

Title: Challenges of collaborative play production on social issues: an entertainment-education project report on Ximba primary school participatory play-making

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Outline of Report

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1. The background to the project

I am a Malawian student who has previously worked on two Entertainment-Education projects in Malawi on issues concerning girls' education, reproductive health and maternal and child health. This work involved researching, acting in plays in villages and writing radio plays. I grew up in rural Malawi where I used to see my mother wake up at around 4 a.m. everyday to draw water from the river. She would also wake up my sisters, younger than myself, to help her clean dishes. My father and I, the only son, would sleep until he reminded me to sweep the surroundings. The women would prepare breakfast and heat water for bathing. My father would bath first, followed by myself. The sisters would come later, which often resulted in them being late for school. Coming back from school, I would take my lunch and disappear to play soccer with friends. My sisters had to do the dishes, draw more water from the river, go to the maize mill or carry out whichever 'women's' job there was. When mother fell sick, the girls had to stay at home to do all the 'women's' chores. I also had an opportunity to tease my sisters at the end of school semesters as I usually performed much better than them.

The Entertainment-Education Course project provided a springboard from which to raise theoretical and methodological questions regarding the gender-based distribution of chores and aspects of participatory education and empowerment. On this project, I worked with an Honours student, Lungile Dlamini. She comes from Swaziland and I found her partnership beneficial as she comprehends Zulu, a language and culture very similar to her Swazi origins.

Project Objective

This was to enable young people to critically question how gender power relations affect the domestic economy in patriarchal communities.

Aims

- To establish what the community refers to as 'men's' jobs and 'women's' jobs.
- To establish community attitudes and perceptions regarding the relationship between gender and household chores.
- To produce a workshop play on the gendered nature of the domestic economy, spiced with songs and dances.

Expected Output of the Project

The anticipated result was the empowerment of community youth so that they would take the initiative in engaging in critical dialogue about the gendered distribution activities in the domestic economy and its consequences.

2. Area of Study

Our area of study was Ximba Primary School, situated in the rural community of Fredville, near Inchanga, some forty kilometres north of Durban. An example of apartheid's many contradictions, Fredville is one of many scattered, yet crowded areas, expanding across the rolling hills and valleys of KwaZulu-Natal. It covers approximately ten square kilometres and is inhabited by about 15, 000, mostly unemployed, people. It is primarily rural, characterised by low socio-economic status, high illiteracy, lack and inaccessibility of social services. People have problems paying their bills and also spend much time collecting river water, as the water supply is unreliable. Fredville is a Zulu-speaking community dependent on subsistence farming, which has a high population growth rate and population density.

Most pupils from Ximba have to carry out some tasks before and after school. In the morning, the young boys have to clean the household surroundings whilst the girls may have to draw water and clean cutlery. When they come back from schools, the boys will go herding cattle or goats, assist the fathers or uncles in building a fence or even go to play football. As for the girls, they have to take on household responsibilities when the mothers have gone to the market at Pinetown to buy and sell vegetables or other

commodities, one of the few ways of earning income here.

Unlike girls, who have to start thinking of what the families will have for supper, boys have time to gossip: they meet at the grounds outside some stores and discuss girlfriends, soccer and other business. When girls get together, it is mostly during work-time, whether they are going to collect water, firewood or to wash clothes. For the girls coming from families where the mother has a baby, they assist in babysitting especially when the mother is away. Working with learners coming from these families where there was an unwritten agreement over what constitutes women's or men's-only activities provided us with an impetus to examine what goes on in our home communities in Malawi and Swaziland.

Project activities

- Preliminary research: Visiting the area, making arrangements with community leaders, explaining the agenda of our visit and making arrangements as to how we intend to carry out the project and what we expect from the community.
- Participatory forums: Selection and organisation of interactive groups to work with; problem identification, developing messages and discussion themes as well as 'what-would-you-do?' situations.
- Developing debates, expanding them to skits and linking the skits and incorporating songs and dances in order to create a play.
- Final performance.
- Minor evaluation, report writing and sending report back to Ximba Primary School.

3. Logistics of carrying out the study

We had problems in getting started as the local councillor who promised Ms Dlamini to introduce us to the community asked to be 'given a couple of days'. Days turned into weeks then a month elapsed before we did what we should have done earlier: We visited Ximba primary school on the Tuesday of 28 May 2002 and met the Principal, Mr. Molefe to whom we introduced ourselves and the project. Acting on his advice, we sought permission from the Mpumalanga Education Office, with which Professor Ruth Teer- Tomaselli helped us. We received permission on Friday, 31 May 2002, which we took to Mr. Molefe on 5 June. Permission to proceed with the project was granted and we were allocated the lunch hour for consultation with grade five pupils (which the teachers had chosen) since it was an examination period. We worked with the pupils for three weeks in discussing and producing three situations, which were packaged together (in the final performance) as one play. There were complaints from other classes over their exclusion, which sometimes resulted in them standing outside the window of the classroom pleading with us (researchers) to give them a chance. We had to explain the limitations of our approach and assure them they were going to participate during the performance.

4. Theoretical framework of our study

Our project activity falls under the broad education strategy called entertainment- education, an umbrella term coined by the John Hopkins Centre for Communication Programs to describe educational strategies that are purposely designed to reach out to people and to encourage them to move from risky behaviours towards positive behaviours through the use of entertainment (Second Conference on Entertainment-Education, 1997). Patrick Coleman notes that entertainment has been an integral part of human life since the beginning of time and that people have always used paintings, songs, dance and drama for enjoyment, education and to communicate social values and morals (2000:75). He proceeds to state that the only difference now is that entertainment has been strategically designed to bring about pro-social changes, although it may sometimes be anti-social.

In stressing the importance of entertainment-education for the purpose of pro-social changes in individual lives, Coleman (2000) came up with a formula, known as the nine Ps of entertainment-education. The nine Ps that determine entertainment-education are pervasiveness, popularity, personal, participation, passion, persuasiveness, practicality, profit and proven effectiveness. Pervasiveness means entertainment-education should be everywhere around us so that we see it everyday and it is accessible, "Every corner of the earth, every remote village includes entertainment as part of local surroundings. Even in areas that are not

globally connected through television, radio, cinema or the internet, there are songs, drama and storytelling in the culture" (Coleman, 2000:78).

Entertainment-education must be popular so that it is familiar to groups and communities. Coleman notes that people like and enjoy entertainment, hence they seek it and they are enthralled by it (2000:78). Entertainment-education is also participatory as people can take part and relate to the action because of the songs, dances and stories. People follow the experiences of the characters and discuss them with family, colleagues and community members. Entertainment-education should involve passion, which is its root. The emotions that are stirred up as a result ensure the individual's involvement in the education process. Coleman argues that entertainment evokes emotions that help people to remember and act whenever emotions are involved. People would want to talk about the issues and would sometimes want to change their behaviour (2000:78).

Persuasiveness is another term used to describe the character of entertainment-education. Role models help to demonstrate behaviour that audiences are encouraged to emulate, and they observe the consequences of unwise behaviour. Entertainment-education should be practical and profitable. Evidence and experience suggest that such projects are supported by entertainment industries that have organised infrastructure for developing, producing and distributing products. Although they require substantial start-up funding and are time consuming, entertainment-education programmes are cost-effective and can yield a profit (Sabido, 1997:208). He gives an example from Tanzania, where the programmes changed behaviour and enhanced positive behaviour in family planning and HIV prevention. The result was that the government was able to reduce the cost of medical care to less than \$1 US per individual (Rogers et al, 1997, cited in Sabido, 1997:208). Lastly, entertainment-education has been and should continue to be proven effective.

Since entertainment-education is an umbrella term, our project with Ximba Primary school falls more specifically under community theatre. Known as educators in Paulo Freire's terms (1970), we, as researchers, work-shopped a play together with the learners. Community theatre is grounded in Freire's participatory education, a move away from the conventional work of the modernisation paradigm where extension workers used to 'advise' (Mulenga, 1999) rural people; a tactic for making the Other change his/her 'heathen' ways and adopt new, 'better' and 'civilised' lives.

Community Theatre and Freirean Participation

Theatre for Development is a group of methodologies employing song, drama and dance as modes of sensitising and empowering communities to improve their status quo. It constitutes two schools - *drama in education* and *theatre in education*. Theatre in education refers to didactic productions on popular themes with which a community can identify. Production, however, is private rehearsals with the performance as a surprise gift. Drama in education is, on the other hand, participatory in its approach for members of a targeted community are involved in the whole process of generating messages that affect their lives. A few outsiders (animators) go into the community and together with villagers identify critical issues of concern. They then develop plays, peppered with songs and dance, such that the performance is not a surprise to villagers, hence the concept, *community theatre*.

Drama in education therefore refers to a process whereby theatre is used to research, analyse and resolve critical issues within communities so as to change people's knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding social issues (Kamlongera, 1988: 161). For example, the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre, employed Theatre for Development to sensitise people of Mbalachanda in Northern Malawi about the newly built rural growth centre by the same name (Kamlongera, 1988). Similarly, David Kerr (1989) discusses how, together with the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre, he toured the Machinga district in Malawi sensitising communities on primary health care. He terms such tours 'community theatre'. Using the Morotholi Travelling Theatre, Zakes Mda toured Lesotho, sensitising communities on sanitation, alcoholism, and health among other issues (Mda, 1993). For such tours, traditional modes of communication play a part in development as well as sustaining a people's culture. Vital to theatre for development is the employment of theatrical expressions at grassroots level, to research and analyse development problems; create critical awareness and the potential for action to solve those problems (Mluma, 1991: 65). The conceptualisation and approach is straightforward: outsiders go into the

community, stay there for few days, during which time they must become familiar with the people and their culture and then produce plays around familiar themes but coupled with 'development messages'.

Theatre for development can also be seen not only as a development support communication model, but as a postcolonial space and discourse, where local memories are performed (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1987, 1989). It can be defined as one created by and for the people in their own language, thus giving us a Freirean concept of community theatre in three ways; as a weapon, a discourse and a postcolonial public sphere (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1987, 1989).

Community theatre, therefore, liberates people by enabling them to say no to an unreasonable idea (such as building a bridge), to accept a project as well-informed citizens, to give them skills to carry out the project and to give them creativity to use those particular skills on another, different project. If ideas are imposed, villagers know how to resist them. Villagers resist imposed educational processes and Eric Dudley (1993) terms villagers' resistance as an *abandoned house*, as they participate in a project in the presence of extension workers and abandon it when the outsiders leave.

To achieve the Freirean objective of authentic participation (Servaes, 1996), we drew our methodology from material developed by the Drama in Aids Education (DramAidE) project at the University of Natal: *How to make an Aids Play* (2001), *See you at Seven: Mobilising young men to Care* (2001) and Pamela Brooke's *Traditional media for Gender Communication* (1996).

See you at Seven is a video about how to develop gender responsibility and the accompanying book details how the film was made. It explains the role of the facilitator, the relationship between the researchers and the workshop participants and how effective explanations regarding the objectives of a project results in a successful and effective performance. Brooke's project was commissioned by UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women), which promotes women's empowerment and gender equality and *Traditional media for Gender Communication* is written in report form. Brooke had worked among the Baha'i community of Asia and her book contains helpful insights into the role of a facilitator, developing 'what-would-you-do?' situations, listing problems, creating themes and developing debates and situations.

We found the Aids Action guide, *How to make an Aids Play* very helpful, particularly its explicit descriptions of the stages of making a play, considering the time constraints for our project. The five steps of work-shopping a play, are listed as: beginning the process, preparation, workshop, practice and performance.

5. Working with the pupils

Step One: Introducing the project

Sessions opened with a popular game-song, *Ko-ko-fisa*, which I had taught them and they liked. We introduced the project to them and they asked questions. We carried out a mini-research project with the Standard Five learners about gender relations within their communities and they were very clear about what women or men should do.

Step Two: Preparation

This involved finding out and negotiating with the authorities about the Fredville community and Ximba primary school in particular. Both of us grew up in villages and working with learners with whom we identified was not only a process of recalling those bygone days but of looking critically at how we view the role of men and women in development endeavours. This also involved looking for manuals and methodologies to guide us theoretically.

Step Three: Work-shopping

We divided the learners into three groups. The first group had male learners only and we asked them to list what they thought were women's activities in the home. The second was a female group and we asked

them to list the jobs they saw as falling under men's jurisdiction. The third group consisted of both male and female learners and we asked them to list and categorise both women's and men's jobs.

Next we asked them to elect a representative and present their findings to the class. Here, there was much disagreement as they were not always clear on the gender orientation of some jobs. Some girls argued that they could do what the men thought they could not and from this came the ideas for our situations and a play. We asked respective groups of boys and girls what would happen if there were no women or men in the village and they began to fantasise about how glorious it would be. We gave the respective groups assignments as regards dramatising what life would be like for the other gender. When we met again a week later, they had included problems: the men said the babies would always be crying at night and that the men would have trouble lighting fires and cooking. The girls said the women would have trouble building fences, milking the cows and there would be no provider for the families. Feedback from discussions about these scenarios, and the question of what would happen if there was a fair, gender-blind distribution of household tasks provided the third group with the material on which to base their scenario.

Group 1: Male pupils' understanding of women's household chores

Asked what women do and should do around the home, the male pupils responded as follows: Cooking for the family, washing clothes, cleaning the house, collecting water from the river, ironing clothes for the family, washing dishes, working in the fields and collecting firewood from the forest.

Group 2: Female pupils' understanding of male activities in the home

These pupils wrote their responses in Zulu, and they can be interpreted as follows: Looking after cattle in the fields, sweeping the yard, milking the cows, cutting grass, washing windows, getting water from the river using a wheel barrow, building houses and toilets, fencing, hunting and washing cars.

Group 3: Male and female learners' understandings of women's and men's activities in the home.

This group took longer to record their activities because there was constant negotiation over certain categorisations, like, drawing water from the river. The girls thought it was a man's job because the water is very far away. The boys however argued they only do it out of generosity because women are busy and because it is far away, but that 'actually' it is a women's activity. They also noted that washing, sweeping indoors, cooking or baking, washing windows, ironing clothes are women's jobs and that looking after cattle, painting the house, sweeping the yard, ploughing the fields, cutting grass and fencing are the men's activities. It emerged that the female learners argued all the heavy work is for men whilst the men noted the 'feminine' jobs are for women.

Step Four: Rehearsals

The pupils rehearsed their three scenarios in our presence and later in our absence. Whilst maintaining the themes, they added their own details. Personal conflicts soured the rehearsals of the third scenario. Additionally, there were problems with the rehearsal times in that we could not closely work with them on the production since it was during exam time. Yet, in the short time we had with them, we asked them to perform and we made our comments. They also practiced during their school breaks and also requested permission from their teachers during class times when a certain teacher did not arrive for class.

Step Five: Performance

We performed on the 21st of June at around 13:30, just after the school finished its exams. We took some sweets for the learners, just like we had done for rehearsals. The performance was filmed. It was watched by all the learners and their teachers after which, Ms. Dlamini asked some questions as part of getting feedback. The school prefect closed the day by thanking us and urging his fellow learners to learn from the plays and participate equally in domestic chores.

The three situations

Situation 1 - Performed by boys only

A boy introduced the situation to the audience, explaining that the men were alone in the village since the women had run away. Characters in the scene had to illustrate their responsibilities for some of the activities in the home, in the absence of their sisters. In this scene, there was a man, who acted as a father to all boys around the home. The boys gathered around the fire in the morning, as is usually the case in the rural areas. They talked about dividing tasks amongst themselves, as there was no woman to help them. They complained about the dirty rooms and homesteads.

So, they divided the tasks: some of the boys cleaned the floors, they did their washing (clothes), got water from the nearby river, as others looked after cattle in the fields. They also cooked, ironed their clothes and collected firewood. One of the boys, who had been washing all day, suddenly complained of a backache. Having done too much work he wished he had a sister to help him so he would be able to do what he did best - looking after cattle. After they worked all day, they sang a song in praise of the day that they were given, and the food.

Situation 2 - Performed by girls only

In this scene the girls divided themselves into two families, each with a mother who assigned the girls to different activities around the home. Both parents (mothers) in this scene asked their daughters to go out and cut the grass in the yard as it had grown long. Their father was away at work and was usually away for a long time. There were no boys in the family, only girls.

The young girl complained, saying that when her father was away, she always had to cut the grass. She wished she had a brother who would do it instead of her all the time. The other girls helped collect the grass after it had been neatly cut and the mother monitored them as they did so. Other girls in the family helped in milking the cows in the morning and making sour milk. They also washed the windows around the house. They were sent to buy groceries at the nearby shop and also helped to rebuild the fence and collect firewood in the forest. After they had milked the cows, the milk was not enough for the whole family so they were sent back to milk some more. The girls were also usually sent to the market where their mother bought from a woman known as, *Gogo*, on credit. They call this, *ukukweleta* in Zulu.

Situation 3 - Performed by both boys and girls

In this scene there was one main family of two girls and one boy. The children helped each other around the home, such that when one of the girls was sent to the shops, the boy helped in the kitchen with washing dishes after he was done locking away the cattle.

As the girls washed the clothes and dishes during the day, the boys helped with getting water from the nearby river, to wash and to clean the floors. The boys also helped to look after the baby, while the girls went out into the fields to do some work. There was a sharing of responsibility in the home and there was basically no distinction as to what a boy or girl should do around the home. It was known, but ignored for the sake of working together as a family. The children worked peacefully and harmoniously together and in the end their mother appreciated the good work that they had done for the day. She also encouraged them to continue working together as it created an efficient household.

Comments by learners and researchers

The researchers noted that in the first scenario there should have been a clarification by the actors as to where the women were, which was one of the main factors that led to them carrying out the so-called women's only duties in their absence. We also noted that the songs sung by men should have been related to the play in some way: they should have included babies - men taking care of the babies or children in the home. The learners should also have faced the audience and spoken loudly when performing. learners complained that the parents in the play were not visible - they couldn't differentiate who the mother, and the father was. Cows should have been made visible as well. They were also requested to speak loudly for the audience to hear them clearly.

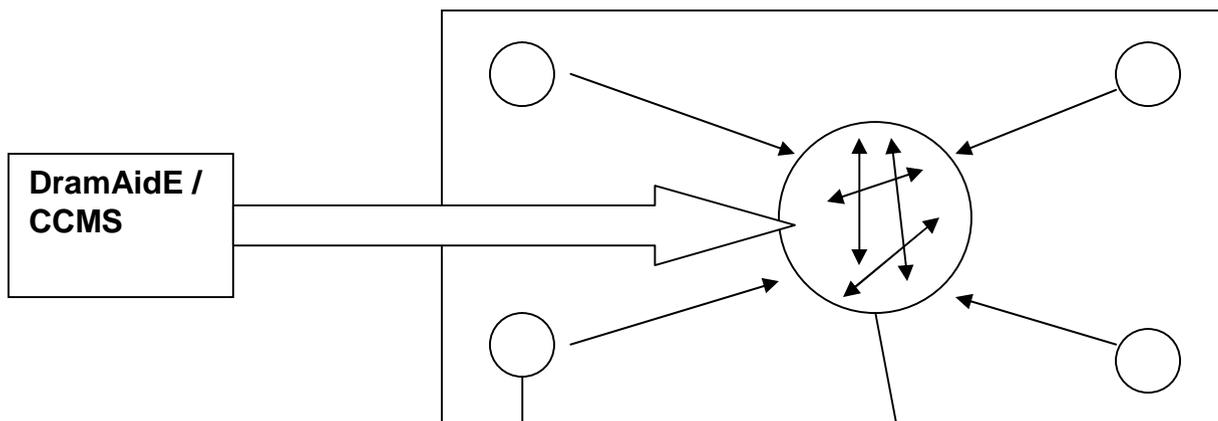
6. Challenges of work-shopping entertainment-education plays

Proper planning and organisation

We spent time negotiating access to the area, which was something our course did not deal with. We also had to negotiate for the release of funds from the department. I felt the Entertainment-Education course should have incorporated practical components from proposal writing to the business side of communication, including negotiation with different stakeholders. The course introduced us to experts, who came to teach different sections but we never had access to how they went about planning and implementing their projects. We did not know, for instance, how *Soul City* lobbies for partnerships and collaborations to see their plays on radio and television. Patrick Coleman has ensured that many entertainment-education plays go on air but we do not know the trouble through which he and his colleagues went to achieve this. The course should encompass the backstage business side of entertainment-education programs.

Inadequate community participation

Having wasted much time negotiating entry into the community and access to funds, we had to finish our projects on time and in some ways, I felt we became interested in results not the process itself. We only dealt with the learners, who do not determine who does which activity in the homes and thus we lacked a proper community context in which to situate our education, as elucidated in the diagram below:



Ximba learners and researchers, who carried out research, sifted the data and c... private and plays were performed to other students as surprise 'gifts'. Plays were also 'directed'... information did not visit the homes or talk to parents so as to understand what it means to grow up in Freedville. In the end, the whole process was initiated and directed by outsiders, although the pupils did enjoy participating in and watching the performance. Questions can be raised about the continuity and community participation in the project, major issues in Freire's educational praxis.

Time constraints affecting the impact of the project

As highlighted earlier, the strict deadlines pose challenges to entertainment- education projects because villagers have their own pace of comprehending and understanding issues. It also takes time for them to open up to outsiders and critically look at issues from new perspectives, thus strict time frames 'force' villagers to understand quickly. Time also becomes a problem because of donors who want results within particular time frames. Additionally, Keyan Tomaselli (1997) laments the lack of understanding from governments which want things done according to their prerogatives, which puts NGOs in dilemma as to

who they should satisfy.

The difficulties of evaluating a once-off play

Lack of cooperation from governments could be compounded by difficulties in evaluating productions that have been performed once. One has a sense that people begin to tell you what they think you want to hear: "Ehh, you know what? Your play has helped us so much". The school prefect referred to the production, as 'your' play and it remained unclear whether he meant the students who performed it or the researchers. Evaluating these performances is a challenge, thus NGOs may do a lot of good work within communities but lack the capacity to take stock of the positive contributions their efforts have added to lives of people.

Conclusions

The three and a half weeks of collaborative work with the learners of Ximba Primary School were very happy for both us, the researchers, and the learners, who were very enthusiastic to *take part* in the production. There may be different reasons for their enthusiasm. They seemed to enjoy the seminars in which we were creating the plays and very much looked forward to the next sessions. The performance was a big occasion at the school with everybody present, except the headmaster who had gone on business duties. The participating students delivered very well and the audience enjoyed the performance, judging from the reaction and the response to the *opening-up* questions posed to them at the end of the performance. We also made an effort to send them a copy of the report on the process. Issues of the time frame, the lack of context (the absence of parents and their exclusion from the process, considering the nature of the assignment) and the lack of business skills on the part of practitioners in negotiating entertainment-education projects pose major challenges in designing and implementing development support communication programmes. There is need for more time and the involvement of communities at all levels of communication.

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