

SERVICE LEARNING AND ART ACTION FOR CHANGE

DRAMA INTERVENTIONS

Drama for Life students in HaMakuya: April/May 2013



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Dr Lara Allen commented that, "Drama has made a "remarkable impact" with regard to information dissemination in HaMakuya" (Kaziboni, 2013:2).

1. Introduction

This account of the interventions facilitated by Drama for Life students in Ha-Makuya, Limpopo, refers to the above quote and the report prepared for the University of Johannesburg by Anthony Kaziboni. Kaziboni is a Masters candidate completing his studies in Sociology. He has prepared various reports to assess the impact of the interventions over the past two years. This report expands the application of Applied Drama methods and techniques with the people of HaMakuya in Limpopo.

This report focuses on the applied drama work that has been happening in the villages of HaMakuya, facilitated and coordinated by Drama for Life students with the supervision and assistance by the DFL Office. The report seeks to put into focus three interventions that contextualises our engagement with the community of HaMakuya. They are as follows;

- 1) Applied Drama and Theatre workshops (in schools and with the Home Based Care workers);
- 2) Theatre for Social Change presentations (at schools and with the HBCs); and
- 3) Homestays as moments of Researching, Learning, Cultural exchange and Self Discovery

2. The Drama for Life Team



Wendy Zvakavapano
Masilwa



Mammatlh Thakhuli
Nzuz



Courage MaMoyo
Chinokwet



Peter Molefe



Sibongile Bhebhe

3. Tshulu Camp

The team was provided accommodation by Tshulu Trust at the organisations subsidiary, Tshulu Camp. Staying at the Camp was a special experience; we slept in a tent and every morning we were greeted by the beautiful Mutale River as well as the relentless spirit of the Camps employees who endeavoured to make sure that we were at home. The Camp hosts academics and researchers from all over the world who engage with the inhabitants of Ha-Makuya and volunteer in projects at the villages in Ha-Makuya.

4. Drama for Life and the University of Johannesburg at HaMakuya- Limpopo

4.1. Introduction

The relationship between Drama for Life (DFL) and UJ (University of Johannesburg) is preceded by the national poetry competitions which are staged at the campus in Bunting Road in 2011. The partnership continues to expand through the community based interventions in HaMakuya over the past two years that contribute to engagement for the betterment of South Africa's communities.

In May 2012 Sibongile Bhebhe and I, Butana Molefe, then masters candidates at the University of the Witwatersrand (DFL), were invited by Professor Kim Berman from the University of Johannesburg in the Faculty of Arts, Design and Architecture (FADA) to collaborate with UJ students, in planning and facilitating workshops using arts to create dialogue and conscientise learners about Bilharzia and Tuberculosis (TB). This was carried out in seven different primary schools in the villages of HaMakuya.

4.2. The Interventions in HaMakuya

4.2.1. 1st Visit: 13th to 20th of May, 2012.

As we entered the homesteads of Hamakuya I repeatedly saw images of children caring for other children and at times having a bucket filled with water on their heads. This reminded me of what one of the pioneers of drama in education or process drama, Peter Slade, who says that 'It is important for children to feel acknowledged by being given the platform to participate' (1965; 11). I began to wonder about the children's motivation and will to participate in community projects and if opportunities for participation actually did exist. The people in the villages were amazing, for they seemed to be willing to engage with the work that we were doing with them; from making Paper Prayers with the visual artists, to playing games and using Applied Theater to dialogue on TB or bilharzia. It was interesting to see how everyone seemed to be yearning for opportunities such as the one we created, in which we all could play, learn and have fun.

As we moved from one school to another, everyone in the team was amazed at how easy the children learned the games and songs we taught them even though we had challenges with communication since we had to have translators work as mediators between the facilitators and the children. The power of embodied work allowed for a deeper dialogue that saw Sibongile

and I attempting to eliminate the distance between us, the translator and the children. When we started to use images in the applied drama process, the children had challenges, yet they were intrigued by such forms of work, where there were no correct or incorrect answers to the questions. We worked with different groups of approximately 60 to 70 children in grades 5, 6 or 7s for a period of two to three hours daily for about three days. Sibongile and I together with the groups would at times prepare something to show the school as a form of theatre presentation to the entire school. Our intervention ended with a session with the employees of Tshulu Trust, co-facilitated with Prof Kim Berman (UJ) to conduct an appreciative enquiry process with the team. Towards the end of three days of the intervention, we divided into four groups with the visual art students and went to the home stays.

During this period, we had a hard-working and determined group of Home –based-carers (HBC's) that serve the community of HaMakuya assisting us with the proper information on the effects of TB, malaria and bilharzia and simultaneously they learnt some of the techniques we used to engage with groups of adolescent learners. They requested to facilitate a part of the last day of our school visits and were intrigued by the experience. Sibongile and I agreed to attempt a return trip to the HBC ladies since they were beginning to ask questions about facilitating discussions and how they can use drama and theatre as we were doing. They clearly were excited by using the arts in Applied Theatre and Theatre for Social Change and saw its need in the work that they do in HaMakuya.

4.2.2. The 2nd Visit 3-7 Sept 2012

After many attempts that almost failed to get me to Ha-Makuya, I travelled there by bus on Monday the 3rd of September 2012. I got to Sibasa a town close to Ha-Makuya and the final destination for the bus. The journey started at 9h00am and I was collected at 18h30 by Oisín – the project coordinator at Tshulu Trust, and Fhatuwani, who was born in HaMakuya and an important role player in the running of the Trust. Anthony Kaziboni, the Sociology masters candidate at UJ was also there. I had no clear devised plan going into this community this time, but I had the drive to extend the work that we had started and to teach the female HBCs a deeper understanding of applied theatre techniques and facilitation. It was important to find ways to talk about the different forms of questioning and questions and how to elicit responses from participants without them feeling exposed or embarrassed to participate in dialogue. When I arrived at the camp everyone was having supper and I was introduced to Dr Susan Harrop-Allin and Lieza Louw, who are both lecturers at Wits School of the Arts, and their undergraduate students. Khaya Mchunu a fashion design master's candidate at UJ was also there with Oisín and Anthony. We all sat together for breakfast and supper. We traveled daily to the Tshulu Resource centre with Oisín, Anthony and Khaya who would be left at the Tribal office. We were a group of young people from Johannesburg, and Oisín from Ireland, volunteering and doing such meaningful work in distant lands, which I found intriguing.

After spending another week with the HBCs, I was convinced that it would be a great idea if they could work with an organized youth theatre or drama group. This might see DFL visit Hamakuya to empower diverse groups for different objectives. The HBCs would be trained to facilitate and at times perform, however their primary responsibility would be to empower a group of young performers that still have the zeal and strength to run rehearsals and do performances. With the knowledge of the various disease, treatment of diseases and all that they already know about theatre and drama in health institutions, schools and imbizos¹. This increased capacity development would enable skills transfer and allow the community to

¹ *The village chief's gathering*

participate in a team process and collaboration across age groups. The objective is to help empower the young people and when the UJ team or volunteers such as myself return to HaMakuya, we would be able to work with other groups that serve the community in different and diverse and yet productive ways. We required more time and opportunity to focus our enhancement sessions on training the HBC ladies as facilitators so they can also work with the youth as performers learning about theatre, drama and facilitation, and life skills.



Participants making images as groups, this one showing the challenges the ladies face while working in the village.

The more time I spent with the HBCs the more it became clear that we were always working to fulfill a number of outcomes. One key objective was to share games and techniques that the participants could use during their different interventions that met with their request. The second was to model how they could apply the creation of community issues based on drama processes that could be performed at different places. We then focused on selected activities that could lead us to have a product that was useful to the group.

Some of the processes included techniques borrowed from *Drama in Education*. These include storytelling and role play in a circle, where participants sit in a circle and one starts a story that would see everyone add their own bit about a character or scenario; and another was applying storytelling and images to create scenes. We also applied methods borrowed from *Theatre for Development* such as 'role on a wall'. This requires participants to draw a figure on a chart that was placed on the wall and they decide who the character would be. Deciding on the character's name, age, occupation and other details, all contribute to creating a fictional being.

These techniques demonstrated ways in which performance, theatre or dramatic techniques can be used to enquire about people, places and situations; and begin a new process of making other meaning which can be translated into a performance. We showed our drama to the staff members and some community members at the resource center. Khaya and Oisin

were some of the people that witnessed this performance one of the responses confirmed the effectiveness: 'Even though you can't understand their language, it is easy to see what they meant from their actions- they had motive' (Mchunu, 2012).

Khaya said after the show: "I am still amazed at applied drama and theatre's ability to create a platform for autonomous participation". This reminds me of Augusto Boal quoting Lope de Vega who says that 'theatre is two human beings; a passion and a platform. Theatre is the passionate combat of two human beings on a platform' (1995: 16). The HBC ladies had been offered a platform to show their passion for the community they reside in. My hope was for them is to get a much more prestigious opportunity to show case their talents so as to gain more positive feedback and esteem about their work, since at times it was challenging to motivate them to stay and rehearse their performances. I hoped that this experience would inspire them to continue to step out of their comfort zones and extend the ways that they educate, empower, counsel and in turn inspire their community.



Participants performing the play titled 'Sam's Ways'

I also saw value for the female HBCs engaging with all the volunteers from multiple disciplines including psychology or healthcare that visit Tshulu. Engaging with others from diverse fields provides an opportunity to create an expanded network of skilled HBC's all over HaMakuya; with these ladies in action; we can see an education of a nation in process. As it is said in isiNguni that "*wa thinta bafazi wathinti mbokodo*" meaning *you strike a woman you strike a rock*.

The reason I went back to HaMakuya as a volunteer the second time was to be responsive to the request from the people I engaged with during my first visit. I found the primary schools and the HBC's participation and willingness to share and learn inspiring and remarkable. In our first visit in 2012 we managed to work with school learners and I found that our recent visit in May this year (2013), the learners remembered us and still greeted me with songs we had shared with them in the previous year.

I left with strong feelings about maintaining and possibly growing relations between DFL and UJ. I hoped for more than two students from Wits, Drama for Life could visit HaMakuya and witness the experience of this community. Both the community and university graduates and students who have an interest in community engagement and development work, stands to gain from the exchange. We are able to learn lessons that might take universities years and years to teach. Lessons about humanity, learning and teaching and how one negotiates ways to reach culture-rich environments such as that we encountered in Limpopo. I see many areas of growth from such engagements in that, it will not only give communities access to human capital, it will also assist artists and scholars from different disciplines an opportunity to witness and collaborate with people from other disciplines. I hoped to return to HaMakuya with facilitation being the main focus of discussion and training with the health care givers. This is one of the primary skills that they identified as a need, and will help to extend their capacities. I hoped to return with additional applied drama facilitators to link into the arts based research activities. This is in fact what happened in the 3rd UJ intervention in May 2013.

5. Drama as a Tool for Conscientising People

5.1. Introduction

What I have come to appreciate about community development work is that, as teaching artists we must learn to work with what is presented for the betterment of the recipients of our work. This applies to creating a theatre work for Social Change or just facilitating a thematic process. A theatre practitioner should learn to be proactive and use the current status to be relevant to their own and their participant's advantage. The objective for the involvement of three additional DFL students to form part of the team going to HaMakuya in May 2013 was to use the opportunity to observe and support their evaluation that was incorporated into their Masters course work. For Sibongile and I, it was an added bonus to have other community activists join in us in using drama and theatre to 'conscientise' the people of HaMakuya. We were also able to observe the 3 masters candidates: Mammatti, Courage and Wendy; so that their participation could be linked to credits for their training requirements in education, activism, therapy and research. A term Paulo Freire explains as the process by which students, as empowered subjects, achieve a deepening awareness of the social realities that shape their lives and discover their own capacities to re-create them (Darder, A. et al; 2003). In our case we were able to arrive at this point through the power of drama and theatre methods and techniques.

The drama team divided itself into two. There was a group responsible for school visits and another responsible for the Home Based Care workers (HBC's) facilitation workshops. For me it was empowering to see that recommendations that were made since last we were at HaMakuya were considered. In particular the recommendation to prepare a group of young people to work with the HBC's, so that they can focus on in improving their ability to facilitate others since performing dramas for the villagers requires hours and days of preparation, something that they believed they had little to spare. Sibongile worked with Mammatti training the HBSC's, whilst Courage, Wendy and I worked with schools using games, images and scenarios to create dialogue with learners on the impact and effects of Teenage pregnancy and Rape.

5.2. The Drama Workshops (Schools Drive)

In his account about the interventions at HaMakuya Kaziboni mentions that,

'dramas were done at different places which were Makuya Secondary School, Karel Ngigideni Primary School and at the Makuya Thusong Service Center. The murals were painted at Makuya Secondary School and the Makuya Thusong Service Center, whilst the paper prayer workshops were done at Maholoni Primary School and Karel Ngigideni Primary School (Kaziboni, 2013: 1).

He goes on to describe the methods and processes at each venue. In the schools where Paper Prayers were being work-shopped, there were also drama processes. One of our objectives was to profile drama as a teaching tool, in order to attract learners Centre. It is these workshops and those that we prepared for the HBCs that this brief account will be based upon.

In her essay, Wendy mentions amongst other things the difficulties of communication through an interpreter, something I too had to acclimatise to during my first visit there. She shares of how the message could be distorted and how unsure one felt as another has to pass a message that could be easier if passed through directly. This led her to reflect on a game that we played called *Elves, Giants and Wizards*. Though the metaphoric lessons the game afforded us we were able to create a dialogue about silencing and keeping silent about moments of disempowerment and oppression. Even though as Wendy also observed not too many of the participants in that session were forth coming in their participation, however for those that did, we were able to use the game to talk about a difficult topic in a playful way. One of Wendy's many lessons was to trust the process, something that can be challenging if you do not have the power to use the local language. However drama and theatre methods allowed us the space to dialogue using the language of the techniques and methods. As do the games that are framed within the interventions we have where we apply these methods. Drama is a tool, so are the games we call icebreakers that we play with our participants. Facilitators use games to create dialogue or to get participants relaxed for dialogue in spaces that they feel more comfortable in.

5.3. Drama Workshops with Home Base Care Workers

The HBCs can be regarded as subject matter experts in issues of Teenage Pregnancy and Stop Rape awareness; so Mammatli framed her workshops with the eight participants using process drama methods and techniques drawing on their expertise. Quoting Cecile O'Neil (1995) process drama seeks to establish an imaginary world for its participants. A dramatic 'elsewhere' is created by the participants as they discover, articulate and sustain fictional roles and situations. Mammatli and Sibongile also had to train the HBCs on basic facilitation skills using drama; this was a focus of the training due to a commitment made in our previous visit to HaMakuya. They were prepared on the art of asking various types of questions that seek to create productive discussions.

The two drama teams met at the end of each day to reflect and give feedback about the day to the entire team. It was clearly evident that Mammatli and Sibongile were making significant progress with the HBCs due to the consistent daily environment at the Resource Centre and the added advantage of having just eight participants. Their process was contained, well held and gave room for participants to ask questions and get answers where

possible. Mammatti as well as Wendy were frustrated about how time was never enough to complete all the work they had planned. I believe that the work that we begun in HaMakuya will live to cause an enormous impact, as supported by the comment by Dr Lara Allen, as we managed to disseminate information that contentises the villagers of HaMakuya in ways beyond previous interventions. Although we did not have enough time to cover all that we would have desired, we contributed to a process that was only two years old and already effecting social transformation. This was evident at the public event on the Thursday of our intervention where the leadership of the Vhembe district including the mayor and chief of HaMakuya who witnessed the drama processes.



Drama is about negotiation (facilitators and the HBC workers)

6. Theatre for Social Change Performances for the Chief, Mayor and Villagers of HaMakuya

Theatre for Social Change (TFS) is a method derived from Theatre for Development (TFD). For according to Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere, people are not developed but they develop themselves-1977. It thus makes sense for applied drama practitioners and scholars in Africa, to see the need of framing TFD processes as TFS. In this form of applied work the objective is from comes from a central transformative principle: to raise awareness on a particular issue (such as Stop Rape and Teenage Pregnancy), to teach a particular concept (prevention, management, literacy), to interrogate human actions (hate crimes, race relations, sexual behaviour), to prevent life threatening behaviours (domestic violence, youth suicide, sexual violence, unwanted pregnancies), to heal fractured identities (sexual abuse, body image), and to change states of oppression (personal victimization).

Our objectives for the week included a school drive that was geared at attracting learners to form part of a performance that was started by the HBCs in 2012. In one primary school and high school the HBCs and some learners had an opportunity to showcase their TFS performance which saw learners dialogue openly about sex and violence in front of their elders. Courage noted that when learners had an elderly person in the room, a teacher or

a board member of Tshulu Trust who is not categorised as a drama facilitator, they would withdraw and not want to speak about such topics. We prepared a performance that was coined 'Sam's Ways' of which I explained in the introductory section of the work book. The narrative is one that has been reflected upon extensively by the drama scholars in their essays.

Sam's Ways was performed in the two schools as previously mentioned and also at the public event at the *Makuya Thusong Service Center*. Attending were the chief of HaMakuya, the



Sam's Ways Performed at a School

honorable vho Makuya and the acting executive mayor of Vhembe district municipality, Clr Lucas Manyuha who were guests of honour in a gathering focussing on teen pregnancy and sexual violence convened by an International organisation. This event was organised for members of the public and the extended public work workers. Wendy, in her reflective essay, quoting Augusto Boal, mentions that for some of the performers in the drama, theatre became a passion and a platform. Sibongile had the opportunity to introduce the play and managed to get the dignitaries on stage to join in the ice breaker; in this way the performers of *Sam's Ways* experienced this passion and platform. They volunteered themselves to be educators of the community about an experience of sexual abuse happening in a family and also showed the effects of negative parental attitudes towards a child. The learners, HBCs and young people from the community that chose to be part of the performance, enjoyed the honour of performing in front of their leaders and father figures; a moment most of them will cherish in the future. This was a moment we could not anticipate and for which I felt grateful for and proud of the team.

Dr Allen and others have commented that the DFL student's presence at HaMakuya is one that extended the ability for the information to reach places and people that it has not been able to in the past (Kaziboni, 2013). It is clear that with the proper use of drama and theatre techniques, communities and organisations are able to bridge gaps that might otherwise exist to empower scores of people. Challenges that remain are those of resources and language, but can be overcome through intensifying our engagements with the villagers of HaMakuya. The benefit of the drama interventions may be primarily experienced by the children of HaMakuya, and I would like to believe that they are the next generation who can replace our role that seeks to overcome challenges of teenage pregnancy and sexual abuse today.

There is a need to support the drama youth group that was started by the school drives and to continue the empowerment of the HBCs. With these two groups of individuals, more performances such as the one's we had this year, we hope will continue even in our absence. I yearn for the community to be able to take charge of its own process of development; and until that happens we will continue to plan for a bigger interventions in 2014.

7. Homestays: Experiences in Researching, Learning, Cultural Exchange and Self Discovery

6.1. Introduction

As in their biographies at the start of this report, the three students profiled are completing their Masters qualifications in Dramatic Art Wits University. They are specialising in Applied Theatre, Arts Education and Drama Therapy methods and techniques and were selected to form part of the team that was to return and apply these methods and techniques for the betterment of the villages in HaMakuya. This report details two of the students' experiences in the home-stays as part of what comprise annual interventions in these homesteads of Limpopo. In this report the three students Wendy, Mammatti and Courage describe some of the lessons learned during the home-stay process in their reflective essays.

6.2. Research, Learning, Cultural Exchange and Self Discovery



Butana with Mammatti and Courage leaving for their Home Stays

The drama students had an opportunity to participate in two nights and three days hosted by different families in the villages of HaMakuya. They stayed with the family and participated in various activities, such as cultural exchanges through songs, games, community profiling, photo voice to mention but a few. (This is expanded in the Photovoice workbook). The families hosting the DFL and UJ students are carefully selected by the management of Tshulu Trust.

Whilst in the evening just prior to all the students depart for their homestays, Kim and Lara shared the groupings for the stays, and none of the three drama scholars were in the same group. Something I thought important to divide skills; and often it is those uncomfortable and challenging moments that are well supervised that we emerge stronger from that which was deemed as challenging.

Courage Zvikomborero Chinokwetu, one of the drama students, said that after they had dinner at her home-stay, the scholars and the hosts together with the children of the house and at times neighbours to the host, would take turns sharing folk tales. While for others such as Wendy Zvakavapano Masilwa, they would play games and songs as forms of sharing and learning about each other. Wendy and Courage are both from Zimbabwe, and Courage who shared that the way of living in her hostess's house, reminded her of her own culture as a girl growing up in Zimbabwe. The drama students were astonished by the resilience their different hostess showed as they managed their homes whilst hosting them at the same time. Mammatlhi Thakhuli Nzuza who shares about a moment when her hostess/ house mother were in the kitchen;

'It was while I was helping her cut the spinach that she shared the story of her mother's passing 7 years prior to our visit and how that affected her life.....I am amazed at how well she has acclimatized and survived the situation. My stay at Khuliswa's home has left me questioning what I sometimes consider to be difficult situations in life, her strength and commitment to the daily levity and survival of her family on minimum resources forces one to appreciate and strive through daily challenges' (reflexive essay).

We can appreciate the profound impact processes such as home-stays can have on university students who come from different social backgrounds. How paradigms such as Mammatlhi's one about survival and lack can be shifted in a period of three days. Not only do processes such as these home-stays play an important role in preparing a student for some of South Africa or Africa's social realities; but in addition, the home-stays at HaMakuya have come to be a platform cultural exchange and life skills empowerment from the hostess to students.

Home-stays can also be perceived as nurturing platforms for research and learning. This is experienced by both the family and the students staying at with the family. Despite the teaching of game and song as already mentioned; Courage further noted that: 'HaMakuya is a conservative and patriarchal community' (reflexive essay; 3). She continues to note what Stacey et al (1993) said, that patriarchy is a structure of a set of social relations with material base which enables men to dominate women. Courage shares that she noticed that men are the dominant figures in society and women usually take up submissive roles. She continues that she recognized various gender patterns existent within the Venda culture and norms which are similar her culture as a Shona. Courage notes numerous behaviours that for her as a self-acclaimed *liberal feminist*, she considers being 'quite extreme'. In her essay she draws scenarios of moments that show women being put in the extreme end of patriarchal oppression. I found this rather intriguing and was amazed that in this instance the home-stay experience has afforded an African woman to look into the mirror about moment's cultural prejudice and allow those lessons to question and challenge her own views about her own culture. Not only was Courage, courageous enough to research and learn about others, she has done the same about herself and her cultural practices practiced predominantly at her home in Zimbabwe. In her brief reflection about her home-stay experience, one can say that she found or created a platform and an opportunity to transcend the boundaries of scholarship and African cultural practices by being able to look in the mirror and challenge herself and what is seen as 'the other'.

6.3. Conclusion

My home-stay experience was in 2012, and I remember key lessons I learned from the family that hosted us as well as from the village itself. These were about 'botho/ubuntu' working together, that words such as TEAM stood for Together Each Achieves More. In HaMakuya the team of drama scholars from DFL did not only learn about the village and the families they were staying with, they also learned greatly about their team members from UJ. About sharing and respecting boundaries since every team was allocated a mud house to sleep in. As diverse in race, culture and beliefs as one can see on the pictures all of the artist/students that have come to visit HaMakuya annually. Home Stays have come to be an important part of the entire intervention, where individuals discover knowledge about the self and one's culture as in Courage's experience. Teams investigate moments of supporting one another emotionally, academically and psychologically, since for many it may be their first time experiencing a family that lives and survives in such extreme circumstances. A community of scholars and villagers are able to share a better understanding of each other's cultures, beliefs and social norms.

The home-stay experience has provided all of the above and more for the drama scholars. It was a platform for learning, research, cultural exchange and self-discovery. All of the scholars spoke of their cultural shocks, discomforts and moments of appreciation and learning from HaMakuya and its villagers. This is something that I find stands to epitomise one's experience as a scholar, since our experience in HaMakuya has become a valuable opportunity of learning both for its people and those that come to visit, as is evident by the experiences of the Drama for Life scholars.



The UJ team at Tshuly Trust, HaMakuya, Limpopo 2013

For more information about the UJ, visit www.uj.ac.za or call 011 559 4555



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