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### A pedagogy of hope: learning about community, self and identity with students in the social and allied health sciences

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Many psychoanalysts agree with Freud (1917) that hope is one of the elements of gratitude, which is a product of the work of mourning, and that giving up unrealistic hopes or, to be more precise, unrealistic goals, while maintaining a hopeful attitude or orientation to life and living, indicates that therapy has been successful. ... Hope is the very essence of attempts to make creative use of traumatic experience, which always involves reparation, restoration and restitution. (Hopper, 2001:206)

This chapter describes a process that was used to create a learning project for South African university students who came from different backgrounds (cultural, professional and institutional) which required them to interrogate the interrelated concepts of community, self and identity (CSI) in a post-apartheid South Africa. The design of the project was based on the sensitive social/ political and psychological understanding of the project leaders that students' deep learning was only possible if they could examine personal beliefs and common cultural assumptions in a facilitated experiential encounter with an 'other'.

... be still, and wait without hope  
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing  
(TS Eliot, *Four Quartets*, 1959:28)

One of the key challenges for education in South Africa – and for the society as a whole – is to ask whether changing embedded practices from the past is

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possible and what mechanisms may need to be in place to bring about a better and more equitable future for all. Educating students to become participatory citizens for a common public good requires an element of hope that change is possible; a hope that the past does not repeat itself. This is perhaps salient now with class replacing race as the new division in this nascent democracy, preventing those who have few economic resources from accessing health, housing, education and work opportunities. bell hooks (2003), inspired by the works of Paulo Freire, advocates a 'pedagogy of hope' for bringing about a 'just' society. She argues that building inclusive communities, through critical and reflexive dialogue, is one way of generating hope; where the development of recognition of one's own and others' humanity may facilitate personal as well as community change (see Carolissen *et al*, 2011 for an exploration of the pedagogy of hope applied to the CSI project).

Straker argues that an inconsolable mourning is part of the identity of every South African. She looked at the effects of the institutionalisation of racism in South Africa and how black and white suffered profound loss and 'grief without end' (2004:408). Black people were the victims of a system that denied them a rightful place of belonging and the white people, who were actively opposed to the apartheid regime, 'could provoke ... the very racism we are attempting to avoid' (*ibid*:407). Straker draws on the Freudian concept of melancholia; an unresolved grief that is distinguishable from the more healthy process of mourning: 'Mourning is resolvable, whereas melancholia is a form of grief without end. It is sustained by the irresolvability of the conflict and ambivalence that loss of the object produces' (2004:408).

What hope can South Africans have then as educators and as human beings, that we can make a difference, that the past can be faced and that to have hope is not a false or manic wish to make the past disappear? Hopper, in defining and analysing the vicissitudes of hope, stated:

Hope always implies a belief in the possibility of improvement and of creativity, that is, in the possibility of making something better and something new. However, to be creative is not the same as to create. ... In other words, to be hopeful does not imply omnipotence and omniscience, which may be defensive against the possibilities of being hopeful. (2001:211)

The CSI course had three iterations between 2006 and 2008, and involved a total of 23 tutors and approximately 300 students from the disciplines of occupational therapy, psychology and social work. From the start, the CSI course was a creative endeavour, incorporating web-based interaction, art-work, group interactions and reflective work. The design and curriculum of

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the CSI course is described below. In undertaking this joint work, the project leaders and students underwent an intense emotional process – learning to speak about how past racial inequities in South Africa remained present in the perceptions we all carried about ourselves and the ‘other’. The previous apartheid government’s spurious and divisive use of racial classification in all aspects of life, work and love had had a profound effect on present day relationships and relatedness. It influenced our capacity to learn. We did not think authentic education could be possible without confronting the recent traumatic past each person held within themselves. By making the past present in all of the project’s curriculum activities, we hoped to provide opportunities for the students, in relationship with each other, to find ways of understanding their past that could offer ‘reparation, restoration and restitution’ (Hopper, 2001:206).

The project was called Community Self and Identity (CSI), making a play on the name of the USA television programme that was popular at that time. This play on words and letters may have had a subconscious deeper meaning; the Crime Scene Investigation of TV often followed a fingertip search through an area of crime to discover what had really happened. But it was never obvious or easily known. In some way the project we undertook with the students and each other had a similar feel. We had to explore each event in the course, consider the ‘evidence’ (students’ final essays) and reflect on our intuitive imaginings while working across the divisions of class, gender, race, institutional culture and professional domain. Unlike the TV programme, there wasn’t a suspect we could identify, confront or send to prison; justice could not be served. We were all part of the messy crime of apartheid and we were all implicated as perpetrators, victims or bystanders, often being two or three of these at different times in the lives we had lived in and out of South Africa.

### **Curriculum matters**

The course, which brought together final-year students from three different professional courses and two historically dissimilar universities, aimed to create an experiential learning environment where students could interrogate their knowledge and assumptions about the concept of community, self and identity. Choosing students from psychology, social work and occupational therapy related to their shared clinical interest in working in health and social care environments. The choice to mix students from the two universities – one with a predominantly white middle-class student group (University of Stellenbosch) and another a historically disadvantaged institution

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(University of the Western Cape) with a majority of black and coloured working-class students – arose from the programme leaders' concern that students were having a mono-racial experience of higher education. This concern about students' lack of contact with the 'other' evolved from an understanding that their future professional work would most likely be with clients from all race groups, and that if students did not talk with each other they might never explore the assumptions they held about the other or themselves.

While where students can study is no longer determined by statutory segregation, the apartheid past retains its evil grip on the aspirations of many black youths, who may be born in the geographical areas previously designated 'homelands'. Many of these areas are rural – a legacy of the 'separate development' policies of the past – and remain in a cycle of poverty due to poor transport links with industrially active towns and a lack of modern educational environments or health facilities. This inheritance of place and race relates directly to class, and its lack of economic stability makes it extremely difficult for black students from rural areas to achieve the equivalent of their white urban counterparts.

In exploring the changes in higher education since 1994 within the new democracy, Morrow (2008) has focused on the role of historically disadvantaged institutions (HDIs) such as the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and previously 'white only' institutions such as the University of Stellenbosch (US). Morrow states that:

While white institutions became increasingly multiracial in their student intakes, the HDI's remain overwhelmingly black. In this, they reflect wider patterns in South African education ... . It has tended, increasingly, to be the poorest and least privileged sections of the black population that attend these nearly all-black institutions, with the most economically privileged ... now attending previously white schools. In other words, social class and race now begin to intersect in complex ways. In this context those who lose out, relatively speaking, in terms of higher education tend to be those who go to the still-existing black universities, desegregated in theory, but in fact catering to the poorer or less qualified students. (2008:266)

This social/ political and economic analysis was reflected in the assumptions students made about their academic worthiness in applying for further studies. A black student, who was part of the 2008 CSI project, said they had applied to UWC as they didn't believe another university would have accepted them.

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The idea for the project was initiated in 2005 by a design team of six academics who worked in four departments – education, social work, psychology and occupational therapy – across the two institutions. Three of the academics had known each other for many years through their political activities prior to the 1994 elections and their shared political principles provided a firm foundation for the work to progress. Leibowitz *et al* described the motivation of the design team as wishing to:

present a pedagogic model ... which would respond to the inadequacies of our present educational system. The inadequacies pertain to the different quality of resources and teaching historically provided to students on the basis of race, and increasingly, of social class, or an intersection between race and class ... Further inadequacies are geographically and socially divided institutions in which students learn, and the ingrained habits of thinking about the 'other' as inferior or superior. (2010:124)

The first iteration of the CSI course involved students from psychology (US) and social work (UWC), while the following two years included students from occupational therapy (UWC). The combination of all three professional courses brought together students who would not have previously shared their complimentary areas of interest. The course ran for six weeks in total and used a web-based structure to organise the overall commutation with the large (approximately 100 in each year of the course) student group. The e-learning platform facilitated shared communication – for example discussion boards and emails – and carried the module rationale and learning objectives as well as the assignment outlines and criteria. During the six weeks students worked online and had three day-long meetings where they were brought together in a large venue at one of the two campuses. These whole-day workshops included participatory learning in action (PLA) techniques (see Bozalek and Biersteker, 2010), facilitated small group discussions and talks given by invited guest speakers (see Carolissen *et al*, 2011).

At the first face-to-face workshop, which marked the beginning of the module, students were randomly assigned into small groups of approximately six. They were required to draw a map of their community and a river of life and to share these with members of their workgroup – see examples below. Following this first meeting and exercise, the module had five assessments and students were given individual and group marks related to their overall contribution (see Table 9.1). Each group had an online tutor (a member of the design team or another member of staff working at UWC or US) and individuals met with their groups during the day-long workshops and had an online presence during the module.

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| <b>Time-frame</b> | <b>Task</b>                                 | <b>Description</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| First week        | Community Map and River of Life drawings    | Students were required to draw a map of their community and a river of life drawing, and to share these with members of their workgroup.                                                                                                                                                                  |
|                   | Assessment 1: Online Worksheet              | Students were asked to answer a series of questions regarding their initial impressions of the course, the other university, and other students that they met.                                                                                                                                            |
| Second week       | Assessment 2: 1st discussion board postings | Students were asked to post a written piece in their workgroups' e-learning discussion forum, reflecting on their own drawings made at the first workshop, as well as the drawings of one other student from the other profession – reflecting on what they had learnt about communities in South Africa. |
| Third week        | Assessment 3: 2nd discussion board postings | Students were required to post replies to comments made by other students (from first assignment).                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Fourth week       | Second workshop at UWC                      | <p>This second face-to-face workshop provided an opportunity for students to meet in person again and to start working on the group project.</p> <p>The workshop included discussions and exercises on identity and community by invited speakers.</p>                                                    |
| Ongoing           | Assessment 4: Group Project                 | The student workgroups were required to prepare (via the e-learning platform and email) a PowerPoint presentation on their thinking about community, self and identity (to be presented at final workshop).                                                                                               |
| Fifth week        | Final workshop held at SU                   | <p>Students presented their group projects to each other. Their ideas were discussed by the audience and the presentations were marked.</p> <p>The workshop ended with a guest speaker or presentation related to issues of identity (eg performance by dancers with disabilities).</p>                   |

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| <b>Time-frame</b> | <b>Task</b>                        | <b>Description</b>                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sixth week        | Assessment 5:<br>Short essay paper | Students were required to submit a short essay paper describing their experience of collaborative learning and reflecting on community, self and identity in contemporary South Africa. |

**Table 9.1: Outline of CSI Module Assessments**

|                       |                  | <b>Psychology<br/>(SU)</b> | <b>Social Work<br/>(UWC)</b> | <b>Occupational Therapy<br/>(UWC)</b> |
|-----------------------|------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>No of Students</b> |                  | 17                         | 44                           | 44                                    |
| <b>Gender</b>         | <b>Female</b>    | 12                         | 42                           | 42                                    |
|                       | <b>Male</b>      | 5                          | 2                            | 2                                     |
| <b>Age</b>            | <b>Range</b>     | 20-52                      | 20-37                        | 20- 42                                |
|                       | <b>Mean</b>      | 27.4 yrs                   | 24.3 yrs                     | 23.5 yrs                              |
| <b>Race</b>           | <b>African</b>   | 2                          | 18                           | 10                                    |
|                       | <b>Coloured</b>  | 3                          | 25                           | 29                                    |
|                       | <b>White</b>     | 12                         | 1                            | 4                                     |
|                       | <b>Indian</b>    | 0                          | 0                            | 1                                     |
| <b>Language</b>       | <b>African</b>   | 2                          | 18                           | 10                                    |
|                       | <b>Afrikaans</b> | 5                          | 14                           | 3                                     |
|                       | <b>English</b>   | 7                          | 12                           | 31                                    |
|                       | <b>Other</b>     | 3                          | 0                            | 0                                     |

**Table 9.2: Description of Students on CSI 2007**

The initial allocation of students to their small learning groups aimed to create a diverse membership based on race, gender, professional and university affiliation. As mentioned earlier, the two universities have a different historical background which continues to be reflected in the demographic profile of the majority of their students. Table 9.2 provides a description of some of the demographics of students participating in 2007. It also includes demographics of race. For an explanation of the use of racial categories, see the introduction.

Twelve mandatory readings from a wide range of academic sources were chosen by the design team for students to use in their group debates and course assessment tasks. This literature, uploaded on the website, created a

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shared language of learning as students began to discuss that concepts such as 'community' and 'community work' may belong to a conservative political past – as Thornton and Ramphela (1988) argue. While literature related to South Africa's social/political past (eg Posel, 2001) seemed to support some students' personal experiences of race and class, for others it elicited a confrontation with previously held assumptions; some students, for example, believed that regardless of one's racial classification (ie past), hard work would lead to the same outcome for all in South Africa.

### Learning about 'the other'

It is difficult to describe the charged emotional atmosphere that became a part of this learning environment. Students and staff alike became absorbed in each other's narratives and insights into what it was like to live, learn and love in South Africa today. The diversities, richness and disparities of experiences were immediately evident from the community map and river of life drawings produced by students at the start of each module. Figure 9.1, drawn by a student from US, depicted a fairly pleasant looking community, with trees, animals and evidence of good economic resources. The other community map is by a student from UWC (Figure 9.2) and depicts the different social problems faced by that community. This student stresses the importance of hope in bringing about change.



**Figure 9.1: Community map by US student (CSI2008)**

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We have selected these drawings because they illustrate fairly stereotypical differences. It is important to state that not all UWC students had difficult lives and not all US students had easier ones. For example, many students from both institutions had similar concerns about crime and safety, and students from both institutions had experienced loss in their lives. But what

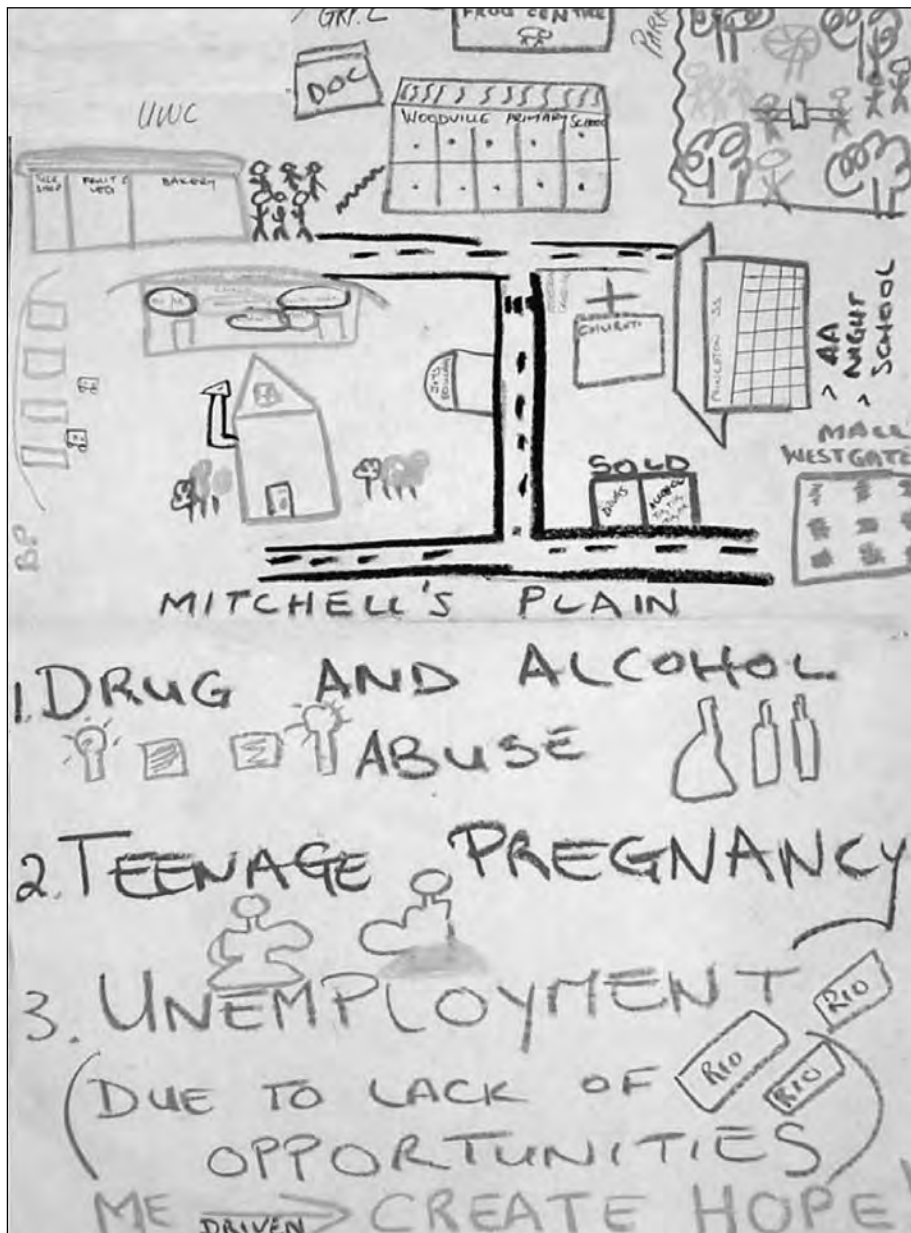


Figure 9.2: Community map by student from UWC (CSI2008)

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the drawings do depict in more general terms is how students are typically situated in relation to their family's history of race and class in South Africa.

The facilitators and design team would meet periodically to reflect on the whole process. During these meetings, we identified a shared concern that students seemed reluctant to discuss race in relation to understanding the 'other'. Despite the disparities depicted in the drawings, students frequently used terms from the 'New South Africa' discourse: they described being members of a 'rainbow nation' or were quoted as saying 'he is my brother, a brother from a different mother' or 'we are still just people' (see Leibowitz *et al*, 2007). This seemed to imply that the past was well and truly behind them and they were all equal and able to relate in open and trusting partnerships. We realised that this dynamic was echoed in our – ie the staff's – reluctance to bring up the past or discuss our experiences of race and class with the students and each other. Following this insight we arranged a week-long experiential group course for the full CSI staff team, where we spoke in a painful and ultimately profound way about our gender, class, professional grouping and race. By the time we ran the final course in 2008, this transformative process allowed us to engage with the students more openly and explicitly about matters of race and the traumatic past of the country that each of us carried and shared (see Leibowitz *et al*, 2010).

### **'We bring blame; they bring guilt ... that is no way to begin a relationship'**

In an early design team meeting we watched a video recording of a workshop Dr Ariella Friedman had run with a small group of students from the 2007 CSI course. Dr Friedman is a psychologist with many years experience of inter-group contact work in Israel/Palestine (see Halabi, 2004). The group of students had volunteered to consider their learning from the CSI course with her and each other. The film showed a deeply moving encounter between students who came from different racial, professional and gendered backgrounds. In it coloured students from rural areas spoke of being warned by their parents not to trust 'black people' when they came to the city (university), while white students spoke of their dawning realisation that their much loved domestic worker or nanny, who lived in a small room at the back of their home, didn't have hot water to use in her bathroom. It was following a prolonged and painful silence, which acknowledged the stories that had been shared by all the group members, that a black student looked up and said 'we bring blame, they bring guilt...that is no way to begin a relationship.'

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Despite their evident difficulty in explicitly entering a dialogue about the legacy of apartheid and engaging fully with the crime scene, students seemed to find the CSI course a moving, challenging and educationally beneficial experience. For many it was an opportunity to briefly visit the lived experience of the 'other', an opportunity not all students had had outside their everyday superficial encounters in the broader society. Despite the many silences during their discussions, it was apparent that many students recognised that they were not 'all the same' and it was in fact their diverse racialised histories that accounted for their different positions in contemporary South Africa. This is reflected in some of the comments students made in their individual essays (their final assignment).

In the following quotes, three students comment on the overall effect of the course. It made them more aware of themselves as professionals or as having a black, white or coloured identity. They seemed able to consider these parts of themselves because they were in groups with students who came from different backgrounds:

[The CSI course] has provided me with an opportunity to reflect on myself in many areas such as my own identity and what determines that as well as the identity of my community and how it has affected who I am and who I will become. My background and upbringing has resulted in a certain way of thinking, and although I do not believe that this is wrong, I do believe that CSI has exposed me to many people with different backgrounds and views and taught me how to consider their views as seriously as I consider my own. (Female, coloured, OT student, UWC)

In this course I have been conscientioused[sic] into investigating and challenging my knowledge about what communities are and how having limited notions on what communities are can result in one being discriminative to other communities that exist in the same space as my community does. ... A comment was made about one of the colleagues in the CSI course about why does each institution not hold its own course. Apparently this individual did not see the importance of the collaboration between these institutions as a drop in the bucket towards nation building and racial integration. Yes we have had our difficulties during the course, but that does not mean that this exercise was futile. (Male, black, OT student, UWC)

As a learning experience the course has been incredible. I have, at different times, been impressed, energised, frustrated, annoyed, overwhelmed, challenged and moved. The group dynamic really added value and I doubt that I would have been able to learn as much without my group member's, and the wider participants', contributions. (Female, white, psychology student, US)

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The critical questions that were part of the assignment guidelines and directed reading exposed students to a number of controversial views. Such questions were debated in their small groups, often prompted by the thought-provoking and emotionally honest presentations given by the guest speakers. From this experience, students described how they began to reflect on their own assumptions and positioning. They emphasised the importance of listening to 'the other' and what was learnt during that process. For example two students wrote:

This has afforded me the opportunity to explore and view my opinions in an open forum, but has also allowed me the opportunity to hear the opinions of my peers. With the new framework of critical thinking, this expanded my knowledge and opened my eyes to a whole new world of hurt, pain and oppression but also a world of expression, reconciliation and a journey of healing. (Female, coloured, OT student, UWC)

I was also struck by [the guest speaker's] beautiful comment at the third workshop that 'the self is both host and hostage to the other'. Indeed it seems that self is not possible without the existence of the other. For me, his comment also tied in with an issue that I have struggled with throughout the course. I am often quite outspoken and my work requires me to be quite directive. I have been grappling with the paradox of how to allow my/one's own voice without silencing the other. And his comment has led me to consider at least a partial solution to this complex problem and that is that any statement of, or arising out of, the self should also include an invitation of response from the other. (Female, white, psychology student, US)

Both quotes also reflect optimism about future change, with students emphasising a hopeful dialogue or expression. In relation to this some students also recognised the value of what was learnt for their future professional lives:

Are we then truly living in a democratic country? Topics such as these stirred many questions in me and above all forced me to relook at my view on this topic. With hindsight it became clear that by 'not having an opinion' I was in fact taking the easy way out and not facing the realities which were lying right in front of me and by this I was taking away opportunities and experiences from many of the clients I was working with by not allowing them the opportunity to be affected by this very real situation and express the result of this. (Female, coloured, OT student, UWC)

Similarly, another student writes about her future professional self:

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This course has been something of a consciousness-raiser for me. ... In the session on PLA techniques ... she [guest speaker] told us a story of a community intervention in which taps were built. For the first time the community had safe, running water. But no-one had consulted the children who, it turned out, were the primary collectors of water in the community and the taps were built too high for them to negotiate. In that story I have found three key principles that I hope to take with me into the future: consultation, inquiry and empathy. (Female, white, psychology student, US)

During the first iteration of the CSI course, the research team began to feel a little despondent that students were not actively engaged in deep and meaningful verbal dialogue on matters of race and identity. We reflected on the assumptions and expectations of the students, we hoped that we had developed a course that could inspire students' critical reflectivity. However, it was in reading the progressive years of such essays that we began to see students becoming able to reflect in a meaningful and creative way.

The CSI project was ambitious in its aim to provide students from different institutions with a containing space so they might engage across areas of difference, to learn from each other. The potential for this type of authentic learning requires the commitment of academics and institutions. There is no quick fix, and everyone involved (educators and learners) is required to explore their identity markers (given and chosen) in an emotionally authentic manner. There can be many conscious reasons given for not doing this type of work (eg timetable issues, the high staff-student ratio required), but these reasons may hide a deeper unconscious denial of the painful past. As Berlak (2004), Walker and Unterhalter (2004) and Hopper (2001) all declare, without an acknowledgement of the injuries caused and felt from the past, no mourning can take place, precluding the possibility of learning something new. This type of curriculum design is not a place for piety or seeking easy solutions, but an acknowledgment of the reality of others lives that can allow us to see ourselves. It is in the silence of listening to the other that we can hope for change in ourselves.

... wait without love

For love would be the wrong thing; there is yet faith

But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.

Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:

So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.

(From the *Four Quartets*, TS Eliot, 1959:28)

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