



## **Real Life Stories Helped Students from a Higher Education Institute to Engage in Understanding across Cultural Borders**

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### **Abstract**

Using real life stories in an innovative teaching assignment given to the undergraduate early childhood education students, strive to understand the boundaries of culture, languages and other belief systems in South Africa. In this project students had to document and engage in a real life story from a person coming from a different cultural and language background, other than them. I examined storytelling as a way to cross cultural boundaries and harnessing the diverse worlds of South African citizens pedagogically. Stories can extend boundaries beyond our single perspectives and experiences to the varying perspectives of others. Stories extend our knowledge and understanding of other people and situations, other cultures and languages by including the emotional expressions of factual information. This experience was for the students to meet each other at the border between the familiar and unfamiliar and to understand themselves better through the eyes of the other. The stories that we hear from others often teach us lessons about ourselves or about life. One of the students wrote: "This simply helped to teach me about the untold stories in the world and how every memory changes the way in which you will live from that point onwards". The linguistic challenges were very real for both the 300 storytellers and the listeners. Miscommunication and misunderstanding became a reality. I came to the conclusion that although the geography and nationality bind people together as citizens in South African, the richness of the 11 different languages and cultures and a history of segregation continue to separate people. This needs to be addressed and hopefully these student teachers will be better equipped to reach out to the other when teaching the young children of South Africa.