reflect on the concept of rhizomatic learning (Cormier 2008) and how this is well positioned within the field of creative education, especially when emphasising storytelling in the classroom. My approach follows Stephen Brookfield's (2017) model for critically reflective teaching. To facilitate such a critical reflection, the evaluation in this article is structured according to a series of vignettes featuring student projects as part of an editorial design project run annually for final-year students in the BA Information Design programme at the University of Pretoria (hereon referred to as the ID Book Project). I also included a short reflection on how belonging can be encouraged through storytelling in the form of classroom workshops. This is based on a design research workshop conducted as part of the MA Graphic Design programme at the University for the Creative Arts in the United Kingdom.

Brookfield (2017:5) emphasises the need to critically reflect on our teaching assumptions and highlights three kinds of assumptions that are often encountered (singular examples of each are given in parenthesis): paradigmatic assumptions ('adults are naturally self-directed learners'), prescriptive assumptions ('all education should promote critical thinking'), and casual assumptions ('using learning contracts increases students' self-directedness'). To uncover and scrutinise our assumptions as teachers, Brookfield (2017:7) suggests viewing them through four 'critically reflective lenses', namely through the eyes of our students, through the perceptions of colleagues, through personal experiences, and through theory and research. This process, Brookfield (2017:7) argues, 'help[s] us to uncover when and how certain assumptions work and when distorted or incomplete assumptions need further investigation'. As Brookfield articulates (2017:9), 'reflection becomes critical when it's focused on teachers understanding power and hegemony'. Thus, I present an evaluation of my teaching assumptions and how these have been shaped and informed by experience.

This inquiry came about because of a challenge to assumptions I held about teaching graphic design, based on my experience teaching in South Africa and the United Kingdom. In the first instance, I assumed that adopting a model where students developed their practice in a way that mimics a graphic design studio (referred to as a 'studio pedagogy' by Davis (2016)), necessitated students to be adept independent learners,[1] and that, as adult learners, they would be able to slot

into a well-established institutional structure without much discomfort. A linked assumption of mine was that when entering a studio space, students enter a kind of sacred bubble where forces and structures of the outside world become less consequential, or at least that these could be set aside for the duration of their time in the studio. Brookfield (2017:10) expresses a similar challenge of assumptions in his earlier teaching career when he states, ‘In fact, as I moved through my first few years of adjunct work it became increasingly evident that structures and forces completely out of my control substantially shaped my supposedly independent classroom universe’. As I progressed in my teaching career, it became increasingly evident that the wider context of education is inescapable, and inextricably linked to graphic design pedagogy. Moreover, based on my experience, inviting students to introduce elements from their worlds outside the classroom can help encourage belonging and build community.

Student bodies are diverse, and challenges across borders are broad and complex. Therefore, an in-depth analysis of students’ political, societal, and personal challenges falls beyond this article’s scope. However, in increasingly global communities, universities are tasked with fostering belonging amongst students from very diverse backgrounds. Additionally, according to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE.org 2020), owing to the typical university age, students are already at an increased risk of mental health illness. Other factors that may contribute to an increase in the prevalence of mental health struggles include moving away from home, developing new social identities, juggling workload pressures (including part-time jobs), and financial pressures (NICE.org 2020). For international students, additional stressors include increased isolation, parental or care responsibilities, navigating cultural expectations, and concerns about visas and funding. Furthermore, mature students may feel more isolated and struggle to engage socially, perhaps especially because of caring responsibilities and increased financial and time pressures. In this landscape, tutors not only need to be cognisant of the many external factors impacting their students, but the curriculum needs to be considered in line with an evolving and diverse student population. In my teaching context, although student cohorts in the Information Design programme largely comprise South African (home) students, the student body is diverse in background and historical identity, with some international students in the cohort. Conversely, in my experience of postgraduate teaching in the United Kingdom, student bodies can be made up of mostly international students, often visiting the UK for the first time during their year-long studies in MA Graphic Design. Despite the different makeup of the groups, international perspectives, as well as a need to establish a sense of belonging, are prioritised for both groups.

In a discussion on the internationalisation of teaching and learning in higher education, Tanja Reinffenrath (2021) from the University of Göttingen argues that incorporating international, intercultural, and global dimensions into higher education curricula ought to be carefully considered and approached intentionally, and not amalgamated into 'already crowded study programmes'. Reinffenrath (2021) provides starting points for this. By expanding course reading lists to include diverse voices, inviting global colleagues to join classroom discussions, engaging in critical dialogue with students on canonical texts, and considering how interpretations are shaped by regional ideology, we could stimulate a change of perspectives (Reinffenrath 2021). In addition, Reinffernrath (2021) argues that we might draw on the knowledge of already diverse bodies of students and their own experiences, by inviting them to contribute and share in class discussions. According to Reinffenrath (2021), internationalisation can also be approached through local dimensions, by considering the effects of globalisation and migration in the context of students' home cities, linked to citizenship and social engagement. In other words, it is worth considering, and perhaps investing in, the impact that international students can have on their local, home contexts after completing their studies abroad.

In my teaching experience, I have noticed parallels between the notion of belonging and storytelling. I have also noted examples of student work that deal with notions of identity, home, family, and belonging, thus linking to Reinffenrath's (2021) suggestions to intentionally include international perspectives in the curriculum by making space for students to share their stories. As this article takes the form of a critical reflection in the context of design higher education, these observations prompted curiosity on how storytelling might be positioned in relation to pedagogic theory. Considering this, I discuss the parallels between storytelling and rhizomatic learning (Cormier 2010) in the following section. Following that, the vignettes discussed in this paper serves two purposes. The first is considering how storytelling might be facilitated in a classroom environment. The second is to reflect on instances where storytelling is actively included in the design of curriculum projects, such as the example of the ID Book Project.

Rhizomatic learning and storytelling

Rhizomatic learning, where the botanical metaphor of a rhizome is used to describe the complex and untidy nature of learning, fits well within the domain of creative education. In the context of this article, I consider the inherently ambiguous nature of creativity and the complex notion of belonging amongst students and learning communities. Dave Cormier of the University of Prince Edward Island in Canada,

coined both the term MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) and developed the notion of rhizomatic learning. Cormier himself does not define rhizomatic learning as a theory but describes it as a story (Bali & Honeychurch [sa]). The rhizome metaphor translates as follows, according to Cormier (2008):

> A rhizomatic plant has no centre and no defined boundary; rather, it is made up of a number of semi-independent nodes, each of which is capable of growing and spreading on its own, bounded only by the limits of its habitat. In the rhizomatic view, knowledge can only be negotiated, and the contextual, collaborative learning experience shared by constructivist and connectivist pedagogies is a social as well as a personal knowledge-creation process with mutable goals and constantly negotiated premises. The rhizome metaphor, which represents a critical leap in coping with the loss of a canon against which to compare, judge, and value knowledge, may be particularly apt as a model for disciplines on the bleeding edge where the canon is fluid and knowledge is a moving target.

Weaving a rhizomatic approach into the design classroom means acknowledging that learning is not designed strictly around content, but that it is a social process, whereby the 'community is the curriculum' (Cormier 2010). Cognisant that rhizomatic learning leans to the more experimental side of an innovative learning spectrum (Advance HE 2020), in the context of teaching graphic design, it can be woven into spaces where storytelling is positioned at the centre of learning.

If storytelling is to be positioned as a priority in the graphic design curriculum, it would be sensible to suggest that students should be trained to become adept storytellers themselves. In the chapter *Writing from zero: Teaching writing to designers* (included in Steven Heller's *The education of a graphic designer* 2015), Warren Lehrer (2015:310) argues that the earliest history of storytelling integrated language, oral storytelling, and pictures, or icons. With the shift to phonetic writing systems, as well as the later invention of movable type, the mechanised production of stories moved them further away from their pictorial and oral roots. Even so, Warren (2015:310) argues that graphic designers are drawn to work in a space where image and text work together in the art of storytelling. The role of graphic designers extends to that of 'informed, conscious mediators' in a digitalised, globalised society, where text and image are inextricably linked (Warren 2015:310). Warren (2015:311) continues that graphic designers often move from the role of mediator to that of collaborator or author. As such, a graphic design education is responsible for equipping students with writing *and* visual skills.

As rhizomatic learning suggests, learning happens through the formation of organic connections from inside and outside of learning communities (Cormier 2010).

Similarly, stories, by their nature, are complex, and our stories are inextricably linked to one another, to histories, cultures, politics, ideology, and hegemony. Thus, good storytelling ought to be considered from multiple perspectives, and the curriculum can make space for criticality and questioning, while facilitating belonging in a nurturing and safe learning environment. In the following section, I discuss vignettes relating to storytelling and belonging, empathy building, and reflexivity, all within the context of graphic design education.

Facilitating storytelling to encourage belonging

In a diverse student cohort, learning can be designed for belonging and celebrating identity in the classroom, and I believe that one way to do this is by facilitating storytelling. Many international students find themselves displaced, in new environments, and might struggle to find their voice and express their heritage. Suzie Wise (2022) unpacks the concept of belonging in her book *Design for belonging*. Wise (2022:21) explains that belonging consists of different layers, comprising 'you, your identities, your group or groups, [and] your larger communities'. Wise (2022:21) also argues that belonging is not linear, and that it does not exist in a vacuum, when stating,

> I belong to my gender, my race, the place where my ancestors came from, a work-based group, and other dimensions of my identity mostly hidden from the world. Backward and forward, my identities shape my belonging and my belonging shapes my identities. But belonging is also shaped by external factors that intersect with my identities. Structures, policies, and practices of the world all shape my experience and cue me to what parts of me I can express where. … You too have places and situations where you show up differently depending on how you are feeling in your belonging.

By designing a curriculum to encourage storytelling from the students' points of view, we not only help them find their voice and identity as designers, but we also create a space for safety, vulnerability and belonging in the classroom. This idea is supported by Emily Baxstrom (2016), who writes,

> in development and adoption of innovative teaching methods, it is important to create a relationship between instructor and student that supports intellectual risk. This comfort allows students to understand difficult subject matter and know it's okay to make mistakes, creating an opportunity for deeper learning.

When we invite students to share stories of their lives, spaces, and culture in their work, we are extending an invitation to contribute, which is key to the notion of belonging (Wise 2022:32). According to Wise (2022:21), ‘contributing is a circle – the more you belong, the more you can contribute; the more you contribute, the more likely you belong’.

At the beginning stages of a major project in the MA Graphic Design programme at the University for the Creative Arts, I designed an exercise in reflexivity, framed within the context of design research, where an image of a pair of glasses (spectacles) was used to signify the lens through which students viewed the world. During the exercise, students were introduced to the notion that research cannot be conducted in isolation or be completely neutral and devoid of external influence and bias (Crouch & Pearce 2012). To complete the exercise, students used the inner lenses of the glasses on the handout to reflect on their inner perspectives – including values, beliefs, and personal assets that inform their practice. The area on the outside of the pair of glasses was used to reflect on external factors that impact on their work – their families, cultural traditions, institutional traditions, as well as their educational backgrounds. To demonstrate the exercise, I completed my own version and reflected on my experience with students.

FIGURE **Nº 1**

Student workshop exercise in reflexivity. Photograph by the author, 2023.

While reflecting on this exercise, it is necessary to consider the notion of power, especially in the context of a student-to-tutor relationship. As Brookfield (2017) argues, 'critical reflection happens when teachers uncover how educational processes and interactions are framed by wider structures of power and dominant ideology. It involves teachers questioning the assumptions they hold about the way power dynamics operate in classrooms, programs, and schools and about the justifiable exercise of teacher power'. During this exercise, I was conscious that I was asking students to share stories, in small groups of four to five, that may place them in a position of vulnerability, where they may feel obliged to share and contribute, owing to the power dynamics at play between tutor and student. Two ways in which I mitigated this risk were that the activity was ungraded, and that I emphasised the fact that they need not share information that felt uncomfortable. Although there are undoubtedly aspects of the exercise that could be improved and made more critical (for instance, making students aware of the activity beforehand to allow preparation time, as well as adapting the activity post student feedback), valuable discussions were prompted in the small groups, and many students related shared backgrounds or experiences. For example, students reflected on their family dynamics back home and the support, or hesitance, of their families in their pursuit of a career in the arts. Other students realised that they came from similar regions in their home countries, or shared stories of having visited the same locations. They also discussed personal approaches to working, including educational experience (many students previously studied courses outside of the traditional realm of graphic design, including engineering, medicine, and psychology), and how these might shape individual students' approach to their studies. On the notion of sharing stories between students and teachers in the classroom, bell hooks (1994:21) writes:

> When professors bring narratives of their experiences into classroom discussions it eliminates the possibility that we can function as all-knowing, silent interrogators. It is often productive if professors take the first risk, linking confessional narratives to academic discussions so as to show how experience can illuminate and enhance our understanding of academic material. But most professors must practice being vulnerable in the classroom, being wholly present in mind, body and spirit (hooks 1994:21).

As educators, engaging in a process of reflection is helpful when initiating dialogues with students on topics like identity and belonging. The workshop discussed here points to some ways in which reflexivity can be introduced in the classroom to help students consider their own positions as researchers and design practitioners, and to articulate a sense of identity and belonging. In these instances, both students

and educators could adopt the role of storyteller in the classroom. A critique of this exercise is that, from experience, establishing an initial starting point for belonging is not enough to foster continued student engagement and participation, and indeed, that the sense of belonging needs to be strengthened by continual interaction over time. This reflects Wise's (2022:32) argument that belonging is linked to contribution. Therefore, curricula must provide opportunities for a sustained sense of belonging.

The following vignettes highlight pieces of student work that address the notion of belonging through storytelling, in a manner where an element of participation and challenge is demanded of students. These have been selected from the ID Book Project, and the projects were featured in *Stories Worth Telling* (2023), a twenty-year retrospective exhibition showcasing around 300 of the most successful student projects created between 2003 and 2023. According to the curators (Stories Worth Telling 2023), 'the featured projects track and unfold South African stories that weave together pockets of history, people's life experiences, unique points of view and indomitable spirits'. The ID Book Project, which runs for four to six weeks, requires students to develop a unique concept for a book featuring a real-life subject they deem a 'person of worth'. In-depth research is required in the form of interviews with the subject, observation and secondary research, which students use to author a creative writing piece with the support of a creative writing tutor. To accompany their writing, students must also produce all imagery used for the book, essentially challenging them to take ownership of the content, art direction, and image creation of their book design (Lange & Lubbe 2023).

Even for final-year Information Design students who are more adept at independent study, the project's demanding and fast-paced nature is challenging. Nevertheless, the element of challenge, collaboration with real subjects, and regular guidance by tutors set a stage for students to create compelling work.

Storytelling, identity, and belonging

In the twenty-year duration of the ID Book Project, students have often been drawn to writing stories featuring their grandparents or other elderly family members. Danielle McGeough (2012:17) argues that family stories are often comprised of fragments, pieced together differently by individuals within the family to form coherent narratives. Whether or not families ultimately agree on these narratives, McGeough (2012:17) argues that storied fragments influence the construction of individual and familial identities. During the ID Book Project, students who choose

to collect fragmented narratives from family members can piece these together and apply their creative licence to the retelling, thereby shaping their own version of reality, whether it is accurate or imaginary. As articulated by Worth (2008:54), 'the way we construct our narratives (fictional and nonfictional) is importantly tied to the way we understand, order, and construct our own reality and our own personal identity'.

My granny's memoir (2019) by Kiara White (Figure 2 and Figure 3) tells the story of her grandmother, who grew up in a small mining town in KwaZulu-Natal. As per White's (2019) construction of the narrative, her grandmother's

> childhood was unashamedly quaint and the years that followed played out to soundtracks from the Beatles and featured endless rounds of badminton. Granny is the type of person who gets all giddy at the sight of a blooming cactus flower. She also won't set foot out of the house without a bright coat of lipstick on. She has a way of putting you right there in the moment of a story, so much so that you'll want her to re-tell it every time you sit down for a cuppa. Gran feels that she's lived an ordinary-sounding life. To others, that may be the case.

The narrative is supported by vividly saccharine, tongue-in-cheek illustrations, showcasing the way in which her grandmother's fragmented narrative has been interpreted artistically and presented by the student as her own version of the story.

FIGURE **Nº 2**

My granny's memoir, Kiara White (2019). School of the Arts, University of Pretoria.

FIGURE **Nº 3**

My granny's memoir, Kiara White (2019). School of the Arts, University of Pretoria.

Also selecting her grandmother, Deline, as the protagonist of her book, Holly King (2018) tells the story of her grandfather, Bruce's, diagnosis with Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and Lewy Body Dementia, as retold by her grandmother. King (2018) chose to structure the book in a series of letters, written by Deline and addressed to Bruce. In these letters, Deline 'tries to process the intimate, hilarious and heart-breaking moments of the end of their lives together' (King 2018). The title of the book, *Return to sender*, references the slippage of memory and the fact that Bruce will never read the letters addressed to him.

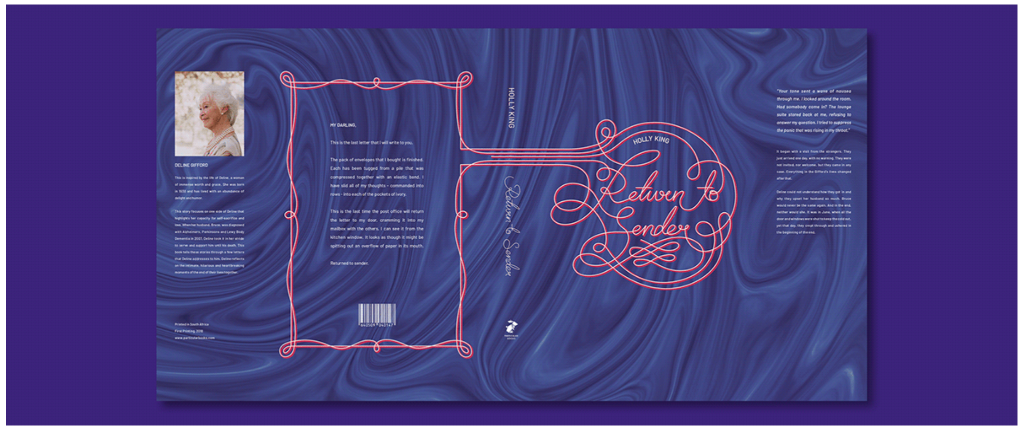

FIGURE **Nº 4**

Return to sender, Holly King (2018). School of the Arts, University of Pretoria.

FIGURE **Nº 5**

Return to sender, Holly King (2018). School of the Arts, University of Pretoria.

In *Bananas on credit* (2014) (Figure 6 and Figure 7), George Asamoah-Awuah tells the story of his aunt, chronicling her life's story – from being a saleswoman in Ghana to her position as a salon owner and hairdresser. The illustrations by Asamoah-Awuah (2014) are inspired by Ghanaian Kente pattern-work and Ghanaian Cedi banknotes. In the process of constructing his aunt's narrative and presenting it as an artistic work, Asamoah-Awuah (2014) can form his own interpretation of a version of his heritage. While engaging with stories of heritage and familial identity on an individual level, discussion groups during the ID Book Project, structured in the form of formative feedback, present an opportunity for students to listen to the stories of others and to provide feedback. This provides another opportunity for contribution when viewed in the context of the belonging cycle (Wise 2022).

FIGURE **Nº 6**

Bananas on credit, George Asamoah-Awuah (2014). School of the Arts, University of Pretoria.

FIGURE **Nº 7**

Bananas on credit, George Asamoah-Awuah (2014). School of the Arts, University of Pretoria.

In these and other examples where students invest so much of themselves in their work, feedback must remain compassionate and focused on a culture of belonging. As stated by Hill *et al* (2020), 'whilst belonging is often associated with perceptions of congruence or cohesion within a group, this isn't about 'fitting in' or assimilating, rather about feeling welcomed for who you are by tutors, peers, course culture and institutions'. Although we as tutors often cannot control factors beyond the classroom affecting student wellbeing, it is within our mandate to adopt a stance of compassion and curiosity in our teaching and our feedback, whether formative or summative.

Storytelling, vulnerability and empathy

Michelle Borba (2016:27) explains how reading fictional stories can help children to develop a 'moral imagination'. This concept refers to the nature of stories to transport the reader into the metaphorical shoes of the character in the book, helping us to live and experience through their experiences. When students spend time with the subjects of their books, they are required to stretch their moral imaginations by storying the lived experiences of their subjects. In a chapter titled *Storytelling and progressive action: A model of engaged scholarship*, Harter *et al* (2020) present and analyse narrative-based interventions that harness storytelling in different ways to activate participation, dialogue, and citizenship amongst students. As documented in the chapter, the interventions required, in various capacities, students to engage with partners from non-profit organisations, children, and community members grappling with social issues, and to interpret these issues as posters and podcasts, respectively, to raise awareness. According to Harter *et al* (2020:808), students involved in the projects shared that being asked to step 'outside of the classroom to learn is risky and makes you feel vulnerable, but it is full of meaningful moments and growth potential'. The notion of stepping out of your comfort zone and being vulnerable is central to what is required from students during the ID Book Project. Often, students engage with subjects they find daunting, challenging, or upsetting.

In her book, *Heyl* (2006) (Figure 8 and Figure 9), Anneli Botha tells the story of Allan Heyl, the only surviving member of the notorious bank robbers, the Stander gang. The book is told in the first person by Botha (2006), who reflects in her interview notes that she felt nervous interviewing a convicted bank robber, albeit one who had served his term and turned a corner. Botha (2006) describes the book as follows:

FIGURE **Nº 8**

Heyl, Anneli Botha, 2006. Image source: School of the Arts, University of Pretoria.

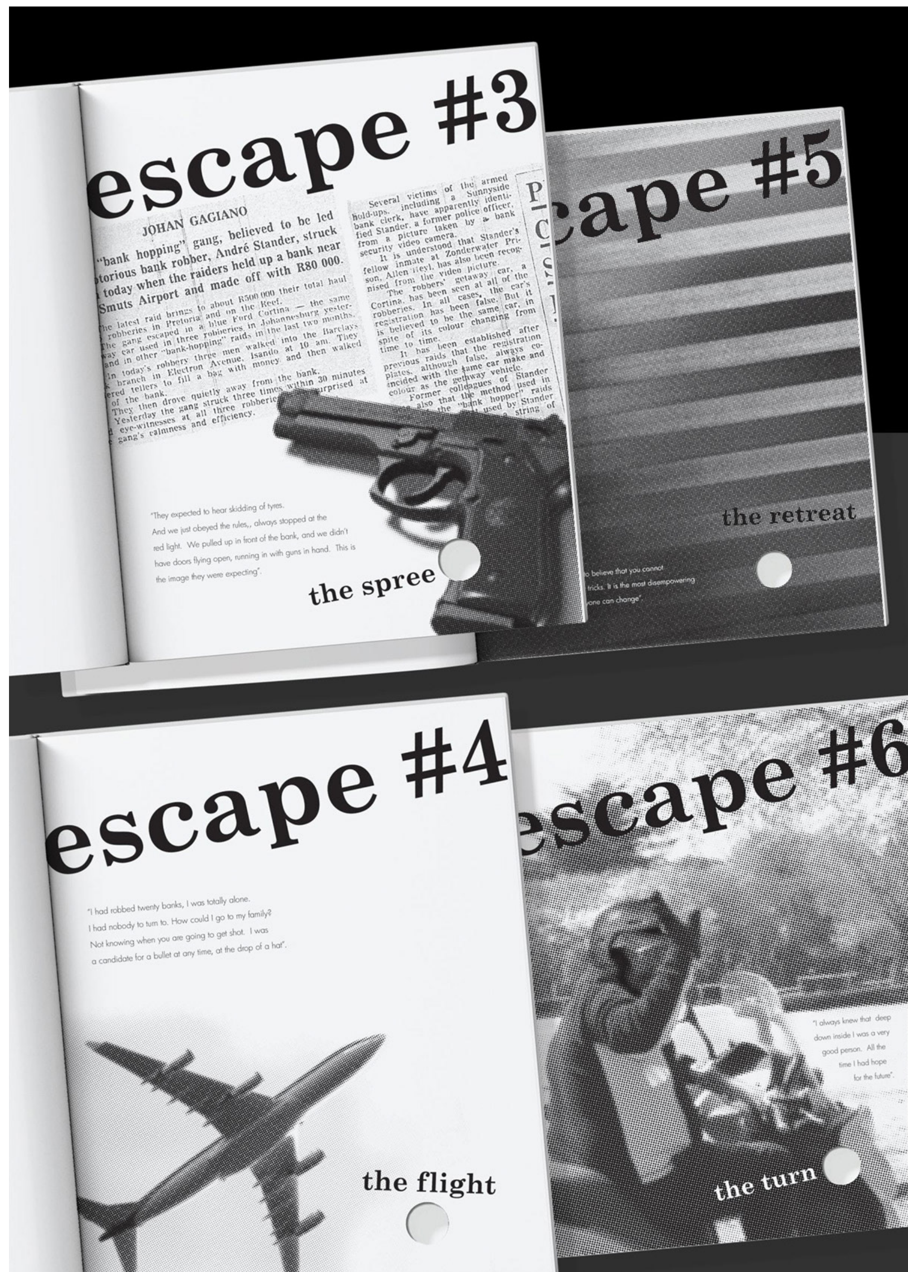

FIGURE **Nº 9**

Heyl, Anneli Botha, 2006. Image source: School of the Arts, University of Pretoria.

> [The stander gang], consisting of ex-police captain Stander, Lee McCall, and Heyl, met while in prison. After breaking out in 1983 they went on a spree, robbing 20 banks in less than two months, and at one point, even five banks in one day. After Stander was killed in a shootout, and McCall committed suicide, Heyl fled to the Greek islands and later to the UK where he was arrested and incarcerated, serving over 27 years in British and South African prisons. Through this book, Allan hoped to set the record straight. It is structured according to a series of

> 'escapes' throughout his life: escaping prison, evading the police, and fleeing the country. But most importantly, it tells Allan's story of escaping depravity and dysfunction, how he made sense of his life and found hope through personal transformation.

By retelling Heyl's story through her book, Botha (2006) could engage in a process of sensemaking (Harter *et al* 2020), where 'narratives endow experience with meaning by temporally ordering events and ascertaining causality by connecting otherwise disjointed activities'. In some ways, one might argue that piecing together narrative fragments of another's story allows the author to attempt to make sense of events that seem challenging, absurd or distant from one's own experience. Furthermore, through this sensemaking process, the author is allowed to flex the muscles of 'moral imagination' (Borba 2016:26), subsequently building empathy.

Conclusion

In this article, I bring together reflections based on my teaching experience that integrate the notions of storytelling, belonging, and the position of the educator in the classroom when facilitating storytelling in the classroom. Furthermore, I consider how storytelling and belonging become especially relevant in contexts where internationalisation is prioritised in curricula, and fostering a sense of belonging amongst diverse student groups can be challenging. The way in which storytelling on an individual level can be introduced and facilitated in a classroom environment was considered through sharing a workshop case study. From this, I concluded that encouraging belonging by facilitating storytelling was a good starting point, but that this wasn't enough to foster a sustained sense of belonging in the classroom. As such, repeated contribution (Wise 2022) and an element of challenge are required to foster sustained belonging, which is evident in the design of the ID Book Project. The first set of examples from the ID Book project highlighted how, when piecing together stories about their own families and family histories, students could grapple with issues related to shared and individual identities through storytelling. Following that, the paper considers how the ID Book project, by requiring students to step out of their comfort zone, be vulnerable and listen to the stories of others, enables them to strengthen their moral imagination (Borba 2016), a skill required for empathy building.

I also aimed to consider rhizomatic learning as an appropriate pedagogic underpinning for storytelling in the classroom. Considering the fast-paced development of design technologies, the proliferation of artificial intelligence and

its use in the classroom, as well as instant access to information, a rhizomatic learning approach fits well within the domain of a graphic design classroom. However, foundational skills and knowledge, traditionally scaffolded (Bruner 1960), and a foundation of critical theory, are required to ensure students are equipped with cognitive tools to navigate this shifting landscape. Perhaps rhizomatic learning, intentional storytelling, and social constructivism[3] (Vygotsky 1968) could present students with a balance of constructed knowledge and shared understanding and allow them an opportunity to construct their own narrative, using storytelling to make connections with their world and situate themselves – at least temporarily – within it. At the end of this reflection, I am left with more questions. When designing a curriculum fostering belonging through storytelling, which voices do we choose to include when we structure our briefs and reading lists? In addition, in the instance that students do not succeed in a particular project, for example, in the case of the ID Book Project, is there a reason that their stories were not told or presented in line with what was expected? Does not attaining mean that students experience a lesser sense of belonging, perhaps due to their contribution not being deemed 'successful' in line with assessment criteria? These questions may perhaps be best addressed through further research, and pertinently through the lens of student feedback. As Brookfield (2017) argues, learning from and responding critically to student feedback is central to being a critically reflective teacher.

Notes

1. An emphasis on autonomous learning stems from a learned application of a constructivist (Davis 2016) approach to graphic design pedagogy, based on my own experience as a student.
2. The botanical metaphor of the rhizome as a more flexible conception of knowledge in the information age was first put forward by Deleuze and Guttari in *A thousand plateaus* (1987).
3. Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism states that learning can be co-created in social settings, and emphasis is placed on language as a transmitter of knowledge. The lived experiences of individuals, as well as their cultural contexts, also has a significant effect on their learning and development (Vygotsky 1978)

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