RESEARCH ARTICLE:

Early Childhood Development: A Case Study of University-Community Engagement in South Africa

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Abstract

Third sector organisations are effective links between Higher Education Institutions and communities in promoting and expediting Community Engagement programmes tasked with raising awareness, fostering social responsibility and civic mindedness in students and, thus, contributing to the common good. In recognition of this, Durban University of Technology (DUT) pre-emptively enabled collaboration between the institution and a cluster of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in 2004. This paper examines one of the partnership programmes between the Gandhi Development Trust and the Durban University of Technology, the Early Childhood Development Values Education Project and the successful Community Engagement partnerships created with three academic departments of DUT. It focuses on the Department of Drama programme based on Bloomgarden's Preparation, Action, Reflection, Evaluation (PARE) framework integrating experiential and academic learning. The study draws on the theoretical lens of Dewey's Democracy and Education and Freire's Critical Pedagogy and uses the case study method to present the data gathered through the PARE phases. Foregrounded in the paper is the impact of democratic education characterised by values such as inclusiveness, participation, reciprocity, and an equality of respect for the knowledge and experience that everyone contributes to education and community building.

Keywords: *early childhood development; community engagement; democratic engagement; critical pedagogy; community building*

Introduction

The Education White Paper 3 (RSA, Department of Higher Education 1997: 4) identified one of the primary challenges facing the sector as "an unmatched obligation, which has not been adequately fulfilled, to help lay the foundations of a critical civil society, with a culture of public debate and tolerance which accommodates differences and competing interests. It has much more to do, both within its own institutions and in its influence on the broader community, to strengthen the democratic ethos, the sense of common citizenship and commitment to a common good". Thus, the pivotal role of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the broader transformation agenda of the state was made abundantly clear. Although that role was not supported with government funding nor clear directives on implementation strategies, the unequivocal policy mandate from the government was that universities should become more responsive to the socio-economic issues/development of the country (Thomson *et al*., 2011: 221). Accordingly, it identified Community Engagement (CE) - community/university partnerships - as an integral and core part of higher education to change the racially divided institutions of higher education to non-racial merged entities in the Republic of South Africa (*ibid*) and initiate the process of narrowing the historical gap between universities and communities.

Amongst the range of CE imperatives, universities had to "demonstrate social responsibility … and their commitment to the common good by making available expertise and infrastructure for community service programmes" (RSA, Department of Higher Education 1997: 11). Plainly, at the heart of this challenge to universities, was the urgency to give effect to CE programmes "through co-operation and partnerships among institutions of higher education and between such institutions and all sectors of the wider society" (*ibid*: 10). This

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vision finds resonance in a Service Learning and Community Engagement study which contends that, "creating partnerships with local community residents and third sector organizations [Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)] for the benefit of the community fits well with the South African government's mandate to incorporate higher education into the national agenda for community development and social transformation of society" (Thomson *et al.*, 2011: 228). This paper focuses on a successful CE partnership between a CSO and an HEI. As such, it demonstrates the valuable contribution of CSOs in giving effect to the policy statements by foregrounding the collaborative CE relationship between the Gandhi Development Trust (GDT) and the Durban University of Technology (DUT). It details the mutually beneficial and reciprocal relationship between the GDT Early Childhood Development (ECD) Values Education Project (VEP) and the DUT Department of Drama. Apropos to this, the study further demonstrates that authentic Community Engagement can best be achieved when university-community partnerships are mutually and reciprocally beneficial. Thus, the novelty of the paper is in highlighting this mutual and reciprocal relationship between Higher Institutions and communities and debunking the claim that "shared power in partnerships remains an ideal" (Mitchell and Humphries 2007: 49); giving much needed clarity to the concept of CE which "is not yet clearly understood as it is still in an emerging stage of development" (Bidandi *et al.*, 2021: 2) and; promoting CSOs as crucial partners with HEIs for CE programmes. As Magaiza (2014: 65) notes, CSOs are important allies to HEIs in reimagining knowledge production, dissemination and consumption in communities that suffer from social injustices.

The genesis of the Gandhi Development Trust (GDT), a non-profit and public benefit organization, in 2002 was to promote the values and principles of Mahatma Gandhi against the backdrop of South Africa's democratic constitution. GDT's programmes, derived from its vision of creating a nonviolent, peaceful and socially responsible society, are rooted in the principles of *Ubuntu,* which include caring for one another's well-being in the spirit of mutual support in ways that demonstrate that people are people through other people (RSA, DSD. WP, 1996: 12). Significantly, the socio-economic and political issues the programmes address have been raised as crucial in the National Development Plan (RSA, National Planning Commission, 2013). These include, *inter alia*, the violence in the country, the widespread breakdown of family structures, high rates of illegitimacy, under-age mothers, the increase in child abuses, child rape and neglect and the crisis of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Thus, the preventative and interventionist programmes of GDT are directed toward intercepting the cycle of violence in its various manifestations, mainly as they affect children. Recognising the value of strategic civil society collaborations, Durban University of Technology (DUT) opened its doors to GDT (and other kindred CSOs) in 2004, followed by the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement in 2008. Notwithstanding the multiple benefits of such partnerships, however, and despite the transformation obligation at the time, HEIs' community engagement initiatives were generally ill-defined (Lange, 2008 cited in Hall, 2010: 5). Thus, DUT's proactive CSO partnership programme with GDT must be commended.

DUT's innovative and transformative initiative in "making available expertise and infrastructure for community service programmes" and concretely giving effect to the White Paper (1997) through the establishment of a range of social responsibility, peace and nonviolence CSOs is demonstrated in the memorandum:

> "*DUT has undertaken to deepen its commitment to South Africa's Reconstruction and Development Programme by inviting other community-based organisations to make their home on the DUT campus. The following organisations, who are also Founding Members of the International Centre on Nonviolence (ICON), have been enriched by and have contributed to DUT's community engagement goals: Gandhi Development Trust (GDT); Satyagraha; World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP); Participative Development Initiative (PDI)*" (DUT/GDT MOA, March 2008).

GDT's work with and in communities is rooted in the democratic principles of the South African Constitution. It is axiomatic, therefore, that the organisation's community development programmes, generally, and the Community Engagement partnership programmes with DUT, specifically, are based on participatory democracy. The processes that constitute partnership initiatives consciously and consistently include all levels of stakeholder involvement with the university and the communities. According to Saltmarsh and Hartley (2011: 18), without this participatory democracy, "engagement efforts are often pursued as ends in themselves, and engagement becomes reduced to a public relations function of making known what the campus is doing in and/or for the community and providing opportunities for students to have experiences in the community".

The Early Childhood Development (ECD) Values Education Project (VEP)

Values education, according to Lovat (2010: 3), may include moral education, character education and ethics education with slight variations in meaning depending on the differing emphases and stages in human growth and development. The concept focuses on pedagogical processes in which young people learn values and morality and acquire knowledge of this domain about relating to other people, together with the ability and disposition to apply the values intelligently. Further, values education can positively influence the expansion of universal values, which have such a powerful effect on the culture of the school and on the development of the child and the fostering of a civil, caring and compassionate society (Hawkes 2010: 237). In the South African context, particularly, values education could contribute to mitigating anti-social behaviours and attitudes, increasingly features of daily life. Pendlebury and Enslin (2007: 251) maintain that post-apartheid South Africa is replete with widespread corruption at all levels of the public service and that heinous crimes persist. Consequently, they argue that values education should be the starting point to contribute to overcoming these ills.

The shortage, however, of adequately trained ECD practitioners (Martin *et al.*, 2014: 91) places a constraint on delivery of quality programmes. Moreover, the training courses for ECD practitioners do not explicitly include a values component in the curriculum. Accordingly, the ECD VEP as a specialised values-based training programme aimed to address this gap to guide and inform classroom practice. In this way, children can develop a set of positive and affirming values, equipping them with critical social skills that include caring, compassion, social responsibility, a sense of justice, and caring about the welfare of others and emotional intelligence. The set of twelve values, developed for the ECD VEP, is based on South Africa's democratic value system underpinned by the South African Constitution. Broadly, they reflect a commitment to a multicultural, multiracial, non-sexist, nonviolent, environmentally sustainable society where all are entitled to justice. Early childhood development is defined as "the processes by which children from birth to at least nine years grow and thrive, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially" (RSA, DOE. WP Education and Training 1995: 31). The initiation in 2013 of the ECD VEP Project – *Izimpande Zobuntu* (The Roots of Ubuntu) - was to address children's exposure to the levels of violence and unethical conduct, most notably, a lack of social responsibility and an unwholesome obsession to succeed at any cost, in our society and its likely impact on them. According to Walker *et al.*, (2011: 1331), the social and emotional development of infants and young children who are exposed to violence in their families and communities are at a greater risk of insecure attachments, increased risk of behaviour problems, reduced levels of pro-social behaviour, increased aggressive behaviour and an inability to regulate their emotions.

There is growing evidence from child development research indicating that the largest part of brain development occurs before a child reaches three years old and that it is during this period that children develop their abilities to think and speak, learn and reason and lay the foundation for their values and social behaviour as adults… It is during early care that a child develops all the key elements of emotional intelligence, namely confidence, curiosity, purposefulness, self-control, connectedness, capacity to communicate and co-operativeness (RSA, DOE. WP 5, 2001: 7). Thus, the early childhood phase is a critical one for optimal learning opportunities because it is when children develop their basic values, attitudes, skills, behaviours and habits, which may be lifelong. According to the National Integrated ECD Policy (RSA, DSD. 2015:18), ECD investments bring about higher levels of positive self-regulation, which lead to significantly less crime and greater public safety, reduced public violence and greater social cohesion and civic participation. Hence, leveraging this window phase, the ECD VEP aimed to give preschool children the tools to make informed choices in their lives, and be compassionate, responsible and peaceful citizens who care for themselves, others and the environment.

As a curriculum intervention, the programme was designed to instil in children a core set of universal values, underpinned by Ubuntu, by way of engaging the practitioner/caregiver in the values. The primary outcomes of the training programme were to develop in practitioners a values personal and professional frame of reference with the skills to integrate the values into the daily theme-based ECD programme. The addition in 2017 of the Parent Enrichment Programme (PEP) promoted parental participation in their children's education, encouraged family participation and provided a valuable space for parents and practitioners to share experiences and raise common concerns. The ECD VEP Project was piloted over two years in 2013 and 2014 in the Inanda, Ntuzuma and Kwa Mashu (INK) area after which the training manual was finalised and the programme implemented between 2015 and 2019. In 2020, the complete shutdown of preschools in the wake of Covid–19 led to the decline of the project, foreshadowing its final closure in February 2021. Post the pilot, the training was based on a 'train the trainer' model with trainers drawn from a range of areas in KwaZulu-Natal. By 2019 374 ECD practitioners had been

trained in practising values in their classrooms, 203 parents had participated in values and rights-based parenting at participating sites in workshops and 20 112 children (based on 1:40 per class, per teacher, per classroom) had engaged with the values programme in these 14 areas. During the project's lifespan, the parallel training programme – the focus of this paper – was supported by the DUT Departments of Drama (promoting dance, drama and song to support learning and teaching), Food and Nutrition (developing a healthy and balanced food and nutrition programme) and Sport (developing an effective physical education programme). The proposal to participate in the project was extended to all three departments *via* the Heads of Departments as a Community Engagement partnership opportunity. Enlisting the cooperation and support of the three departments was expedited by the enthusiastic reception and participation of all three CE practitioners from the three departments.

The CE sessions in the programme demonstrated concretely the interconnectedness between theory and practice which Boyer (1996: 23) refers to as the 'scholarship of application', and which, according to Lazarus *et al*., (2008: 60), draws attention to the fact that knowledge is not produced in a linear fashion since theory often leads to practice as practice leads to theory. Thus, Community Engagement, viewed and practised as a scholarly activity, provides the context for a dialogue between theory and practice through reflection. Equally demonstrable in the programme, based on Boyer's (1996) model of a scholarship of engagement, is the 'scholarship of teaching'. Within the framework of a scholarship of engagement, the traditional roles of teacher and learner become somewhat blurred to give way to a learning community including community members, students, academic staff and service providers (*ibid*). The composition of the ECD VEP 'learning community' reflected this inclusive representation, working together equally and respectful of one another's knowledge and experience. Accordingly, all discussions after the formation of the project partnership - from inception, conception, mid-review, presentation and evaluation - involved all role players - the DUT Educational Theatre (ET) community practitioner and her students, the GDT ECD VEP coordinator and head trainer and the ECD community trainers.

The DUT Educational Theatre (ET)

The DUT Educational Theatre (ET), formerly called 'Theatre in Education' (TIE) is applied theatre to teach values to children in ECD Educational Theatre, a programme which in its current form was initiated in 2011. This forms one of the four electives (Scriptwriting, Singing, Educational Theatre and Dance) which a DUT drama student can choose in the second and third (final) year of studies. The annual Diploma course of Drama and Production studies at DUT is divided into core subjects and electives. In the first year of Educational Theatre the objective is to teach students children's theatre forms from the ECD level to the foundation phase (2 to 7 years). To create children's plays, that are equally entertaining and educational, the students need to apply techniques of interactive performance, scriptwriting, props and puppet making with the ability to perform in either English or isiZulu. Accordingly, a manual, 'ABC of Children's Theatre', was developed, highlighting the important ingredients of good drama for children. These include:

- Characters children can identify with or superheroes they will admire
- Stories and characters with a clear distinction between good and evil
- Characters and moments where children will feel empathy with a character because they go through similar situations of injustice, loneliness, helplessness or weakness
- Stories for young children must have happy endings
- Use of puppets or animal characters is advisable, as children will identify more easily with a non-realistic or fantasy character because they are themselves in the 'imaginative phase' of learning.

The second stage in Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory - 'pre-operational' (Rabindran and Madanagopal, 2020: 2154) has reference to children between 2 and 7 years of age, which included the target audience in the ECD VEP project. The symbolic thinking of this phase of 'animism' (characteristic of this stage when the belief is that everything that exists has some kind of consciousness) asks for stories and characters where the fantasy and imagination of children can be stimulated and explored (*ibid*). The ancient tradition of African story telling draws on, to a large extent, traditional fables where African animals show typical human behaviour such as greed, jealousy, pride, empathy or love linked with their typical animal characterisation. An array of studies has demonstrated the benefits of ET in positively improving young people's knowledge, attitudes and behaviour in relation to various life skills (Waters *et al*., 2012: 6).

The DUT ET Community Engagement Project (detailed below) was modelled on the principles of democratic engagement. Following an initial briefing on the project and its objectives, the students were excited and

enthusiastic about participating, inspired largely by the prospect of contributing to the development of underprivileged pre-schoolers and the greater purpose of helping deliver on the project outcomes. Further, they were stimulated when tasked with investing their inventiveness into devising a relevant and suitable programme of action, especially in the knowledge that they were participating in an ongoing and developing project and one that was already accommodated in the ET schedule of activities.

Methodology

As a qualitative strategy, case studies involve the researcher's deep exploration of a programme, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Also, the case(s) are bound by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period (Creswell, 2009: 227), as was the case in this study. Data were collected over a three month period through series of meetings and dialogues (introductory, planning, preparation, evaluation, reflection and impact) between and among programme participants (DUT Community Engagement Practitioner and Drama students, GDT ECD Values Education Project team and Community Practitioners) based on the particular phase (Refer to PARE diagram, Figure 1). In this regard, Yin (2009: 264) points out that a common type of evidence for case studies comes from qualitative data that can offer rich and extensive materials. These are generally less structured and have the potential to reveal how participants construct reality and think about situations, not merely responding to specific questions. In some instances, this construction of reality provides important insights which gain further value if the participants are key persons in the organisations, communities, or small groups being studied. Accordingly, the discussions were characterised by these ethos of openness enabling enhanced understandings of one another's positions.

Findings and Discussion

According to Bloomgarden (2013: 135), since the heightened research on CE in the last decades, university-based practitioners have become increasingly aware of the ethical and practical imperatives of reciprocity and mutuality in their work. In elucidating how outcomes in community-based-learning partnerships are created, he proposes an understanding of how they develop among students and in communities, and between campus and community partners which demonstrate the emergence of reciprocity that produce outcomes and substantive returns. While the returns matter in different ways and to different extents, they intersect and retain momentum in similarly cyclical ways for campus and community constituencies. Independently and jointly, these cycles are dependent upon the creation of results or outcomes. This model (see Figure 1), PARE (preparation, action, reflection, and evaluation), a framework for sequencing experiential with academic learning in higher education and depicting these two interdependent cycles, draws on the learning theories and conceptual frameworks of, most notably, John Dewey (Corporation for National and Community Service 2002, in Bloomgarden, 2013: 136).
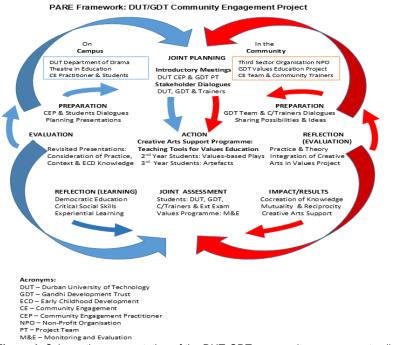

Figure 1: Schematic representation of the DUT-GDT community engagement collaborative partnership

On the left is the campus cycle, represented by the blue cycle of preparation, action, reflection, and evaluation (PARE). On the right is the community cycle, represented by an adapted version of the same PARE framework, but instead drawing upon the cycles of programme planning, implementation, and evaluation more commonly shaping third sector organization (CSO) project management (Kellogg Foundation, 2004 cited in Bloomgarden, 2013: 136). The central point is that sustainability depends upon maintaining motion and productivity on both sides. Reciprocity and mutuality materialise here as the interactivity between left and right to maintain momentum. In this way, the concepts of reciprocity and mutuality become inseparably linked to sustainability (*ibid*). In this regard, the collaborative partnership in the GDT/DUT CE programme has upheld the principles of reciprocity and mutuality at every stage of its execution, supported the project's training programme in the delivery of concrete and positive results and demonstrated its capacity to be sustainable. To sum up, "engagement is positive when it is responsive, productive, and regenerative; and it can be essentially unjust, exploitative and self-serving when it is not" (Bloomgarden, 2013).

The ET Community Engagement project involved a group of five ECD Values Education community trainers, the head trainer and the project coordinator (in GDT's *Izimpande Zobuntu* Project) and a senior lecturer with the second-and third-year educational theatre students (in DUT's Department of Drama). The brief was to devise creative arts activities (movement, dance, acting, storytelling, fine arts) targeting children aged 0-4 years that would support and reinforce the ECD VEP training programme. According to Fisher *et al*. (2004: 25), service-learning initiatives with community partners must be informed by a shared vision, encompass clarification of roles and expectations, and allow for collaborative decision making, reciprocity, and attaining mutual goals and benefits. Similarly, Prilleltensky (2001) cited in Thomson *et al* (2011: 230) maintains that the practice of creating participative processes where the voices and involvement of local residents are included is crucial to the success and sustainability of community-based endeavours. In configuring workable programmes of action, the students chose particular values on which to base their plays or artefacts. The third-year students were divided into three groups (Movement/Dance, Creative artefacts, Storytelling/Acting) and created outputs based on their selected values, which they shared with the ECD trainers so that they, in turn, could include in their Values Education training programme in their respective communities. The second-year students directly performed their plays, based on the chosen values, at preschools in the township of Kwa Makutha, south of Durban.

The initial meeting involved a discussion on the Values Programme and the most appropriate and effective way to embed it into the first Semester project. Considering that the practice at the Drama Department was scripting and performing plays based on topical socio-political or real-life issues for the age group 2 to 7, participation in the ECD programme (0-4 years) was apt. Although the students had not dealt directly with values education and, much less, translating values into dramatic presentations, the CE practitioner was keen on testing the possibility and extending their range in service and experiential leaning activities. Moreover, the ECD VEP training programme included, amongst other teaching tools, stories to impart the values. The students could adapt the values stories or devise their own for dramatisation and role play. Drawing on Piaget's theory of fostering young children's cognition through exploration and participation in play activities, especially imaginative play within their environments (1962 cited in Mills, 2014: 9), the educational theatre students were expected to conceptualise appropriate creative arts activities in collaboration with the VEP ECD community trainers. Freire's opposition to, what he called, the "banking" concept of education, was that it derived from the presumptuous position that knowledge was a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider knowing nothing. He argued that the more students worked at storing the "deposits" entrusted to them, the less they developed the critical consciousness to intervene in the world as transformers of that world (Freire, 1970: 70). This has particular applicability in light of the imperative, "to promote and develop social responsibility and awareness amongst students of the role of higher education in social and economic development through community service programmes" (RSA, Department of Higher Education, 1997) and "the development of professionals and knowledge workers … who are socially responsible and conscious of their role in contributing to the national development effort and social transformation" (National Plan for Higher Education 2001: 9). Additionally, the levelling or equalising of the power dynamic between the traditional roles of those who teach and those who are taught underpins the ET programme that is based on student participation in projects from conceptualisation to action.

The creative arts activities and the drama productions were the products of a series of dialogues between the CE practitioner and the students, and later, the participation of the ECD community trainers. According to Shor (1993: 24) the basic format of the Freirean class is dialogue around problems posed by the teacher and students. The

teacher initiates this process and guides it into deeper phases until students assert ownership of their education. The classroom itself is active and interactive because of the problem-posing, co-operative learning, and participatory formats. Likewise, the CE project is located within the Freirean paradigm of education that is 'socially relevant' and based on mutual and participatory exchanges of ideas and knowledge. The participating second- and third-year drama students were briefed thoroughly on the project and its objectives within a CE framework and were expected to discuss, amongst themselves, a range of possible presentation options. Included in the interactions with their teacher, was the values training content to encourage a deep understanding of the values. The plan was that the third-year cohort of students should work with the five community trainers and the head trainer to develop appropriate creative arts activities that would support the values training, such as art, dance, dramatic play or theatre, puppetry, and music. The creative arts engage children across all domains - cognitive, language, social, emotional, and physical - and may also help children explore their emotions, both displaying and regulating them (Koster, 2012 cited in Mills, 2014: 8). Mills (*ibid*) adds that theatre and puppetry activities can help children explore their emotional range and, in play, develop emotional self-regulation and self-control, essential to the emotional regulation required in adulthood.

The second-year group were tasked with conceiving, designing, scripting and producing a series of short values-based plays, the final performances of which would be performed and externally examined in one of the participating preschools. The execution of this part of the CE programme would entail the students learning how to conceptualize and write plays for the age group of 0-4. Included in the developmental/rehearsal stages leading up to the final production were critical and instructive discussions with the ECD community trainers. In this way, one of the key goals of Community – Higher Education-Service Partnerships (CHESP), making CE an integral part of teaching and research for a deeper sense of context, locality and application (Kruss, 2012: 6), found practical application. The series of discussions around strategies for structuring the creative arts sessions necessitated the participation of all stakeholders – the DUT Community Engagement practitioner and students with community trainers, the GDT head trainer and project coordinator - and explored a range of contextually appropriate and 'best-fit' presentation options. This authentic illustration of the cocreation of knowledge between the university/academy and the community members resonates with the definition of service learning offered by Bringle and Clayton (2012: 105) that it "involves the integration of academic material, relevant community-based service activities, and critical reflection in a reciprocal partnership that engages students, faculty/staff, and community members to achieve academic, civic, and personal learning objectives as well as to advance public purposes".

During the dialogues, the students' proposed creative arts training programme was adapted through the guidance and direction provided by the community trainers. Content had to accommodate such factors as: the developmental stage of the children being targeted; clear and well-defined expected outcomes; the capacity to integrate the values; recognition of contextual conditions and availability of resources; and the transition from theory to practical application. Similarly, community trainers explored a range of creative teaching tools, discussed possibilities of integrating the creative arts in the values programme; creatively improvising with scarce resources; and discovering the link between practice and theory. According to Keeton (1983) cited in Lazarus *et al* (2008: 64), because service learning has its roots in experiential education, it has the potential to transform students, help them revise and enlarge knowledge, and alter their practice. Also, it can affect the aesthetic and ethical commitments of individuals and alter their perceptions and their interpretations of the world.

Indeed, the interactions between the students and the ECD community trainers in the preparation stages brought valuable insights that informed and shaped their creative arts presentations, e.g., games and activities involving numbers, shapes and colours were revised to better integrate the relevant values and to define literacy, numeracy and spatial concepts as per specific developmental stages such that target outcomes could be effectively achieved. Equally, during the production of the short plays, the ECD community trainers' consistent interventions to guide the students included such detail as acceptable language levels, appropriate questions and comments, reasonable duration and realisable outcomes. The participation of the Drama Department in the ECD Values Education project and the promotion therein of a reciprocal exchange of knowledge reinforces the argument that Astin (1999) cited in Stewart and Alrutz (2012: 45) makes, that if universities want their graduates to acquire ideals and ethics associated with healthy democracies (e.g., honesty, tolerance, generosity, teamwork, consensus, social responsibility), they must provide students with opportunities to practice and ultimately acquire those dispositions and skills. In the case of this particular CE project, the experience was twofold – both the process and content are steeped in democratic values.

The third-year presentations to the ECD community trainers were as follows:

1. Movement group - songs and dances on values of nonviolence and freedom against a 'safe playground' backdrop.
2. Story telling group - two stories: 'The Dodgy Goat' and the 'Dazzy Rat' on values of respect, honesty and responsibility.
3. Acting group - telling and enacting a story about a greedy lion and a brave, compassionate rabbit on the value of humility and compassion.
4. Creative group - making colouring-in shapes on values of cooperation and happiness and incorporating literacy, numeracy, sensory and spatial concepts.

During both the preparation and presentation of this round of activities, the mutually beneficial and participatory discussions amongst the participants were an unequivocal demonstration of shared learning. The students' learning was broadened by the inputs of the ECD community trainers who brought to the project actual experience, specialised knowledge, descriptions of material and contextual conditions in public, sub-economic preschools (large numbers, scanty resources, unqualified teachers, poor infrastructure, etc.) and a social justice perspective. Likewise, the ECD community trainers embraced the innovation and creativity of the proposed creative arts programme, the skills of dramatic story telling, the idea of locating stories within everyday realities or the familiar and the designing of creative artefacts as teaching tools. Emerging from these interactions with the ET students was a very real sense that they were grounded in critical thinking and application. According to Shor (1993: 25), a Freirean class invites students to think critically about subject matter, doctrines, the learning process itself, and their society, which seems to be a fitting description of the ET drama classes engaged in this service-learning project.

The second-year presentations (10 minutes each) to about 80 children at a preschool were as follows:
1. 'Monkey Business' on the values of responsibility, cooperation and nonviolence.
2. 'The Lion and the Mouse' on the values of compassion, respect and humility.
3. 'Chickly Chicks' on the values of cooperation and love.
4. 'The Leopard Learns his Lesson' on the values of honesty and nonviolence.

These short values-based plays were inspired by the supporting stories in the ECD VEP training programme. In the adaptation, however, the students devised popular, everyday plots, locations and scenes to resonate with the lived experiences of the children for whom the dramatisations were performed. Theatre as an educational medium uses entertainment and humour to attract children's attention and emphasises learning through the interplay between actual and fictional contexts. The range of artistic devices, including the active participation of children in the drama, demonstrate reflexive learning where the students integrate learning in a community context as well as through analysis and application to academic learning (Fisher *et al*., 2004: 25). The contributions of the ECD community trainers to the creative and educative processes of these presentations were highly instructive, e.g., duration of plays, language levels and engaging children post the performance. In the case of this presentation which included the live performances for the children, the benefits were multifold, and included: children experiencing a dramatic performance (most for the first time); children actively participating in the performances and the educative value of that exercise; ECD community trainers observing the value of participatory drama as a teaching tool/support; ECD community trainers noting the potential of drama for behaviour change; students participating in experiential/service learning; and students engaging in child centred education. Ultimately, the CE platform provided an inclusive environment for all participants and the participants-community trainers and students - reported feeling more empowered because they had an equal voice and were able to share their views openly with all participants.

Conclusion

The collaboration between DUT and GDT demonstrates the valuable contribution of CSOs in giving effect to the White Paper on the Transformation of Higher Education (RSA, DOE 1997) which sought to lay the foundations for integrating Community Engagement into South African higher education. As stated, DUT's decisive action in creating space within its institution for CSO participation in 2004 catalysed the mutually beneficial partnerships. This is manifest, especially, in the multi-disciplinary partnership programmes between the ECD VEP and the DUT Departments of Drama, Food and Nutrition and Sport, featured here. The practical and demonstrable sharing corresponds closely with 'knowledge enablement', when "the outcomes or impact [are] of a kind of knowledge

that is not simply abstract and theoretical but one that enables local change and transformation" (de Beer, 2014: 131). In the case of the creative arts component, detailed here and developed to support the ECD VEP training, it was an effective and enriching teaching and learning tool that greatly enhanced the values-based curriculum intervention. As such, it contributes significantly to the project's primary goal of engaging children in the critical early years to nonviolent and socially responsible ways of relating to others and the environment. Equally, the CE activity afforded academic staff and students the opportunity to cocreate with community members new and relevant knowledge, consistent with the Freirean counter-colonizing model that seeks to challenge the historical hegemonic position and dominance of academic knowledge. Through their participation, they developed empowering relationships with disadvantaged communities, became active agents for social change and advanced the public good. Finally, the promising reception to the project, especially by the ECD practitioners, strengthens the project team's long-term goal: the explicit inclusion of values education in ECD practitioner training curricula. This is more likely to encourage a values-based ethic in the practitioners and to positively impact the children in their care in the phase that singularly has the greatest potential for sustainable learning opportunities. In this way, the possibility of the early development of a new generation of socially conscious and responsible citizens looms.

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