

CREATIVITY IN ENGAGED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

Narrative report on workshop hosted by One Ocean Hub researchers at the Environmental Learning Research Centre (ELRC), Rhodes University

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MAKHANDA, SOUTH AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

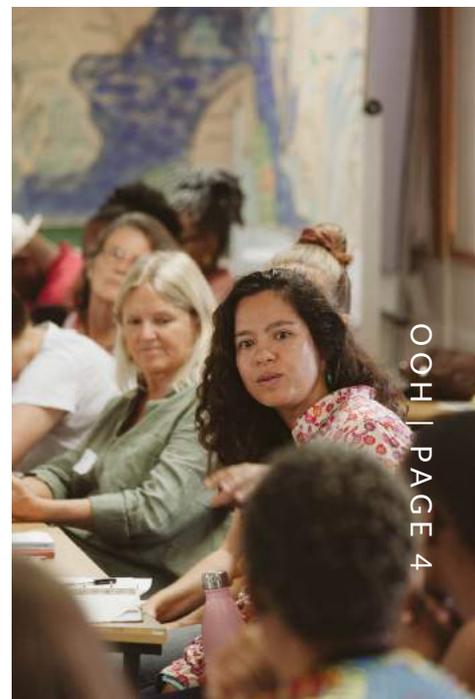
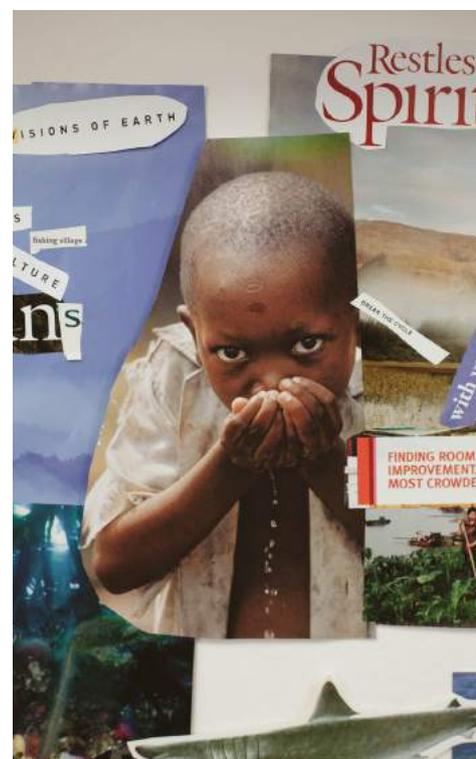
This report narrates the content and discussions from a two-day workshop held in March 2020 at the Environmental Learning Research Centre (ELRC), Rhodes University. The workshop was facilitated by the One Ocean Hub (OOH) team based at the ELRC. It follows a year-long OOH pilot project, 'Lalela Ulwandle', which engaged the Empatheatre approach to share and facilitate dialogue about South African relationships with the sea. In many ways, it is this experience and project that prompted the need for a workshop that reflects generally on the use of creativity in research and the transformative potentials that it offers.

The first section reflects on the concepts that served to frame openly an orientation to the workshop, aiming to bring diverse participants (academics, civil society, artists, post-graduate students and activists) together for a sensitive and productive dialogue.

The second section reflects on the day dedicated to empatheatre, including experiencing the Lalela Ulwandle performance. This includes a dialogue with Small Scale fishers from Hamburg in the Eastern Cape who travelled to participate in the Lalela Ulwandle performance.

The third section reports on the second day in which researchers, artists and practitioners shared their work with creativity in engaged research. This section includes a narrative collage of the discussion that followed as well as some critical questions guiding what to think about when aspiring to engaged research.

Section 4 reflects on the workshop, drawing on three different sources: A google evaluation form (which unfortunately had quite a low response rate, as COVID-19 and related disruptions arrived in South Africa just at the time of this workshop), informal verbal feedback and an account of the play-back theatre reflection session. Overall, the workshop was a rich and challenging experience for those who participated as well as those who organised.



SECTION 0: LEARNING IN PLANNING

The initial thinking for this workshop began in mid-2019, at the One Ocean Hub inception workshop in Cape Town. At this meeting, where researchers from different countries and disciplinary backgrounds came together to plan their work together as One Ocean Hub colleagues, the Rhodes / ELRC team shared a preliminary version of the empathetheatre production *Lalela Ulwandle*. One of the innovative undertakings of the GCRF One Ocean Hub (OOH) is to use arts-based and creative approaches in integrated ways throughout the life of the project, to help achieve its transdisciplinary, transformative goals, which include the bringing together of different forms of knowledge related to ocean governance, and enhancing the participation of marginalised communities in ocean decision making. The empathetheatre team shared *Lalela Ulwandle* ('Listen to the Sea') as one example of the potential role that a theatre-based methodology can play in achieving these goals. However, there was not enough time at this inception meeting to fully, critically explore empathetheatre and other creative approaches to participatory, transdisciplinary research, or to answer the many questions that our OOH colleagues had about how they might go about integrating such approaches into their research. Therefore, the idea was formed to host a workshop at the Environmental Learning Research Centre, in Makhanda, South Africa, on 'Creative Practices within Participatory Research', for OOH researchers as well as others interested in the topic. In planning for this workshop the organisers realised a few crucial things which are important to document. As we began talking about this workshop we

realised the danger of polarising through the use of the concept of "creative practice". Due to a troubling discourse of creativity being associated with a particular kind of form or genre or "person type" ('She is so creative'; 'I'm not a creative person'), we were aware of how the notion of creative practice in research can create a binary between creative research and non-creative research. This would in turn set up the possibility for normative valuations where creative = good and non-creative = bad. We all believed strongly that this was not the case. We all know that there are practices which would be classed as creative that are uncritical of power relations and can be disempowering for those participating, and we all have experience of non-arts-based research practices being very useful for engaged, public and participatory research that is oriented towards social, ecological and cognitive justice. This resulted in moving toward the notion of "creativity" in research to understand creativity as a "something" [a kind of element of responsiveness] or a set of competencies, that can contribute to doing engaged research. This also reminded us that perhaps the root concern of this workshop was not creative practice but it was a practice of knowledge production that can be in greatest service to enabling change (with the definition of that change being co-determined in the knowledge production process). In order to straddle the care required in not polarising and to learn about in-context research practice, half of the workshop would be focused on the practice of *Empatheatre* which allowed us to work with and listen into a research practice involving the mode of theatre in context and learn from it. The second day would open out into other case studies of participatory and partnership building research, and some of the different creative approaches to this research that have been used by others.

SECTION 1: OPENINGS AND ONGOING THINKING ABOUT CENTRAL CONCEPTS FOR ENGAGED CREATIVE RESEARCH

As each person introduced themselves at the beginning of this workshop, we asked them to bring a translation of the word participation. We found at the end of this that there were at least 14 different languages in the room.



Collage image by Nwabisa Magengele created on our first morning together in the workshops. Collage process was facilitated by Claire Homewood, inviting participants to visually bring their work and thinking into the room.

We planned this exercise keeping in mind the space we hoped to create, which was one where academics, students, civil society and arts practitioners could come together and feel like their perspectives and knowledge was welcomed. This exercise allowed us to experience creative expression before we began to discuss it.

NWABISA A PHD STUDENT AT THE ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING RESEARCH CENTRE (ELRC) SHARES HER EXPERIENCE OF COLLAGE MAKING IN THE WORKSHOP

I can really struggle with efficiently articulating myself, I always have this clear picture in my mind that I want to put in words but always leave feeling I didn't communicate what I wanted to. It has never dawned on me that maybe the picture in mind and words in mind can be best said in a big picture with pictures of things, people and words. During the collage making I could find words and pictures that said what I was brave and not so brave to say. This is because the full story of what the picture is about can be half understood and half assumed in the absence of me explaining them. What this element of collage afforded me is safety, I was able to say my deep thoughts without saying them or being afraid of being misunderstood or not understood. I was also exempted of being criticized because they are my thoughts that are not trying to fit anywhere in the different worlds of academia. Exempted again of being scared of not well constructing a sentence and being intellectually judged on that. Freedom is the word that best encapsulates what collage making opened up myself to. I remember finishing and having to put it up in the wall with others, out in the open and I had zero fear of falling less to the standard of "academia" no one could say it was wrong because its thoughts said in pieces to the outside world but in full to me with the most expressive words, I could find. I realized that I could even freely uptake journaling if I were to do it in pictures as it affords me a new sense of expression I didn't know I needed. I can only imagine the worlds of possibilities and awareness that collage making can afford children sometimes there are no words for the feeling in your vocab or you don't even think such exist until you hear someone say it. Now if you exist in a space with less expressive people imagine if you can look on the magazines, books and find the words you are missing and be able to put them out in half thought whilst remaining with the full thought as you best know what the word and picture mean together when in one picture. I don't really know how right now but I know I have to use this in my research data collecting as I wish that what the exercise afforded me and left me with post the exercise is worth affording others.

Thank you Ocean Hub team.

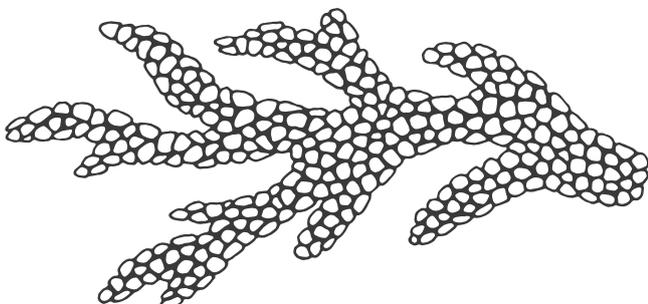
INTER/ TRANS/ UN DISCIPLINARITY, PARTICIPATION AND CREATIVITY

Thinking about the scope and focus of this workshop as facilitators, we realised that there were three important conceptual framings that bounded and held the process. We were here as researchers, to talk about research practices that can extend beyond disciplinary boundaries, and also beyond the construct of the university as an elite space of knowledge production. All of the workshop participants were either already self-identified as transdisciplinary researchers, or wishing to become more transdisciplinary in their research, and interested in how creative approaches might support this shift. Therefore 'trans-disciplinarity' was one of our framing concepts. Our position, as workshop organisers and facilitators, was that transdisciplinary research includes a progressive commitment to disrupting power imbalances in knowledge production and ownership - in other words, TD research should address and respond to injustices (epistemic, cognitive, environmental, social), and therefore necessarily include non-academic partners in the research process. Participation in research was therefore a second critical conceptual framing for this workshop. The use of creativity in research - 'creativity' in its broadest sense - was at the heart of this workshop, as the third framing concept, that we wanted to explore in relation to the role that creativity can play in the 'more-than-intellectual' work of TD research, and in facilitating the meaningful, equitable participation of non academic partners in TD research.



DISCIPLINARITY

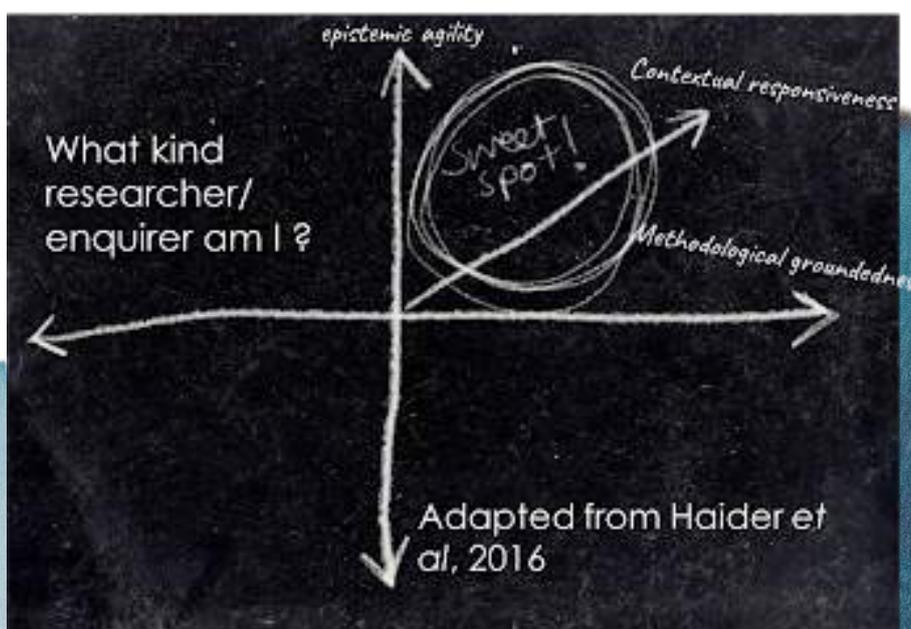
. . .the social conditions built into bourgeois capitalism were too brutal to contemplate in a single seamless context. For culture industry employees (including academics), the choice was either to convert these contradictions into disjunctive fragments or to dissolve the materiality of the contradictions into linguistic games. The best example of the former strategy is the sharp division of all knowledge into disciplines and professions so that no one can gain an inkling of totality. Each sector is mandated to develop exclusive terms and methodologies as if it could successfully seal its autonomy . . .an example of the latter strategy is a reassertion of linguistic and discursive priority where material obstructions such as poverty, suppression and resistance are decomposed and erased in abstract blurs and blobs. . . .both are gestures of surrender and homage to the dominant in the hope that culture employees might be granted shares..



This extract from Moten (2017) describes the cultural responses to capitalist formations in our world. It is the tendency to divide ad nauseum, but in two ways specifically: the one is to fragment the whole of the problem and just focus on neatly and artificially bounded parts, and the other is through the focus on language "...where material obstructions such as poverty, suppression and resistance are decomposed and erased in abstract blurs and blobs". Especially in response to the ecological crisis, but also in insurgent undercommon, black radical tradition academic spaces, there has been a push back against these in order to better understand complex socio-ecological systems and work transformatively. We briefly elaborate on some of these concepts below

- Multi-disciplinary: This is where people work in their separate disciplinary ways but draw on findings in other fields to inform their topic of study. Interdisciplinary: This is where academic fields co-design research projects building different methodological considerations into the practice of research around a complex problem.
- Transdisciplinary: This aims to 'create a unity of intellectual frameworks beyond the disciplinary perspective' (Jensenius, 2012), and also moves research beyond the boundaries of the academy to integrate societal partners and knowledge. Un-disciplinary:
- Un-disciplinary is an idea put forward by a group of early career researchers at the Stockholm Resilience Centre. This notion is a move towards dissolving the boundaries between disciplines that are still active and at work in the three concepts above (Haider et al. 2016).

So the question is if we are in a sense shedding ourselves of the traditional tools, what tools do we use going forward? Haider et al. (2016) offer us a schematic that we have added to. Instead of thinking in terms of disciplines, we can think in terms of epistemic agility - our ability to move across multiple knowledge cultures; methodological groundedness - becoming masterful in a praxis of research; and we add contextual responsiveness, meaning that both epistemic agility and methodological groundedness need to be informed by the context of the study. These are dimensions upon which 'undisciplinary'/'transdisciplinary' researchers might articulate their practice.



PARTICIPATION

spectrum of participation



We spoke next about the idea of 'participation', and about the spectrum of participation that was developed by the International Association for Public Participation (<https://www.iap2.org/page/pillars?>), that moves from 'informing', to 'consulting', to 'involving', to 'collaborating' to 'empowering'. We would like to situate ourselves as conducting partnership-based co-engaged research, where our non-academic partners are also recognised as researchers and knowledge producers. We also spoke about the risks of PAR (Participatory Action Research)

going too far, where researchers can shed themselves of responsibility and effectively place the burden of responsibility on vulnerable groups for finding the solutions to their own situations, on their own - with no regard for the structural inequalities that hold these situations in place. There is a need to develop the participation of those with power. (For example, who is engaging with the Banks, who is engaging with big business?). One of the audience members in the PE Lalela Ulwandle performance explained they would like to hear the perspective of those people responsible for the suffering of the characters in the play.



CREATIVITY

A WAY OF TALKING ABOUT SENSIBILITIES AND COMPETENCIES FOR CONTEXTUALLY RESPONSIVE RESEARCH.

Three ways to be thinking about creativity in research and learning

1. Creativity - the notion of creating - to create, is to make, is to bring something new into the (your) world and embrace the possibility for remaking, re-turning and remembering the world.. Hannah Arendt speaks about the essence of a democratic process where an individual brings something new into the world and that is taken up by others. Almost like a call and response... This is a much more embodied sense of our being and participating in our world than the abstract and ideological notion of democracy which disenfranchises people in it's an abstraction. Here.. creativity is about the contribution that is necessary for participation.

2. Of course, another arm of creativity is arts-based modalities used in research: these hold the potential for people to re-frame conversations, disrupt assumptions that can be built into spoken or text languages or research; to bring new languages into research; Importantly, but not automatically, to bring the political in. Arts-based inquiry, as a methodological field, has an explicit emancipatory goal for example as Finley (2018) referencing Pencoast on bioart notes: "...the purpose of a developed bioart is to provide access, "not so much to laboratory but to field methods" in a people's performance pedagogy that is participatory and brings important information into conversation and debate among the nonscience public". (pg 567)As an important caveat to Arts-based pedagogical and research modes, the arts don't do anything, it is people who do things (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013) , but our doing chas the potential to expand through creative engagement with arts-based modes





3. Bhaskar speaks about the cycles of creativity which correspond to his dialectical model. This provides a link to processes of learning which perhaps brings us to another reason why creativity is a concept of interest to this work: That it captures dialectical processes of learning...

- A moment of calling - a state of preparation characterised by inner emptiness.
- Moment of creativity - the "eureka" moment when you can see "the first glimpse of the new world opened up.
- The cycle of formation, shaping and playing - gradually mastering the techniques for this activity.
- The cycle of making: "This is the moment at which the knowledge becomes part of your being so that it can be produced spontaneously when the occasion demands".
- Fifth moment is the moment of reflection: " When you can recognise your intentionality reflected in an achieved result in the world"

SIYAPHAMBILI: A VISIT FROM SMALLS SCALE FISHERS

This workshop overlapped with Lalela Ulwandle's first tour in the Eastern Cape. While the play was workshopped and developed with small scale fishers in KZN

Background of Siyaphambili Fishing Cooperative

Cooperatives in a small-scale fisheries sector are supposed to provide the long-term community benefits by dealing with the threats of fisheries mismanagement, uncertainty of livelihoods and poverty (Kalikoski, 2012). Established with the similar view; was Siyaphambili Fishers Cooperative, which is based in Hamburg, a small town in the Eastern Cape province, in South Africa. Hamburg is located on the coast between the city of East London and many of the villagers found in this area rely out of fishing for livelihoods. Siyaphambili fishing cooperative was formed under Cooperative Act of 2005 as beneficiaries under Small Scale Fishers Policy (SSFP) which was adopted in 2012. Following the SSFP, the government of South Africa approved the establishment of various cooperatives in the country as per province. Siyaphambili was among the first 72 cooperatives in the Eastern Cape to have their registration approved, hence its establishment the same year. Siyaphambili fishing cooperatives is composed of 27 women and 21 men. The fishing cooperative work in group of eight, with men taking up the role of fishing while women assist with cleaning and packing of the fish. It is a group of people that have always lived in harmony with the ocean and their experiences are easily reflected in Lalela ulwandle play.

It was from this background that an invitation was extended to the Siyaphambili fishing cooperative to attend the Lalela uLwandle show through their Leader. The invitation was received with a great appreciation and excitement whereby a group of 15 members attended (five men, seven women including two youths).

On arriving at Rhodes University, they were given a tour the University including Eden Grove Centre where student registration takes place and they were moved by this gesture;

" This is my first time to visit a University, and more so to be given a tour, it is such an honour that is beyond imagination to have this opportunity to be at Rhodes University. I am so happy to see the place where our children do their registration and ultimately get to learn and complete their various degrees, I am in awe."

said one adult participant.

The excitement and great experience were further expressed by the fisherfolks after watching the show. They easily resonated with the play which they felt mirrored their own experiences.

"When we received the invitation, we honesty did not know what to expect, BUT, after having watched the show I feel a special partner and a person whose voice is heard through the show. It is a rich play and it reminds me of all the stories of my grandmother, what she taught us about the ocean and how our lives are shaped by it"

said another fisherfolk.

These are a group of people whose life has always evolved around the ocean and as such they view and treat the ocean with great respect and try to live in harmony with it.



SECTION 2: EMPATHEATRE

A HISTORY AND PRACTICE

Diving into a methodology emerging from South African struggles for dignity and justice.



HISTORY AND DISCUSSION

Empatheatre is a research-based, theatre-making methodology that emerged from friendship and solidarity between artists, academic researchers and responsive citizens. The process begins with extensive action-based research in which co-participants and key partners work to identify matters of concern and a pressing central question. Through these research explorations, the team works iteratively to shape the research data into an engrossing, relevant and true-to-life theatrical experience. The theatre production offers new ways of seeing different perspectives on a complex situation and above all honours the participants' narratives. The script is first performed to participants and partners to check the credibility of the play. Performances are then rolled out to strategic audiences. Audiences are made up of people with different levels of agency, power and privilege in relation to the matter of concern. Audience members are invited who hold diverse, even conflicting, views on the central concern represented in the play. Post-play facilitated dialogues with the audience allow for another layer of reflexive data to emerge in relation to the issue of concern. In this way, Empatheatre is a method of conducting and publicly interrogating research that democratises the way in which we surface and co-create knowledge.

Theatre making as participatory research

Empatheatre allows us to amplify a chorus of voices, particularly those of marginalised groups, with and for our non-academic research partners, in powerful and validating ways. It allows for collaborative exploration of research findings and their implications, with diverse publics; in this way, it can help to bridge the divide between multiple research disciplines, policy forums and the wider society. The methodology is not merely a way to share findings from research, or a device for one-way dissemination. While accessibility and reach of research to a broad public is an aspect of the methodology, the research and theatre-making processes are inextricably linked throughout:

IDENTIFYING A CONCERN: In collaboration with partners, the Empatheatre team identify or are approached by civil society, on an area of social conflict and concern. Further discussions assist in refining research questions.



RESEARCH: After an initial literature review, research is carried out through narrative methods, such as interviews, focus groups, oral histories and archival records. The data is analysed collectively by both the research and theatre team to develop the first iterations of the script.

MEMBER CHECKING: Early readings of the script are 'Mirrored back' to partners on the ground and participants through table readings, often leading to reflexive iterations of the script.

PERFORMANCES: The play is then performed for strategic audiences. Each performance is followed by a post-performance facilitated discussion.

ADVOCACY AND POLICY FORUMS: The research and theatre team work extensively to build up a wide network of partners through which to stimulating public conversations about the research issue, to share findings from the research and to invite strategic audiences. This moves the research into direct contact with governance and policy processes, with the aim to bring about transformations in decision making.

Examples and the history of Empatheatre can be further explored here: www.empatheatre.com/projects

Performance & Mid performance discussion

Need transcripts from Evaan's recordings [CLICK HERE](#)

There was a general appreciation for the play in terms of how it represented different ways of being with nature, the struggles of fishers and coastal communities. However, the discussion raised **3 important concerns that can inform and complement creative practice** towards research practice for solidarity and justice.

Managing and meeting expectations of community partners: There was a question posed about managing expectations when engaging with community groups - the response is two-fold which requires careful consideration of what expectations can and can't be met.

- Working through partnerships of existing civil society organisations who have years of experience working with people, moving sensitively with power dynamics.
- Secondly, in terms of actually trying to meet expectations, through connections with the One Ocean Hub (lawyers and environmental scientists) we could seek answers to the questions communities had about their situation

Here there is a **move beyond the concern for managing expectations through shifting relationships within research processes**. This requires that we resist the framing of community groups as deficit and honour them as active participants and knowledge producers. In addition, work on refining what exactly research processes can offer community groups which are likely along the lines of networking and voice amplification in forums of power. This shift needs active work.

A fisher from Hamburg raised the concern that the “bad guy” was missing from the play. He said that he and other fishers are familiar with these stories, they know their stories of connection with the ocean and of how their relationship with the ocean has been violently by colonialism, apartheid the continuations into and neoliberal capitalism. Admitting that he was the 1976 generation and had a particular way of working, he said, “**But where is the bad guy?** When are you researchers going to help us understand the bad guy so we can fight him”. He explained that he sees our government actions as being absent from ubuntu. He feels the need to understand why they do what they do and it would be helpful if researchers could facilitate that.



Hamburg fishers with Buhle Francis. Shortly after this photograph was taken they chanted: “Siphefumla Ulwandle” (We breathe the ocean).

This concern is one that relates to the work of social movement learning or popular education and can be expanded to who/how/what is the enemy in relation to a particular problem. This question relates to the political dimension of creative practice.

Summary

This discussion raised the important work that complements creative research processes linking them into solidarity building processes. The dimensions of research relationships, collective transformational mobilisation, and to support mobilisations, co-defining the “bad guy”, or root cause of the issue.

SECTION 3: THINKING WITH CASE STUDIES: PARTNERSHIPS AND PROCESS IN ENGAGED RESEARCH

Case study presentations

This day expanded the conversation beyond empathatre to hear what other researchers were doing in terms of partnerships and process for engaging research. [Click here for the transcripts](#)

Joanna Bezerra: "Connecting through images"

Joanna shared a presentation which shared a Photobiography project done with Communities in and around the Amakhala Game Reserve. Interestingly, she noted: "That participation only truly materialised after the first draft of the photobiography" at the stage when communities began to make decisions about how their biography would be assembled. She reflected on raising the aesthetics of the participants, the possibility of ownership in these projects and sense-making through these projects.

Selloane Mokuku: Ukunuka, South African forum theatre

Shared a video of the ukunuka play developed in Makhanda in 2019. A summary of Ukunuka project is shared below: "In 2018 the Rhodes Drama department and School of Journalism in conjunction with other parties developed a participatory theatre production. Its aim was to engage communities within the Makhanda Municipality in dialogue about conditions in the locality.

The initiative came about in response to an open call for investigative journalists and creative artists to apply for funding to explore new ways of telling stories about corruption ahead of the 2019 elections. Ultimately, the drama department led and coordinated the project.

The Applied Theatre approach that was used drew from Augusto Boal's seminal work Theatre of the Oppressed. In keeping with the principle of interdisciplinarity, the project aimed to develop the interactive theatre drawing on the skills of post-graduate students from three disciplines: Applied Theatre, Journalism, and Politics. Preparatory actions included attendance at project conceptualisation workshops, a workshop in Asset Based Community Development, scriptwriting, auditions, rehearsals and formative research. The inaugural performances – at Rhodes University on 10 March and at Sun City on 23 March – were followed by touring performances across the municipal area throughout April. The interactive nature of the performance gave rise to fruitful discussions, useful suggestions and frank comments, including allegations of corruption and nepotism, as well as expressions of anger, despair and hope: all of which can now serve as research material.

Given that an objective of local government is to involve communities, see Chapter 7 section 152 (1) of the Constitution, the creative team expressed disappointment that no Municipality officials participated despite having been invited. Nonetheless, it has been recommended that a briefing meeting with the local government be organized to share the project outcomes. A further intended outcome is the publication of a book as well as a video documenting the project process and highlighting the voices of more than 1700 citizens who witnessed the interactive play."

Anna James: Making (non)sense of urban water flows: play-building as urban water inquiry with highschool learners.

Gave a short insight into the water inquiries she facilitated with a group of high school learners as part of her PhD titled: Transformative potential of intersecting arts-based inquiry with environmental learning: A focus on pedagogies of water and climate change. Firstly, she shared some lived lessons about how attempts at participation can fall flat and how we need to enact participatory processes with a keen sense for what is happening in the room - this will be different in every context - rather than an abstracted recipe of a participatory process. Secondly, She shared an improvisational theatre exercise which formed the basis of a scene that unpacked the root causes behind a communal standpipe tap running out of water. She reflected briefly on this as a process for making (non)sense of urban water flows, learning about how localised experiences connect to spaces, times and structures beyond that experience, and most importantly, witnessing the ways in which young people debated responses to this problem.

She shared some insights into the possibility and impossibility of realising pedagogical practices that embrace the fullness of an environmental problem, within the racialised and divided South African city landscape; the possibility of transgressing the divide between educational cultures where environmental content is taught and the everyday lived experience. This was a short view into her concern for transformative potentials in arts-based inquiry as environmental learning.

Michel Wahome: Decolonising Assistance - An Adaptation of the Parable of the Good Samaritan

Michel brought an important narrative into the room, one that is critical of the political economy that has emerged around the idea of development. As such, she brought a focus to research with the intention for development and problematised it with a decolonial lens. Focusing on the story of the good samaritan she artfully showed how good samaritans are produced within a historical context. In the case of our current world, this is a historical context of violence and therefore we should take care when we come across the good samaritan within ourselves and others. This story is important for "decolonising assistance" as she titled her presentation. This contribution articulated a crucial sensibility for any work that attempts to enter into a critical decolonial sensibility at this time.



The samaritan is preceded by, and potentially in business with, a bandit who sets the scene for the samaritan to appear as good.



“

The samaritan enters with their understanding of what will help the victim: In this case, the skill of coding which is no help to the man who has been trying to get supplies for his bakery.



Pinned Tweet

 #KeepingItMoving2020
@prisonculture

Questions I regularly ask myself when I'm outraged about injustice:

1. What resources exist so I can better educate myself?
2. Who's already doing work around this injustice?
3. Do I have the capacity to offer concrete support & help to them?
4. How can I be constructive?

5:28 PM · May 26, 2018 · [Twitter Web Client](#)

12.1K Retweets 27.1K Likes

- Mariame Kaba

“

Those who find themselves in the samaritan situation have some learning to do

Vaughn Sadie:

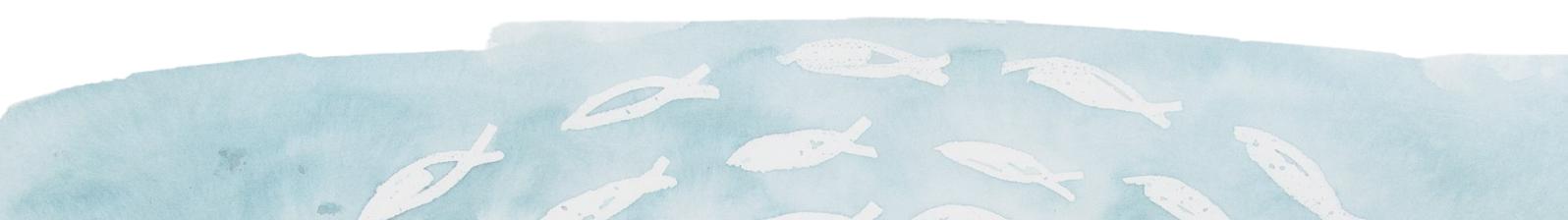
Vaughn shared his experience of working on an interdisciplinary arts-based project in a mixed-income development in the City of Johannesburg South Africa: The Revolution Room project. "The Revolution Room project – a collaboration between Picha (Lubumbashi, DRC) and VANSA (Visual Artist Network of South Africa) – seeks to explore new ways that artist lead projects and organisations can mediate and reflect on their process in the public realm, through participatory practice and interventions in 'common space'. The broader project has developed, over an extended period, out of considered collaborations between artists, citizens, local and international museum professionals in specific communities." The presentation raised important concerns around the roles of residents, artists and visiting artists in this project, the possibility of art projects to leverage 'relationship to "Place" as meaning making tool', as well as how elements of power and parties emerge or not. This was a richly contextually grounded project that was shared with honesty about the incommensurable struggles that emerge as we transgress professional and spatial divides within <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1g8ZnEXQOS-E5f49O7fgtfs-9al6jwq6R> South Africa. Here are the transcripts:

Discussion: The dialogue that followed opened up some generative tensions that exist in the work of the participatory knowledge production with intentions for radical change. What follows, is a summary distilling key points from the discussion. Given the inevitability of skewed power relations in the world or, put slightly differently, the impossibility of eradicating systemic historical oppression .

through a few research processes and partnerships, we need capabilities for working in and with the mess. With this more 'honest' perspective we can embrace the moments of transformative potential that creative process in knowledge production provides. Our representation through language, in particular the use of terms signifying race and class amongst other axes of difference, must be rigorously and explicitly conceptualised and resist essentialising what we are referring to. As we do this we need to be building a new language that can make the invisible visible, name the problematic and bring new possibilities into the world. We should not assume authorship in arts processes is the equivalent to agency. While working to centre the voice of the marginalised and removing barriers to flourishing in our contexts, we need to be sure that we play with the Gaze of research: For example, the government needs to be researched too

Compass for political rigour (Temper et al.)

There is almost a need to honestly embrace the imperfections of this process work. Given the nature of the challenges we are trying to tackle, we cannot expect our research processes to be perfect models of relations in the world, the best we can do is reflect honestly on the obstacles to realising this and through that read our worlds more thoroughly. To borrow Michel Wahome's slide the work is to fill out these dialogue boxes.



We need a **compass for political rigour**: "participatory" has been at risk of neglecting a consideration of power in these processes. In a way, because we have this term that we come together around, we sometimes lose the substance of what enables genuine participation. Here are some questions that continue to ensure rigour in participatory process amongst the multiple obstacles. .

- How am I representing the voice of others?
- Have I considered all the terms I am using in conversation with the participants?
- How am I situating my process in relation to myself, my participants, broader social structures and the planet, so that I do not abstract the process from the context in which it emerged?
- What does my relationship building process look like that led to the engagement?
- Have I reflected on my positioning in relation to antiblack racism within South African Society?
- Why is it important that I work with the subjects I am working with? What assumptions do I have about them? How are invisible assumptions I did not realise I had made visible for me in the context of this research practice? How am I continuously disrupted and reminded about my own learning journey?
- Have I done a significant analysis of the challenge to which my research responds and have I attempted to make contact with other researchers who are looking at different aspects, actors of the problem?
- Have I adequately considered what I am giving and what I am taking from this interaction with research partners/subjects? What is my impact and how am I impacted? Without over-burdening, the researcher with the weight of the world (after all, a researcher is just another job), have I adequately accounted for my privilege in these relationships, and therefore what I can reasonably offer of myself and my position to be in service to others' projects or needs?
- Can I be honest about the 'performative' aspects of my relationship building, positionality statements, expressions of solidarity - and find ways of striving for sincerity over piety? (MacFarlane think piece)

SECTION 4: REFLECTIONS

WORKSHOP EVALUATIONS

We only received 8 workshop evaluation responses. As South Africa and the world plunged into COVID chaos shortly after this workshop it was hard to badger people for more responses. Of those 8 who completed the evaluation, 6 attended the entire program and 2 attended it partly.

All of the 8 felt that the workshop met their expectations. Expansion on expectations that were met included: space for discussion or involvement by all in the room: "to share your own ideas, thinking, learning throughout". (4); appreciation for discussions across discipline and scales (1), to see creative methods being useful for researchers (1),

What was the most powerful moment - 7 people responded with one of these:

- Three respondents explained that the "engagement", "plenary discussions" post play including "feedback from the community",
- Two remarked that the most powerful thing was to witness the theatre in action - including the playback theatre.
- One person referred to a particular epiphany that emerged in a discussion about one of the presentations: "that spatial planning and progress management is Process on Collaboration of different Actors and Artists, Professionals and some Educators"
- One remarked the history of empatheatre.

What could have been improved or picked up on in the following workshop? 4 people responded and of those 3 included points to follow up or improve upon. Three points include: We needed **more time** to engage the artwork; we needed to **grapple with the representation of race** without problematically reinforcing essentialised ways of thinking about race. Think better how to integrate our civil society partners into these workshops.

What was left unsaid?

One response made the point that "conversations just generated more and more..lots more to be explored". They also added that "enough was said" but we can take further reflections to the next workshop. One person remarked that we did not consider the institutional blockages to this kind of work: "Whether lagging behind academic institutions like Rhodes are prepared or ready for creativity in participatory research" Communication skills - "to be able to facilitate good participatory research" - are taken for granted in this work.

7 out of the 8 people left with the feeling that they would like to collaborate with someone they had met at the workshop.

- Ocean hub connections
- Empatheatre developments
- Participatory methodology guides.
- Jackie, Lalu, Warrick and Prof Kanyimba from Namibia mentioned in particular.

Empatheatre experience:

- Greater emotional involvement sitting in the circles as opp to the seating further back. (This person watched 3 times in a row.)
- The discussion was rich.
- Empatheatre enables "both sides of the story are heard, more especially that of the unheard and ignored, unlike sharing one's one-sided thoughts for the masses to consume.

This relatively small bit of feedback on the workshop showed that at least 8 people took something from the workshop, appreciated the mix of engagement included in the workshop and left with a desire to collaborate or even to have a second workshop to follow up on all that was opened in the too few two days.

Verbal feedback

We received another very important piece of feedback from an experienced educator working within Rhodes university. One participant expressed to us verbally that she really enjoyed the workshop. However, she was disappointed to see that the facilitation was dominated by white people. We know that this participant has a long history of being with students in their learning struggles. We take her point that spaces facilitated by white people inevitably face a limitation that does not exist when black voices and bodies lead. She noted that this does not always come naturally and it is because of this that we need to socially engineer it in the reverse. This piece of feedback was valuable for us who designed and held the workshop but is also a useful reminder of the important pedagogical insights into creating a care-filled affective space for learning in a context where we know racism and domination are rife. I.e. we cannot simply avoid them, we need to actively work against them.

In a debrief, the organisers and facilitators reflected that we need to work on resolving the contradiction that arises between two concerns: essentialising race/gender by seeking out such facilitators and the danger of not actively seeking out diversity of facilitators.

Meqoqo and the playback theatre reflection

With the help of Meqoqo we held a playback theatre evaluation session. In sequence, they enacted two feelings experienced in the workshop and a layered story.

"Playback Theatre is a forum theatre form, style of improve were you tell us your stories and we play it back to you. They asked two questions which surfaced the following responses." (Member of Meqoqo introduced)

Did anyone in the audience feel a particular feeling during the workshop?

Yesterday afternoon after the Eskom interruption there was the second half of the play one in the box theatre... I only saw the last half. It was a beautiful space. The way the props had been done were so simple and affective and I loved everything about empatheatre... And yet, sitting there I got more and more enraged in a way I couldn't understand. Enraged and hopeless that I hadn't really felt yet. It was the shift of being moved by empatheatre and what I had heard about it. And then experiencing the boil [of rage] coming up.

Does somebody have a story that has multiple layers?

"So I came to this workshop, this conference rather because I had to, because of curriculum. I was completely flustered. Came here not knowing what it was about. It was in this space that I got to find the bedrock of my personal voice in the academy. Now I know what catalyses my thinking. Now it is beyond me, it is a part of my identity which I get to craft. From feeling completely lost...i feel a sense of peace and gratitude and a deep sense of direction. We have arrived, now let's work.

These experiences surfacing for the playback theatre speak richly for the experiences I had in this workshop - challenging, opening to say a very little about it.

Evaluative closing

This multidimensional evaluation has left us with a nuanced account of the workshop space. In a sense it has illustrated how multiple forms can shed light on different evaluative impulses that all participants and organisers would have had. One that can inform workshops facilitated in the future.

SECTION 5: CLOSING NOTES:

This section distills a few key themes that arose in this workshop.

Disrupting the binaries:

As we reflected in the planning stages, we wanted to resist the binary that the term creative practice introduces. The need to disrupt this ring-fencing arose throughout the workshop as creative processes such as empathetheatre which did spectacular work of representation of complexities and nuance were seen in the context of important partnership and solidarity work.

One of the presenters on the second day reflected that although they were presenting on creative research processes, these were not done in a vacuum, rather they were done together with partnership building and relationship forging that is required to prepare the soil.

The workshop structure of separating creative process and partnership building allowed for an effective consideration on these two elements of work. However, it seems clear that partnership building is done through the creative process and creative processes cannot be done well without partnership building and relationship forging! Neither are without tensions, nuance and struggle. This relates to the importance of contextualising the creative process in socio-political context.

Politicising research process, representation and research space

A careful listening to all that emerged over the workshop revealed a need to develop a practice of working explicitly and actively around issues of race, class and gender (among others). The challenge is two-fold and akin to walking a thin line between: on the one hand addressing these intersectional concerns in a) how we speak about our research, b) how we facilitate co-learning workshops, considering how the learning space is affected by who is present and who is in charge and c) within the research process. On the other hand, resisting the danger of essentializing identities and reproducing the oppression working around these axes of difference. It requires reflexivity with the self, with the field and with the institutional dynamics at play.

The importance of creativity in logistics in light of precarity and spatial inequality

For intentional and careful transdisciplinary learning spaces required considered and integrated logistics - not the outsourcing of this. So it requires the privileging of translation and multiple languages in discussions. This is especially important given the spatial inequality experienced in South Africa which means we have to put extra effort into making processes accessible to the concerned publics.. Unfortunately, the fishers did not see the full performance they had traveled to Makhanda to see. This was due to two reasons. The performance was interrupted by load shedding and we were ordered to leave the theatre for safety reasons. Secondly, they could not afford to wait the 2 hours for the power to come back on because their journey needed to be completed before dark. This compounded situation reminded us how representation of research for public dialogue needs to go with rigorous and care-filled logistical thought. It made us realise that one way of thinking about arts-based modes beyond the arts-material is to think about creative qualities in logistics: Attentiveness, Intuition empathy, reflexivity, sense-ability, embodiment. These qualities might assist a more authentic coming together across disciplinary and practice boundaries.

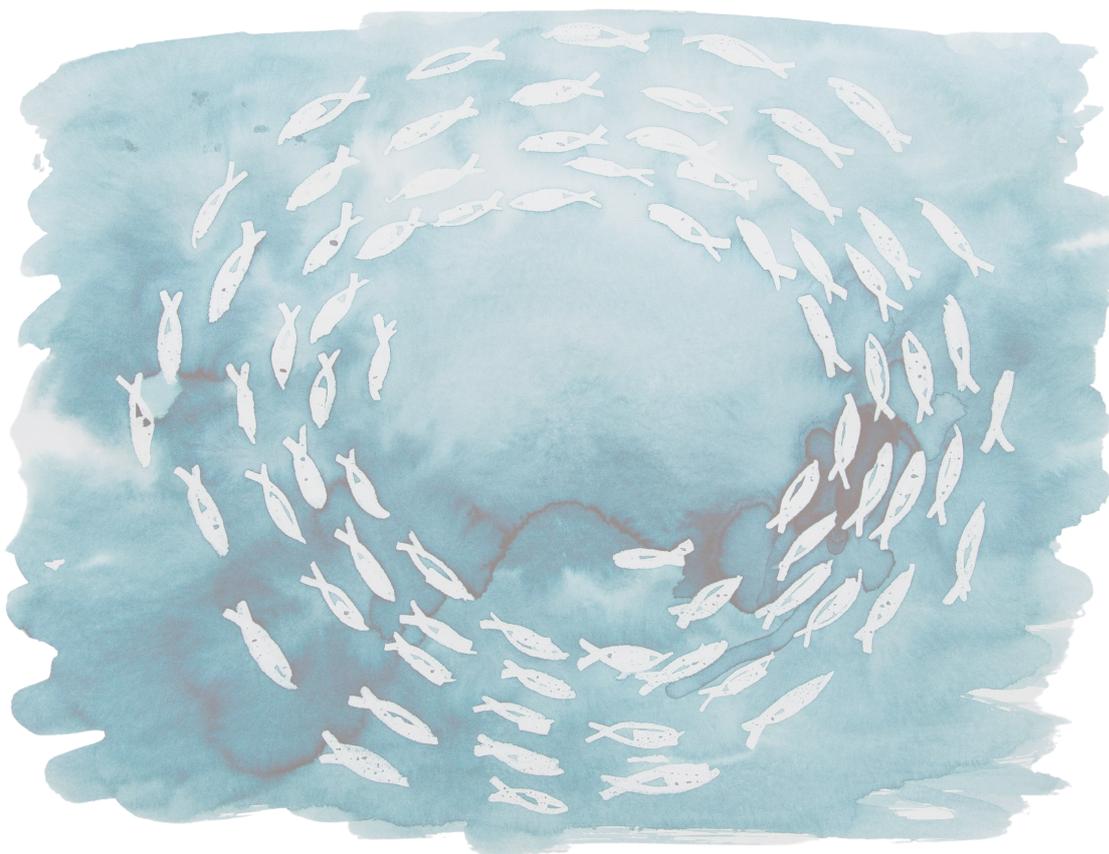
Enacting transdisciplinarity in university spaces: Bringing together diverse stakeholders

Universities tend to be spaces that are not accessible to people who do not work or study there. They also tend to be difficult spaces to be in and participate in if you are not in the university business. As facilitators we were constantly aware of the differences between participants in the workshop and the way these differences were produced by the different kinds of work they do. We had academics from the global north and South, we had students, we had civil society members, we had small scale fishers from a rural part of the Eastern Cape, we had artists.

We thus designed interventions to ensure the space was welcoming to those who were entering from the outside. Also as the small scale fishers were only joining us for the performance of the play, the workshop group did our best to welcome them with a song as they arrived.

The fact that this workshop was useful for different people surfaced in our multimodal evaluation: an artist said that it was interesting to see how her work was relevant in the world of academi, a student felt she found her space in the academic conversation.. An academic educator was concerned that we did not have a racially diverse facilitation team.

The fishers shared an unexpected appreciation for visiting the university and having an understanding of where their children would one day be registering..... This is one way of thinking about how different roles come together and take different things away from the experience. Perhaps this is a close enactment of transdisciplinarity.



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