

ARTICLES

THE “DANCE” OF RECONCILIATION: UNDERSTANDING THE COMPLEX STEPS IN A RECONCILIATORY PEDAGOGY USING AN ORAL HISTORY ASSIGNMENT

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Abstract

This article is about understanding the challenges and successes of a reconciliatory pedagogy with second-year student history teachers, eleven years after South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established. While the TRC report stated that it started South Africa on the journey towards reconciliation, it never claimed that it was able to achieve this goal, although its legacy continues to affect the way reconciliation unfolds in this country. Education plays an important role in addressing the effects of conflict on the second generation, but the contribution history education could make has largely been ignored (Cole & Barsalou, 2006). Using eight interviews with student history teachers, which reflected on an oral history assignment at the University of the Witwatersrand, this article focuses on understanding the complex steps involved in a reconciliatory pedagogy. Applying the image of the “dance” of reconciliation (Lederach 1999) and selected examples from the TRC to the data from the interviews, helped to contextualise the students' responses in relation to the main ideas that inform reconciliation. This provided insights into the twists and turns involved in this difficult process, and how it affected relationships between the first and second generations. It also allowed me the opportunity to reflect on my own practice as a history teacher educator.

Keywords: “Dance” of reconciliation; Reconciliatory pedagogy; Student history education; Narrative inquiry; Oral history; South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Introduction

The process of reconciliation is a complex journey, especially in a post-conflict society. One of the difficulties lies in negotiating a space and place where victims, perpetrators, beneficiaries and bystanders can live together in relative harmony after a successful transition in the political sphere. Another difficulty is how to address the ongoing effects of this past conflict on the children of the antagonists, irrespective of the position adopted by their parents during the conflict.

Education plays a vital role in this process, and this article focuses on a quest to understand the steps in a reconciliatory pedagogy using an oral history assignment by a teacher educator in South Africa. Firstly, I explain the background to the apparent lack of reconciliation, despite the country having experienced a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), among second-year students studying to become history teachers at the University of the Witwatersrand's School of Education in 2006. Secondly, I provide a brief survey of the literature relating to reconciliation and pedagogy. Thirdly, I turn to Lederach's (1999:79) images of reconciliation, such as the "dance" of reconciliation to provide a theoretical framework, and use a narrative inquiry methodology to show how the data from the interviews relates to this image, as well as selected examples from the TRC. Finally, I discuss some of the advantages and disadvantages of using the image of the "dance" of reconciliation in relation to my own practice.¹

Background

Efforts to promote reconciliation in South Africa, as in many post-conflict countries, show that structural changes in the political sphere do not necessarily lead to individual and social attitudes changing in the short term. The establishment of the TRC in 1995, which aimed to account for the "overall human rights violations" (Boraine, 1999:470) in South Africa's past, played an important role in revealing the multiple abuses that occurred during the apartheid era. While the TRC is credited with starting South Africa on "the long road" to reconciliation, it never claimed that it was able "to reconcile the nation" (*TRC Report*, Vol. 5, 1998:350), although its legacy continues to shape the way reconciliation unfolds in this country. Yet there are ongoing examples of a lack of reconciliation, which is shown in different ways in many university

¹ This article is based on ideas and data from my PhD (Nussey, 2012).

contexts in South Africa: a ministerial report concerning transformation² in higher education stated: “that discrimination, in particular with regard to racism and sexism, is pervasive in our institutions” (Soudien, 2008:13). My experiences in the lecture room supported this view of the problem of racism.

When I started to lecture in history education methodology at the University of the Witwatersrand’s School of Education in 2002, I expected that relations between students of different races³ would be better than those prior to the end of apartheid.

Most of these students had started and completed their schooling together, as part of the post-1994 generation (when the first fully democratic elections were held in South Africa). However, the divisions of the past were apparent in lectures, in terms of where students sat and how they engaged, or did not engage, with one another. I felt strongly that these divisions, in and outside the lecture room, perpetuated the inequalities and injustices of the past in the present. If these divisions were not addressed in some way while these students were at university, then this situation would remain unchanged in the present and affect relationships negatively in the future too. Furthermore, if the students were not given an opportunity to reflect and shift in their thinking towards the “other”, defined mainly by race in this case, then they would take these unreflective attitudes into their classrooms once they became qualified history teachers. In turn, this attitude of “us and them” could affect future generations, because their pupils would be unwittingly exposed to their views whether intentionally or unconsciously.

Events came to a head in 2006, with an oral history assignment about life before and after 1994, which a class of second-year students, who were mostly 19 or 20 years old, were required to do as part of their compulsory Social Sciences methodology course. The oral history assignment consisted of three parts. The students had to interview someone who had lived during apartheid, then rewrite the interview as an oral history for Grade 6 pupils; next, the students shared their oral histories in a cooperative group, which had the joint task of dramatising aspects of the group’s oral histories; finally, the students were required to write a reflective essay about the interview and cooperative task.

2 I am not suggesting a conflation between transformation and reconciliation, but a link between the two concepts was made by a university colleague who said that there can be no transformation without reconciliation first.

3 I accept that race is a social construct, but the use of apartheid racial terms does not indicate support for a ‘race as essence’ understanding in this article. However, the effect of apartheid racial classification continues to affect identity and relationships in post 1994 South Africa, as shown by research conducted in schools (Carrim & Soudien, 1999).

Many students of all races reacted strongly and negatively when the assignment was handed out, and they expressed their frustration in a way that is best summarised as “not apartheid again!” The class’ resistance to engaging with a difficult past is not something peculiar to South Africa. The German author, Bernard Schlink (2010:27), identified the problem associated with “[t]he legacy [of continual discussion of the Holocaust] for the next generation. ... The ennui sometimes exhibited by schoolchildren concerning the Third Reich and the Holocaust has its roots in the deadening frequency with which they are confronted with the past by their teachers and the media”. His explanation resonated with me as a possible reason for the students’ initial negative reaction, which appeared to be a mixture of arrogance and ennui that they knew all about apartheid, because of the numerous repetitions of the topic at school and university. I felt that there was a need for the students to investigate the past in a way that they made a personal connection. Interviewing someone they knew who lived during apartheid might move them beyond the grand narrative of those times, and reveal that they did not know everything about apartheid.

A further challenge was how to address this situation as someone whom the students viewed (correctly) as a beneficiary of apartheid policies: I am a white, English-speaking woman who grew up in a conservative city, Bloemfontein, during the 1960s and 1970s. Yet, during the process of the assignment something shifted in a positive way in relationships between the students in the lecture room and between the class and me. This led to my questioning how to understand these shifts, and to theorise the implications of this “critical incident” (Tripp, 1993:24) by exploring conceptions of reconciliation and pedagogy in the literature.

Literature survey

There is a small amount of literature in the field of education that deals with the link between reconciliation and pedagogy. In South Africa, there were examples such as a post-conflict pedagogy (Jansen & Weldon, 2009), and research related to reconciliation combining visual arts and English in secondary schools (Ferreira & Janks, 2007, 2009). Other developments were international, with South African scholars making the links between reconciliation and pedagogy explicit (Akhluwalia, Atkinson, Bishop, Christie, Hattam & Matthews, 2012). There was also an attempt to develop different kinds of reconciliatory pedagogies in Israel and Cyprus (Bekerman & Zembylas,

2012), and a related field which linked education and reconciliation (Crowley & Matthews, 2006; Paulson, 2011) in different countries. Most of this research was based on countries that continue to deal with ongoing conflict in the international arena, as well as those that experience the aftermath of bitter conflict and its effects on the educational context.

Yet there is little research that has linked history education to reconciliation. According to Cole and Barsalou (2006:14), “few scholars have definitely assessed the impact of history teaching initiatives on social reconstruction in post-conflict societies”. In South Africa, there are some materials based on oral history that were developed for use in schools, such as, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation’s *Pass Laws in the Western Cape* (2004), which could be used to facilitate reconciliation in the school history classroom. But there is only a small amount of research regarding the effects of history teaching and social reconstruction in South Africa, for example, Kros and Ulrich (2008) have published research on oral testimony and the teaching of history based on teacher workshops in Mpumalanga, and Weldon (2010:353) has focused on the importance of addressing “painful personal legacies of the past” during in-service teacher development workshops in the Western Cape. However, I am not aware of any research about the lack of reconciliation among student teachers that has been carried out in a South African history methodology context. This article seeks to contribute to this conversation by focusing on reflective interviews with some student history teachers about their experience of an oral history assignment. Doing this assignment appeared to shift relationships positively outside and inside the lecture room, and contributed to my understanding of a reconciliatory pedagogy. By pedagogy, I follow a conceptualisation proposed by Lusted, which “draws attention to the process through which knowledge is produced. ... How one teaches is therefore of central interest but, through the prism of pedagogy, it becomes inseparable from what is being taught and, crucially, how one learns” (1986:2-3). The strength of this view of pedagogy is the way it integrates the key actors involved in teaching and learning with the creation of knowledge. But the conception of reconciliation that informs a reconciliatory pedagogy is something that requires further theorisation, and a discussion of this follows in the next section.

Theoretical framework: Lederach’s images of reconciliation

“Reconciliation” is an extremely slippery term: Cole (2007:3) suggests that

“[reconciliation] is an imprecise term ... [and] is also highly contested”, because it has a variety of connotations and a multi-faceted relationship to other concepts. Themes from the broader literature about reconciliation support this view, because reconciliation is linked to concepts, such as, forgiveness (Tutu, 1999; Griswold, 2007), truth (Cherry, 2000; Posel & Simpson, 2002), apology (Brooks, 1999; Govier & Verwoerd, 2004) and justice (Sachs 2009; Metz, 2010). There is limited agreement as to what reconciliation means, how these concepts are conceived and how they relate to reconciliation.

In contrast, a model of reconciliation that helps to show the inter-relatedness of key ideas associated with reconciliation was developed by John Paul Lederach, an international peace-maker, based in the United States of America, in association with other peace builders at a workshop. This model of reconciliation, and how it changed over time, played an important role in helping me to understand the shift in relationships that occurred during the oral history assignment. Applying this model of reconciliation to my interviews with the students helped to generate further insights into the steps within a reconciliatory pedagogy.

The name given to this model was “The place called reconciliation” (1997:30). Reconciliation is placed in an oval in the centre, with the key ideas of Justice, Truth, Mercy and Peace arranged clockwise around the oval, and opposite one another in a symmetrical pattern. The purpose of this model is to show that people and their relations with one another are part of a dynamic social context. The key ideas of truth, justice, mercy and peace are understood as paradoxes, because this model “links seemingly contradictory [ideas], but in fact [they are] interdependent ideas and forces ... the opposing energies ... [which] form the poles of the paradox ... [and all the ideas are] necessary for the health of the group” (Lederach, 1997:30). This model offers a way of integrating many of the “big ideas” frequently associated with reconciliation, instead of an approach where reconciliation is seen as related mainly to one of the key ideas, as shown in the broader literature on reconciliation.

Further, Lederach developed this conception of reconciliation, by describing the “big ideas” of truth, justice, mercy and peace as “social *energies*” [italics in the original] (Lederach, 1999:79). This means that these ideas, which are all abstract nouns, become transformed into verbs, so that reconciliation in the centre becomes an anchor for the opposing energies of the four. The inter-relationship among the social energies is “dynamic, interdependent, and evolving” (Lederach, 1999:79), as a change in one of the energies

involves a change in another. Together, the interaction among the social energies helps to achieve “[t]he primary goal [which] is reconciliation, understood as relationship and restoration, the healing of personal and social fabrics” (Lederach, 1999:138). This reveals the strength of his conception of reconciliation, because it emphasises the dynamic interaction between individual and social reconciliation via the social energies. However, as Zembylas (2007:215) noted there is also a tension in this conception, because “there is almost always an unbridgeable gap between collective and individual efforts for reconciliation”.

Image of the dance

Another important aspect of Lederach’s (1999:78) ideas is that he used a “*polychronic*” and “*systemic*” [italics in the original] approach to reconciliation, where “[l]ike a dance, we simultaneously have activities taking place related to the past (Truth), the present (Justice and Mercy), and the future (Hope and Peace)” (1999:79). When a fifth social energy, “Hope”, was added, it disrupted the symmetry of the original model of reconciliation, and created the need for another image for reconciliation. Thus Lederach transformed the social energies into dancers on a stage, where all of them are present at the same time, and engaged in a “dance” of reconciliation.

It is this image that was key in shaping my understanding of what conception of reconciliation could inform a reconciliatory pedagogy. The reasons are as follows: the “dance” of reconciliation provided a lens for understanding the students’ interviews about the oral history assignment, where the possibilities and challenges of a reconciliatory process in practice are shown; the image of the “dance” of reconciliation also keeps the strengths of the original model of reconciliation, such as the relational ideas between truth, justice, mercy and peace, instead of viewing them in isolation. Moving away from a fixed place for these social energies as shown in the original model allows them to interact in different ways during the “dance” of reconciliation, such as forming partnerships or groups, wherever appropriate. The notion of paradox is still implicit in the “dance” of reconciliation, although in a different form. It is impossible to talk about the social energies without considering their opposites; for example, to refer to Truth indirectly raises its opposite, namely, Lies. The same applies to the other dancers: Justice and Injustice are two sides of the same coin; as are Mercy and Revenge, and Hope and Fear. Incorporating Hope as a dancer in the “dance” of reconciliation is vital,

because this is the dancer most likely to be engaged in a close dance with the other social energies. For example, there is the hope that the truth will be discovered about the past, and at the same time, the fear that lies about the past might triumph and disrupt peace in the future. However, without Hope, there is little chance of any reconciliatory process succeeding.

By applying the “big ideas” that inform reconciliation, as represented by Lederach’s five dancers, to the interviews I conducted with former students about the oral history assignment, I use his conception as a means of showing some of the tensions and ambiguities, the successes and challenges, of a reconciliatory process in a different and much smaller context.

Methodology

A qualitative approach known as “narrative inquiry” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) helped me to unpack the steps within the “dance” of reconciliation as shown in my interviews with the students. These researchers suggested that John Dewey transformed the concept of “experience” into an inquiry term, so that research is the study of experience, as “education, experience and life are inextricably intertwined” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000:xxii).

Following Dewey, they claim that experience is both “*personal and social* (interaction)” [italics in the original] (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000:50). This idea links with this article because my experience in the lecture room was a starting point for this research: the next step was to interview the students to understand their respective perceptions of the oral history assignment after it was completed, and how this led to a shift in attitudes towards their interviewees, peers and me.

Clandinin and Connelly suggest that their framework of narrative inquiry allows for inquiries to travel in different “directions”, such as “*inward, outward, backward, forward and situated within place*” [italics in the original] (2000:49). By “inward”, they suggest that questions can be directed to the researcher’s own experience, while “outward” refers to questions that can be asked about the environment in which the inquiry takes place. My narrative inquiry travels in different directions, as I inquire into the students’ experiences of the assignment during my interviews with them, relate their individual experiences to Lederach’s “dance” of reconciliation and situate this inquiry within the broader context of relevant examples from the TRC. Finally, this process of inquiry encourages a reflection on my own practice.

This methodology provides the means for an open-ended inquiry, which mimics that of a dance.

Data

During the first part of the data collection, I collected 15 oral history stories and reflective essays on the process of the assignment from the class of 2006 (out of a class of 66 students). These assignments were collected after they were assessed, and returned to the students. I requested that the students volunteer to resubmit their assignments for the purpose of research, and 15 students gave me their permission via written consent. This formed the basis of my first article, which examined their oral histories and reflective essays (Nussey, 2009).

The second part of my research was based on follow-up interviews with these former students from the end of 2008 to 2011. This was after I had lectured some of them in their fourth year, once they had almost completed their undergraduate studies and embarked on their teaching career or post-graduate studies. This delay in interviewing the students was due to ethical considerations, as the university’s Ethics Committee expressed reservations about the power relations of someone lecturing students and conducting further research with them. The result is that my sample is small, as only eight students from the original sample agreed to be interviewed. Thus, I cannot make broad generalisations based on my data. However, by focusing in depth on a few former students’ experiences of the oral history assignment as shown by their interviews, I believe that there are valuable insights gained into understanding the steps in a reconciliatory pedagogy, which a broader study might lack.

The demographics of this research was formed by the students who agreed to be interviewed, and the result was an even split between black and white students. Two of the students were not born in South Africa, although they attended primary and high schools in the country, and they were the only males in the sample. This gender imbalance was representative of the general situation in the school of education. However, there were more black students than white students in this class, so the sample I interviewed was not representative of this particular demographic.

During the interviews, I asked questions to uncover the background to their oral histories, and what changed in their understanding and relationships

with their interviewees. The students (individually) interviewed two black parents, two white parents, one coloured⁴ parent, one coloured member of the community and two black members of the broader community. Five of the students chose to interview their own parents, while three interviewed members of the broader community. The reasons for the latter choice varied. Neither David⁵ nor Kagiso had family who lived in South Africa during the period of apartheid, so David interviewed a fellow member of a political party, and Kagiso interviewed a worker at the flats where he lived. Greta decided not to conduct an oral history interview with her white parents, as she considered them to be bystanders with not much of a story to tell about apartheid. Instead, she chose to interview one of the victims of apartheid, because “I wanted to hear it from a person of a different race ... that’s the real people who we need to ask.” Greta interviewed her coloured “nail lady”, with whom she had a personal relationship, which was a rare example of an oral history interview that crossed racial lines.

During my interviews with the students, I also asked questions related to how they felt and responded to their peers during the cooperative task of dramatising their oral histories. Quoting from the data in my interviews with the students allows for their views to be expressed in their own words, which is a perspective that is sometimes side-lined in reporting about an educational process (Paulson, 2011).

I have used the “dance” of reconciliation as a lens to help understand and explain what happened during the process of the assignment in greater depth. There is a dance among the various parts of the assignment, from the students’ interviews with an older member of the family or community which formed the basis of the oral history stories, to the cooperative task of the dramatisation of these stories with their peers, to the students’ individual written reflections as shown in my interviews with them. However, this “dance” of reconciliation does not occur in isolation, instead, it occurs within the broader historical context of the TRC and its legacy.

The “dance” of reconciliation and a reconciliatory pedagogy

The social energies that inform Lederach’s “dance” of reconciliation, such as truth, justice, mercy, peace and hope, are contested ideas as shown in the

4 This was a term used to describe people of mixed race during apartheid, but it is still used, despite being controversial.

5 All the names of the students are pseudonyms, and I have used first names throughout this article to indicate where I have drawn on their ideas or quoted from their respective interviews.

brief survey of the broader literature of reconciliation at the beginning of this article.⁶ In the following sections on each of the different dancers, I will start with a brief overview of how Lederach conceptualised each of these social energies. Next, I will select a few, relevant examples from the TRC to illustrate aspects of the dancers in the South African context. Finally, I will show how these ideas provided a framework for helping to understand my interviews with the former students and the effects on relationships as part of a reconciliatory pedagogy. In the next section, I start with the dancer of Truth.

Dancer of Truth

According to Lederach (1997:29), the dancer of Truth involves the “the longing for acknowledgement of wrong, and the validation of painful loss” in contemporary conflicts, and is associated with images of “honesty” and “open accountability” (Lederach, 1997:28). At the TRC, in some cases, the truth of what happened to anti-apartheid activists, such as the death of Phila Ndwandwe at the hands of the security police, was revealed (Tutu, 1999:151-152). However, in other cases, the truth proved to be elusive, because competing versions were offered by the perpetrators as to how three men, known as the PEBCO Three, died (Cherry, 2000:137-138). Cherry commented on the problem of establishing “the truth” in relation to this example as follows:

My fear is that in an attempt to establish a consensus about ‘the truth’, many of the complexities and nuances of the truth are lost. It seems that we have to acknowledge that the truth that the TRC has uncovered is, at best, only a partial truth ... it may be more valuable to see historical truth as a continually unfolding process – not something that is past but something that is still part of the present, still contested and under construction (2000:143).

Her comments demonstrate some of the difficulties of establishing “the truth”, and the wisdom of perceiving it as “partial” and an “unfolding process” in “the present”, which remains “contested and under construction”, especially where there are conflicting eye witness accounts. Other issues concerning “the truth”, which are suggested by this example of the PEBCO Three, are that memory is fallible, or that people may deliberately lie to protect themselves, or commit the “sin of omission”, where salient details are omitted. Yet, there

⁶ These concepts have a long history of controversy in political philosophy, which is impossible to discuss in this context, so at the risk of oversimplification I have chosen to limit my discussion of these concepts to Lederach’s ideas and relevant examples from the TRC.

may also be different perspectives as to what happened and how an event occurred, so that an absolute truth may never be known. The PEBCO Three victims cannot speak to give their version of events, although there is no doubt that they were killed by members of the security forces. But the TRC's legacy concerning the establishment of "the truth" is ambiguous.

Examples of different aspects of "the truth" were shown in my interviews with the students: Zahiera said that this assignment "opened my eyes to my parents' point of view", while Greta commented on the power of hearing about people's experiences at first-hand, as "[n]o textbook, video, story in a book was as effective as actually hearing it out of someone's mouth", which suggests that they both felt that information gathered at first-hand from their interviewees was honest and "the truth".

However, there are dangers associated with this perspective: Eva Hoffman indicated, from the perspective of a daughter of survivors of the Holocaust, how traumatic events can be passed from one generation to the next in the form of "first knowledge" (2005:6) and even transmitted in an unconscious way. In the South African context, Jonathan Jansen, coined the term "bitter knowledge" (2009a:114). He used the term to describe a similar process of how the parents' stories, using the particular example of white Afrikaners, can be used as a means to transmit prejudices against, stereotypes and myths about "others". I acknowledge the validity of the possible effects of the parents' stories on children. But one of the results of my interviews with the eight students revealed "the truth" that of the five who interviewed their parents, none of them had discussed this difficult past of apartheid with their children in a comprehensive manner.

There is a silence about the topic between the generations. Both Mpho and Nonzali complained bitterly that their parents had censored the past, but it was unclear whether this was a deliberate "sin of omission" on the part of the parents. For example, Nonzali found out "the truth" behind the story of one of her cousin's scars. He was cut (as a young onlooker) by a gas canister that the police lobbed at protesters during an anniversary of the Soweto Uprising.⁷ Nonzali's mother was forced to make a difficult choice between taking her eight-year-old nephew to hospital and leaving her baby, who was a few months old, at home. She decided to take her nephew to hospital. Nonzali was angry that she had never been told this story before, as well as commenting on how "unthinkable [it was] ... that people would actually go that far" to injure an

⁷ This uprising in 1976, was the start of major protests against apartheid, where the spark that caused it was the enforcement of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in some subjects at black schools (Lodge, 1983:328-330).

innocent child.

Mpho acknowledged that there were stories about the past in her home, but they were only told in “dribs and drabs”, and Mpho wanted the “the whole picture of it” from her mother. This was not only for herself, but also for her future children, as she said that “we’re ignorant of the past”. Her admission was an acknowledgement of the importance of this assignment, as well as a challenge to the students’ view that they knew the whole truth about apartheid when the assignment was announced.

Irrespective of whom they interviewed for their oral histories, none of the students subjected their interview to “scrutiny” to use Portelli’s term (quoted in Field, 2008:8). I hoped that the students would apply some form of historical thinking by comparing the oral histories with other historical sources that they knew to establish “the truth” of what they were told during the interviews, as required by an instruction in the assignment, but this did not happen in most cases.⁸ Mpho was the only person who tried to corroborate her mother’s story by checking it with other members of the family. However, her story also revealed a historical error, as she wrote that passes were abolished after 1994, whereas the laws that enforced the carrying of passes were repealed in 1986. This does not mean that the students’ oral histories were necessarily based on an active attempt to deceive on the part of the interviewees: sometimes oral histories may be inconsistent, as individual memories are repressed or there are selective representations of the past, which are influenced by the social context. Furthermore, the interaction between individual memory and collective memory may also be unreliable (Ward & Worden, 1998:209-211). But the students did not engage with the possibility of the dancer of Lies emerging in their interviews, and many appeared to take at face value what they were told, which was problematic.

A possible reason why some of the students did not probe “the truth” further during their interviews was expressed by Kagiso, who stated that “apartheid is over and people have moved on, but you still get people that still carry scars ... [they would] remember what happened ... it’s going back into memory land and some had very bad memories.” He pointed to a real difficulty with interviewing people who lived during apartheid, because the act of interviewing someone has the potential to retrigger trauma in an interviewee.

⁸ In lectures, some of the problems with oral histories were raised, and the students were given a reading pack on oral history, which explored these issues further. The students also practised asking one another questions, and reflected on what worked (or not) before doing their own oral history interviews.

I learnt more about “the truth” of the background to the oral stories during the interviews. For example, Mpho’s oral history was about her mother’s perspective of the fears of both white and black people concerning the 1994 elections in a small town in the rural Eastern Cape. The former expected the worst and hoarded cans of food, while the latter feared that they would be killed if they voted for a particular party.

This oral history was clearly written from the point of view of a victim of apartheid, but during the course of my interview with Mpho in 2008, the family’s story behind the oral history emerged. Her grandfather was a policeman during the apartheid period in the Eastern Cape. This job was regarded by many people as being the equivalent of a black collaborator with the apartheid state. She said the following:

People always looked at us as one of the traitors ... So that was one of the things that even today when I go to the village ... people still ... say that your grandfather was a very rude policeman, he was just violent ... And I always tell them, but I’m not him. So you can’t compare me to him ... He was in the police force, the circumstances forced him to be like that, so there were no favours, we were as much victims as anyone else.

This example reveals some of the complexities behind the oral histories, and within the concept of the “dance” of reconciliation, because whose perspective of the dancers of Truth and Justice do we acknowledge here? The ambiguities of this family’s position in relation to the past are clearly shown: Is Mpho’s label of her family as victims of apartheid acceptable, or is the perspective of some members of the community that they were beneficiaries of apartheid, more accurate? Either way, this example clearly shows the intergenerational effects of the past on the present and the future, where a granddaughter feels that she is unfairly being held responsible for the choices and actions of her grandfather. This also shows how the scars of the past are passed on to another generation.

During another part of the interview, Mpho described the anger she felt about the way her grandfather was treated during apartheid and the role this played in developing a love of ballroom dancing, where she felt that she could channel her anger in a positive manner. This direct link to dance shows a literal connection to the image and another angle to the “dance” of reconciliation. It reveals some of the raw emotions associated with coming to know about the past, where there is a see-saw between compassion and anger about the injustices of the past, and about members of the first generation who embody this past.

Overall, applying the dancer of Truth to the students’ interviews and the examples from the TRC shows some of the difficulties of coming to terms with the past in South Africa. There are layers of truth and lies, remembering and forgetting, as well as different perspectives on the past, which will continue to unfold in the present and future. The journey towards “the truth” is ongoing, and one that is closely related to the dancer in the next section, namely, Justice.

Dancer of Justice

According to Lederach (1997:29), the dancer of Justice “represents the search for individual and group rights, for social restructuring, and for restitution”, and is associated with images of “making things right [and] creating equal opportunity” (Lederach, 1997: 28). This view supports a conception of justice known as restorative justice, where the aim is “to repair the injustice and to restore the relationship between the parties involved” (Ericson, 2001:25), instead of retributive justice where the aim is to prosecute those responsible for crimes in court, where perpetrators were punished if found guilty (Nussey, 2012). In the South African context, the principle of individual and group rights was adopted in negotiations for a new constitution. But the issue of how to hold those responsible and accountable for human rights violations proved to be a thorny issue during negotiations, and the TRC was established as part of a last minute political compromise (Posel & Simpson, 2002) to address this issue.

The TRC adopted a restorative justice approach to justice: amnesty was offered to individuals in return for the truth about gross human rights abuses during 1960 – 1994. The problem initially was that only a few perpetrators came forward to take responsibility for their actions in the past at the TRC: Eugene De Kock, who was in charge of the notorious Vlakplaas, where “enemies of the state” were tortured and murdered, was one of the first to apply for amnesty. He was granted amnesty for a number of crimes, but was also charged and convicted in a law court for murder, and is serving a double life sentence in jail, despite launching an appeal for parole (Hamlyn, 2010). Many alleged perpetrators chose not to appear before the TRC, and only a few have been prosecuted in South Africa for their alleged crimes committed during apartheid. For example, Dr Wouter Basson was prosecuted for his role while in charge of the South African Defence Force’s Project Coast, where chemical and biological agents were allegedly developed for use against the

opponents of the apartheid government. He was acquitted in 2002, despite corroborative evidence that suggested his guilt (Du Preez, 2005:16). This suggests that there is unresolved business concerning the dancer of Justice in present-day South Africa, which is likely to affect the future too.

In my interviews with the students, there was a brief nod in the direction of the dancer of Justice, where they acknowledged that social equality was established among all South Africans as a result of the 1994 elections in South Africa. But the students' reflections on their own interviews highlighted the opposite of the dancer of Justice, in the form of the injustices of apartheid. For example, Kagiso recounted how the man he interviewed recalled being told to strip in order to establish whether he was old enough to be forced to carry a pass (a document required by apartheid laws to show that one was "lawfully" permitted to live and work in a white area), and "the shame involved in whole process".

This emphasis on the injustices of the past in the interviews with the students was hardly surprising given the oral history topic on life before and after 1994. Yet, some of the students emphasised the continuities between the injustices of the past, in the present and their effects on the future. For example, Clare acknowledged that her father, as a white man, benefitted from apartheid, "as he had that foundation, he had the schooling ... he had all the resources available to him". Another example was provided by Michael, who stated that his black interviewee thought his fight against apartheid was for social and economic justice, but "there's still a bunch of rich white guys who own everything and ... manipulate the state to make them even richer". According to this view, despite the political changes introduced in 1994, the social and economic power of whites has continued unchanged.

This view was challenged by a theme that ran through a few of my interviews with the students, where some of them considered Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) to be a major injustice in the present and the future. This is a policy of affirmative action for black people, as a means of redressing social and economic inequalities of the apartheid past, and is an example of "making things right [and] creating equal opportunity" (Lederach, 1997:28). Greta stated that she was "proudly South African ... [but] where do we draw the line [as] to how much we give back to the wrongs of our past? So for example, how long can affirmative action stay? How long can BEE? ... when is there ever really going to be equality?" Her concern was echoed by Zahiera: "If a white child is looking for a job, he shouldn't be disadvantaged because

it is his ancestor’s history. It’s our history as South Africans, but our children shouldn’t be punished for it. ...You can’t make all white people suffer. There were lots of white people that were involved in liberation ... struggles ... those people also need to be acknowledged ... not all Afrikaans [speaking] people were racist and did horrible things.” Her compassion towards “our children” is noteworthy, because she described herself as being of “mixed heritage”, and personally stood to gain from a policy of affirmative action.

The dancer of Justice evokes strong views around sensitive issues, which requires an ongoing, delicate dance between the past, present and future. There is a close partnership here between the dancers of Truth and Justice, as there is a need to acknowledge “the truth” of the political, social and economic injustices of the past, and the need for restitution.

Policies, such as BEE, are required to redress the wrongs of the past, and to level the playing fields in the present and future (despite the debates in favour of and against the policy, its uneven implementation and the sometimes unexpected consequences of these ideas in practice). South Africa’s present Constitution ensures formal equality, although South Africa’s high Gini coefficient⁹ demonstrates significant inequality in practice, despite the impact of social grants.

These issues of social and economic justice will not be solved in the lecture room, because they are clearly part of the broader society’s responsibility. But the TRC’s legacy of ambiguities surrounding the dancers of Truth and Justice, needs to be addressed via an ongoing dialogue in the lecture room, especially as these dancers are closely linked to the next dancer, namely, the dancer of Mercy.

Dancer of Mercy

Lederach (1997:29) sees the dancer of Mercy articulating “the need for acceptance, letting go, and a new beginning”, which is associated with images of “compassion” and “forgiveness” (1997:28). However, he warns that mercy on its own is “superficial” (1997:28), because it may conceal truth, and there

9 Donnelly (2013) wrote the following explanation: ‘The Gini coefficient is a ratio between 1 and 0, where 0 shows perfect equality and 1 perfect inequality. The closer to 1 a country’s Gini coefficient is, the greater the inequality in that country.’ According to the calculations of the World Bank in 2011, South Africa’s Gini coefficient was 0.65. Available from: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI/countries?display=default>. Accessed on 24 November 2014.

is a need for interaction between the dancers of Truth and Mercy in any process of reconciliation.

In the South African context, the connection to the dancer of Mercy was made by Archbishop Tutu, who chaired the TRC. Restorative justice was linked to forgiveness (Griswold, 2007:158–159), despite forgiveness never being part of the official brief of the TRC, and criticisms that Tutu's conception was too Christian-orientated (Griswold, 2007). Yet, there were examples of forgiveness shown at the TRC, such as by the family of Amy Biehl. She was an aid worker from the United States, who was killed in 1993 by four men in Guguletu. Not only did the Biehl parents support the killers' amnesty request at the TRC in 1997, but her mother attended the wedding of one of her daughter's killers and danced with him (Philp, 2005). In contrast, Marius Schoon refused to forgive an apartheid policeman, Craig Williamson, for killing his wife and six-year-old daughter by a letter bomb. The reason for Schoon's refusal was that Williamson showed no sign of "remorse" (Robertson, 2000:273). These examples show the mixed legacy concerning the dancer of Mercy at the TRC.

My interviews with the students revealed aspects of the dancer of Mercy, which were not related to matters of life and death as at the TRC, but were nonetheless intensely felt. Nonzali reflected on the cooperative part of the oral history assignment in the interview with me as follows:

[W]e looked at ourselves and where our parents come from and what it means for us ... we got to appreciate and understand what happened in the past. And again, we counted ourselves lucky for not being there and how we should not be taking it out on each other. So it did kind of bring us together, even though some stories you hear ... you can't help but think to yourself, you guys had it easy ... your parents weren't even aware, it [apartheid] was like something happening in another country ... So although there's those feelings of bitterness, but at the end of the day we ... realise that ... this is not our story, it's our parents' story, but it's important to keep them [the stories] alive and they can make us appreciate where they [the parents] came from.

Nonzali's response reveals a mixture of emotions. These range from the compassion she showed towards her peers, when she stated that they were lucky not to have been alive during apartheid, and should not take it out on one another, to the anger and bitterness she expresses in terms of the lack of awareness and care of some of her peers' parents during apartheid. But she tries to distance herself from the past by saying that "this is not our story, it's our parents' story". Her attempt to take a step backward in this intergenerational dance is understandable. In a literal sense, she is correct that

the stories do belong to the parents, and the implicit desire not to be saddled with the heavy burden of the past is a plausible response.

However, it is impossible to reject the effects of the stories of the past on the present (and the future), especially for the children. Schlink suggests that German adults in Nazi Germany were guilty either directly or indirectly, and their children were “entangled in this web of guilt” (2010:18), and this applies to the situation in South Africa too, especially for the children of perpetrators, beneficiaries and bystanders.

In addition, Schlink argued that each generation has to recreate its own identity, as “[t]he task of dissociation from specific historical guilt” (2010:21). But there still needs to be an “acknowledgement of wrong” (Lederach, 1997:29) by these children concerning what happened in the past, and this is something that some of the students are grappling with as shown in the interviews.

Elaine said that she thought that forgetting was an important part of forgiving, although “not forgetting what had happened, but forgetting ... your hurts and to just move on from that ... so that the next generation can grow up without that hurt being instilled in them.” The desire expressed by Elaine “to move on” appears a way of leaping into the arms of the dancer of Mercy, without doing the work of engaging with the tough issues represented by the dancers of Truth and Justice, such as “acknowledgement” and “making things right” (Lederach, 1997:30).

Another student, Zahiera, suggested that reconciliation was about “forgiving ... but not forgetting ... not in a sense that you ... still want to exact some kind of revenge or repayment. Just [by] making amends.” The difficulty lies in what steps to take in making amends, and how to deal with the hurt during the process of a reconciliatory pedagogy. For example, Mpho relished the opportunity of working in a cooperative group with members of different races, languages and genders in order to dramatise their respective stories. In my interview with her, she mentioned that a white male student apologised to her “on behalf of the white people” after she retold her oral history and gave parts of her mother’s background. But when I interviewed David (the male student who was in her group at a later stage in my research), and asked him about the apology, he denied ever having made it. This is an example of where the dancers of Mercy and Truth appeared to be out of step in my interviews with the students, and it is unclear whether Mpho was expressing the desire for an apology or whether David forgot.

The dancer of Mercy, and her opposite, Revenge, were both present in my interviews with the students Greta, Kagiso, Michael, Mpho and Nonzali. Their interviewees could be identified as belonging to the category of victims, and they expressed no explicit desire for revenge. Nonzali further reported that her family did not encourage ideas of harbouring hatred towards white people for what had happened in the past. But her boyfriend's family did, especially the boyfriend's grandfather who spoke of the pain of "what they did to us". Further, her boyfriend complained that in the workplace "we still call each other names that we know are banned." These examples show some of the challenges for the dancer of Mercy/Revenge within the "dance" of reconciliation, both in the present and for long term peace in the future. Finally, I turn to the dancers of Peace and Hope in the next section.

Dancers of Peace and Hope

According to Lederach (1997:29), the dancer of Peace "underscores the need for interdependence, well-being, and security", and is associated with images of "harmony, unity" (Lederach, 1997:28). The dancer of Hope was less clearly defined, but a major reason for engaging in a Cambodian peace process was explained by former antagonists to Lederach as "I do it so my children and grandchildren will never have to suffer as we did" (Lederach, 1999:76). This shows how the dancers of Peace and Hope relate to the future.

In the South African context, the negotiated settlement between opposing political parties led to the cessation of the formal armed conflict in the early 1990s, and the hope for a different future. Despite criticisms of the narrow interpretation of its mandate (Mamdani, 1999), the TRC also contributed to developing peace in a fragile democracy, by its exposure of the truth in many cases of what happened to anti-apartheid activists who were killed by the security forces. But South African society continues to experience unacceptably high levels of violence in the present (Gould, 2014), which suggests that the images of "harmony [and] unity" (Lederach, 1997:28) are difficult to be applicable to this society.

My interviews with the students revealed their mixed feelings when it came to the dancer of Peace. In response to a question as to whether they considered South Africa to be a reconciled country, Zahiera replied that there were some positive changes, such as the ability to walk down streets, and to choose what schools children can attend, and "in some ways there is that ... a freedom

from conflict”. However, Michael disagreed as he mentioned that he lived surrounded by electric fences and was burgled many times, despite doing charity outreaches in his neighbourhood and stated flatly, “[South Africa] isn’t reconciled. It’s horrible.” Nonzali added a further twist by her suggestion that everyone is pretending that everything is fine, “[b]ut behind back doors, I don’t think it is.” I think that it is important to acknowledge the significant shifts towards the dancer of Peace that South Africa experienced in the change from apartheid to democracy, although this dancer was not formally part of the TRC’s brief. Yet, it seems that the dancer of Conflict continues to move under the surface now and will continue to affect the future.

The cooperative task of dramatising their oral histories helped to change relationships in a constructive manner towards peace among members of the small groups: Nonzali stated that it allowed her to “let down [her] walls”; further, she acknowledged that “boundaries were broken”, as “at first we didn’t even know the other existed.” But this acknowledgement of a shift in relationships was qualified, because some students said that the oral history assignment did not lead to their developing friendships overnight, although they now greeted one another and asked for information about other university assignments. As Greta described the situation, “I don’t have to be your best friend, I just need to make peace ...”.

An assignment based on the topic of apartheid evokes the opposite to the dancer of Hope, that is, Fear, especially on the part of the white students. Clare said that she was scared that there would be a “clear-cut fight between the black people and the white people”, and that people’s feelings might get hurt, and that her own experience might be excluded from the discussion. Instead, she found that in practice the cooperative task of dramatising their stories did not cause the controversy she feared, because it led to a sharing of “how people had experienced [apartheid].”

Elaine’s fear was that she would be blamed, as “all white people are responsible for apartheid”. In contrast, she discovered in the process “how much it [apartheid] actually affected the students who were in the group with me ... and those things are still with them today.” There was a subtle shift in Elaine’s position during our interview, where she acknowledged the negative impact apartheid continued to have on some of her peers.

However, it appears that this oral history assignment started a process of reconciliation, which is like the reweaving of relationships. Many of the former students that I interviewed years later recalled that they established

friendships across the racial barriers of the past during the course of the rest of their four-year degrees (Clare, Greta, Kagiso, Michael, Mpho and Zahiera). But Nonzali pointed to the clear ongoing racial divisions in the canteen as evidence that not much had changed in relationships with their peers, in fact, that this was evidence of no reconciliation whatsoever. These contradictory examples show some of the difficulties that continue in the present in relation to the dancer of Peace in the South African context.

Overall, the application of the “dance” of reconciliation to the interviews about the oral history assignment revealed a variety of mixed feelings, such as anger, guilt, empathy and the desire for revenge. But this showed that the students engaged both intellectually and emotionally with the topic as well as with their interviewees and their peers. This corroborates the view that “[i]t is impossible to change students’ deep knowledge and emotions about the past by simply treating the subject as a cognitive or intellectual problem. ... To shift this knowledge in the blood, or understandings of the heart, requires emotional engagement with the subject” (Jansen, 2009b:330). An emotional response is crucial in this context, because it gets to the heart of what a reconciliatory pedagogy hopes to achieve: relationships between the different generations and among members of the same generation are extremely damaged by what happened in South Africa’s past. The aim is to encourage understanding of one another and to explore different perspectives about the past, because without an honest dialogue that allows for an intellectual and emotional response to the past in an inclusive and safe space, then the hope of living peacefully together will continue to be elusive.

Conclusion: The advantages and disadvantages of Lederach’s “dance” of reconciliation in a reconciliatory pedagogy

Using the lens of the “dance” of reconciliation helped me to develop my understanding of what happened during and after the assignment at a number of levels. As a teacher educator, I was searching for ways to present ideas about reconciliation so that theory and practice were integrated in an accessible manner for my history student teachers. The interviews with the former students showed that an application of the “dance” of reconciliation to the oral history assignment offered many advantages: it provided a flexible, coherent framework, which allowed me to develop an understanding of the complex steps within the oral history assignment from a broader perspective; it also encouraged dialogue between the students and myself about key ideas

concerning reconciliation, and the importance of engaging with the legacy of the TRC in a bottom-up approach to reconciliation; it also revealed some of the complexities of a reconciliatory pedagogy in practice, such as, the unexpected revelations that occurred during some of the interviews.

My students taught me during their interviews that reconciliation is different for each generation, and that their initial reaction to the assignment was a symptom of a major problem of how history teacher educators (among others) are dealing with the recent past in relation to the second generation. The “dance” of reconciliation provides an alternative way to address issues surrounding reconciliation: by incorporating Lederach’s “dance” of reconciliation into my conception of a reconciliatory pedagogy, it could act as a powerful way of debriefing the oral history assignment with the students. By engaging with the “big ideas” in Lederach’s “dance” of reconciliation, it provides a way for the students to discuss and reflect at a deeper level about what happened in their interviews with members of the first generation and during the cooperative task with their peers, so that the discussion moves beyond their respective experiences. This process provides the opportunity for the students to question received knowledge from the first generation, their own prejudices and allows for an on-going shift in perspective and relationships with “others” in an open-ended manner.

This does not imply an uncritical acceptance of Lederach’s “dance” of reconciliation, as one of the disadvantages of using this conception is that it was developed at an international level and in a different context to a South African history lecture room. However, I have shown in this article some of the similarities and differences in applying the “dance” of reconciliation from one context to another. Interrogating these similarities and differences further could provide a way to encourage further dialogue among the students through a critique of Lederach’s conception of reconciliation. In turn, by critiquing the “dance” of reconciliation, this becomes another polychronic activity within a reconciliatory pedagogy. While there is an assumption that a dance is choreographed, the interviews with the students showed that in a post-conflict situation there is no choreographer. Instead, it is a free dance, where the steps are made up by the dancers, which sometimes flows and sometimes does not, but there is no predetermined outcome to this process.

One of the most difficult steps in classical ballet is the pirouette, because it requires balance and strength as a dancer spins around on one leg; yet, it is extremely easy to become dizzy, and to fall off centre if you stop concentrating

on a particular spot. So, too with a process of reconciliation: this is why the image of the “dance” of reconciliation is so evocative, as it captures the gravity of the situation with its important cast of dancers, and, paradoxically, their opposites; it allows for the possibility of both fluid or mechanical movements, because it is a free dance that is not choreographed; it also acknowledges the difficult steps involved in this non-linear process, where it is easy to lose balance; but it never loses sight of the dancer of Hope. The open-endedness of a reconciliatory pedagogy, as shown by the students’ interviews about their oral history assignment, means that there is no pre-determined outcome to this process, and this is what makes the “dance” of reconciliation so fragile in a post-conflict country.

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