

Drama education in the age of AIDS

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This article arose out of my involvement in an undergraduate drama module at the School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, where I made use of workshop theatre methodologies to explore how second-year drama students construct knowledge and develop sociocultural understandings of critical issues in society. The workshop theatre project described in this article aimed to allow drama students to explore and expose the myths, practices and world view associated with the sexual behaviour of young people in two townships and on two campuses. The purpose was to ensure that, as prospective teachers, these students are prepared with knowledge and skills to engage their future learners on this topic in a relevant and effective manner. The article draws on the theories of applied drama and argues for workshopping as a cogent means of researching and representing social issues. The data-gathering process undertaken by students, and the plays constructed from the analysis are described. I conclude with a discussion on how the methodology reflected the beliefs and attitudes of the participants in a contextualised manner, exposing a flaw in their image of the sexually liberated and independent young woman. I also show how the approach allowed me to develop an emancipatory pedagogy which endows students with authority.

Keywords: HIV/AIDS, young females, applied drama, workshop theatre

Introduction

Theatre serves many purposes in society, not the least being Hamlet's injunction to hold a mirror up to life. In a more contemporary context we may list among its uses, apart from entertainment, its ability to educate, challenge, debate and reconcile. Workshop drama as a form of theatre-making is a very powerful yet accessible strategy which carries a strong transformative agenda. It could be used to good effect by researchers and educators seeking methods that elicit relevant, situated and culturally contextualised knowledge. In her study of school-based gender violence in Africa, Leach (2002:110) notes the lack of teacher preparation in appropriate methods for teaching and counselling in the field of HIV/AIDS, and suggests the use of drama among other methods for more impact. Although drama has been used to good effect in HIV/AIDS interventions, there has not been enough detail about the processes, a fact noted by Pillay (2010:88) in her book review of the work of Morrell *et al.*

The purpose of this study was to use the workshop theatre methodology to explore young people's attitudes to sexual relationships, while at the same time allowing the student researchers an opportunity to experience the processes of workshopping a play. The article is therefore written mainly as an account of the processes undertaken, while raising issues for critical reflection in terms of the implications of the findings and allowing for critique in terms of the methodology.

Background

In their second year of study, Drama Education students in the Faculty of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) are immersed in a workshop theatre project as part of their study of South African theatre forms. The approach is experiential, so that the students learn the processes and techniques of workshopping a play as they go along. The choice of theme is prompted by the facilitator but negotiated with the students. The themes typically revolve around critical issues in contemporary South African society. As a teacher in the arts, part of my responsibility is to engender a consideration for social awareness and action. In a context of HIV/AIDS – KwaZulu-Natal being at the centre of the pandemic in South Africa – the words of Garoian (1997:20) are most pertinent: "If we acknowledge the necessity for

compassionate and caring representations of illness and disease, then art education must consider how such representations are dealt with in the classroom”.

When I indicated that the topic was to be social stigma associated with a positive HIV status, the students expressed some ‘AIDS fatigue’, stating that they were tired of hearing about this topic. Once we brainstormed specific angles to the topic, they were far more receptive. Once the students actually began their interviews, the focus moved away from stigma to beliefs and attitudes about HIV/AIDS and how these influence behaviour. Initially it was the knowledge that they would be devising and performing in their own play that excited their interest, but ultimately they came to see the significance of what they were investigating, and approached the performance with great commitment to the topic.

Theoretical framework

This study can best be described as an example of applied theatre/drama. Nicholson (2005:2) defines applied drama as those forms of dramatic activity that exist outside conventional mainstream theatre institutions and are intended to benefit individuals, communities and societies. Nicholson’s seminal text on applied drama, *Applied drama: The gift of theatre*, explores a range of performance processes and key practices to provide a critical analysis of what constitutes applied drama and its ideological content. This work forms the theoretical underpinning for this study.

Applied drama has a strong developmental agenda, can take on many forms and is found in a wide range of applications – corporate, community and educational. Most widespread of these in the developmental context is the use of Augusto Boal’s *Theatre of the oppressed* (1979) techniques, which are highly participatory and have a clear emancipatory agenda. What is common in all the many manifestations and uses of applied drama is ‘intentionality’, i.e. the intention to use drama to improve the lives of individuals and create better societies (Nicholson, 2005:3). What I am suggesting in this article is the existence of a similar intentionality in drama education pedagogy, specifically through workshopping a play. I do not intend to suggest an uncritical endorsement of the theatre for development movement with all its ‘missionary’ zeal; instead, use of an aspect of applied drama in this instance is to align it specifically to my drama education pedagogy.

Nicholson (2005) points out the two distinct strands of pedagogy which have influenced applied drama, one associated with Paulo Freire and the other drawing from European traditions of progressive education. Freire, in turn, had a profound influence on fellow Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal, who is alluded to above. Both the Freirean and progressive approaches place the learner at the centre of the education process, often as the generator of knowledge. The interweaving of these two strands of pedagogy raises questions about where knowledge is situated and whose cultural experiences are reproduced in theatre-making (Nicholson, 2005:9); these, in fact, become the driving questions for data analysis.

Applied drama is intimately tied to contemporary questions about the politics of context, place and space – and so, I ask, how do I approach teaching contexts in South Africa which are characterised by plurality and cultural dissonance (Nicholson, 2005:13)? How can I, a middle-aged female drama lecturer, a South African of Indian descent, work with undergraduate students of different racial, cultural and ethnic backgrounds in a way that promotes social justice and equity? Would my (middle-class) values undermine the possibility of constructive dialogue, as bell hooks (1994) suggests? If I claim – as I do – to espouse an emancipatory pedagogy, then I have to bring into critical focus the question of power in the learning process, and how this is negotiated between the learners and I, and what is to be learnt.

By shifting the locus of power from myself, I believe I can provide the kind of environment where “learning can most deeply and intimately begin” (hooks, 1994:13). An emancipatory pedagogy allows for students to have a voice in the teaching-learning process. How would I be able to guide my students to explore a critical social issue such as HIV/AIDS in a way that allowed their lived experiences, their community and cultural capital to have currency? I believed that applied drama, with its intentionality, provided a way to achieve a socially just approach.

If I were to be true to my theoretical underpinnings and view my students as producers of knowledge, then I would have to allow their voices to shape the project as much as I did. Again, I am mindful of the

warning that hooks (1994) offers, in stating that most students are not comfortable exercising the right to free speech, even in a democratic classroom. This project, then, would be a means of encouraging free speech in a different way. My role, as I saw it, was to provide guidance where they as second-year students needed it – for example, in areas of ethical consideration, research (interview) techniques and dramatic/aesthetic conventions of performance. In other areas they assumed the mantle of leadership and shaped the project.

While I gave a great deal of input and impetus at the beginning, once the project got off the ground I found that I was playing an increasingly diminishing role as project leader. Although this letting go of the reins was what I needed to do, it was extremely frustrating at times not to be able to select the sample and design interview schedules myself. I had to allow the students to choose their own participants and ask their own questions. This method, then, combined my emancipatory pedagogy and the intentionality behind applied drama. I worked with what the students generated and helped them to shape their data into a performance using the workshop method.

A short guide to the workshop theatre process

The term ‘workshopped’ theatre became popular in the 1960s, with the work particularly of British socialist theatre director Joan Littlewood. This was the kind of theatre that allowed ordinary people, particularly those in oppressed situations, to voice their concerns and share experiences. The workshop theatre movement found a home particularly in South Africa in the apartheid era, providing a vehicle for the disenfranchised and marginalised to record their histories and register their resistance. More than a form of protest, workshop theatre as a methodology resonated with the needs of South African performers and theatre-makers of the 1970s and 1980s because of its unique conventions and procedures.

Workshop theatre relies on the shared concerns and ideas of a community of performers, and is created in collaboration. Literary skills are not a prerequisite. The style of performance is drawn from the participants’ own cultural experience in terms of song, dance and acting style. In South Africa the style drew on the long oral tradition and storytelling techniques of indigenous people. Based as it is on the participants’ own concerns, it allows for personal lived experiences and observation of life in a particular society to become the subject of the play. Much has been documented by theatre historians such as Coplan (1985), Orkin (1991) and Fleischman (1990) about this unique form of theatre in South Africa.

The workshop theatre process begins with a core theme or issue. The participants then engage in a period of research on this theme. This research could follow many of the methods used in academic research in the social sciences – interviews, focus groups, document analysis, archival searches, as well as auto-ethnography in the form of personal stories and reflections. In the case of the latter, time is spent in the rehearsal process on uncovering past experiences and hidden histories.

Once the basic content (data) has been produced, the next step in the workshop process is improvisation: elements of drama and narrative are applied to the material to develop the characters, conflicts, dialogue and dynamics of theatre. Scenes are built up by the participants, who together decide how to represent the researched material as authentically as possible. After improvising and creating the scenes, the structuring of the theatrical piece occurs. This entails selecting and sequencing the scenes in much the same way as a researcher will codify and rearrange data. If there is a ‘director’ figure involved, then this person will help shape the playmaking to enhance the central theme using theatrical conventions. The participant actors add in song, movement and any other theatrical devices which will make for dramatic impact. Since workshop theatre historically had to be portable and easily accessible, it does not rely on the external artistic devices of mainstream theatre. Costumes, setting and design elements are sacrificed, to be replaced by raw emotion, physicality, energy and authentic dialogue.

The HIV/AIDS workshop theatre project

A group of 11 female students formed the researchers for this project, with the drama lecturer as overall supervisor. The aim was primarily for these undergraduate students to learn about the methods of workshop theatre through an investigation based on HIV/AIDS. Initially the project set out to explore social stigma

associated with a positive HIV status. Once the students began their interviews, the focus moved away from stigma to beliefs and attitudes about HIV/AIDS and how these influence behaviour. The students were of the opinion that this would be more meaningful for them as future teachers; it also resonated with many of their own experiences and interests. In his research with undergraduate students on attitudes and awareness, Van Wyk (2006:16) notes that “relatively little attention has been devoted to testing the perceptions of the different role players, and more specifically, the youth, regarding this disease”. I was happy to accommodate the shift in topic, since it was clearly what excited the students. As Bell hooks points out (1994:7), excitement in the higher education classroom can never exist where agendas are not flexible enough to allow for spontaneous shifts in direction.

Approach and methodology

The project comprised the following steps:

- Brainstorming and refining the theme;
- Discussion of research procedures, ethical considerations, interview schedules, and so on;
- The fieldwork;
- A written account of process and findings;
- Workshopping and improvising;
- Shaping the plays;
- Rehearsals and production, and
- Focus group and evaluation.

The drama students were both the participants in the workshop theatre project and the researchers on the HIV/AIDS project. For the sake of clarity they are referred to as students throughout this article, while the university students and others whom they interviewed are referred to as participants. The students chose their own sample groups; since they were working mainly with young people, they enjoyed the idea that they were ‘interviewing peers’, and were of the opinion that they would obtain more authentic data in this manner. I had little control over this aspect and trusted in the students to make informed choices. I was reassured by researchers such as Kafewo (2008:205), who states that “no one can claim to know the sexuality issues that concern them more than the students who experience them first-hand”.

My advice to students was that they should work in pairs so as to support each other – they were, after all, novice researchers. Students were also advised to keep the numbers of the participants small to enable them to manage the material more efficiently. My idea was not to have a very large sample, but to obtain ‘thick’ data which would give insight into the participants’ attitudes and beliefs. Students were asked to think in terms of the play towards which they were working. The approach I used was to ask them to find out the participants’ ‘stories’, as we would want to tell such stories in our plays later. Kafewo (2008) also alludes to the power of theatre pedagogy in enabling people to explore and understand their reality, generate solutions to their problems and communicate their learning to others.

One pair of students chose to source participants from three university residences located in the centre of Durban. They chose off-campus residences as they believed that participant students who live off campus have ‘greater freedom’ and fewer controls over their activities, partners and lifestyles. They also believed that these residences, which are situated in an area of the city close to clubs, shopping and entertainment centres, brought participant students into closer contact with what they termed ‘greater temptations’. The three residences chosen were allied to three different institutions, namely Durban University of Technology, Mangosuthu University of Technology, and UKZN. Interviews were conducted as informal focus groups of approximately 6-8 female participants ranging in age from 19 to 25 years. It was felt that a girls-only group would be more open, especially when talking to other girls.

The second pair of students chose to interview participants from one on-campus residence at UKZN, precisely because they believed that it is cut off from the centre of town and somewhat isolated from the clubs and party circuit. This pair focused more on males, and interviewed four males and two females aged 18 and 19 years. These were individual face-to-face interviews using an interview schedule as the basis for discussion. All the participants were well known to the students who interviewed them. According to the students, this made for a more ‘comfortable’ interview situation.

The third pair chose not to focus on university students at all but rather on two young females from the township of Marrianridge in Durban. One participant was 15 years old and the second, who was known to the students, was a 19-year-old single mother. Both had dropped out of school, the older one because of her pregnancy.

The data used in this article are from these three pairs of students and their female participants.

Other students interviewed a practising nurse, a priest, and two senior community members (including a grandmother), all from Kwa Mashu Township in Durban. The remaining students chose different means of gathering data. The ideas and information gleaned from the latter data sources were incorporated into the plays through the various older characters created.

The data were analysed in terms of what could be revealed about attitudes and beliefs about sexual behaviour and HIV/AIDS. Using an applied drama lens, the data were viewed in terms of where knowledge (about HIV/AIDS) is situated and what kinds of cultural experiences are reproduced. We asked questions such as: Where is this knowledge coming from – what is it based on? Why do young women indulge in this behaviour? What does this behaviour tell us about young women’s beliefs and attitudes about HIV/AIDS? To what extent is peer pressure driving this behaviour?

Findings

Analysis of the data revealed the following attitudes and perceptions among the young female participants:

- It is not ‘cool’ if you don’t party.
- To prove that you are ‘hot’ you should have different guys to provide different things for you (your ‘Ministers’).
- If you are not having sex you are totally outdated – virginity is a ‘high school virtue’.
- ‘Friends with benefits’ (sex-based relationships) are acceptable.
- If guys can manipulate girls like that (referring to friends being cheated on), then the same thing should happen to them; ‘two can play that game’.
- You are not a prostitute, so men don’t have power over you – nobody will force you not to use protection.

The following rather fatalistic responses came from the participants from the townships:

- Everybody is going to die at the end of the day – how they die does not matter, they are going to be dead.
- It runs in a family to die from this (HIV/AIDS), just like falling pregnant at a young age.
- If you have only one partner, you will starve; you (as a woman) also need experience.
- Thinking of AIDS ‘only spoils the mood’.

Using the findings

These and other findings were then used as the basis for improvisation for the workshopped plays. This ‘factionalising’ process is akin to the deeper levels of analysis in social science research. In narrative analysis researchers combine the stories of their participants to tell one composite story. The students used both their drama skills and their knowledge of the participants to create characters that were credible

and effective on stage. Mannerisms and actual dialogue from the interviews were woven into the scenes. In keeping with the workshop style, characters were not subtle or nuanced. This does not mean that they were all one-dimensional; there were moments of realisation and shifts of consciousness, but these were portrayed in a non-realistic style.

The plays

Two plays were created, each with a different cultural context. In the first play, *Amakwapeni* (underarm, i.e. the hidden girlfriends), the protagonist, Sanele (known as Sash to his friends and girlfriends), lives with his 'straight' (serious) girlfriend Nomalanga, who has dropped out of school to have his baby. The heroine is Zama, one of Sash's other girlfriends. Zama is a confident high school student who lives something of a double life. She appeases her mother by going to church, but she likes what she calls 'life in the fast lane'. Sash is one of her many boyfriends – her 'Minister of Pleasure'. She sets the pace for the relationship – she is very provocative and often takes the lead. She insists on always using a condom and carries her own with her. Sash's other love interest is the character Rose, known as 'schoolgirl' to Sash and his friends. She is a virgin when she meets him but by the end of the play she is pregnant and abandoned by her family. He has promised to marry her but cannot be found.

The second play *Choices* is set in the township of Chatsworth. The protagonist in this instance is Nichole, a young girl who has left home since her parents died of AIDS. She pretends to be much older than her 15 years and works as a prostitute. She is offered a home by a client, Raj, and attempts to move in with him. Raj's wife will not tolerate this, so Nichole ends up with a choice to make - either go back on the streets again or return to her grandmother, go back to school and take antiretroviral medication. The choice is left open, with alternative endings provided. The play's first ending shows Nichole's funeral in tableau, where each character speaks his/her thoughts about her out loud. The second, alternative ending depicts Nichole in freeze-frame after leaving Raj's house, and the audience decides which road she takes.

Discussion

In analysing these narratives we found two distinct strands of experiences coming through the voices of the female participants. The first may be characterised as the case of the naïve young victim. These girls had been in relationships with the same partner from their early teens. In all instances, their partners had concurrent relationships with other girls. A typical case in the data was that of one 18-year-old living in an on-campus residence. She had fallen pregnant and was dumped by her boyfriend, who had also been seeing someone else. She confessed to still loving him anyway, and was very afraid of what her HIV status might be. Another story of betrayal told of a girl who was rejected when she confronted her long-standing boyfriend about his cheating. When she dropped him and tried to rebuild her life, he wanted her back. She accepted him and now pretends indifference to his 'misbehaving', which she says makes him 'more loving towards her'.

These participants displayed a strong dependency on their male partners and were willing to accept what was offered to them in the name of love. Many of the girls appeared to be resigned to a stereotypical view of male and female roles where the male is expected to have many sexual partners. In her research, Leach (2002:106) noted that "girls seemed to feel that they were always at fault, even when they became pregnant through forced sex".

The second strand - encompassing by far the majority of the participants' responses - showed a strong attitude of agency and power. These young women are clear about making choices concerning their relationships and their bodies. They maintain that girls can be 'players, too. These young women have multiple partners, and many set out to use sex and their bodies for material gain. They spoke with frankness about their 'ministers' – of finance, of transport, of food and pleasure. They were quite happy to date 'sugar daddies' who treat them well and provide them with the luxuries they want. Mention was made of cars, money, clothes and cell phones which were obtained from 'sugar daddies'. Leach (2002:106) also found that "some girls entered freely into relationships with sugar daddies or teachers, primarily they said for money". The participants from the township stated that married men were preferred. All the

women mentioned that men their own age were ‘immature’ by comparison. These women displayed great independence and were not willing to accept less than they believed they deserved.

Both plays conveyed quite clearly the shift away from the dependent, victim-type young woman. Dependent characters were portrayed with compassion and sympathetically acted, but the focus was on the heroines who were independent, feisty and sexually assertive. Characters such as Zama and, to a certain extent, Nichole were portrayed as having admirable traits – survivors who were to be emulated. Zama, with her ‘cabinet’ of ministers and her obvious enjoyment of sex, was set up as the liberated woman who knew her power over men and used it to her advantage. She spoke of her awareness of the dangers of her lifestyle and the responsibility to protect herself. At the end of the play, when Sash the protagonist is dying, his two other partners are not only abandoned but also HIV-positive, while Zama is thriving and moving on with her achievements.

This calls into question the message sent out by the students in respect of popular perceptions among the participants. The students were of the opinion that they were being responsible in showing how Zama insisted on protection and taking care of herself. Unlike the character of Nichole, she was not reckless, and unlike the schoolgirl character, she did not allow her partner to dictate to her. Unlike Nomalanga, the ‘straight’ girlfriend, she did not ignore the dangers. Her conditions for sex were unambiguous - my way or no way.

While this may have been an empowering message to send out to other young women, the morality of Zama’s general behaviour was left unchallenged by the student performers. This was commented on in audience feedback. She had as many as five sexual partners at the same time and used her body for material gain. The likelihood of Zama being able to continue her lifestyle indefinitely without repercussions was not considered. The students believed that she represented their data best as she was presented. Zama is made to say: “And I’m out there, I like things that look good, I like life in the fast lane, I just want to have fun and live for today ’cause you don’t know what may happen tomorrow!”. This character was held up as the epitome of the young woman who has power over her own destiny.

By contrast, the character of Nichole was presented more ambivalently. Her economic situation was clearly the reason for her life on the streets. Her recklessness in not using protection was attributed to a sense of fatalism about dying young. She was also shown as wanting to enjoy the material things in life – to ‘enjoy life’ while she could. She emerges as a reckless, materialistic and aggressive young woman likely to meet an unfortunate end, unless she took the advice offered to her by the other characters in the play to change her life.

Both Zama and Nichole are shown as having power and agency in their lives. Both draw on the experiences of their peers and those around them to shape their lives.

Related literature findings

Many of the above findings and their representations in the plays are consistent with the findings of other researchers. The work of Selikow, Zulu and Cedras (2002), Leach (2002) and Pattman (2002) have particular resonance with our findings in respect of young people’s behaviours and attitudes. Nata, Muula, Siziya and Kayambazinthu (2008) conducted research with university students in Malawi and reported that “we found a reasonable knowledge base about HIV among our sample, but exposure to HIV risk behaviour was common too” (Ntata *et al.*, 2008:204). Studies by Pretorius, Roos and Visser (1995), Visser, Roos and Korf (1995) and Van Wyk (2006) all indicate that students are knowledgeable about HIV transmission - but whether they actually apply this knowledge to actively protect themselves is another matter altogether. It seems that young people remain at risk because of multiple partners, and women in particular because of their involvement with older men.

Programmes that target behaviour, attitudes and perceptions rather than information are now required. The large-scale study undertaken by Harvey, Stuart and Swan (2000) on the evaluation of a drama in education programme to increase AIDS awareness confirmed that school students showed positive changes in attitude following the programme, particularly relating to preventative behaviour. They also found that

students exposed simply to HIV/AIDS educational literature showed some improvement in knowledge, but not in attitude (Harvey *et al.*, 2000:108).

All of this confirms that the plethora of information available at school and university level does not necessarily affect young people's behaviour. Their behaviour is driven by what they perceive to be applicable to themselves. Context, culture (youth subcultures) and circumstances are the drivers. "Pressure to conform influences sexual practice and in so doing may serve to increase young people's exposure to the risk of HIV infection" (Leach, 2002:107). The unfairness of gender expectations especially prompts young women to undertake risky sexual behaviour. In his school-based study in Nigeria, Kafewo (2008:203) notes that students are sent mixed and confusing messages: "society expects girls to remain virgins and maintain their chastity until marriage but never asks the same of boys and men". This has led to the 'two can play that game' attitude noted in our findings. Ojedokun and Balogun (2008) reported that the traditional male-female difference in early sexual experience has disappeared, and that females were at least as likely as males to engage in premarital sex.

Conclusion

Since this was a dual-purpose study with a number of subsidiary intentions, a number of conclusions arose.

Regarding the topic of HIV/AIDS, it appears that young females are out to disrupt and challenge the traditional images of themselves as oppressed and male-dominated victims. The new image of the independent and sexually savvy woman, however, also endorses the commodified body and transactional sex. Reflecting on this paradox, one is made aware of the risks facing young women as they struggle to find appropriate and safe expressions of their sexuality. This is what now has to be interrogated in awareness programmes. Will the liberated young woman outdo perceived male freedom in sexual permissiveness? What is the male perspective of such women? These questions, I believe, will make for challenging and authentic education in AIDS awareness with young people.

In respect of the approach used, I have to question whether the same findings would have been found should I have chosen to use some other research method. The findings were by no means new or unknown, as researchers such as Selikow, Zulu and Cedras (2002) and Pattman (2002) show – it is thus likely that I would have arrived at similar findings. However, if the question were rephrased to ask whether the applied drama/workshop theatre approach achieved something unique, then I have to respond with a resounding yes. Applied drama not only brought home to me the world that the students with whom I work inhabit, but also literally put that world on stage for all to see and begin to question. The audiences of university students could recognise and identify themselves and their world reproduced in the lives of the characters.

The benefits to the students in the project were inestimable – there was no doubt that their voices came through; their experiences and opinions about the data as well as about its representation were paramount. Nicholson (2005:151) mentions that "one of the social purposes of drama is to practice human rights by both embodying the position of an imagined other and re-affirming an assured sense of selfhood". In follow-up activities (conducting Theatre in Education discussions for Grade 12 learners on this topic, for example), the confidence and assurance of the students was unquestionable.

More importantly, students came to realise that the perceptions and attitudes that they uncovered were those which they would soon encounter in their own students. They also perceived through their interactions with the participants that the conventional methods of dealing with the issue of HIV/AIDS were not likely to make much headway. This project equipped them with skills and techniques to provide guidance and support that would be relevant and culture-fair.

In their responses to questions on the project, the students wrote the following: "We went out there and got all sides of the story from people who are really affected by HIV/AIDS and how life goes on for them and their perception on HIV/AIDS."; "The experience gained from information gathering shocked me because I never really knew how youngsters felt."; "... young people are really not afraid of it, exploring this topic made me change my attitude towards HIV/AIDS and unprotected sex. I have learned a lot I even learned new things that young people do."; "Collecting information for the play, it was really nice because you get to hear from people their different views." It provided a method for political action

and a critique of punitive and moralising approaches to the topic by showing a more relevant and less judgmental approach.

My own role in providing an emancipatory environment for students was allowed to develop because of the approach used in the project. I return to bell hooks (1994:11), who provides one of my guiding pedagogic principles: “to teach in varied communities not only our paradigms must shift but also the way we think, write and speak”. Neither I nor the students in this project will think, write or speak about HIV/AIDS in the same way ever again.

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