

Using theatre to explore critical understandings
of gender oppression with
South African youth.

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Guiding concepts.

- Peer education.
- Gender and social identities.
- Participatory action research.
- Critical consciousness
“conscientização” (Friere, 1973).
- Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 1973).

Theatre of the Oppressed.

- A 'rehearsal for revolution' (Boal, 1979)
- T00 includes different techniques and special improvisations that turn "the practice of theatre into an effective tool for the comprehension of social and personal problems and the search for their solutions." (Boal, 1995).

Methods.

- 11 peer educators, 18-35, isiXhosa speaking, socially and economically disadvantaged.
- Male, female, and non-conforming gender identities. Diverse sexuality.
- T00 workshops. 'Image Theatre' and 'Forum Theatre'.
- Narrative interviews.

Image Theatre



Forum Theatre.



Forum Theatre.



Findings

- Performing and analyzing oppression.
- The spaces in-between: Dialogue and inter-subjectivity.
- Breaking down power relations, building participation.
- Critical reflection and new learning, leading to....
- ...Motivation to educate others.

Critical reflection, transformative experience.

- *“I learnt that incenezelo (oppression) is not good anymore, to any human being, because I’ve learnt a lot about how to do incenezelo to a human being. So I realized it might be that the things I have committed before, you see, that was an incenezelo to my friends, and to my family members. So, I started recognizing, ‘oh I’ve learnt a lot about this now.’ The things I have learnt about incenezleo, you never know that I’ve committed it, you just keep committing it.” (Male, peer educator).*

Emotional identification and critical realisation.

- *“I find that somewhere somehow it is inadequate to speak with words, maybe we must try to get them to act. I have noted that the first day I became emotional because there was this thing that was happening here - I did not know that this thing was happening to me - but when I was acting I realized that this thing happened to me one time. When someone is telling you, you don't understand it. You see it as something far away. But when your mind and your body is doing this, it is when you realize there are issues. This thing we can take it sometime and acting it somewhere.” (Female, peer educator).*

Conclusion and implications.

- Theatre of the oppressed is a powerful method for exploring young people's knowledge-creation around gender identities.
- Implications for peer education and other gender transformative youth programmes that seek to build agentic, gender equitable and non-violent social identities.