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“Even today they call him *Induna*”: Theatre, empowerment, and making a difference

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Abstract

Theatre and drama approaches are a popular way to draw young people into HIV and AIDS awareness programmes. These approaches have been used in South Africa since the beginning of the response to the epidemic in the 1990s, but how do they work? Previous studies suggest that for this theatre to be effective, it must be aesthetically appealing, dramatic, popular, and culturally appropriate. It should also incorporate the voices of those who represent its audiences; and theatre-makers and health programme developers must find ways for communities to participate if the theatre is to be made meaningful. The theoretical underpinnings of such participatory projects include the pedagogy of Paulo Freire (2002) and call for an understanding of development communication issues. The article looks in particular at the example of the UVHAA “Man-to-Man” drama project conducted in the Umdoni district on the KZN South Coast. The article outlines current thinking about the notion of participation in applied theatre projects. Through interviews with project managers and project participants, it explores how participation happened in the project, and how it had an impact on the individuals who were part of it. The article concludes that participation in the project had a profound impact on the participants, and that such projects can have an empowering effect on those involved in them.

Keywords: Theatre; HIV and AIDS; participation; young people; impact.

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Innovative approaches to HIV and AIDS

Communicating about HIV and AIDS raises a specific set of contradictions and challenges. As a health-related issue, it is one that needs to be dealt with by providing specific and potentially life-saving bio-medical information. However, it also needs to address some of the complex social factors that exacerbate HIV prevalence. If messages about HIV and AIDS are simply generated by ‘experts’ from outside of the target community they may not be seen as relevant and accessible by the audience.

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The recognised key to reducing HIV prevalence is to provide information about HIV and AIDS and to encourage people to adopt behaviours that put them at less risk from infection. According to Mitchell, Nakamanya, Kamali and Whitworth (2001) behaviour change interventions offer the best chance of preventing the further spread of HIV and AIDS in developing countries. The primary focus of these behaviour change interventions should be to ensure that the audience has the necessary information, motivation and access to resources to change their sexual behaviour and thus reduce the likelihood of HIV transmission.

However, broad awareness campaigns that provide information alone are not sufficient to reduce the risk of HIV infection, since access to information does not necessarily bring about a change in behaviour (Francis & Rimensberger, 2005). This may be because a range of social and cultural factors that feed the epidemic and give rise to behaviours and practices that place people at risk of HIV infection are not directly addressed in these campaigns.

Decisions about sexual behaviour are intensely personal and often not rational. Because HIV is predominantly spread through sexual contact, which is both intimate and emotional, the reasons for a person adopting or ignoring HIV prevention messages are going to be less rational than when he or she is considering other health threats. Decisions regarding sexual behaviour are driven by factors including gender relations, sexual identity, desire, pleasure, preference and self-expression (Gumede & Durden, 2010). This means that campaigns dealing with HIV and AIDS should not centre solely on questions of health, but should take a more holistic approach and include issues of gender and sexuality. The reasons why individuals adopt safer sex behaviours or change behaviour are also mediated by the society in which they find themselves. Health messages must therefore take into account how HIV and AIDS are framed and discussed in the local context and must engage with “the broader structures of social conduct within which meaning is articulated, circulated and appropriated” (Kunda, 2010, p. 1).

This article argues that theatre is a useful and effective vehicle for communicating about HIV and AIDS, in that well-designed theatre interventions allow for a more holistic, cultural approach to talking about the epidemic, which takes the local context into account in message-making and understandings.

Current thinking recognises that including local voices in health-related message creation makes for more effective messaging, and promotes ownership by a community of the messages that could bring about change (Tufté, 2005). It is argued by Collins Airhihenbuwa and Rafael Obregon (2000), amongst others, that participation in HIV and AIDS communication in particular, is an important factor in ensuring that messages are locally appropriate and effective. Theatre as a live and immediate medium that is popular and encourages participation has a particular appeal and can provide a powerful vehicle for this participation.

Theatre and drama dealing with HIV and AIDS

Since 1990, there has been a growth in the popularity of theatre and drama-based methodologies for HIV and AIDS awareness in schools, prisons, community groups, workplaces and a range of other settings (Marlin-Curiel, 2004; Dalrymple, 2006). As a communal activity that brings people together, theatre provides a place for them to engage with complex issues in a ritualised and removed way (Schechner, 2002). Theatre can be seen as an opportunity for a community to engage non-directly with issues of importance that are otherwise seen as threatening or intimidating, such as HIV and AIDS.

Further to this, theatre can provide a space in which the unspeakable is spoken. Fraser McNeill (2009) argues that cultural conventions in South Africa dictate that death and the causes of death cannot be spoken about. He suggests that complex social processes are employed to “create and maintain the avoidance of open conversation around HIV/AIDS” and that these are rooted in these conventions (2009, p. 353). This consensus for silence means that innovative and non-threatening ways must be found to address HIV and AIDS issues.

The fact that many HIV and AIDS plays use humour as a way to address these complex and serious issues results in a high enjoyment level by audiences. Using humour as an approach to deal with difficult issues is a recognised approach in both cognitive and social psychology. The use of humour encourages the audience to process information on an intellectual level as well as on an emotional level, and can encourage a feeling of well-being (Martin, 2007). Previous research into how audiences rated an HIV and AIDS play reveals that respondents found that theatre is enjoyed as a means of communication, and that this enjoyment enhances learning (Durden & Nduhura, 2007; Piotrow, Kinkaid, Rimon & Rinehart, 1997).

Theatre can play an important role in highlighting people's susceptibility to the disease by showing characters on stage with whom the audience can identify, and from whom they can learn through watching the consequences of their actions. Watching characters in a drama who are able to confront and overcome challenges (such as an HIV positive diagnosis, or other health challenges) may increase audience members' belief in their own ability to do the same. Participation in creating a drama may heighten this belief, which Albert Bandura terms 'self-efficacy'; the belief that a person has to succeed in a given situation, which affects how they think, behave, and feel (Bandura, 1995).

Previous research suggests that over 30% of adult South Africans have a fatalist view about HIV and AIDS, and that they report a low level of self-efficacy to effect change (Meyer-Weitz, 2005). While this fatalism may have developed in the period before antiretroviral (ARV) treatment was readily available in South Africa, Mark Heywood (2010) argues that this 'disease fatalism' is still prevalent. This sense of fatalism may discourage people from seeking help, or from changing their behaviour. Building their confidence about their ability to manage HIV, then, is an important part of communication interventions that deal with HIV and AIDS. The research expanded on in this article explores how self-efficacy is developed through participation in a theatre-based HIV and AIDS project.

Theatre is essentially a social event where the practice of constituting meaning becomes a communal act in the shared space of the theatre experience. In the context of HIV and AIDS communication, theatre can create a space for the interaction, dialogue, and the negotiation of meaning that Parker, Hajiannis and Makhubele (2007) argue are important to increase a shared understanding of HIV and AIDS. This shared understanding can have an impact on the social system, which is vital since social support for individual behaviour change is an important factor in ensuring that the behaviour change is sustained. However, it is crucial that the target community participates in processes other than simply watching the theatre if real benefits at both the personal and the community levels are to be realised.

The notion of who participates in such programmes, and to what extent, is debated by a number of scholars. While Freireian principles of participation have guided most theatre for development experiences in Africa, there remains the challenge of putting these principles into action and avoiding conforming to the dominant (usually government) ideology. David Kerr (1995) suggests that theatre has often been used under the guise of development simply to justify existing power structures. This is a problem related to the catalyst groups that engage with a community.

Defining the relationship between conscientisation (the role of the catalyst) and participation (the role of the community) is an ongoing challenge for theatre for development scholars and practitioners. Zakes Mda (1993) suggests that understanding the concepts of homophily and heterophily are key issues in ensuring workable theatre for development. The principle of homophily is that like-minded people from similar backgrounds will gravitate towards each other, and that this guarantees more effective communication. In the case of theatre for development projects, the catalysts are usually outside agents from different class, social, or educational backgrounds, and are therefore likely to be heterophilous (different from) the proposed audience of the rural community. Communication between these two groups who share different world views and experiences may therefore be less effective than communication that occurs within a closed group.

This concept of homophily relates to theories of peer education; members of a particular group work to educate and develop other members of the same group in order to effect change. The case study discussed in this article makes use of this principle: the production is embedded in the community and the performers are insiders, facing the same daily challenges as the audience does. The recognition of similarities between the audience and the actors can encourage a “me too” inclusionary response, or can exclude audiences who are markedly different from what is viewed on stage, and become the ‘other’ (Hall, 1997). Identifying who is inside and who is outside the group may have an impact on the reception of Entertainment Education and theatre for development performances.

Based on the homophily principle, it is likely that people will listen to messages that come from people who are most like themselves. Alex Mavrocordatos (2003), on the one hand, suggests that individuals or communities with a strong sense of identity and which are bound by homogenous traditional beliefs are most ideally placed to be able to use theatre to analyse and change their situation. On the other hand, Mda (1993) argues that a certain amount of difference between the two groups is necessary for there to be any desire to act as a catalyst and encourage change, and that outside intervention is always necessary. He suggests that the key functions of intervention in theatre for development projects are threefold: to keep order and coherence in the play; to facilitate a deeper analysis; and to contribute technical expertise on the medium itself, and on the content.

At face value, Mda’s arguments for intervention read as counter to participatory development ideals. Mda, however, recognises that more intervention by the outside catalyst results in less community participation and less conscientisation (1993). He argues for a case of optimal intervention, described as “the best compromise between the opposing tendencies of participation and intervention” (1993, p. 173). Mda suggests that this optimal intervention is attained when participants are able to go through the processes of naming problems, reflecting critically on these, and considering action (Freire’s points of problem-solving, critical consciousness, and praxis). He cautions that the catalyst should withdraw at this optimal point, before imposing its views and values. This point of optimal intervention varies depending on the proficiency of the catalyst, and the level of critical awareness of both the catalyst and the community. Mda argues that only a catalyst with levels of social consciousness and critical awareness higher than that of the target community can function effectively to develop this in the target group. Mda concludes that the community should retain ownership of the project, and that genuine conscientisation can only occur when “the community itself assumes the function of catalysts” (1993, p. 174).

The discussion of the case study below seeks to explore this notion of optimal intervention. It questions whether the involvement of outside ‘experts’ in a community-based theatre project still allows for the development of critical consciousness amongst participants, as well as encouraging peer education and recognition between actors and audience. It also questions how participation happens, and how it can build a sense of self-efficacy for the participants.

Case Study: The UVHAA Man-To-Man Project

The Man-to-Man Project is a project of the Umdoni and Vulamehlo HIV and AIDS Association (UVHAA) that is based in the rural area of Amandawe on the KwaZulu-Natal South Coast. The organisation exists to support people who are infected or affected by HIV and AIDS, to raise awareness, and to encourage and support behaviour change (UVHAA, 2008). The organisation has a range of different projects dealing with orphans and vulnerable children and home-based care, and working specifically with men and boys. Working in a rural area with high levels of unemployment and poverty, UVHAA is based in a community with a high rate of HIV infection, AIDS deaths that have a resounding impact on the local community, and a number of child-headed households.

The Man-to-Man Project encourages men to explore their cultural practices and the behaviours that may put themselves and others at risk of contracting HIV. The project predominantly involves men in lectures and workshops that are facilitated by other men from the same community, who have been trained by UVHAA. As such, this is an example of a peer education project. The particular areas that this project addresses are the role of men in the community, patriarchy, gender issues, relationships, HIV and AIDS, and the role of men in prevention, care and support initiatives (UVHAA, 2008).

An award for innovation in 2008 gave a financial grant to the organisation that allowed UVHAA to expand the project and to introduce the element of theatre into the programme. This involved bringing together a group of adult men and a group of younger males to work in a performance project. These distinct groups are referred to as 'the men' and 'the boys' by the project managers and in the discussion that follows.

As a member of the Problem-Solving Theatre (PST) Project partnership, I was invited together with three of my Zulu-speaking male colleagues to work with UVHAA to develop this project. This involved my writing, as an experienced theatre-maker, a script for a play that was based on the content and issues contained in the Man-to-Man workshop programme. My male colleagues then took this script and translated it into Zulu, and worked with the two separate groups of the men and the boys, to adapt and rehearse this script for performance in their own community and surrounding areas. This process of adaptation allowed the participating men and boys to interpret the script and make changes to ensure that the language and gesture of the performance was local, with appropriately recognisable conventions and colloquialisms.

The script for this project was written around the interactions of five male characters: a traditional, older man who refuses to change with the times; the local induna (chief) who knows that change is needed and that people are counting on him for leadership; a promiscuous taxi driver; a bright and ambitious young school-boy; and his best friend who has lost both his parents to AIDS. These are almost stock characters in the community—types of people that audience members will definitely recognise.

Through these five characters, the play is able to explore a number of issues concerning gender stereotypes, leadership, relationships and support in the context of HIV and AIDS. Since 2009, the play has been performed a number of times to other men in the community, as well as to mixed groups of men and women on health days and other events in the group's local community and in surrounding areas. Although the men's group no longer exists, the programme managers hope that the boys' group will continue to perform at appropriate events during weekends and school holidays.

Research methodology

The choice of the case study method for the investigation of the UVHAA project allows for a "detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions, and their relationships" (Zainal, 2007, p. 2). The UVHAA research forms part of a multiple-case design conducted in 2009 and 2010 as a way to explore and explain how participation in HIV and AIDS-related theatre projects is envisaged, and how it has an impact on the participants and their communities (Durden, 2011).

The UVHAA case study included an interview with three of the project management team in 2010, and a focus group discussion involving two of the project participants and a temporarily appointed guardian. The project management team consisted of three adult females, who were the core team driving the project. The initial project participant population was a group of six men and six boys. The focus group participants were a self-selected sample of the six boys who remained involved with the project after it had ended its active cycle.

Although a number of meetings and workshops were held with both the project management team and the participant group throughout the process of the project in 2009 and 2010, the data for this research is drawn from a single interview with the project management team and a single focus group discussion held with the project participants, as well as a follow-up interview with one of the project facilitators. The questions for these interviews were derived from a detailed literature review regarding notions of health communication, participation and empowerment. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and notes were taken during the interviews. In addition to these interviews, one of the theatre performances of the project was recorded for analysis.

The project management team was interviewed regarding the specific goals that had been set for the project, and whether they felt that these had been achieved. They were asked about the experience of participation in the project, and whether they had received any direct feedback from participants in the project. They were also questioned about their opinion of the final performance product that was created, and any feedback they had received from audiences. The team was asked to imagine what they thought might have been different had there been more or less participation from the local men and boys in the project.

The participants were asked to talk about why they chose to get involved in the project, and what their expectations and their experience of participating in the project had been. Probing questions were asked to ascertain the levels of their participation, responsibility and decision-making in the project. They were asked whether participating in the project had made them feel differently about HIV and AIDS, and whether they had learnt any new skills and knowledge. They were also asked to imagine what could have made the project better for them, and whether they had felt that participating had in any way given them a sense of control or strength in their own lives.

For ethical reasons, a nurse who was familiar with the boys was asked to sit in on the interview with the project participants since they were minors. Her presence added assurance that if any issues raised in the discussion were upsetting, she would be on hand to deal with this and to support the participants if needed. Given the rural setting, a Zulu-speaking translator also sat in on this session to clarify when needed any of the questions or the responses. The interview with one of the project facilitators was added to better understand the process of creating and rehearsing the play, and the transformation that the participants went through over this period.

The collected data was arranged and coded to ensure a more effective thematic analysis. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to identify a limited number of themes which link to the identified research questions (Howitt & Cramer, 2008). These themes were drawn from communication and development theory, and were identified as participation, reception, empowerment, the organisational and personal benefits as experienced by the project management and participants respectively. A broader theme of the potential for community development was developed based on an analysis of the collected data.

One of the limitations of this research was that it did not include a reception analysis of the play performances, which means that there is no direct data on the response of the community audience. However, discussion with the programme managers and participants, as well as analysis of a recorded performance gives some insight into this response.

The UVHAA findings

The Man-to-Man drama project was the first instance in which UVHAA had used theatre in an intervention. The primary rationale to make use of drama was to harness a different and potentially exciting new methodology, and specifically to draw men and boys into the performances. Interviews with the project

managers reflected that they found drama an excellent vehicle for raising issues of HIV and AIDS since many members of their target community are not functionally literate. In addition to this, they felt that theatre might bring about a more immediate response on the part of the audience to the problems posed in the play.

Participation in the project

The organisation itself (UVHAA) determines the goals for the projects as well as the content and message, the prior research, and the medium for the projects. Since UVHAA is a community-based organisation, these processes are more participatory than in cases in which the organisation is an outside catalyst for change.

The project works with specific in-groups (the selected men and boys) to pass predetermined information to the community. The participants are selected by UVHAA in conjunction with local gate-keepers, making this project participatory at the level of selection. The gatekeepers are local nurses who work closely with UVHAA, and who are familiar with all the participants from their attendance at the local clinic and other community events. Being a small rural community, the participants were also known to most of the rest of the community. This ensures that they are recognisable peer educators.

When the participants themselves were asked why they had got involved in the project, they responded that “It was to tell other people to know about HIV and AIDS,” and “We were trying to teach them right and wrong” (Participants 1 and 2, FGD, 2010). These responses suggest that they chose to participate because of altruistic educational motives. However, when questioned further, both boys agreed that the only reason they joined the project was “because it was a play” (Participant 2, focus group discussion, 2010).

The participants in the Man-to-Man project are not seen as partners in the project, but are merely performers for a particular period of time. The Man-to-Man project employed a group to perform in the scripted play. The older men were paid a stipend for their work, but the school-going boys were not. Interestingly, the group of older men fell apart, but the boy’s group continued until the end of the project. One project manager suggests that the reason for this failure to retain the men in the project was financial because their families expected them to earn a living rather than survive off stipends for involvement in community projects (Interview, 2010). This is not a reflection of their lack of interest in the project, but rather of the imperative to earn a more sustainable income. This provides an example participation not being entirely voluntary. Expectations regarding stipends and payment that these participants have of the project can colour the way in which they participate. This may be a common problem that has arisen through expectations generated by a history of donor-funded projects, rather than projects initiated from within the target community.

The project made use of outside experts (in this case, myself and colleagues from the PST Project) for training project participants and for the scripting of the play for performance. The organisation was grounded in the local community and had a good understanding of the complexities of the epidemic, and appropriate messages, but felt that they required expert advice on using theatre as an unfamiliar medium for communicating about issues that they are otherwise conversant with. The content for the play and the broad issues covered were decided on by UVHAA, based on their Man-to-Man workshop programme and other work in the community. This partnership is a good example of striving for optimal intervention: local needs are met by local solutions, but with input from skilled outsiders.

This use of outside experts should mean that the plays have the potential to be of a high artistic standard and therefore more engaging for the audiences, depending on the performers. The interviewed project managers reported that for them “a good play” was more important than who participated in the project (Interview 2, 2010). However, later comments during the interview contradict this, and they explained that it was important for them to draw men and boys into the project. However, they expressed delight at the

standard of the play. They felt that the different groups of the men and the boys had interpreted the script differently, and both had done a good job with their performance. However, most of the project managers felt that the boys' performance was better, suggesting that, "The boys did a better job to be honest, because they were less polished, things didn't always go quite right, which the audience could appreciate" (Project Manager 1, Interview 2, 2010).

Although the boys had been trained and the script was written by an 'expert', the performance itself was appreciated more because it was flawed and not professional. This may be particularly because the boys were recognised as living within the community from which the audience came. This recognition of the boys and their efforts is part of the 'me too' identification phenomenon described by Hall (1997), which gives peer education its power.

The interviewed project facilitator noted that the process, although only over the period of three weeks, had a visible impact on the group of boys with whom he worked. He comments that, "When you first meet, there are barriers, people are shy. But once you start, the mind shifts and the communication starts" (Project Facilitator, Interview, 2012). It was apparent to the facilitator that the process of playing drama-related games and activities, rehearsing the script, and simply talking about the project brought the group together, almost as a family. He comments:

I didn't know at the beginning that most of them were affected by AIDS or were positive, but as time went on they started to talk about it. We started to talk about ARVs. We were more like fathers to them, and they started to be free and talk about it.

The facilitator felt that it was the process of being involved in the drama that was liberating for these boys, as well as the sense of camaraderie that was developed through working together. His reflection on the process suggests that a number of processes were at work that encouraged the boys to start talking about their personal experiences regarding HIV and AIDS. One factor in this is the guidance relationship that they had with the boys, and another is the relationship of trust that developed amongst the boys themselves.

The reception of performances

The interviewed boys who had performed in the plays thought they had done a good job, and that they were successful in passing on a message to their communities. They felt responsible for this success, and, typical of young boys who have been recognised for any achievement, they were extremely confident that they had delivered a good performance.

The project managers felt that the audiences received the plays very well. Video footage of one of the performances at a local community health day shows the audience being very vocal, applauding, shouting and laughing both during and at the end of the performance. When asked if they had received any later feedback from the community, one project manager responded, "They used to say 'oh this was good,' in passing" (Project Manager 2, Interview, 2010).

Although there was no formal feedback from audiences, the UVHAA project managers live in the community and reported that this kind of casual positive feedback was regularly received. The reasons given by the project managers for this positive feedback are twofold. One reason is that the medium was novel and exciting for an audience that may be bored by the conventional approach to HIV and AIDS awareness programmes. A further reason for this positive acceptance is the fact that the performers were recognisable to the audience. One project manager commented, "I just think there was a better relationship because the boys were from around here" (Project Manager 1, Interview, 2010).

However, the group of boys also performed in more distant communities where they have no links with the local people, and the project managers reported that these performances were also well-received by those audiences. One of the project managers felt that the information contained in the play had a greater impact because it had not been heard by certain audiences before. While the information contained in the play may have been new to the audiences, the fact that it was presented by people from their own community, and that these were boys (as opposed to adults) was significant. The use of young people speaking out on a topic that is often seen as an adult issue was unusual, and had a particular impact on the audience. One of the project managers commented:

There were some things that the boys were saying on the topic, and the play on its own was in categories, so that as a child you would understand and as an adult you would also understand what all of these people go through in life.

This suggests that the use of boys as performers gave the theatre performance an added dimension, providing a point of view accessible to both adults and children. One of the project managers felt that:

It was also because of the information that they were giving out. There was something that parents don't think, so it was easier for parents to talk to their children after seeing the play.

In a culture where sex and sexuality are taboo subjects, and not often discussed between parents and children, this is a significant result of this project. This unexpected result of the Man-to-Man Project points to the importance of selection of participants for any theatre project that deals with HIV and AIDS. A performance of the same script by the older men's group would not have had the same impact. Choosing participants who might have been marginalised or were otherwise less vocal within the community can have an enormous impact on the participants and on the community itself, allowing audience members to hear another point of view.

The boys who were part of the focus group discussion said that the positive response that they received from the audiences made them feel good. They had received no negative feedback from their involvement, and although their guardian commented that she had heard talk in the community that "sometimes these boys are too young" (Guardian, FGD, 2010). One boy commented that his parents were "proud" (Participant 1, FGD, 2010).

However, the boys reported that they were nervous about the audience reception at the start of the project; one participant voicing, "I was scared that they would laugh at me" (Respondent 2, FGD 2, 2010). Another participant voiced that he had been afraid that there would be some stigma attached to performing in a play about HIV and AIDS: "We were scared for other people. Other things about what we were saying that we are not supposed to talk about HIV and AIDS," (Participant 1, FGD, 2010).

The boys recognised that there were some people in the community who said, "it's not for us, not right" but that there were others who "said it was a good thing" (Participant 2, FGD, 2010). They reported that the negative comments were passed on before people had seen the play, and that after the performances, they did not receive any negative reaction from their audiences. Both respondents reported that they were often approached and called by people from their community who asked them how they knew that information and who had taught them. It seemed that there was a genuine interest from the community in the process of participation and how these boys had come to have the information that they had about HIV and AIDS.

The level of participation and the potential for empowerment amongst participants

The boys were questioned about what they felt they had learnt through participating in the project, and the project managers were also asked whether they had perceived any change in the participants. While the project managers felt that the plays had allowed adults insight into the views of children on HIV and AIDS, the children who participated felt that they had learnt about the views of adults.

The boys felt that they had learnt a lot about “the older generation” (Participant 1, FGD, 2010). This was perhaps because the play included two adult male characters, and allowed them insight into their way of thinking. This is a unique aspect of theatre and drama techniques that allows participants in such projects to develop empathy with the characters that they portray. When asked what in particular they had learnt about this generation, their responses included that “old people” (adults) had a different way of life, that they did not talk about HIV and AIDS, and that they were afraid of both the disease, and of getting tested for HIV.

These responses suggest that the play allowed the participants to understand some of the complexities and challenges that adults face in relation to communicating about HIV and AIDS. This may make them more confident to open up dialogue on this issue with adults.

The boys also reported that they had learnt “about testing and condoms and saying no” (Participant 1, FGD, 2010), as well as “about living and ARVs” (Participant 2, FGD, 2010). This suggests that they have taken away useful factual information from their involvement in the project. Asked whether they had learnt anything personal about themselves or if the project had had an impact on them in other ways, one of the boys responded that participation in the play had taught him *wahlomeka*, which the interpreter and the boys together translated as “not to be involved in the wrong things” (Participant 2, FGD, 2010). This shows that the participant felt that being a part of the project had taught him a greater respect for himself and others. He had learnt “not to get into the wrong things when other people tell you to do it” (Interpreter, FGD, 2010). It would appear that participation in the play allowed him to develop a stronger sense of self, which made him more resistant to peer pressure. This is a remarkable result—evidence of significant personal empowerment for this individual.

Both the respondents commented that they thought that being in the play had made them stronger. They also reported a sense of camaraderie amongst their fellow participants, saying that they regularly talk about “remember this, remember when this happened” (Participant 2, FGD, 2010), and that they laugh together at the reminiscences of their performances. This is evidence that participation can build a sense of group and community amongst the participants.

When asked whether they thought the boys could create their own plays and therefore continue with this project without expert help, the project managers, doubtful of this, reported that “they might give off the wrong information” and that “there were things in the script the boys could never have dreamt of ... we would never have achieved that” (Project Manager 2, Interview 2, 2010). This suggests that there is still a reliance on outside experts for both the content and the form of the performance. While the content for a new play, including accurate medical information, could come from UVHAA itself, the project managers felt that the performance techniques that the boys learnt during the training and rehearsal phase of this project might not be able to be replicated if they worked alone.

The project managers commented on the growth of confidence amongst the boys, particularly in their ability to talk about HIV and AIDS. They have subsequently made use of some of the boys in another of their projects, known as the Talking Book, in which the boys make house visits in the local community to talk with others about HIV prevention. One project manager reports that it was because of their

involvement in the play that they realised that these boys were capable of talking confidently about HIV and AIDS:

Well, it gave us the confidence to use them otherwise we wouldn't have used them, to be honest. So it did give them skills in speaking in public. It's actually a very difficult thing to talk about HIV. To knock on somebody's door and say—and this is a school-boy—to say "Can I come in and talk about HIV?" I mean you can imagine the grannies saying "what do you know"?

The project managers also talked about the impact that participating in the project had had on the men and boys personally. With reference to one participant, one of the project managers notes:

One of the boys I used to communicate mostly with, I was just asking him as to how he felt when he was doing the plays. There was this particular speech that he does at the end of the play, and it was very touching because I knew his life, and sometimes you talk about your status. It's never easy in public and if you haven't disclosed it, and he said it was one of the best things that he did because he never used to talk about it in public, but now he can see that by what he was saying made him able to understand that he was really affected. He used to just say "I am sick" but being in the drama made him understand that "I need to accept that I'm not well".

Further expansion on this comment revealed that the boy in question had accepted his HIV positive status, and disclosed that he was HIV positive subsequent to performing in the play. The strength to do this was a direct result of performing in the play since this was "because the play made him know" (Project Manager 2, Interview 2, 2010). This provides evidence that a level of self-efficacy was built amongst the participants: they felt that knowledge had allowed them to build confidence in their own abilities to make changes in their lives. It was apparent that this process of change had started for this participant through the initial phases of the project, as the Project Facilitator notes:

I didn't know that the small one's parents passed away, until there was this one time where we were all seated under a tree and we were talking. There was this guy that was older and we were talking about ARVS. Slowly the small one joined the conversation and started to talk. When you looked at his face, he was talking, he was not sad, he was just talking.

The Facilitator noted that the boy started to speak about being orphaned, his parents having died of AIDS. He also told the others that he was HIV positive. This candid confession was accepted well by the other boys because the relationship of trust had been established amongst the group over the rehearsal process. Rather than being exposed to information in any other format, being intimately connected with this information and learning lines for a performance allowed this participant to take this new information and apply it to his own life. In the focus group discussion with participants, it became apparent that the same boy had gone from previously being very shy in the community to being very confident on stage. He had played the character of the *Induna*, a local chief, in the play. This enactment of a person in a position of power, and the energy that this boy had brought to the performance, was remarked on by the community health nurse who was part of the discussion: "It was a surprise for them (the audience) and even today in the community they call him *Induna*" (Guardian, FGD 2, 2010).

Further discussion with the nurses from UVHAA revealed that this child was orphaned, having lost both his parents to AIDS. This transformation from the stigmatised orphan to the popular child referred to as *Induna* may have enormous effects both on his self-esteem and the status that he enjoys in the community.

While this is a specific and remarkable case, it does point to the potential for participation to raise the status of participants, so that they are able to enjoy more power in their own communities.

Potential for development and empowerment for the broader community

One of the factors that affect the impact of TFA projects is that of sustainability. If the group is able to sustain their own participation in a project and to continue to open up channels from dialogue about HIV and AIDS issues, this may result in further empowerment for themselves and possibly for others in the community. While the boys from the focus group discussion reported that they would definitely participate in other plays again if they were given the opportunity, they said that they might not initiate this on their own, but would wait from the nurses from UVHAA to give them direction.

The project managers discussed the possibility of the local nurses themselves doing the performances, but concluded that it would be less effective because “They (the nurses) are used to telling them (community members) what they should do and shouldn’t do” (Project Manager, 1, Interview, 2010). The project managers felt that the didactic approach from the nurses would be taken too seriously, while the boys were able to make the audience laugh. This suggests that in this case, people with less power within the community had a greater role to play than those identified within the community as ‘experts’ on HIV and AIDS. It also points to the fact that using theatre allowed unusual sources and those previously less visible to have a more powerful voice.

The UVHAA project managers felt that the balance that had been developed for this project, with the technical information coming from them as nurses, the script and performance direction coming from the PST Project, and the performers coming from the community was “a very good balance” (Project Manager, 1, Interview, 2010). The Man-To-Man Project provides a positive experience of a participatory project with benefits for the catalyst organisation, the participants, and for the rest of the community.

Conclusions and a way forward for theatre interventions

The case study provides an example of the involvement of outside ‘experts’ in a community-based theatre project that has a strong focus on local input and peer education. Through the project processes, the outside intervention allowed for the development of skills and the introduction of a new and exciting element into an already existing peer education project. While audiences reportedly recognised and enjoyed the messages contained in the play, which had a positive response, the question remains as to whether the project played a consciousness-raising and empowering role for both the participants and the broader community.

Empowerment, as defined by Sadan (1997), relates not only to the actual, but also to the perceived ability to make changes and take control over a situation. Participants who are involved in inclusive participatory theatre projects are likely to feel a sense of empowerment (this perceived ability) through their involvement, and there is evidence of a sense of personal empowerment for all the participants in the Man-to-Man project. This sense of empowerment creates agency and increased self-efficacy for these participants, who are then able to bring about changes in their own lives.

However, if practitioners wish to escalate the effects of their projects from bringing about individual change to encouraging a re-examination of power structures and to bringing about societal change, then participatory theatre projects need to encourage participation at other levels, to build a greater critical consciousness. This can only be built when participants start to question their lived existence —in this case examining the causes of the AIDS epidemic, and the social structures and practices that give rise to and feed the epidemic. The UVHAA project raised some of these issues in the scripted play, but did not involve

people directly in questioning this reality. The men and boys were personally changed through participation in the project, but the lack of the element of deeper exploration may limit the project's potential to have longer-lasting effects on a broader societal level.

Freire calls for liberatory education to involve an investigation into the root causes of oppression. In the case of HIV and AIDS, this would mean investigating how the epidemic affects the target community in question, and how to overcome the associated problems. A deeper understanding of the AIDS epidemic should explore the patterns that explain how and why HIV is transmitted as it is currently within the target community, and why AIDS has such a devastating effect on development in South Africa.

At present, there is evidence that theatre projects clearly have an impact at the micro-level of individuals and those with whom they come into contact. For greater impact at the macro-level, such projects may need to engage more directly with policy makers and those in structures of power, or more actively to encourage project participants to take on this role of engagement, for self-directed change. However, we must recognise that major change sometimes comes about through small processes. The small changes in the lives of a handful of individuals participating in just one theatre project may develop a groundswell that, in time, changes the future course of the AIDS epidemic.

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