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What kind of respect is this?

Shifting the mindset of teachers regarding cultural perspectives on HIV & AIDS

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ABSTRACT

In this article I attempt to answer the question, 'How can I influence teachers to be able to contribute to changing social/cultural norms and practices that hamper effective HIV & AIDS education and prevention?' There is a growing realization that HIV & AIDS education and prevention initiatives need to move away from trying to change the sexual behaviour of individuals towards addressing societal and cultural factors which promote rapid transmission of the virus. However, societal and cultural change has to start with helping individuals to imagine alternative ways of thinking and being. Teachers occupy a powerful position when it comes to changing mindsets and challenging norms, but they themselves have been shaped and influenced by their culture and may not, therefore, 'see' the need to question prevailing norms, and/or may be so constrained by these social and cultural forces that they are unable to do so. Following a values-based action research approach, I describe how I adopted emancipatory pedagogies in an attempt to influence teachers to develop their own theories of practice with regard to HIV & AIDS prevention and education in their specific cultures. As validation of my claims to having contributed to the development of educational theories about HIV & AIDS prevention and education, I invite the reader to evaluate my narrative against specific criteria. I also present my educational value of respect as a living standard of judgement.

KEY WORDS

- Emancipatory pedagogy
- HIV & AIDS education
- Living theory
- Values-based action research

Introduction

My aims in this values-based self-reflection of my practice (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006) are twofold: To increase my own understanding of the complex issues surrounding HIV and the social and cultural factors in Africa that fuel its transmission so that I can adapt my teaching to reflect this new understanding; and to influence the teachers in my programme to develop their own theories of practice with regard to HIV & AIDS prevention and education in their specific cultures. This will necessitate that they first interrogate their own understandings of their cultural and social reality, addressing possible contradictions between their knowledge and behaviour. For this reason, I was concerned that my approach to teaching had to be of an emancipatory nature, challenging the status quo and raising the awareness of the possibility of change.

By striving to deepen my own understanding of their cultural and social influences, I will be in a better position to facilitate teachers to become more aware of their own understandings and subsequent behaviour. Both the teachers and I will be then better placed to identify and question the hegemonic conditions which hamper their ability to become effective HIV & AIDS activists. Ultimately, if teachers are aware of their own social and cultural identities and have a deep understanding of the cultural and social issues surrounding HIV & AIDS education and prevention, then it will be more likely that my teaching will have addressed the core cultural and social issues. I therefore formulated the following question: 'How can I influence teachers to be able to contribute to changing social/cultural norms and practices that hamper effective HIV & AIDS education and prevention?' In answering this question, I will address three interrelated concerns, namely the need to facilitate teachers to counteract hegemony and begin to question cultural and social norms that provide such a fertile breeding ground for the HI virus, particularly their own beliefs and behaviour; the need to move from a traditional 'banking' pedagogy towards critical engagement and emancipatory practice; and the need to create the possibility for action to challenge systems by introducing innovative and progressive ideas for HIV & AIDS education and persisting with their implementation.

Following a systematic process of self-enquiry into my own practice (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006; Sullivan, 2006), I describe how I adapted my own teaching to address my educational concerns and show how I influenced the education of the teachers on the programme. I will justify my claims of having contributed to the development of emancipatory pedagogies for HIV & AIDS education and prevention by providing evidence from the teachers' own narratives, as well as holding up my professed educational value of respect as a living standard of judgement (Whitehead, 1989). The question I ask you to keep in mind as you read this account is: did I live out my value of respect in my interactions with the teachers? My hope is that this narrative will contribute to the development

of more emancipatory pedagogies to address the real issues which fuel the fire of HIV & AIDS in Africa.

Background

From a bio-medical paradigm, HIV & AIDS education is a relatively simple concept – adopt Universal Precautions, abstain from sex or use a condom and you will not (usually) be at risk to contract the virus. However, this does not take into consideration the myriad factors in South Africa which collectively create a highly effective breeding ground for HIV. In the words of the eminent bacteriologist Louis Pasteur (my translation from the original French), 'the microbe is nothing, the terrain is everything'. Social, cultural and economic conditions in South Africa provide the ideal terrain for the transmission of HIV and its rapid development into full-blown AIDS. The immediate aetiology of HIV & AIDS may be viral in nature, but the intertwined social, psychological, economic, cultural, spiritual and health factors weave a very complex web that is extremely difficult to untangle.

Widespread poverty, high rates of violence against women, gender inequalities which disadvantage women and preclude them from negotiating their sexuality within relationships, cultural views about illness and prevailing beliefs about witchcraft – all these factors have to be considered when educating about HIV & AIDS with a view to influencing behaviour (Walker, Reid, & Cornell, 2004). What is obvious, moreover, is that preaching abstinence or safe sex, while being a necessary component of HIV & AIDS education, is definitely not sufficient (Badcock-Walters, Kelly, & Görgens, 2004; Boler & Aggleton, 2005).

There is therefore a growing realization that HIV & AIDS education and prevention initiatives need to move away from trying to change the sexual behaviour of individuals, towards addressing societal and cultural factors which promote rapid transmission of the virus (Parker, 2004). Education has to address issues such as human rights, women's rights and gender issues, cultural beliefs, social sustainability, legal issues and the general health and wellbeing of people, since these are the factors that influence human behaviour. In addition, there is a need to move from a pathogenic approach, where the focus is on what people are doing 'wrong' towards a more salutogenic approach, building on the strengths of a society (Potsma, 2004). Societal and cultural change however has to start with helping individuals to imagine alternative ways of thinking and being. Teachers occupy a powerful position when it comes to changing mindsets and challenging norms, but they themselves have been shaped and influenced by their culture and may not, therefore, 'see' the need to question, and/or may be so constrained by these social and cultural forces that they are not able to do so. In order to make HIV & AIDS education more relevant and effective, it is crucial that educators

are helped to interrogate their teaching practices to ensure that they address the above-mentioned issues.

Context of research and areas of concern

I am heavily involved in the design and presentation of a 2-year postgraduate qualification for teachers, the Advanced Certificate in Education: HIV & AIDS in Teaching (ACE HAT). From the beginning, I aimed to make the programme as practical as possible in order to encourage the teachers to actually go back into their schools and other spheres of influence and initiate positive change. My aim was to facilitate the teachers on the course to become HIV & AIDS activists. However, in my interactions with the teachers it became apparent that extrinsic and intrinsic factors were hampering the attainment of this goal. I identified three main areas of concern.

The first realization that engendered concern was the fact that these teachers are products of their culture and upbringing. Their ideas, beliefs and behaviours have been shaped by cultural influences that may contribute to the spread of HIV and I suspected that it would be very difficult for them to 'change their eyes' (Polanyi, 1958, p. 137) and challenge these cultural practices. It is necessary for teachers to begin to question hitherto accepted aspects of their culture, if they are in turn to engender critical thinking among their learners. It would be hypocritical and unconvincing if teachers were to preach one philosophy and practise another. Teachers are in a position to influence not only the learners, but also their colleagues and the broader community and if real societal changes are to be made, such powerful individuals need to change first.

Second, and closely linked to the above concern, the teachers have been educated in and work in a climate of nonenquiry. Until recently, with the introduction of the Outcomes Based Education curricula in South African schools, traditional pedagogical approaches were the norm, based on the 'banking' system (Freire, 2002) of education – the teacher deposits information into the learners, who then accept it and repeat it without questioning. In terms of HIV education, from a traditional educational perspective, transmission of knowledge is regarded as sufficient to enable positive behavioural change. It is based on a behaviourist premise which assumes that if you impart information on how the virus is transmitted and how to avoid it, people will then adopt safer sexual practices. The teacher or lecturer is regarded as the expert, directing others on how to change. I was aware that the teachers tended to regard me as the expert, and eagerly awaited me to dispense solutions for HIV & AIDS education and prevention. In formerly disadvantaged schools in particular questions and challenges to the teacher were and still are viewed as impertinence and are not encouraged, or are even punished. I realized that I would need to help them to adopt a more critical

approach to learning and to begin to see themselves as the experts who are in the best position to decide on culturally and socially appropriate ways to address HIV & AIDS education and prevention.

Third, the teachers reported that they were not finding it easy to introduce innovations in their classroom and school since they encountered resistance from colleagues and the system in general. This is understandable since the school syllabus in South Africa is rather rigid in terms of prescribed outcomes and teachers battle to complete the work in time. New ideas are often regarded as 'more work' and are not encouraged.

Earlier investigations by a colleague and I (Wood & Webb, 2008) indicated that HIV & AIDS education in schools tends to be relegated to the Life Orientation teacher, who then focuses on prevention through adopting an ABC (Abstinence, Be Faithful, Condomize) strategy, and/or other biomedical approaches to prevention. Within this environment, it was therefore difficult for teachers on this course to be innovative and engender support for HIV & AIDS education outside of their own classrooms and to adopt a more holistic approach which addresses the context rather than the individual.

Although I knew that they found it very difficult to adopt more learner-centred pedagogical practices, I was also convinced that the adoption of emancipatory pedagogies (Freire, 1994) would be crucial to attain my goal of freeing the teachers from the constraints of accepted social and cultural norms that served to keep them captive in terms of their freedom to challenge the status quo. Through critical discussion, I wanted to facilitate them to reach agreement on what practices are most effective to prevent the spread of HIV in Africa. Only when they could weigh up the alternatives for themselves and make informed decisions as to what and how to educate with regard to HIV & AIDS, would they be able to fulfil their roles as HIV & AIDS activists in their circles of influence. Only then would I also be freed from the epistemological and ontological dissonance I was experiencing as a result of their traditional pedagogical expectations.

Clarification of my epistemological and ontological values

From an epistemological point of view, I adhere to the notion that knowledge is not a fixed, definitive body, but that it is a developmental process. Those who live in specific circumstances are the best creators of their knowledge and as an educator I must respect their 'knowledge of living experience' (Freire, 1994, p. 26). The teachers on my programme (all African women) possess a deeper and richer understanding of their culture than I can hope to gather from my reading and limited interaction with the community. All of them were raised during the Apartheid era, and although some of them are now living in 'the suburbs', they are steeped in both traditional African and township culture. I must acknowledge

explicitly that my knowledge has huge gaps and that I need to rely on the teachers to fill in these gaps. However, even if I increase my knowledge and understanding of their reality, at best I can only hope to increase my empathy and insight into their lives. I will never 'know' as they 'know'.

However, I do not regard such an admission as a weakness in my teaching but rather a strength since the essence of values-based practitioner self-enquiry is based on an ongoing quest for improvement, rather than the need to arrive at a definitive truth (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). I want to influence the teachers to make their own pedagogical decisions and not just reproduce my ideas, beliefs and practices. In this way they will become creators of their own theories of educational practice (Whitehead, 1989).

My ontological values influence my everyday existence and underpin how I think, act and interrelate with others. I cannot separate my teaching from my being, therefore it is necessary that I make my values explicit in order to help you, as a reader, understand what I stand for and what I am striving to attain in my teaching. Since these values are the basis of everything I do, I want to hold them up as living standards of judgement (Whitehead, 1989) for my claims of having influenced the education of others. Everything I do or say in the classroom and beyond must reflect my values, otherwise I am not credible as an educator and my claims cannot be taken seriously.

Although I embrace several ontological values such as democracy, social justice, compassion, integrity and commitment, the main value which guided my development and teaching of this ACE programme, and in particular the module on HIV & AIDS and Culture, was respect. By this I mean respect for the culture of my students, and for their ideas and behaviour, however much it differs from my own. In order to respect them, I must listen to them, consider their ideas and value the fact that they know and understand their learners and community better than I can ever hope to. I also wish to convey respect for their lived experience and my belief in their ability to be effective agents of social change.

Counteracting hegemony

As I interacted with the teachers, I became aware that their cultural and social beliefs were very strong. They have been shaped by a culture in which women play a subordinate role, and the married woman in particular has very little freedom to voice her own opinion. The secondary role that women play in African society is perpetuated by women's acceptance of and complicity with cultural norms. This acceptance can produce devastating effects (Freire, 1994) – in the case of HIV it can lead to infection and ultimately to death. Silence and acceptance maintain hegemony but also avoid confrontation and thus make life easier

to a certain extent for those being oppressed. The teachers gave examples from their own lives of this:

> Black women are mostly abused by their husbands, even those who are educated. Our culture teaches the woman to be understanding of her husband, to understand that men will have other relationships. Regardless of the education one has, one has to respect her husband. Most women who are married can't negotiate condoms with their husbands . . . Women are protecting their marriages and families, they end up not talking about their rights.

They spoke of the name that women acquire from their communities if they try to stand up to their husbands or dare to challenge community norms (*uNokhontoni*) – such labels are ascribed mainly by other women, meaning that women are actually colluding in their own oppression. If a husband remains faithful to his wife, he is ridiculed by other men as being weak, and is told, '*Ungayicalanye ungathi ulizembe – usisishumane*' meaning 'don't be faithful to your wife, you will spoil her'. The husband's mother usually supports this type of behaviour, probably, in the teachers' opinions, because she has had to accept the same treatment from her own husband. The fear of being labelled prevents women from standing up to their husbands and hampers men from negotiating more equal relationships. When some husbands do try to treat their wives as equal partners, the wife is then accused by other women in the community of giving her husband 'idliso', a type of spell that will control him and make him obey his wife.

According to the teachers, another fear which perpetuates complicity with cultural norms is the fear of upsetting the ancestors. There is a belief that if you go against the wishes of the ancestors, you will not enjoy their protection and bad luck/illness will befall you. This belief could be equated to the fear of not getting to heaven in the Christian belief and this interpretation helped me to empathize with their fear. I again realized that it would be imperative for me not only to try to understand the norms which guided them, but also to demonstrate respect for their beliefs and practices.

Paulo Freire (1994, p. 106) tells the story of an imprisoned militant who asked to be supplied with a Bible while in prison. Since the militant did not tend to be of a religious disposition, this was deemed to be an unusual request and his request was questioned. He replied, 'I need the Bible. I need a better understanding of the peasants' mystical universe. Without that understanding, how can I communicate with them?' This quotation resonated with me since I believe I am in the same position. How can I hope to really be effective in my teaching if I cannot understand, and therefore communicate with my students? For that reason, I began to read books on popular culture, such as *Khabzela* (McGregor, 2005), rather than research conducted by academics who have researched 'others' with little understanding of the lived reality of their 'subjects'. I needed to learn from my students, not preach to them and therefore I repeatedly encouraged them to write up their own stories and used them as pedagogical tools since I believe

epistemology must follow from ontology, rather than the other way around. I was also reminded that students are perfectly able to learn on their own and my role was merely that of a facilitator, a fact which is reflected in one of my own journal entries: 'I was amazed how little I had to say to get them to "shift" their mindsets – they did it on their own, with only pertinent challenges and questions from me'. I must first respect my students' culture and their ways of being, try to understand them, and if I cannot, then respect their different views of the world and convey this respect to them. Only then can I begin to select readings and literature to support my teaching and my stated pedagogical aims.

I decided to use their values as a basis for trying to raise awareness of how some cultural norms were working to spread HIV and were infringing on women's rights to health and equal treatment/opportunities in life. I asked them to identify which values they considered to be good in their culture. The main values they cherished and did not want to lose were identified as respect, *ubuntu*, and the willingness they have to care for those in their extended families. Because respect was the guiding value for my own practice, I asked them to define what it meant to them. From their answers, three main ideas could be identified:

- Respect for those older than you – you cannot challenge or question your mother-in-law, for example;
- respect for husbands as head of the home – you cannot negotiate condom use or insist on fidelity;
- respect for the ancestors – you have to perform the necessary rituals/consult *sangomas* to ensure good luck and protection from illness and other misfortunes.

I realized that their concept of respect was based very much on fear of being rejected by family/community/ancestors and that this led to practices which directly contribute to the spread of HIV. In helping them to reconceptualize the meaning of respect, I did not want them to discard the value altogether, but I wanted them to interrogate it and decide for themselves what is valuable to preserve and what has to change (Lewis, 2000). Brin (1998) refers to the concept of *memes* to describe beliefs that stop new ideas from being considered. Dawkins (1976), and later Blackmore (1999) developed this theory of cultural evolution to refer to cultural entities (such as ideas or belief sets) which replicate in society and which can change over time, due to certain evolutionary pressures such as, *inter alia*, fear, economics, and political leadership. *Memes* are only changed when people perceive them to no longer be working due, usually, to drastic environmental and social change, as in the case of the HIV & AIDS pandemic. In order to deconstruct the *memes* of the teachers regarding their cultural position as women, I introduced the idea that respect cannot exist alongside the economic, social, sexual, physical and emotional abuse of women, characteristic of society today in South Africa (Hargreaves & Boler, 2006).

My ethical values compelled me to make the teachers aware that change involves risk, since it is very difficult to change back again once one has seen things differently (Freire, 1970). Seeing a different reality makes one an 'other' (cf. the names women are given for questioning their 'place' in society). This otherness brings with it the very real risk of alienation: in the case of the teachers, alienation from their own families and from their colleagues at school.

I used material from contemporary literature and films which highlighted the powerlessness of women and asked them what they would like to have happened, how they would change the scenarios if they had the freedom to do so. In this way, they were facilitated to edit the stories to make the outcomes more respectful of women's rights. I also used interactive dramatization techniques (Doyle, 1993) where the audience of teachers could interrupt and take over the role when they thought that the character needed to do things differently. Based on work done by Greene (1995), I tried to break the boundaries of the teachers' narrow conceptions of respect. I aimed to engage each teacher in active learning, and to help them perceive that change is possible. As they rewrote the endings, so to speak, the teachers were able to discover their hidden potentials and the voicing/acting out of changed realities helped to reinforce this new feeling of self-efficacy in terms of their own behaviour and choices. We discussed possible obstacles in their way, and the resources they could use or create to help them to sustain change. I realized I was succeeding in my aim of breaking down hegemony when the teachers started to write journal entries such as the examples below:

> Respect has to first start with self-respect – how can you respect others when you do not respect your own right to protect your health? If a man really cares, he will wear a condom, just like the truck driver (reference to the movie *Beat the Drum*) because he will not want to harm you.

> I am not of the opinion that if you question someone you lack respect for him. I think that it is misinterpreted by people who want to be bullies in their relationships. If one could interpret respect correctly, they would be able to negotiate safer sex with their partners.

> Our culture has lots of cultural beliefs which affect women. It is claimed this was done by the ancestors so you do not have to say or question anything. But I think that gradually a change is needed. In fact, it is not that it cannot be changed but there is the fear of the ancestors. A woman when visiting the mother-in-law must wear a headscarf and a big scarf around her waist. If that is not done the ancestors may become angry, the woman can even break her leg or become 'idlolo' (infertile). What is funny about our culture is this part of visiting in-laws, your husband is allowed to visit the wife's home wearing anything. How far does this respect go? I think it's only female oppression.

In every contact session with the teachers I encouraged debate on the tensions between the critical agency they possessed in their role as teachers and com-

pliance with cultural norms and what implications such compliance has for the spread of HIV. Teachers did report behavioural changes in their journal entries, as evidenced by the following example:

> Yes, I have experienced change in my thoughts and behaviour. As a little Xhosa girl I always knew that men cannot have one partner even if one is married. It has been acceptable in our culture, I have changed my thoughts. I would rather be alone than to have [sic] partner with multiple partners. There are things which are done in my culture and are seen by other cultures as evil, e.g. Ancestors, I will never stop believing in them. I started teaching boys/men in my community that it is wrong to have multiple partners. It has to stop because it is killing our nation.

Once they had interrogated one aspect of compliance, they were more open to engaging in critical thinking about other aspects of their culture. I am of the opinion that I have succeeded in my aim of at least raising the teachers' consciousness around the negative impact of certain cultural beliefs for the spread of HIV. Their journal entries corroborate this claim, and even if some of them are not as ready as others to actually make the change in their own lives, I do believe that their assertions show that they have at least begun the process. In the words of one teacher, 'Our culture has caused irreparable damages to the lives of the black women. Unless we stand up for ourselves, this will not change'.

Encouraging critical engagement

> The legacy of the past has a lot to do with how HIV has taken a hold in the Black community in particular. For example, Black people were taught not to question authority. So now, whatever they are told they believe it, instead of asking questions.

This quotation from one of the teachers is one of the reasons why so many myths surrounding HIV and AIDS are given credence in the Black communities. For example, the myth about sleeping with a virgin to be cured of HIV has led to the rape of many young girls, and even babies. For outsiders, it appears impossible that people would believe such a blatant falsehood, but for those who were taught not to question, acceptance of such beliefs comes more readily. Another factor that promotes the spread of HIV in Africa is adherence to traditional beliefs and practices about witchcraft and traditional healing. I decided to explore the teachers' beliefs in this area and help them to interrogate the implications of such beliefs for HIV & AIDS prevention education.

I realized that I would have to engender trust in the teachers for them to open up about their beliefs. I decided to make my beliefs and values explicit to model to the teachers what I expected from them, and also to try and allay any fear they might have that I would not accept their beliefs. I told them that as a

reborn Christian, I also believe in the supernatural, in the Holy Spirit, in demons and in miracles – beliefs that are ridiculed by many academics, but that neverthe-less guide my decisions and influence my interactions and behaviour. I did this to try and create a safe climate for them to share their beliefs and to create some similarities between our different cultures. I then gave them an exercise to do in various groups, where they had to discuss a newspaper article about a traditional healer who claimed to be able to cure diseases through tortoise urine. When I asked for feedback from one of the groups, they replied that they had not actu-ally discussed the given question since they had been debating something else. It transpired that they had spent the time debating whether to 'tell me the truth' or whether to give me the answers that they knew I was expecting. They had con-cluded that it would be safe and more worthwhile for collective learning to be honest and say what they really thought. For me, this was a breakthrough in my teaching since it demonstrated that they trusted me enough to be honest about their beliefs. I also applauded them on the fact that they had been brave enough to risk my disapproval or ridicule and that I admired them and respected them all the more for this. This honest type of interaction was as beneficial to my teach-ing as I hoped it was to the teachers' learning: 'This session was so motivating to me – I can feel the energy in the class – must video it for J! – and it makes me so excited about my teaching – I am not only freeing the teachers' minds, but mine also' (Journal entry).

My aim was to convey respect by showing the teachers that I accept their beliefs, but that it was important for them as educators to interrogate how such beliefs could contribute to the spread of HIV. I wanted to free them to exam-ine their cultural beliefs and practices and then choose for themselves what they could and would change. As I reflected in my journal,

> Some of the things that they accept as given are so foreign to me, but I think this is OK, I can gain a deeper understanding of them but in the end they have to decide what and how to change, not me – and that is my goal, to get them to the point of making this decision for themselves.

In the words of Huiskamp (2002), there was a need to 'decolonize' the mentali-ties of the teachers and facilitate them to question hitherto unchallenged beliefs. Once they are self-aware, and can theorize about their beliefs, they will be more empowered to choose alternatives. Slater (2002) proposes that there are four con-ditions necessary to create space for such questioning to take place, namely an understanding form of leadership, creation of a positive discourse, an outlet for student's voices and encouraging them to imagine future possibilities.

The first condition is leadership which portrays an understanding of the thinking and motivation of others. I tried throughout my interactions with the teachers to emphasize that I wanted to learn from them, that they were the experts in their culture and that I needed them to fill in the gaps of my knowledge. I also

emphasized that I could not and would not judge them for their beliefs, but that I only wanted them to engage with these beliefs and then to decide for themselves what to do with their perceptions. I stated overtly that perhaps I would not really ever be able to fully understand certain cultural beliefs and practices and the teachers appreciated this – they repeatedly reiterated the phrase, 'you will never really understand us, but . . .' as they proceeded to try to explain their beliefs to me. This vocalization of their own understanding helped to contribute to new insights, as the teachers began to challenge each other about these beliefs.

One exercise involved them posting their answers to the question, 'What do you as an African woman believe with regard to traditional healers, witchcraft, and *sangomas* and how does this influence your teaching?' They did this on a discussion forum in the online learning component of the programme. I was surprised to learn that all of the 20 teachers, with the exception of 1, believed in witchcraft and the power of *sangomas* to heal. Several of them told stories of how family members or friends had been healed by performing rituals to please the ancestors, such as slaughtering a goat and eating its almost raw meat. Others told of businesses that had been successful only after performing such rituals. Although the majority of teachers professed Christianity in various denominations as their faith, they still believed in the power of the ancestors as a mouthpiece for the will of God. We explored what implications such beliefs held for HIV treatment and voluntary counselling and testing (VCT).

I asked them as an assignment to research the perceptions of their learners/colleagues/community about traditional healers and to explain how they would use their findings in their teaching. Their reports indicated that they realized the importance of accepting people's beliefs and actions but that they also had to inform them of the limitations of such beliefs in the case of HIV treatment and of the need to combine both traditional and modern medical treatments. Their findings indicated that there were many advantages of consulting traditional healers, such as the psychological support they offered; their understanding of cultural norms; and their accessibility and relative cheapness – although they also indicated that many traditional healers were exploiting people's beliefs and charging exorbitant rates for treatment that was ineffective. They provided many stories of both successful and unsuccessful healings via traditional healers and *sangomas* and most concluded that it was important to address beliefs and traditions, to accept them but also to offer alternative explanations and treatments for illness, specifically for HIV. I claim that I have been successful in opening up their minds about their beliefs in this regard and helping them to reconcile the traditional with the more modern approaches which help to safeguard against HIV transmission. An example of this shift is given in the response of one teacher:

> I strongly believe in God, therefore I need not judge others. People have different perspectives therefore people cannot see what I see. Even myself before I enrolled with the NMMU [the university] I thought just like them, I had the same beliefs they

had. To site [sic] an example, I always said we are going to die irrespective of the disease. I need to understand them because I have been there. If you want to influence people about something you should put yourself in their shoes, see what they see but tell them the truth. For instance, if you are talking with a teenager, show him/her that you care, listen, carefully, show compassion, love and respect.

As evidenced by this and other journal quotations, I maintain that my teaching has helped shift the teachers from blind acceptance of traditional cultural beliefs and facilitated the development of leadership qualities based on empathy, compassion and respect for beliefs.

Another condition for change postulated by Slater (2002) is the creation of a positive discourse that is future-oriented and optimistic. Fatalism is rife in Africa (Mufane, 2000) with disastrous results for HIV transmission. People, the youth in particular, have adopted a fatalistic approach to HIV – we are going to die anyway, so what does it matter to protect ourselves? This stems both from traditional beliefs about the power of the ancestors to determine one's fate and also from environmental conditions, such as dire poverty, that do not engender hope of improvement and escape from pre-determined circumstances. However, fatalism can be a learned response to material conditions (Huiskamp, 2002) and can therefore be unlearned. It is often the response of the politically and economically oppressed to their circumstances (Freire, 1970) and a way of helping them to cope with the unfair situations they feel powerless to change. In my teaching I was concerned to use emancipatory pedagogy to try and break through this destructive *memes* underlying fatalism and convey the possibility that people can and do change.

I attained this by helping teachers to reflect on their situations and their position as HIV & AIDS activists in the schools and communities, in order to raise awareness of their powerful roles as agents of social change. I also helped them to evaluate the different behavioural change theories in terms of what theories are relevant for the cultural and social conditions in South Africa. They decided that behavioural change theories based on equipping individuals with knowledge and skills would not work since even if an individual possessed these, social and cultural conditions precluded them from changing their actions. They concluded that what is needed is change in the social and cultural conditions, which can only be attained through collective action (Parker, 2004). The teachers decided that one way they could do this was to form a group which they would register with the Department of Education as an educator-driven HIV & AIDS activist unit to promote HIV & AIDS prevention and education in the schools and community. By registering an official group, they would then have access to communicate with provincial and national officials who control the finances and policy making in education. I continually supported them and encouraged them to imagine what they could achieve if they believed in themselves as activists and supported each other in ventures such as this.

By asking them to keep journals and also creating the opportunity for them to interact with me and each other in online discussion forums, I hoped to create an outlet for their voices and nurture their new-found opinions, another condition for change (Slater, 2002). Their journals have been a revelation to me and have enabled me to understand the tensions they experience surrounding change and the risks involved therein. These insights have enabled me to choose material for discussion in class, such as tapes made by an HIV-positive woman; popular movies such as *Beat the Drum*; true stories about real-life people and how they coped with HIV & AIDS and the responses of the community and family to their condition. The teachers could identify with such material and it helped them to voice their own opinions and ideas surrounding the tensions between societal conditions which promote the spread of HIV and the risks involved in making changes:

> My learners are from poor socio-economic backgrounds, therefore they talk about things they have observed at their homes. Traditional healers' herbs are best for them; they go to traditional healers so as to hear about their customs and witchcraft. Their parents have a positive attitude in beliefs and cultures. I think parents should get some classes so as to be able to change their mindset about HIV. Parents should be told how HIV/AIDS can be controlled and how modern medicine can help, as well as traditional approaches. I have also observed how some colleagues and community members do not want to be open about traditional healers. They don't want to be known as people who visit sangomas – the visit is a personal secret.

This statement shows that the teacher is beginning to observe and form opinions of her own, which will influence her teaching and education, not only of learners, but also of colleagues and the community.

I also tried to use relevant cultural materials and engender discussions which would help the teachers to imagine what could be (Slater, 2002), and develop 'the capacity to invent visions of what should be and might be in our deficient society, on the streets where we live, and in our schools' (Greene, 1995, p. 5). I challenged the teachers on some of their customs, which they accepted without question and without really knowing why they observed them. For example, there is a custom at funerals that someone addresses the mourners about the cause of death of the deceased. I asked them why it would be important to talk about that, and no one could answer me. They replied that it was just so and always had been. However, in the case of death from AIDS or an AIDS-related disease, the speaker usually attributed the death to some other cause to avoid stigmatization. I asked them to imagine what it would be like if people were open about the cause of death, such as in the case of our icon, President Mandela, who openly admitted that his son had died of AIDS. This helped them to realize that they could actually use this custom as a way of combating stigmatization around HIV, by encouraging people to be open about it. They could see that they did not have to abolish their cultural practices, but that they could adapt them to work for the good.

Creating the possibility for action

One of my concerns was that the school and social environment placed obstacles in the path of teachers who wished to make changes to curricula, school practices and ways of operating. Many teachers reported that colleagues told them they were sick of hearing about AIDS and that they were too overloaded with academic work to cope with what they believed to be extra work dealing with HIV education. One teacher even said in one of the early classes, when asked what teachers could do to encourage societal change, that all she could do was to 'tell them to wear condoms, what else works?' This comment alarmed me because the teachers had already completed five modules on this programme, all aimed at emphasizing the need for a holistic approach to HIV prevention. However, at the end of this module the same teacher said to me in class,

> I want to thank you for opening up to me the fact that we are making things worse by our actions and beliefs. I now realize that HIV is about gender issues, not just safe sex. I actually knew it, but felt hopeless, now I know what I need to do – I want to be a community activist.

This teacher then told me she was going to resign from teaching since she felt that she could more easily change attitudes as a community worker, rather than in the school system. This was also not exactly what I was hoping to achieve by my teaching, but I am consoled by the fact that this teacher is still working in her school and is implementing innovative strategies in HIV & AIDS education. However, her comment reemphasized for me the fact that change can bring about unexpected consequences and I have to accept this responsibility as a teacher educator.

However, the majority of journal entries by the teachers indicated that they have embraced their roles as HIV & AIDS activists and are translating their new perceptions and insights into reality:

> I believe that the Health Department has to work hand-in-glove with the traditional healers in order to make a breakthrough in this epidemic. One of the things I am going to do is to organise a panel discussion with a traditional healer, a doctor/nurse and peer educators. This will give the audience a chance to ask questions they are concerned of [sic]. This I think would be of a great help to those who spend a lot of money on rituals and still die of HIV – they could be helped to be more realistic.

> It is important for the teacher to know the perception of learners to help them to direct them to the right path. The teacher should provide information about traditional and modern medicine and explain both ways . . . so that a learner can make a suitable choice. Learners trust teachers, especially those coming from their race groups and having the same clan names. Eventually people will come along like the truck driver in *Beat the Drum* and decide to soften and listen to the teachings about the use of condoms.

This quotation indicates to me that the teacher has accepted the responsibility for helping others to see alternatives and that she is confident that things will slowly change for the better if she persists in her education of learners, offering them the choice without forcing change.

The teachers also constructed a diagram to represent the need to first change their own attitudes in order to change their cultures. This diagram placed them in the middle of the change process, and showed their far-reaching influence in the wider community and indicated to me that the teachers are creating their own theories of practice.

Contribution to the development of emancipatory pedagogy for HIV & AIDS education and prevention

Through this cycle of values-based self-enquiry, I have begun the process of developing my own 'living educational theory of professional practice' (Whitehead, 1989, p. 41). I also claim to have made good progress towards my aims of increasing my understanding of the influence of culture on HIV & AIDS prevention education; that I have adapted my teaching practices to model emancipatory pedagogies to influence the teachers to shift their mindsets; that I have influenced them to become more critical in their own choice of what and how they teach; and that I have awakened them to the possibility that they can be effective agents of social change by taking on their roles of HIV & AIDS activists.

As justification of these claims, I invite you to evaluate the evidence provided in my narrative against the criteria of social validity, as identified by Habermas (1975):

- Is my account comprehensible and does it make sense in the context of HIV & AIDS prevention education in Africa?
- Were my interventions appropriate to attaining my aim of influencing the teachers to adopt a more critical stance towards their own cultural beliefs and practices?
- Does my narrative convey sincerity in living out my stated value of respect in my research approach and actions? Did I listen to teachers and consider their ideas; did I value their knowledge and show belief in their ability to be HIV & AIDS activists; did I value their lived experiences?
- Does my account appear truthful and do I present enough data to support my claims?

It has become apparent to me during the course of this enquiry, that living out the value of respect will help to contribute to the curtailment of the spread of HIV in Africa, but also that respect has to be reconceptualized by those concerned to make it more inclusive of human rights. Teachers will then be able to

adapt their own practices to ensure that they promote the freedom of people, and in particular women, to make choices about issues that affect their physical and psychological well being. In this narrative, I have explained how I developed practice grounded in my value of respect and how I influenced teachers to begin to develop similar practices. By modelling critical, emancipatory pedagogy I hope to have enabled the teachers on the programme to begin to counteract hegemony and free themselves to make informed choices in their personal and professional lives, albeit within the limited context of their own institutions, families and communities.

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