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“A Child’s Playground”:

Investigations into ARROW SA as a Dialogical Space of Learning and Development

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the use of participatory communication with youth by exploring the possible influences of dialogue on learning within the setting of the South African branch of Art: A Resource for Reconciliation Over the World (ARROW). The research investigates the use of participatory communication, particularly the use of Freirean dialogue, and considers the potential impact of this communication on learning. Three inter-linking aspects of learning are examined, namely learning creative skills, learning about morals and values, and learning about oneself.

The participants in the study are the Bechet High School participants who attend weekly ARROW SA sessions, as well as the facilitator of ARROW SA, Mary Lange. As an ARROW SA volunteer, I also draw on my own general observations to describe and analyse the use of participatory communication in the weekly sessions.

INTRODUCTION

While sweeping statements are frequently made about nurturing children because they are the future of society, opportunities are rarely provided for young people to participate in their own development (Matthews & Limb, 1998). The use of participatory communication has increasingly been celebrated in general development contexts, but engaging in dialogue with *youth* is particularly important (Diaz-Bordenave, 2004; White, 2004). Research has indicated “that young people thrive when we listen to them, respect them as current contributors, and engage with them” (Johnston Nicholson et al, 2004: 55). This project seeks to add to the growing body of literature that addresses the issue of using participatory communication with youth. In particular, the aim is to explore the possible influences of dialogue on learning within the setting of the South African branch of ARROW (Art: A Resource for Reconciliation Over the World).

The intention is to investigate the use of participatory communication, particularly the use of Freirean dialogue, in ARROW SA sessions. The potential impact of this communication on learning will be then be explored. Three inter-linking aspects of learning will be examined, namely learning creative skills, learning about morals and values, and learning about oneself.

The participants in this study are the Bechet High School participants in Durban who attend weekly ARROW SA sessions, as well as the facilitator and co-ordinator of ARROW SA, Mary Lange. By conducting research with these parties, three research questions will be addressed. Firstly, how is participatory development communication implemented in ARROW SA sessions? Secondly, how does participatory development communication influence learning amongst ARROW SA participants? And thirdly, how is ARROW’S use of participatory communication perceived and understood by the ARROW SA participants?

The context will be set with a brief introduction to ARROW and development communication. Following this will be an outline of pertinent theories and concepts with reviews of a few relevant studies. The research approach and methods employed for data collection will then be explained. Finally, the research data that has been gathered will be discussed and analysed.

ARROW: Painting for Peace, Singing for Reconciliation

ARROW was established in 2004 by David Oddie, a drama lecturer from the University College Plymouth St Mark and St John. As a response to the violence and intolerance present in the world and enacted in events such as the 9/11 attacks and the Iraq war, ARROW was established as:

a network of people, organisations and institutions with a commitment to exploring, developing and promoting the uses and benefits of the creative arts...as a resource for reconciliation between individuals and groups, the peaceful transformation of conflict, cross-cultural dialogue and the encouragement of understanding about principles of interdependence (Prentki, 2008: 6).

Originally founded in the United Kingdom, ARROW now has hubs in other countries, including Palestine, Kosovo and South Africa (ARROW, 2006). The South African branch was founded in 2004, with Mary Lange being appointed as co-ordinator. Presently, ARROW SA receives no financial support from any aid organisation but is housed as a research site under the Culture, Communication and Media Studies Department (CCMS) at the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN) (Ebrahim et al, 2008).

The ARROW SA hub is presently focused at Bechet High School in Sydenham, Durban. The weekly sessions take place on Thursday afternoons, from 14.30 to 16.00, and the student group this year consists of approximately 30 learners, from grade eight to grade twelve. Aside from being a culturally and racially diverse group, the learners also come from different economic contexts, although most are from working-class families for whom unemployment is a reality (Lange, 2005). Aside from the Bechet participants and Ms Lange, the other parties present at the ARROW SA sessions include visiting artists and student volunteers from UKZN or from abroad.

Introducing Development Communication

Before the theory of participatory communication can be discussed, it is necessary to understand that this theory is embedded in the field of development communication. A formal and modern notion of development emerged after World War II and the establishment of the United Nations,

which marked “the formal beginning of development aid to Third World countries” (Melkote & Steeves, 2001: 47). On a general level, development communication can be taken to refer to the use of communication for the purposes of development (Melkote & Steeves, 2001). While numerous definitions have been proposed (see Manyozo, 2008), the point is that “the meaning of development communication...varies depending on how one views and defines the component concepts of development and communication” (Melkote & Steeves, 2001: 44). In this project, the focus is on development in the form of *learning* within the ARROW SA workshops. Thus, in this context, Paulo Freire’s view of development is the most appropriate as it refers not to economic development, but to the holistic growth of human beings:

In order to determine whether or not a society is developing, one must go beyond criteria based on indices of ‘per capita’ income...as well as those which concentrate on the study of gross income. The basic, elementary criterion is whether or not the society is a being for itself (Freire, 2002: 162).

By investigating how ARROW functions as a dialogical space of learning, the intention is to explore how participatory development communication can be employed to facilitate the transformation of human beings, particularly in the area of learning.

Participatory communication: Theory, concepts and past studies

This section situates my research project within a particular theoretical context. It begins with a brief overview of studies relating to ARROW, followed by a discussion of the major concepts related to dialogue and participatory communication. The section then focuses on research projects that deal with the idea of engaging in dialogue with youth. These projects are dealt with last as it is more beneficial to examine them in a holistic manner *after* the key concepts of participatory communication and dialogue have been outlined.

ARROW: A participatory organisation

The decision to focus on participatory communication in this study was informed by past reports and projects relating to ARROW (Ebrahim et al, 2008; Lange, 2008; Prentki, 2008). Sana Ebrahim and colleagues (2008) investigated ARROW’S ability to dispel stereotypes and promote cross-cultural understanding. While their study does not explicitly focus on ARROW’S communication approach, they note that a “participatory approach to learning is observable in the interactions between Ms Lange (coordinator of ARROW SA) and the ARROW SA participants” (2008: 26).

Similarly, Mary Lange's report, "What's it got to do with me?" (2005), refers to the participatory nature of ARROW by mentioning the participatory action research approach used by the organisation. This approach has been adopted by the UKZN CCMS staff and students who are involved in research with ARROW SA (Lange, 2008). Action research is a participatory approach because it is collaborative in nature, involving the researcher engaging in dialogue and working with the community under study (Einsiedel, 2001). This research approach should ideally result in both the researcher and the participants learning and growing (Servaes, 1991). The ultimate goal of action research is to produce knowledge and information that can be used to improve the operations of communities or organisations (Einsiedel, 2001). These concepts related to action research, including dialogue, collaboration, mutual growth and knowledge creation, will be discussed in more detail later as they are important aspects of participatory communication.

Tim Prentki's (2008) evaluation report of ARROW also refers to the participatory and dialogical nature of communication favoured by the organisation. According to Prentki, one of the main elements of ARROW's conceptual framework is "the notion of dialogue as an exchange between people who enjoy an equal relation of power with each other as articulated in the writings of Paulo Freire" (2008: 7). This study shall draw heavily on the ideas conceptualised by Freire as he is regarded as bequeathing a legacy to all current and future grassroots movements that make use of dialogue for development (Richards, Thomas & Nain, 2001). Since it is ARROW's intention to use dialogue "to create spaces of transformation" for youth (Prentki, 2008: 8), it would be impossible to investigate ARROW as a dialogical space of learning without referring to Freirean pedagogy.

Freire: A new type of education

This project will specifically draw on the ideas proposed by Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2002 [1970]). The concepts developed in this book hugely influenced the participatory framework of communication. After working in the slums of Brazil in the 1950s, Freire realised that education was a stepping stone to participation and eventually emancipation from oppressive structures (Richards, 2001). During the 1960s, Freire further developed the notion of education being a participative process while working on adult literacy programmes that employed dialogical methods of teaching (Shor, 1987).

In his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2002), Freire posits that two very different approaches to education can be employed, namely the "banking concept" or the "problem-posing method". While

the former reinforces the social forces and structures that keep people passive, the latter challenges them by encouraging people to be active in word and action (Wallerstein, 1987).

Freire formulated the banking concept to refer to the educational approach that simply attempts to fill learners with information and facts, encouraging them to record, memorise and repeat what they are ordered to know by the teacher (Freire, 2002). This one-way transmission of information views the learners as containers to be filled with facts from the omnipotent teacher (Richards, 2001). Thus, this approach suggests that education is “an act of depositing” as opposed to the practice of knowledge creation (Freire, 2002: 72). Freire’s condemnation of the banking concept of education stems from the fact that this approach encourages learners to simply be passive entities who absorb a static knowledge that is “a given, packaged and completed corpus” (Thomas, 2004: 51).

To address the flaws of the banking concept, Freire (2002) proposed the problem- posing approach as an alternative method of education. While the banking concept encourages the top-down transmission of information, the problem-posing approach challenges hierarchies by advocating the sharing of ideas between the teacher and learners. This approach encourages participants to participate because learning occurs, not when students acquire facts, but when they engage in knowledge sharing by exchanging ideas with each other and with the teacher (Shor, 1987; Wallerstein, 1987). The problem-posing approach encourages dialogue in an educational context because it is through participation that learners become critical thinkers (Freire, 2002).

The above discussion of the banking concept and problem-posing approach provides only a succinct summary of Freirean ideas. The following section explores the notions of dialogue and participatory communication in more detail. This section will be structured under key points and themes that are conceptualised by Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2002) and that have subsequently been developed and built upon by other theorists. These points and themes overlap to a large extent but are examined separately for the sake of coherence.

Participation of the people

Freire favours the problem-posing approach to education because he believes that it encourages participation of the students (Shor, 1987). True learning can only occur when people become actors as opposed to spectators, when they speak up as opposed to being silent and when they make their own choices as opposed to simply following orders (Freire, 2002). True education must involve the

people, since “a pedagogy of the oppressed...must be forged *with* not *for* the oppressed...in an incessant struggle to regain their humanity” (Freire, 2002: 48).

Although the nature of oppression will vary in different contexts, Freire (2002: 47) uses the word ‘oppression’ in a general sense to refer to the notion of “prescription”, which involves ideas, practices and decisions imposed on people. This imposition is a form of oppression because it is forced on people from an external source (Thomas, 2004: 50). By not allowing people to participate in the education process, and indeed in their own lives, a process of dehumanization occurs. If people are barred from being involved in their own education they “change...into inanimate ‘things’” because they are treated as objects instead of subjects (Freire, 2002: 59).

Since the 1970s when *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was first published, the term ‘participation’ has been widely debated and developed to the extent that “now, no respectable development project can be proposed without using this ‘in’ word” (White, 2004: 16). Yet it is the very frequency with which the word is used that complicates its definition because ‘participation’ can refer to so many different aspects and characteristics in different contexts (Jacobson, 2004). Similarly no single definition regarding the use of communication in participative development has been widely accepted (Jacobson & Kolluri, 1999) because participatory communication is “kaleidoscopic”, changing with each situation (White, 2004: 16).

Despite the lack of a single, formal definition, the common thread running through writings on participatory communication suggest, like Freire, that the emphasis should be on involving the people (Jacobson, 2004; Servaes, 1999; Thomas, 2004). People should not have education or development imposed on them by external forces, rather, they should be allowed to collaborate with specialists to bring about their own education and development (Servaes, 1996; 2000). Freire clearly supports this collaborative approach, writing that teachers “must be partners of the students in their relations with them” (2002: 75) and should “enter into communion with the people” (2002: 61).

In terms of the development communication field, the idea of participation appeared within the paradigm termed ‘Another’ Development (Jacobson, 2004). According to Jan Servaes (2000), this paradigm emerged to offer a more normative approach to development in an attempt to address the growing number of crises facing the world. ‘Another’ Development proposes many points that contemporary development projects should bear in mind (The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation’s report *What Now?* 1975). The scope of this study does not allow a full exploration of ‘Another’

Development. What is important is that, like Freirean pedagogy, ‘Another’ Development regards “participation itself of central importance in the development process” (Jacobson, 2004: 67).

According to Servaes, along with the idea of ‘Another’ Development comes the idea of Another Communication (1991: 68). He refers to this mode of communication as participatory or organic, and it can also be described as horizontal and bottom-up (Wildemeersch, 1999), and two-way and dialogical (Jacobson, 2004; Nair & White, 2004). This notion of dialogical communication will now be discussed.

Dialogue: A two-way road

In order for participation to be successful in an educational context, or indeed in any other development setting, a dialogical mode of communication must be employed (Jacobson, 2004). Similarly, Freire argues that for true education to be achieved “the correct method lies in dialogue” (2002: 67). Teachers and students must talk together because knowledge can only be created when teachers and students practice “co-intentional education”, whereby both parties engage in dialogical discussions and debates (Freire, 2002: 69). Freire suggests that “liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information” (Freire, 2002: 79).

Like Freire, Servaes (2000) argues that dialogue is a necessity because decisions cannot be made by teachers or experts for the people; rather, they should be made *with* the people. Servaes advocates the use of a participatory communication model that builds on Freirean ideas such as the use of horizontal, two-way, bottom-up communication (1991: 77). This participatory model stands in contrast to the mechanistic mode of communication (Servaes, 1991). With its emphasis on communication as a top-down monologue, the mechanistic model is similar to Freire’s banking concept, while the participatory model is reminiscent of the dialogical problem-posing approach. The transactional model, proposed by Sadanandan Nair and Shirley White (2004), also bears resemblance to the organic model. Like Freire and Servaes, Nair and White argue that communication should involve a transaction or exchange between parties in order to “arrive at shared meanings” (2004: 347). Dialogical communication is not about transmitting fixed knowledge but rather about creating knowledge in the process of communication.

Encouraging dialogue is not simply about ensuring participation. Rather, people must be allowed to speak simply because it is a fundamental human right (Servaes, 1991). Freire (2002) talks about the right of every individual to speak, asserting that people must be allowed to voice their opinions

because “human existence cannot be silent” (Freire, 2002: 88). To have a voice means to have one’s humanity: “women and men as beings...cannot be truly human apart from communication, for they are essentially communicative creatures” (Freire, 2002: 128). Thus, people must be provided with the opportunities to speak and express themselves. ARROW SA is explored in this study as an organisation that provides this opportunity for Bechet youth.

While it is the right of every individual to speak their word, no individual can do this without the help of others: “no one can say a true word alone” (Freire, 2002: 88). Participatory theorists suggest that dialogue is collaborative because no one should speak *to* or *for* someone else, but should rather speak *with* them: “Communication between people thrives not on the ability to talk fast, but the ability to *listen* well. People are voiceless not because they have nothing to say, but because nobody cares to listen to them” (Servaes & Malikhao, 2005: 91).

Equality: A dialogue of love, humility and faith

Based on this collaborative approach, it may be inferred that if people truly listen to others it means that they regard them as their equals. A fundamental flaw of the banking concept and a major obstacle to dialogue is the positioning of the teacher as a knowledgeable subject and the students as ignorant objects (Freire, 2002). This positioning suggests that a relationship of inequality exists between the two parties. Freire’s recommendation is that “education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction...so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students” (2002: 72). If learning is to occur, a relationship of equality should be established between the parties concerned. Since dialogue involves a two-way flow of communication, participatory communication necessitates that the people concerned view themselves and one another as equals (Jacobson, 2004).

The result of engaging in egalitarian, dialogical communication is knowledge sharing as the people involved teach and learn from each other (White, 2004). Education then becomes a process in which all involved learn, grow and develop (Freire, 2002). In order for this process of mutual growth to occur, love and humility are necessary (Freire, 2002). The relationship between the participants must be one of love as dialogue cannot succeed in a “relation of domination” (Freire, 2002: 89). Similarly dialogue cannot exist without humility on the part of the participants (Freire, 2002: 90). Superior and domineering behaviour destroys the communication process, while “a spirit of equality emerges” from treating others with care and respect (Nair & White, 2004: 174).

Freire (2002) also argues that an equal, dialogical relationship is based on faith. People involved in dialogue must trust and believe in themselves and in each other as being capable of learning, making and creating. Instead of viewing people as ignorant, teachers or specialists must “not underestimate the ability of the masses to develop themselves” (Servaes, 1999: 89). The ‘Another’ Development paradigm also rests on the assumption that “human beings have an innate ability to create knowledge. It rejects the notion that knowledge production is a monopoly of ‘professionals’” (Servaes, 1991: 75). This paradigm embraces the Freirean notion of dialogical, egalitarian communication being founded on faith and trust in people’s potential, as well as the idea that knowledge creation is the domain of all human beings.

While participatory communication relies on a relationship of equality between the participants, this does not mean that there is no role for an authority figure. Within the educational context, in particular, Freire (1987) argues that learning cannot occur in an environment where no rules exist. If authority is abandoned completely, it could result “in a climate of irresponsibility and licence” where nothing productive happens (Freire, 1987: 212). Similarly, the paradigm of ‘Another’ Development does not suggest that there is no longer a need for specialists and leaders, but simply that these authority figures work in collaboration with the people (Servaes, 1991).

Endogenous development

This idea of collaboration is further developed by Freire in his concept of “cultural synthesis” (2002: 179). He uses the term to refer to the idea of experts and people working together to bring about transformation and joint knowledge creation. Cultural synthesis suggests that education should not rely on outsiders, but rather on the people themselves. The starting point for education should be the students and their contexts (Freire, 2002). ‘Another’ Development similarly stresses that development should be endogenous and stem from the people or community involved (Servaes, 1991). Although development should involve a dialogical collaboration between the people and outsiders, it should always originate from and return to the people and their needs, which is why participatory communication is commonly described as “bottom-up” (Servaes, 1996: 81). While some communities may have basic needs such as hunger, ‘Another’ Development recognises that human beings also have non-material needs such as the needs for expression and creativity (Servaes, 1991). What is important is to communicate information that addresses these needs.

Praxis: A dialogue of reflection and action

Since participation necessitates the involvement of the people, fulfilling needs is not solely the job of experts. People must play an active part in fulfilling their own needs and developing themselves. In order to do this men and women must engage in a praxis of reflection and action whereby they reflect on their needs and situation *and* they act on it (Freire, 2002). The problem-posing approach to education is a means of encouraging learners to engage in a praxis of reflection and action (Freire, 2002). Instead of telling students what to know, problem-posing involves presenting students with problems or situations concerned with human beings' relations with the world. Students are encouraged to reflect on and eventually act on these problems or situations by engaging in dialogues with each other and with the teacher (Freire, 2002). People must contemplate and act upon problems because humans are creative beings who "not only live but exist...humans exist in a world which they are constantly re-creating and transforming" (Freire, 2002: 98).

Conscientisation: People as liberated and empowered beings

According to Wallerstein (1987), a key Freirean idea is that the purpose of education should be human liberation. A praxis of reflection and action is necessary if people are to truly learn and to truly learn means to become liberated: "[People] will not gain this liberation by chance but through the praxis of the quest for it, through their recognition of the necessity to fight for it" (Freire, 2002: 45). This recognition of the necessity to struggle for one's liberation is termed *conscientisation* (Freire, 2002). When people engage in a process of conscientisation they are engaged in a fight for their humanity, as conscientisation involves people transforming from objects to subjects. Problem-posing education is a means of stimulating this process of conscientisation as it is "a humanist and liberating praxis" that views people as active subjects by encouraging their participation in their education (Freire, 2002: 84). The process of conscientisation is a dialogical and collaborative process because "we cannot say that...someone liberates someone else, nor yet that someone liberates himself, but rather that human beings in communion liberate each other" (Freire, 2002: 133).

While Freire refers to conscientisation as the process of understanding oppressive structures, other scholars use the term *empowerment* to refer to the process of conscientisation in a more general sense (Nain, 2001). White argues that people become more empowered when they gain an awareness of their own identity and talents, when they achieve the feeling of self-confidence to participate in group processes, and when they gain "the ability to determine the course of their own lives" (2004: 23-24). To be empowered, people must gain a sense of control over their own lives by participating in processes and decisions that affect them (White, 2004: 25).

Similarly, Servaes explains that ‘Another’ Development advocates people “understanding and mastering their own destiny” (1991: 67). Empowerment is about people taking control of their own lives as opposed to having their fates decided for them by an external source (Rappaport, 1984). Melkote and Steeves write that “as a process, empowerment may have different outcomes” in different situations but they associate the concept with the idea of greater control, whether it be greater control of resources or decision making, or just generally greater opportunities to speak out and voice oneself (2001: 334-335).

Criticisms of Participatory Communication

While the scope of this project does not allow a detailed exploration of the criticisms aimed at participatory communication, it is important to point out that such criticisms do exist. One of the main criticisms of participatory communication is that, while it is celebrated in academic circles, it is an idealistic concept that is difficult to apply in reality (Servaes, 2000). The problem with the participatory paradigm of ‘Another’ Development is that it “lives mainly in the literature of academe, its proponents content to pontificate in turgid scholarly language than to enter the arena of applied development...” (Ascroft & Masilela, 2004: 269). Additionally, the celebration of participatory communication in academic circles has resulted in the over-use of the term and the “banalization” of the concept of participatory communication, to the extent that participation is honoured more in word than in practice (Diaz Bordenave, 2004: 46). Similarly, Paul Taylor (1993) argues that one of the major shortcomings of Freire’s pedagogical philosophy is that, in theory, he discusses wonderful abstract ideas, but, in practice, these ideas are difficult to achieve because it is unclear how they are to be implemented. My research project shall investigate the discrepancy between theory and practice by exploring the use of participatory communication in the practical setting of ARROW SA sessions.

Talking With Youth

So far, this section has concentrated on the theory of participatory communication and dialogue. The focus now will be on journal articles and studies that have explored issues surrounding the notion of engaging in dialogue with youth. I have specifically chosen this youth focus because ARROW is an organisation for young people.

The invisible, silent youth

In a study focusing on youth councils and forums within the UK, Hugh Matthews and Melanie Limb (1998) argue that young people are a silent and invisible part of society. Similarly, a study conducted

by Heather Johnston Nicholson and colleagues (2004) suggests that young people are rarely provided with opportunities to voice themselves or to be involved in their own lives and wider society: “As caregivers and educators, our inclination is to do things “to” youth and “for” youth rather than “with” youth” (Johnston Nicholson et al, 2004: 55). It is not the inability of youth that prevents them from taking control of their lives and participating in society, but rather that they are prevented from doing so by frameworks and structures created by adults (Matthews & Limb, 1998). This study aims to investigate whether the ARROW youth also believe that they rarely have the chance to express themselves, and whether they perceive ARROW as one of the few spaces where they can speak out.

Dialogue and participation

In order to avoid young people becoming invisible and silent, it is imperative that they are provided with platforms for dialogue and opportunities for participation. A study conducted by Val Rapmund and Cora Moore (2002), focuses on how such platforms and opportunities are created by the Student Self-Empowerment and Enrichment Programme (SSEEP) at the University of South Africa (Unisa). The SSEEP was established “to create a domain for dialogue” so that young students can engage in conversations with their educators regarding course curricula and content (Rapmund & Moore, 2002: 24). The SSEEP provides the learners with the chance to make themselves heard by creating “spaces for the telling and sharing of stories” (Rapmund & Moore, 2002: 24).

The SSEEP can be regarded as adopting a Freirean approach because it attempts to bridge the gap between educators and learners, so that everyone is simultaneously a teacher and a learner. Everyone who participates benefits from the egalitarian sharing of information, stories and experiences (Rapmund & Moore, 2002). Another aspect of the SSEEP that is Freirean in nature is its use of the “strengths model” of education (Rapmund & Moore, 2002). This model is reminiscent of Freire’s problem-posing approach because it is based on the assumption that, for learning to occur, students must become active subjects who participate in knowledge creation with the educator: “No longer are learners to be regarded as passive recipients of knowledge...but rather as equal participants in the process” (Rapmund & Moore, 2002: 23). Learners involved in the SSEEP believe that having the freedom to participate in conversations with each other and their educators helps them to learn more about course curricula and content because they are actively involved in the discussions (Rapmund & Moore, 2002).

Similarly, Matthews and Limb (1998) suggest that youth appreciate and benefit from having opportunities to express themselves. Like adults, children have a right to express themselves and to

participate in decisions that affect their lives. This idea, of youth's right to expression, is reminiscent of Freire's thoughts regarding the right of every individual to speak their word. Matthews and Limb advocate that young people should be allowed to exercise this right by being "encouraged to participate as equal partners in setting agendas and making decisions..." (1998: 68-69). Allowing youth to play such active roles must be based on the belief that young people are capable of exercising agency and that they are in possession of their own opinions and knowledge systems (Matthews & Limb, 1998). This belief is similar to the Freirean idea of having faith in people's potential, as well as the view of 'Another' Development that people have an innate ability to create knowledge.

Similarly, the study conducted by Johnston Nicholson et al (2004) focusing on youth development in after-school settings, also suggests that after-school programmes are successful when they operate on the belief that young people have the potential to take charge of their lives. According to Johnston Nicholson et al, committed adult leaders or facilitators are necessary in youth after-school settings but these facilitators should "lead from behind" (2004: 58). While the facilitator is there to offer guidance and advice, youth must be allowed to participate in decision making, so as to become "the agent of her or his own present and future" (Johnston Nicholson et al, 2004: 58). This idea, of young people being active agents in their own lives, is similar to Freire's ideas regarding conscientisation and the notion of empowerment as described by 'Another' Development.

A space of learning: Trust, respect, belonging

In order to encourage young people to participate and speak out, spaces need to be provided for this to happen. A study conducted by Tom Hall and colleagues (1999), focusing on feelings of citizenship amongst British youth, explores the importance of young people having a space to express themselves and develop a sense of identity. I believe that this study is relevant to this research because I wish to investigate ARROW as a space of youth development, particularly in terms of learning. According to Hall et al (1999), youth need spaces to develop their identities, by gaining an awareness of themselves as individuals and as citizens of society. Citizenship incorporates notions such as belongingness, independence and responsibility, which are developed as individuals learn to participate, whether in their local communities or wider society (Hall et al, 1999).

For young people, learning often takes place in informal settings "outside the formal venues of education and training, and the familial contexts of the home" (Hall et al, 1999: 505). These informal settings provide youth with the spaces to 'move' around as they discover more about themselves

through interaction with other young people (Hall et al, 1999: 506). Through a sense of membership and shared identity, these spaces provide youth with a sense of belonging that help to buffer them as they work through the process of discovering themselves (Hall et al, 1999: 509). The aim of this research project is to investigate ARROW as such a space of support for young people.

In order for youth settings to function as spaces of support, it is necessary that they cultivate a conducive atmosphere. Johnston Nicholson et al (2004) argue that these spaces must make young people feel safe and comfortable enough to participate. Often youth programmes use the arts, such as drama and singing, to build the confidence of young people so that they feel comfortable enough to participate (Johnston Nicholson et al, 2004: 61). What is important is to create an environment where “young people [are] confident that their opinions will be treated with respect and given the seriousness they deserve” (Matthews & Limb, 1998: 76). As pointed out by Freire, if participation is to be encouraged people must feel that they will be listened to with respect and tolerance (Rapmund & Moore, 2002). In exploring how participatory communication is implemented in ARROW SA, I will investigate the nature of the environment and atmosphere cultivated during the sessions.

While the field of participatory communication is a vast one, the aim of this section was to draw attention to and discuss the major concepts related to this field. Now that the theoretical background has been established, the research methods that were employed to gather data will be discussed.

Methodology

The interpretive tradition: Making sense of the world

As the focus of this research is on how ARROW participants communicate and create meaning using participatory communication, an interpretive approach was adopted as this intellectual tradition explores “the ways that people make sense of their social worlds and how they express these understandings through language, sound, imagery, personal style and social rituals” (Deacon et al, 1999: 6). The interpretive paradigm is appropriate because it “is characterized by a concern for the individual” and its “central endeavour...is to understand the subjective world of human experience” (Cohen et al, 2001: 22). This allows the researcher to investigate the possibilities of dialogue influencing learning amongst the individual ARROW participants.

Ethnographic research: Entering the world of your subjects

Researchers who adopt an interpretive approach tend to employ ethnographic practices (Deacon et al, 1999). Ethnography is intended to offer “an account of the behaviours, beliefs, attitudes, and values of the people under study” (Shimahara, 1988: 78). This project concerns itself with if and how the participatory mode of communication employed in ARROW sessions affects how the participants learn new things - this is an ethnographic endeavour because the intention is to discover “how people invest their world with meaning” (Deacon et al, 1999:7). While ethnographic research traditionally involves a researcher spending an extensive amount of time with a particular community, full ethnographic studies are not always possible to conduct as a result of time and resource limitations (Deacon et al, 1999: 8). Therefore this project can be described as “a pared-down version of ethnography, borrowing the basic techniques of observation, open-ended interviews and group discussions” (Deacon et al, 1999: 8).

Research methods: Achieving a holistic understanding of ARROW SA

In order to gain an understanding of the participants, ethnography typically employs qualitative methods to enable the researcher “to penetrate beneath surface appearances and reveal the harder realities there concealed” (Woods, 1988: 91). In conducting qualitative research, I made use of triangulation, which involves the use of two or more methods of data collection. Triangulation allowed me as a researcher to “explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint” (Cohen et al, 2001: 112). I therefore decided to engage in qualitative research by means of questionnaires, interviews and participant observation.

In addition to employing methodological triangulation, I also gained a rich, holistic picture of ARROW SA by engaging in research with multiple parties: firstly, the students at Bechet High School who participate in ARROW sessions every week, secondly, Mary Lange, the coordinator and facilitator of ARROW SA, and thirdly, myself, since I have worked with ARROW SA as a volunteer since the end of 2008 and I participate in the weekly sessions. The participants were chosen using purposive sampling techniques, whereby I “built up a sample that [was] satisfactory to [my] specific needs” (Cohen et al, 2001: 103). As will be discussed, each set of participants were selected because they specifically suited the purposes of my research. To ensure that the project was conducted ethically, all participants were provided with informed consent forms that clarified the nature of the research and their involvement in it (see Appendix 1) (Cohen et al, 2001).

The Bechet school students who attend the weekly ARROW SA sessions were given a questionnaire to complete during an afternoon workshop session. Since there were 27 ARROW

students at the session, I used a structured questionnaire as the larger the size of the sample, the more structured and closed the questionnaire should be (Cohen et al, 2001: 247). I included mostly closed questions as Ms Lange suggested that the younger students would prefer to answer questions that provided options. A few open-ended questions were also included so that more detailed, personal answers could be acquired. There were a few younger students who did not provide responses to these open-ended questions, either because they were bored or unable to, so Ms Lange's recommendation to include closed questions proved to be very useful. The questionnaire was used to gain a general idea of the students' feelings and attitudes towards ARROW SA and to determine how they perceive the use of participatory communication in sessions.

Many students who attend ARROW SA sessions only joined in 2009. Therefore, I chose to conduct a group interview with seven students who have been with ARROW for two to four years because I believed they would be more familiar with ARROW'S communication approach. I interviewed the students in a group as children find interviews less intimidating if they are with other children and can discuss and develop ideas together (Cohen et al, 2001: 287). Although the actual group interview was a success, the process leading up to it presented challenges. It was challenging to ensure that the students returned their consent forms on time because ARROW sessions were disrupted by school exams and holidays. Another complication that arose was that I could include only seven learners in the group interview. I only had half of an ARROW session (about 40 minutes) to conduct the interview and as the sole researcher it would have been difficult to interview a large group. While working with a small group was convenient, it did lead to some tension and disappointment, as several students who wished to be part of the group simply could not be included. I did attempt to include every learner in my research by allowing every student who attended ARROW on that day to complete a questionnaire.

In addition to the group interview, a face-to-face in-depth interview was conducted with Mary Lange. As the coordinator of ARROW SA and the facilitator of the sessions with the Bechet students, Ms Lange provided invaluable insight regarding ARROW'S communication approach and how this approach influences learning. It was necessary to not just investigate the learners' opinions of ARROW, but to also examine the facilitator's perceptions of participatory communication, so as to avoid biased results (Cohen et al, 2001: 112).

In both the group interview with the students and the interview with Ms Lange I adopted the interview guide approach. This involved me deciding on the issues to be discussed beforehand, but

being flexible during the actual interview in terms of question wording and sequence “as people do not answer in neat linear ways, they often make conceptual leaps” (Deacon et al, 1999: 69). The interview guide was used to ensure that only relevant topics were discussed. For example, when conducting the group interview with the learners, there was a point when they began to digress as they talked about a trip made to uShaka Marine World as part of an ARROW workshop in December 2008. By consulting the interview guide I was able to bring the discussion back to the topic by asking a relevant question. Conducting the interviews face-to-face allowed me to also record the participants’ non-verbal reactions, such as laughing or nodding their heads in agreement to something that was said. Furthermore, I was able to re-phrase questions or provide clarification if the participants were unsure about a particular question. In order to put the participants at ease, they were first asked general introductory questions and once a rapport had been established more complex questions were asked (Deacon et al, 1999).

Participant observation, which involves the researcher taking part, in some form, in the activities of the subjects under study, is often used in ethnographic research (Deacon et al, 1999). As a volunteer at the weekly ARROW SA sessions, I collected data by observing the forms of participatory communication used in sessions as well as the students’ reactions to these participatory forms. Observation was used to add another layer of richness and detail to the data collected from the questionnaire and interviews, as well as being used to identify important points that the participants had not mentioned (Deacon et al, 1999). I employed an observation sheet to guide my observations as “however open and flexible your research process, without a well-constructed plan the research will drift from flexibility into confusion” (Deacon et al, 1999: 271).

Analysis of results

This section discusses the data that was gathered during the primary research phase of this project. The data will be analysed using thematic analysis because this method “can offer a more accessible form of analysis, particularly for those early in a qualitative research career” (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 81). Thematic analysis involves “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 79). Using themes to structure the discussion of results will allow me to describe and analyse the experiences of ARROW SA participants in relation to participatory communication (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

A theme is regarded as an idea or notion that “captures something important about the data in relation to the research question” (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 82). I have chosen to structure my discussion around certain themes that are in turn grouped into two broad sections loosely structured around two of this project’s research questions. The first section shall address the question: regarding how participatory development communication is implemented in ARROW SA sessions. The second section shall address the question regarding how participatory development communication influences learning amongst ARROW SA participants?”

The third research question as to how ARROW’S use of participatory communication is perceived and understood by the ARROW SA participants will be addressed throughout the analysis section as it completely informs the other two research questions. Analysing the use of participatory communication in ARROW necessarily involves taking into account how this communication is perceived by the participants. In order to understand how learning is influenced by participatory communication, the participants’ perceptions and personal beliefs regarding learning at ARROW must be taken into account.

Since ARROW challenges the traditional hierarchies between teachers and students the term ‘participant’ is used to refer to both the ARROW learners and the facilitator, Ms Lange. Although my role as an ARROW volunteer could also involve me engaging in a self-reflexive analysis in terms of my own participation and personal views, the scope of this essay does not lend itself to such a detailed analysis. My use of participant observation is therefore limited to general observations regarding ARROW SA rather than the inclusion of an auto-ethnographic account of my experiences at ARROW.

Throughout the analysis section, reference will be made to the key concepts, ideas and issues raised in the theoretical framework and literature review, especially as many of these ideas form the themes that guide this discussion of findings.

Participatory communication in ARROW SA

ARROW SA sessions: Free flow in a structured space

To explain how participatory communication is implemented in ARROW SA, it is best to begin to by describing the general format that tends to be used in each session (Reddy, 2009). Ms Lange usually begins the sessions by explaining a certain concept or idea and asks the learners for some input. After a general discussion, Ms Lange divides the class into smaller groups and provides a set

of instructions for the groups to be involved in a creative task that will illustrate the idea under discussion. After the groups have worked on their task they present their work and a discussion around the presentations ensues.

An example of such a session is when the notion of ‘interdependence’ was discussed (Reddy, 2009). The session began with Ms Lange introducing the concept of interdependence. She then asked the learners to work in groups to create a series of movements and sound effects to form some type of machine. The aim was to convey the idea of interdependence by depicting many parts working together to create a whole machine. Ms Lange issued fairly detailed instructions regarding what had to be done and also provided a short example of how a machine could be created.

The above example of Ms Lange initiating the session and providing instructions may not appear ideally participatory. In reality, however, Ms Lange’s role as facilitator does fulfil the position of authority that is often necessary, even in participatory settings (Freire, 1987). Servaes acknowledges that “participation does not imply that there is no longer a role of development specialists, planners, and institutional leaders. It only means that the viewpoint of the local groups of the public is considered...” (1991: 74). Although Ms Lange believes in the participatory ideals of ARROW, she acknowledges that she occupies a position of authority:

As the facilitator, even though there’s a dialogue [in ARROW sessions] I have a responsibility...The facilitator needs the knowledge and skill to guide and coordinate, [which] requires flexibility and the ability to improvise (Interview, May 2009).

Ms Lange does provide instructions, explanations and guidelines to a certain extent at the beginning of sessions because her past experience as a Drama teacher has taught her that a certain amount of didactic skill transferral is necessary:

When I first started teaching I tried [using] *all* participatory methods, all the time...but the self-confidence [of the learners] would grow but there was a lack of verbal communication skills, so in ARROW there is freedom but [I do] transfer skills (Interview, May 2009).

The ARROW learners themselves acknowledged the need for guidance and for an authority figure who could manage the sessions and maintain some order:

Sertanya: Do you think that it's good to have Aunty Mary [Ms Lange] sometimes telling the class what to do and to be quiet?

All: Yes! (nodding heads)

Mahoro: It is necessary to have a bit of control.

Keran: You need a balance. We are allowed to talk but we also have to keep quiet sometimes [in order to] communicate (Group Interview, May 2009).

Although Ms Lange occupies the position of facilitator, she does not dominate the sessions because a large amount of time is devoted to encouraging the learners to participate (Reddy, 2009). During the interdependence session, the learners were provided with ample opportunity to freely create their own machines as most of the session involved them discussing what movements and sound effects they would like to make. Although they occasionally asked Ms Lange or me for guidance, neither of us told them how to create their machines. Once the learners had completed their creations, they presented them to the rest of the group. The concept of interdependence was then discussed in relation to each presentation.

The above example is reminiscent of the problem-posing approach to education because the learners were encouraged to actively participate in the session (Freire, 2002). ARROW therefore allows young people to have the freedom to learn and experiment, but within a structured setting. The learners were provided with the opportunity to decide for themselves what 'interdependence' meant because ARROW views "education as the practice of freedom, as opposed to education as the practice of domination" (Freire, 2002: 81).

The interdependence exercise is also an example of the praxis of reflection and action that characterises problem-posing education (Freire, 2002). When the learners were involved in discussions in their groups they were engaging in reflection as they contemplated the meaning of interdependence. When they physically worked to create their machines they were engaged in action, as their reflections were demonstrated in a physical activity. The final discussion of the presentations then initiated another stage of reflection as the learners developed a greater understanding of the concept of interdependence by discussing it in relation to the machines that were created. This cycle of reflection and action epitomises the notion of praxis because "in Freire's pedagogy, action and reflection are not separate activities but an organic whole...it is [a] dialectical interplay..." (Thomas, 2004: 51). ARROW SA therefore encourages participatory communication by encouraging Freirean practices such as the praxis of reflection and action.

Circle conversations: Dialogue in ARROW SA

Participation and the problem-posing approach are further fostered in ARROW SA by the use of dialogue during the sessions. Every session begins with the learners, Ms Lange and myself sitting in a large circle (Reddy, 2009). No one sits in front or behind any one else because this physical arrangement is symbolic of ARROW'S endeavour to encourage dialogue by breaking down hierarchies. A relationship of equality is necessary if true dialogue is to occur, and in turn equality is strengthened when people engage in dialogue since an "important outcome of knowledge sharing and joint discovery [is] the feeling of worth and equality which [grows] out of interpersonal interaction" (White, 2004: 27).

The circle that is present at the start of every ARROW session is a site of dialogue. While Ms Lange typically initiates a discussion, an exchange of information then occurs as the learners, Ms Lange and I express our beliefs about a certain issue. For example, during the interdependence session the learners debated Ms Lange's definition of interdependence by relating the notion to the global recession that the world is currently in. Others pointed out that interdependence is needed in a variety of contexts, including the classroom and the home (Reddy, 2009). This sharing of opinion typifies the idea of dialogue "as a process of exchange,...[as] a form of and a forum for participation" (Einsiedel, 2001: 105).

Once a general discussion has occurred within the circle, other dialogues take place as the participants complete creative tasks in groups (Reddy, 2009). Ms Lange perceives this dialogical sharing of information as a collaborative process, describing it as "a ripple effect" and her role as the facilitator to "throw the stone into the water" (Interview, May 2009). She may possess a certain amount of knowledge because of her longer life experience but she firmly believes in the potential of the ARROW learners: "I try to focus on the learner as a source of knowledge and inspiration. We [are] all different...and all have something to offer" (Interview, May 2009). Ms Lange engages in dialogue with the learners because she believes in their abilities. Her conviction that they are capable of generating knowledge is similar to the Freirean idea of having faith in others because "without this faith in people, dialogue is a farce which inevitably degenerates into paternalistic manipulation" (Freire, 2002: 91).

While it is clear that Ms Lange advocates the use of dialogue in ARROW sessions, it is also important to point out that these participatory forms are recognised and embraced by the learners.

81% of the participants believe that *everyone* at ARROW is a leader, suggesting that they perceive ARROW SA as a space of participation (Questionnaire, May 2009). According to one respondent “we usually get to make our own decisions but are monitored and directed by an adult. But we usually are able to decide what we want” (Questionnaire, May 2009). This respondent clearly perceives ARROW as a space that allows her to make her own choices, although these choices are guided by an adult like Ms Lange. Similarly, another respondent views ARROW as a space that encourages her creative participation guided by Ms Lange, writing that “at times we are given the freedom of creativity and [we] do as we please, but at times we are given specific instructions by Aunty Mary” (Questionnaire, May 2009).

The participants clearly perceive ARROW as an organisation that thrives on dialogue and participatory communication. In response to the question ‘What do you think about how people speak to each other during ARROW?’ 97% of participants believe that during ARROW sessions *anyone* is allowed to say what they think or to give their opinion (Questionnaire, May 2009). The learners believe in ARROW as a space where they can articulate their views:

Mahoro: At ARROW you can be free!

Others: murmuring in agreement and nodding their heads

Sibusisiwe: Here we have freedom of speech, [there are] not many repercussions if you say something...I mean you can say something and people won't judge you (Group Interview, May 2009).

The reference to ‘freedom of speech’ is reminiscent of Freire’s (2002) notion of every human being possessing the right to speak their word. The learners perceive ARROW SA as a space where they can speak out and be listened to: “I know that [at ARROW] I can be me and be unique as I know that what I have to offer will be taken into consideration” (Questionnaire, May 2009). ARROW SA therefore makes use of participatory communication by encouraging dialogue amongst the participants.

The use of dialogue in ARROW is not simply limited to the weekly sessions. Any decision regarding an ARROW activity is made after Ms Lange has consulted with the ARROW learners. For example, when Ms Lange had to decide what kind of fieldtrip to organize for the ARROW learners, the learners were asked to consult with their parents and to voice their own opinions before a final decision was reached. They were presented with the option of embarking on an

overseas trip or on a local trip to the Kalahari. The majority, who are from working-class backgrounds, voted for the latter because it was the more affordable option for them. The fact that the ARROW learners and their parents had the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process is an example of the endogenous development popularised by Freire and the paradigm of ‘Another’ Development. The use of dialogue before a major decision is made in ARROW SA suggests how “communication may be of many forms. But it must, in the end, reflect the felt needs and interests of individuals receiving the communication” (Jacobson, 2004: 72).

The ARROW SA environment: A space of freedom, trust and belonging

In order to gain a richer understanding of how dialogue is used in ARROW SA it is necessary to understand the environment that is created during the sessions. According to a 13 year old respondent: “Normally I am very shy to speak out and dance in front of people but here at ARROW I’m not that shy” (Questionnaire, May 2009). For this respondent there is something about the ARROW SA space that allows her to overcome her normal shyness. From research conducted with the learners and Ms Lange, it is clear that the environment and atmosphere created during ARROW sessions is one that is conducive to dialogue.

As discussed earlier, the physical arrangement of ARROW sessions, such as sitting in a circle, is used to encourage a feeling of egalitarianism. According to Ms Lange, she consciously strives to create an environment where the participants are at ease:

One of the objectives [of ARROW] is for self-development and self expression. To encourage this, you need a comfortable environment, physically and psychologically. I try to have [the environment] structured enough so people can focus but there must be freedom too for people to express themselves and to be creative (Interview, May 2009).

An important point that Ms Lange raises is the idea of creating an environment that is physically *and* psychologically comfortable. In addition to the use of circles, the physical setting of ARROW is very informal (Reddy, 2009). The weekly sessions occur in Bechet High School’s boardroom, which is a large room without desks. The lack of clutter provides plenty of room for the participants to freely move around. This open space means that the participants have the freedom to engage and interact with one another. The physical freedom that is permitted in ARROW led one of the participants to exclaim: “It’s a child’s playground! No one is trying to control you, you can just be free” (Respondent, Group Interview, May 2009).

In addition to the open physical environment of ARROW SA sessions, a psychologically and emotionally comfortable environment is also created. According to one respondent, she feels comfortable participating at ARROW because she is “not afraid of the people within the group” (Questionnaire, May 2009). This respondent lack of fear or anxiety is most likely the result of the fact that ARROW SA is a safe space for young people to participate in. In using the word ‘safe’ I am referring to the fact that many learners perceive ARROW as a non-judgemental space where they can participate without fear and be accepted for who they are:

Nonkululeko: I’m not afraid to participate. ARROW is like your family.

Gillie: Yes, definitely! I don’t really care what people will think about me because I know that [at ARROW] I can just be [the] positive, confident me.

Nkosinathi: Like the other week we had to do that dance. You know, dancing is not my thing, but I really just enjoyed it and went for it.

Others: nodding their heads in agreement, clapping and laughing

Nkosinathi: I didn’t care what the others thought because at ARROW I feel comfortable (Group Interview, May 2009).

The notion of ARROW as a non-judgemental space was explained by Ms Lange at the first ARROW session this year (Reddy, 2009). In order to introduce the new participants to ARROW, Ms Lange explained that respect for others should always be practiced at ARROW. She described how it is necessary to show respect when others are performing or talking by listening and not laughing at or ridiculing them. Ms Lange’s emphasis on ARROW as a space of respect suggests the high value ARROW places on fostering participation by creating an environment of safety and tolerance. In an organisation such as ARROW, “young people need to be given the respect and seriousness they deserve. Without this assurance young people will quickly become discouraged and dismiss the participation process as ineffective” (Mathews & Limb, 1998: 76).

Another aspect to consider when discussing the environment that is necessary for participation is the idea of a space of belonging. For many participants, ARROW is not simply a weekly session that they attend. It is a site of friendship, a place where “everybody feels welcome” (Respondent, Questionnaire, May 2009) because “it’s like a home away from home” (Respondent, Questionnaire, May 2009). 93% of participants say that they attend the ARROW sessions because they believe that ARROW is a special group that they belong to (Questionnaire, May 2009). This idea of

belonging is articulated in the following extract from the interview conducted with the ARROW learners:

Sertanya: Do you feel like ARROW is a special place? I mean do you feel like you are part of something here...like you belong here?

All: Oh yes!

Bekithemba: ARROW has left footprints...

Others: laughing and clapping their hands

Sertanya: That's quite a deep thought!

Bekithemba: But it's true, hey.

Nkosinathi: Yes, he's right. Because you become friends with everyone in ARROW, [it is] like one big family, always opening up for new people.

Keran: Like at school you [are] only friends with people from your class or, you know, people your age. But at ARROW we [are] all becoming friends, even with people younger or older, we [are] all mixing (Group Interview, May 2009).

The learners perceive ARROW as more than just an after-school activity. As an organisation and as a space of gathering, ARROW presents the learners with the opportunity to interact with other participants and to create bonds with one another. The fact that one respondent describes ARROW as having “left footprints” suggests that membership to the organisation has had a profound impact on the participants. The learners’ feelings of belonging have important implications for their participation in ARROW because the more young people feel connected to something, the more involved they will become. For young people such as the ARROW learners “the same expansion of horizons which marks youth as a time of emergent and enhanced individuality also provides a broader context for *affiliation and belonging* (Hall et al, 1999: 509, [my emphasis]). As a space of belonging, ARROW encourages participation and dialogue because “for young people looking to ‘go public’ with their interests and concerns, youth work settings may provide a welcome stepping-stone to wider involvement and understanding at a local level and beyond” (Hall et al, 1999: 512).

ARROW SA as a place of learning

The atmosphere and environment at ARROW is one of the reasons the participants enjoy learning at ARROW. Before ARROW can be discussed as a space of learning, it is necessary to point out that the both Ms Lange and the participants distinguished between the educational contexts of school and ARROW. According to Ms Lange, a different type of learning occurs at ARROW:

With classes getting bigger there's the idea that children should be seen and not heard. But at ARROW I try to speak with the kids, instead of speaking to them. At school, the outcomes for education are set and there is an emphasis on linguistic and mathematical abilities. But in ARROW the outcomes are more flexible, they can change to suit the kids. And I try to focus on multiple intelligences, like not just improving their writing or numerical skills but also verbal communication skills and artistic skills (Interview, May 2009).

The types of skills that are learnt at ARROW will be discussed later in more detail. What is important to note from Ms Lange's comment is that the nature of formal education does not allow for much freedom because curricula and objectives are relatively fixed. ARROW, on the other hand, does not have to adhere to national educational policies or regulations and is therefore afforded a flexibility that allows for a free and more open type of education to occur. The fact that Ms Lange adjusts the ARROW agenda to suit the participants is reminiscent of the problem-posing approach whereby "this view of education starts with the conviction that it cannot present its own program but must search for this program dialogically with the people" (Freire, 2002: 124).

The participants also perceive ARROW as being different to their traditional educational context:

Sibusisiwe: You know, at ARROW Aunty Mary doesn't tell you to speak. It's not like when the teachers force you to speak in class.

Mahoro: Yes we have more freedom of choice here [at ARROW].

Gillie: In class they're always telling us to be quiet, but here we can speak.

Nonkululeko: In class we learn because we have to. At ARROW we learn because we *want* to.

Keran: For school you *have* to do the work but for ARROW we come here because we like it. Sometimes I feel like my brain is shut but then I come to ARROW and it changes. It's like an open and close switch (Group Interview, May 2009).

The participants involved in the above discussion clearly perceive ARROW as a space where they learn by choice. For them, the education at ARROW is characterised more by autonomy than by authority or orders, it is "education as the practice of freedom, as opposed to education as the practice of domination" (Freire, 2002: 81).

According to Ms Lange, there is no *concrete* way to measure the occurrence or type of learning amongst participants (Interview, May 2009). Therefore, I will judge the influence of dialogue on learning by analysing the perceptions and opinions of both Ms Lange and the ARROW SA

participants. The concept of learning has been divided into three areas: learning creative skills, learning about morals and values, and learning about oneself. These three areas are inter-linked but have been separated for the sake of coherence.

Learning creative skills: An enjoyable education

The creative tasks that the ARROW participants are involved in include painting and drawing, creating lyrics for the ARROW theme song, choreographing dance and movement sequences and creating short drama skits, amongst other things (Reddy, 2009). It is clear that ARROW strives to foster an appreciation and a practice of the creative arts amongst youth. Several participants enjoy ARROW because of the opportunities it provides them in terms of learning creative skills. According to one, she enjoys ARROW “because we learn new thing[s], [we] get to know other people and we learn more about art and different ways you express [yourself] using art such as the media, sounds, painting and drawing” (Questionnaire, May 2009). Similarly, another respondent wrote “Yes, I enjoy ARROW. It gives me the chance to express myself using the various forms of art. I especially enjoy getting a chance to recite my poems” (Questionnaire, May 2009).

The participants clearly associate learning creative skills with enjoyment. When describing ARROW, a 13 year old participant chose to emphasise the entertaining aspect of the organisation: “[ARROW] is the most fun and enjoyable club ever. It has lots of fun games and many more other stuff” (Questionnaire, May 2009). Similarly, Ms Lange believes that an important aspect of ARROW as a space of creative learning is the fact that “it’s a fun place to be, it’s enjoyable. They’re learning in a fun way, they enjoy the creative side of it, it’s almost like therapy. It’s different from the stresses of the classroom” (Interview, May 2009).

The fact that Ms Lange distinguishes between learning creative skills at ARROW as being different from the classroom setting is important. Many participants enjoy ARROW because it is their *only* space of creativity since their high school does not offer subjects such as art or drama. One respondent wrote “I feel like through ARROW I can somehow achieve my future goal [of being] a journalist or lawyer because it builds my self-confidence, especially since our school does not offer drama as a subject” (Questionnaire, May 2009). She perceives ARROW as an important space of learning because of the dramatic and performance skills she has begun acquire by actively participating and speaking up in ARROW sessions. While ARROW may provide a space for the participants to learn skills that are not available at school, what is particularly interesting is that the

participants perceive a link between what they learn in ARROW and what they learn during their formal school lessons:

Nkosinathi: You know subjects like art and drama are not offered for us at school.

Keran: If they were, we would take them. But at least here [at ARROW] we can learn these things.

Gillie: But guys when we were reading *Macbeth* during English, I could just visualise it, I felt like I could see the characters and what was happening. Everyone else was bored but I was enjoying it because Aunty Mary has taught us [at ARROW] about visual imagery and creative visualisation, so the things we learn in ARROW help me with my school work (Group Interview, May 2009).

The fact that this respondent can perceive connections between her formal education in class and her informal education at ARROW suggests she is able to think independently. By participating in dialogues in ARROW that encourage her to engage in critical thinking, she is able to “apprehend the challenge as *interrelated* to other problems within a total context, not as a theoretical question, and the resulting comprehension tends to be increasingly *critical*” (Freire, 2002: 81 [my emphasis]).

In addition to encouraging critical thinking, participatory communication also influences the learning of creative skills by creating an environment that is conducive to creativity. This is clearly articulated by Ms Lange: “Participation is needed to learn creative skills. You learn just by watching others and by interacting. [The participants] need a space where they can be free and where they won’t be judged because this is when people are truly creative” (Interview, May 2009). At ARROW the participants do not sit and listen to a teacher who tells them how to, for example, create a collage representing themselves. Rather, they learn how to create the collage by actively constructing it because participatory “problem-posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality” (Freire, 2002: 84).

Learning morals and values: Learning by doing

In addition to fostering a love of the arts, ARROW also strives to educate youth about values such as peace, reconciliation and intercultural interaction. According to one respondent “[ARROW] inspires me to be a better, loving person. It teaches me about other religions and cultures” (2009b). The learning of morals and values occurs through the learning of creative skills. It is through activities such as creating drama skits or dances that important life-lessons are learnt:

Sertanya: Do you think ARROW sessions are a time when you have fun or is it a time to learn important things?

Keran: It's both, you can't separate them.

Mahoro: Like that time when we were learning about interdependence. Instead of learning what it means or like a teacher telling us, we actually got to *do* it by working in a team and creating a fun machine. We had to come up with what we thought it meant. It teaches us the value of life (Group Interview, May 2009).

Mahoro's point is that learning about values in ARROW does not involve a didactic transmission of information. Rather, the participants learn about values such as interdependence by actively participating in creative tasks. By engaging in dialogues with group members while working on creative tasks and by engaging in dialogues with everyone else after the tasks have been presented, the participants participate in creating their own education. Learning about values at ARROW does not rely on explanations or descriptions from Ms Lange. The participants learn not by being told but by doing (Servaes, 1991: 79).

An important point to consider when discussing how learning occurs in ARROW SA is the fact that *all* participants are involved in the learning process, not just the school students. Ms Lange believes that everyone simultaneously adopting the roles of both teacher and learner:

The thing I really love about ARROW is the multi-layers of education. The students have the opportunity to learn not just from me but from each other, I have the opportunity to learn from the students and we all have the opportunity to learn from the university student volunteers, who in turn learn from all of us (Interview, May 2009).

By encouraging dialogues during the weekly sessions, ARROW has created a space where "human beings in communion liberate each other" (Freire, 2002: 133). All ARROW participants co-learn about life's important lessons through participating in tasks and activities. The participants also embrace the idea of everyone teaching and learning from each other. In particular, the older ARROW participants enjoy passing on what they have learnt to the younger learners:

Keran: The grade eight's are welcome to talk. But I think they still feel shy.

Nkosinathi: It's like an exchange. I can teach the younger ones what I have learnt and they can tell me what they know. So we can combine the old with the new.

Mahoro: Like how Aunty Mary sometimes puts us older ones in charge of groups so we can mentor the new students. It empowers us because we become leaders (Group Interview, May 2009).

This idea of ‘empowerment’ is an important one. When conducting research with Ms Lange and the ARROW learners, it became clear that personal growth is one of the major reasons participants enjoy ARROW. This idea of personal development will now be discussed.

Learning about oneself: A journey of discovery and self-expression

Several of the points relating to personal growth in ARROW are encapsulated in the following comment made by Ms Lange:

I think drama and painting and dialogue are therapeutic...they build self-esteem because you learn more about yourself when you learn to identify with others. Hopefully [at ARROW] people can share who they are and they can hear and see who others are and this contributes to breaking down barriers. Many learners have told me that at ARROW they discover things they never knew about themselves. I think it’s through dialogue that they learn about themselves (Interview, May 2009).

The first point that can be made regarding personal growth in ARROW SA is the impact that participating in creative activities and dialogue can have on the participants’ self-esteem. Several participants believe their self-esteem has improved as they have developed the courage and confidence to speak out. One respondent wrote that “ARROW has influenced my self-esteem a lot because before [ARROW] I was always shy and quiet. But now I speak my mind and grow to be more confident” (Questionnaire, May 2009). Similarly, another wrote that “I am a very shy person and scared to talk in an audience but I am getting confident each [ARROW] session and my self-esteem is growing more and more” (Questionnaire, May 2009). ARROW’S use of dialogue is an example of how “participatory communication...is based on the rhetoric and practice of liberation, of freedom, of emancipation, of struggle...of transformation and change” (Thomas, 2004: 55). In this particular case, the use of participatory communication has influenced the transformation of young people, who are developing a stronger sense of self as they develop stronger voices.

ARROW’S use of participatory communication has also contributed to the learners developing a greater sense of who they are as individuals. One respondent wrote on her questionnaire: “I have learnt a lot about myself [at ARROW]. I always wanted to be an actress but I didn’t believe in myself and I never thought I could do it. But now from ARROW I have confidence and I believe

that in life I can achieve a lot if I believe in myself” (Questionnaire, May 2009). Similarly, another emphasised the idea of ARROW strengthening her faith in herself: “I have learnt that anybody [can] have the ability to do anything if they put their minds to it. I’ve learnt that I’m special and can be what I want to be” (Questionnaire, May 2009). These participants are progressing through a process of conscientisation or empowerment. This empowerment is the result of being allowed to actively participate in activities and decisions in ARROW. For example, one respondent embraces the collaborative forms of participatory communication that are used in ARROW: “Mostly we get together as a group and come up with something and then discuss [it] and if we are all happy with it then we do it” (Questionnaire, May 2009). This type of dialogue is empowering because “to activate consciousness and critical awareness of one’s situation and environment, one’s identity, one’s talents, and one’s alternatives for freedom of action is an imperative to participatory action” (White, 2004: 24).

The participants also perceive the use of participatory communication as empowering specifically because they are youth. As discussed in the literature review, youth are rarely provided with opportunities to express their views. The ARROW participants think that they are often not taken seriously because they are youth:

Mahoro: At home, we’re the children. So we have to obey orders and do as we are told. We have to listen to what others say.

Sibusisiwe: But at ARROW, you know if we weren’t respected or didn’t like something, we’d just pack our bags and leave!

Gillie: You [are] right, hey! I mean if we don’t like something or we’re bored at ARROW, Aunty Mary will change it. But in class or at home this won’t happen.

Sibusisiwe: That’s why [at ARROW] you feel bold, like you can take on the world.

Mahoro: Here [at ARROW] you are the creator of your own image (Group Interview, May 2009).

These participants embrace the fact that they can speak out at ARROW, because they do not really have the opportunity to do so in other contexts. They are undergoing a process of conscientisation because they have begun transforming into “beings for themselves” (Freire, 2002: 161). Although society in general may silence young people because they “demean children as imperfect adults and, in consequence, draw doubt upon their abilities to participate” (Matthews & Limb, 1998: 67), these ARROW participants have started to take a stand by embracing their opportunity to speak out

at ARROW. The fact that one respondent says that they can become “the creator of [their] own image” at ARROW suggests that they are on the path to becoming beings for themselves.

A Freirean Utopia: Guarding Against Idealism

Despite the fact that this study has emphasised ARROW’S use of participatory communication, it is important to guard against idealism. While many participants understand and appreciate ARROW’S participatory communication approach, some indicated their insecurities regarding participation. One respondent wrote “I guess sometimes I just don’t feel like speaking because there are too many people for me to handle” (Questionnaire, May 2009). Another described her fear of participating in front of a crowd of people, writing “I feel scared when all eyes are on me and I start to stutter. So then even though sometimes I have something to say I just keep quiet” (Questionnaire, May 2009). While a big group of learners can facilitate participation through teamwork and collaboration, for these respondents the size of the group actually discourages them from participating. Even though an organization such as ARROW may strive to encourage dialogue, it does not necessarily mean that a Freirean utopia is created because there is always the chance that there will be those who are uncomfortable with participating.

Furthermore, creating a culture of participation amongst a group of youth presents its own unique challenges. For example, trying to integrate the learners into ARROW and its system of communication is complicated by the fact that “young people...are likely to be involved in many other activities and thus able to participate only on a limited basis” (Matthews & Limb, 1998: 75). Several ARROW participants have missed sessions because they have been attending sports trials or extra tuition classes (Reddy, 2009). This disruption in attendance means it is sometimes difficult to cultivate the ideals of participation and Freirean learning amongst the participants.

Conclusion

By conducting research with the ARROW SA learners and the group facilitator and from my own general observations, the aim has been to explore the links between participatory communication and learning. In terms of its participatory communication approach, ARROW SA encourages a free flow of participation within a structured space. The facilitator, Ms Lange provides a basic framework and structure for the sessions but the learners have ample opportunity to participate. The fact that participants are encouraged to participate, particularly in terms of a continuous praxis of

reflection and action, suggests that ARROW SA favours a Freirean problem-posing approach to education. Furthermore, a Freirean approach to dialogue is evident in the circle conversations that occur every session, as well as when important decisions are being made in ARROW SA. This sharing of ideas is also reminiscent of the two-way communication approach favoured by supporters of 'Another' Development such as Servaes (1991) and Jacobson (2004). This dialogical form of communication is encouraged by ARROW'S open and 'safe' environment. Not only can the learners freely move around to interact with one another, they can also freely express themselves because they know ARROW is a space where they will be supported and to which they belong.

Both the participants and the facilitator believe that ARROW'S pedagogical approach, in contrast to the traditional classroom approach, is characterised by freedom and enjoyment. Three areas of learning were considered and each has been influenced by ARROW'S participatory mode of communication. Learning creative skills is encouraged by the open environment that supports participation and interaction. While many participants perceived the learning of creative skills as different from what they learn in the classroom, connections were also drawn between their ARROW education and school education. The creative activities at ARROW help the participants learn about important morals and values. By actively participating in the learning process the participants acquire a deeper understanding of values such as interdependence. Finally, personal growth and learning about oneself occurs as the participants develop self-esteem by acquiring creative skills and by actively participating in tasks dealing with morals and values. By providing the participants with the opportunity to voice their opinions, ARROW has created a space that fosters the personal growth of the participants as they develop greater faith in their abilities and in themselves.

Although ARROW SA strives to encourage participatory communication that has positively influenced learning amongst some of the participants, the benefits of dialogue should not be idealistically over-celebrated. Some ARROW participants are insecure about participating in sessions because they are nervous of the large group. These participants still need to develop confidence and become accustomed to a culture of participation. The only way this will happen is if they are regularly immersed in the world of ARROW. As has been pointed out, however, it can be difficult to integrate youth into ARROW SA because they are busy with other activities. A possible solution is to emphasise the idea of ARROW being an extra-curricular activity just like hockey or swimming. In order to belong to a sports team, it is vital that young people regularly attend

practice. Similarly, it should be made clear that being an ARROW member necessitates regular attendance and commitment.

Aside from guarding against idealism, ARROW SA can be proud of successfully employing dialogue to facilitate learning amongst its participants. The primary recommendation that can be made based on this project's findings is for ARROW SA to continue to employ its dialogical approach and to maintain itself as a site of research so that new projects can be undertaken to maintain and improve its operations as a participatory organisation.

This study emphasises the importance of engaging in dialogue with youth, particularly for pedagogical reasons. According to Diaz Bordenave, "My hypothesis about the foundation of a participative society is that it will exist only when children are respected...education is essential to prepare children to be good decision makers in a democratic, participative society, and to develop values of co-responsibility and cooperation for a common goal" (2004: 42). ARROW SA is an organisation that strives to provide this type of participative education. Investigating dialogical spaces of learning such as ARROW SA is important because:

In the spirit of Freire there is the need to explore new spaces for possibility, new places for the birthings of liberation...in the recognized and unrecognized centres of human creativity, in all the places where people think and dream and work toward inclusive futures (Thomas, 2001: 252).

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