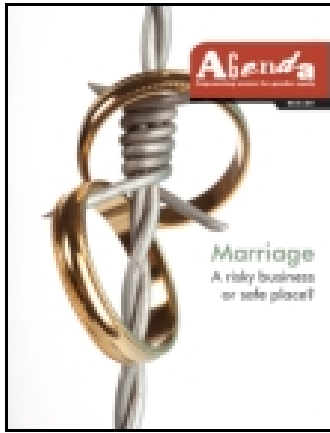


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Using transformative pedagogies for the prevention of gender-based violence: Reflections from a secondary school-based intervention

Ndumiso Daluxolo Ngidi and Relebohile Moletsane

abstract

This article describes an initiative aimed at addressing gender violence, and in particular sexual violence. Implemented in 2014 in a township secondary school in Durban, the initiative involved six peer educators from the Durban University of Technology and 10 from the secondary school. In its design, the initiative has drawn from what might be called 'transformative pedagogies'. Moreover, located more broadly within feminist pedagogies, the project focused on work that emphasises the creation of safe spaces in education for young female learners. This was aimed at enabling participants' deep reflection on the self, addressing both structure and agency. Our analysis suggests that through its pedagogy, the initiative created a platform for both male and female students to speak about their experiences of violence and forge new ways of talking about and addressing sexual abuse. Further, the process was successful in enabling an appreciation of difference and resourcefulness among the participants. This article highlights the potential value of transformative and feminist pedagogies in addressing gender-based violence, and particularly sexual violence among learners in secondary schools.

keywords

transformative pedagogies, feminist pedagogies, sexual violence, secondary schools, peer education

Sexual violence and the urgent need for interventions

Available research has identified gender-based violence (GBV), and in particular, sexual violence in and around schools as a challenge for young people in South Africa (Human Rights Watch, 2001; Mncube and Harber, 2013; University of the Witwatersrand *et al*, 2014). In the country, sexual violence - described as a range of behaviours that include rape, physical violence, intimate partner violence (IPV) and

emotional violence - is under-reported and prevalence has reached crisis proportions (Dosekum, 2007; South African Council of Educators - SACE, 2011). It is further embedded in existing social, cultural and economic inequalities between men and women (Posel, 2005). Within this context, the inequalities between males and females that are constructed and reinforced by gender roles leave young women particularly susceptible to sexual violence, harassment, assault and discrimination (Mullick *et al*, 2010).

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Reflective of the wider community context, secondary schools, which bring into close proximity a collective of young people, tend to be a fertile environment for gendered violence by and against youth. For example, sexual harassment in the “form of fondling and touching of girls in their private parts within classrooms and hallways on school grounds” is common and perpetrated by teachers and male learners (Bhana, 2012:353). The gendered nature of sexual violence in schools speaks to the unequal power dynamics in male to female relationships in which girls tend to hold little or no power (Mullick *et al*, 2010).

research describes widespread forms of gender violence and harassment of girls by adult teachers, male relatives, as well as male peers in the household and in schools

South Africa has one of the highest rates of sexual violence in the world (Petersen *et al*, 2005; Dosekum, 2007). Crime data for the year 2013/14 from the South African Police Services (SAPS) shows a figure of 62 642 reported sexual offences cases (SAPS, 2014). The number of women raped in South Africa each year has been estimated as 119.5 per 100 000 (Jewkes and Abrahams, 2002; Jewkes *et al*, 2006). While some of the violence is perpetrated by strangers and acquaintances, the country is also notorious for its high rates of intimate partner violence. For example, according to a Gender Links (2012:2) study:

“the most predominant form of GBV experienced by women and perpetrated by men [in Gauteng, Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape] occurs within intimate partnerships, [with 51 percent of ever-partnered women in Gauteng, 51 percent in Limpopo, 44 percent in Western Cape and 29 percent in KwaZulu-Natal reporting having experienced IPV in their lifetime].”

Thus, young women, and adolescent girls in particular, are at heightened risk of sexual abuse at home, at school and within their respective communities. Approximately 40% of reported rape cases are of girls under the age of 18 years (Human Rights Watch, 2001; Jewkes *et al*, 2005; Petersen *et al*, 2005).

Likewise, earlier studies found that sexual assault was a regular feature of young women and girls’ lives (see for example Wood and Jewkes, 1997) with at least 20 000 girls raped in 2004 (Jewkes *et al*, 2005). Similarly, studies have identified educational institutions as sites for sexual violence, particularly against girls and young women (Jewkes and Abrahams, 2002; Jewkes *et al*, 2006; Mullick *et al*, 2010).

Despite the fact that male youth are often the perpetrators of the sexual abuse of girls, studies suggest that adult men are also often the culprits (Petersen *et al*, 2005; Prinsloo, 2006). For example, research describes widespread forms of gender violence and harassment of girls by adult teachers, male relatives, as well as male peers in the household and in schools (see Bhana, 2012). While statistics reflect troubling rates of abuse against women, researchers have argued that this is only the ‘tip of the iceberg’ since women face many social pressures that discourage them from reporting rape and any form of sexual violence (see Jewkes and Abrahams, 2002:1231). For example, only 1 in 9 rape cases are reported to the police in South Africa, and sexual assaults that take place outside the victim’s household or that are perpetrated by an unknown person are more likely to be reported than those perpetrated by someone known to the victim (Jewkes *et al*, 2006; Mullick *et al*, 2010). Thus much of the abuse that takes place at home or at school might go unreported.

There is evidence suggesting that within poor communities sexual abuse is rife (Jewkes and Abrahams, 2002). Thus, girls in poor township contexts, including schools, tend to be more vulnerable to such violence. Although ample research has been published on sexual violence in South Africa, very little is covered in the literature on interventions that seek to address this phenomenon (see for example, Gibbs *et al*, 2014), particularly those that seek to work with high school learners in addressing sexual violence. We add to this growing body of knowledge by reflecting on a secondary school-based GBV intervention. We describe an initiative aimed at addressing gender violence, and in particular sexual violence, with 16 participants in a township secondary school in Durban.

Conceptual frameworks

Recently, researchers of gender violence have highlighted the need for interventions that are comprehensive and community based in order to deal with multi levels of risk influences (see for example, Petersen *et al*, 2005). In this regard, we designed *Inyathelo Lethu* (which means 'Our Initiative' in both isiZulu and isiXhosa) as an intervention aimed at addressing gender-based violence among secondary school learners. In its design, *Inyathelo Lethu* has drawn from what might be called 'transformative pedagogies'. In particular we focused on feminist pedagogies that sought to create safe spaces in education for young female learners, in this case, by addressing and reducing sexual violence against girls and young women in and around the school. Our work also looked at methods of responding to violence (secondary prevention).

Thus, we use the notion of transformative pedagogy as a conceptual framework to analyse the intervention and its potential role in addressing sexual violence. Transformative pedagogy engages students as critical thinkers, participatory and active learners, who envision alternative possibilities of social reality (see for example, Nagda *et al*, 2003:167). This is very similar to the ideas of Paolo Freire who argued that "through dialogue people can start to think critically and envisage different ways of being and acting" (Gibbs *et al*, 2014:162). The pedagogy concerns itself with the elimination of oppressive, harmful and violent hierarchies, and endeavours to be liberating through raising consciousness (Harrell-Levy and Kerpelman, 2010). Located within the feminist paradigm, transformative pedagogy encourages students to critically examine their assumptions, cope with social issues and participate in social action. Of particular significance in this project was the value of transformative pedagogy in:

transformative pedagogy engages students as critical thinkers, participatory and active learners

"...creating safe spaces for students; encouraging students to think about their experiences, beliefs and biases; promoting the student engagement and participation; posing real world problems that address societal inequalities; and helping students

to implement action-oriented solutions" (Meyers, 2008:219).

Both feminist and transformative pedagogies endeavour to create a sense of consciousness where an individual is able to understand their position in a world that undervalues marginalised groups and how an individual can use such knowledge to transform society (Elenes, 2001). These pedagogies promote critical thinking, foster self-examination and facilitate civic engagement (for example, with regards to gender violence among young people) (Meyers, 2008). Moreover, the pedagogies help to develop among the participants the:

"ability of seeing or an understanding developed by those in the margins [such as secondary school learners in a poor township school] a survival tactic... developed from 'below' based on experiences of oppression" (Elenes, 2001:692).

In this initiative, it was our aim, through transformative learning, to assist the participants in examining their experiences of gender-based violence and then take action that would effect widespread change (Levitt, 2008; Meyers, 2008; Harrell-Levy and Kerpelman, 2010). This was informed by our belief that the collegial and informal nature of transformative education challenges conventional ideas of gendered power and authority seen in the classroom, household and community (Meyers, 2008). Perhaps because of the level of comfort and trust created at the onset, participants often feel a willingness to share experiences and collaborate in creating solutions.

In this article, using these frameworks, we reflect on the participants' experiences of the project (as well as our own as researchers and implementers) and on the extent and ways in which the intervention and its pedagogy were transformative. The article also reflects on what this pilot intervention might teach us about addressing sexual violence among young people in resource-poor school contexts.

Inyathelo Lethu: A transformative pedagogy-based intervention

The project was implemented in 2013-14 over a period of 10 months at *Imizamo* Secondary School (a pseudonym) in Ntuzuma



The DUT and Imizamo Peer Educators in a gender violence discussion and debriefing session facilitated by The International Centre for Non-Violence (ICON)
Photo: Ndumiso Daluxolo Ngidi

township, a large township outside Durban. The school is an all-African quintile 1¹ township school located in an environment mostly made up of informal housing and low-cost housing built by the then apartheid government, as well as post-apartheid Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) housing comprising small two- and three-roomed houses. As a quintile 1 institution, the school was a 'no-fee school' and relied largely on government subsidies and donations. As a result the school is characterised by poor infrastructure, which bears testimony to the socio-economic demography of the learners it attracts.

The intervention involved two groups of male and female participants: an existing peer educator group (N=6) from the Durban University of Technology (DUT) and a newly established group at the secondary school (N=10). In total the project worked with eight females and eight males. The DUT participants were recruited through individual applications and were subsequently interviewed. Around student registration in January, posters advertised for students to apply to join the Peer Education Programme, which is headed and housed at the university's HIV/AIDS Centre (where the first author was employed during the implementation of the initiative). The secondary school participants

were recruited by their Life Orientation teachers, and were identified as 'learners at academic risk' (or who were performing poorly in their academic work). Drawing from the understanding that the project would also focus on career guidance and planning, the secondary school teachers specifically selected these learners to help them overcome their academic and learning challenges.

The 10 peer educators from the secondary school came from a variety of households in Ntuzuma: some from shacks made of scrap materials (such as wood and mud) and others from government RDP dwellings. The community mostly shares the water supply among these households; while toilet facilities are outdoor pit-latrines built on the periphery of each shack property. Seven of the participants lived in female-headed households (mostly headed by grandmothers), two were from child-headed households, and one lived with her neighbours after the death of her parents. No participant, from either the secondary school or university group, lived with both parents. The university peer educators came from different township households around KwaZulu-Natal. One male from this group once lived on the streets, and eventually a shelter for children living in the streets, in central Durban. All university participants

lived in DUT residences at the time of the project.

The initiative's goal was to establish and facilitate a collaborative effort between the university peer educators and the high school peer educators. In 2013, prior to the commencement of the project, a proposal was written, submitted and approved by the University of KwaZulu-Natal's (UKZN) Extended Learning Programme in collaboration with the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) Centre for Global Health. The project described here was part of the MAC AIDS Fellowship Programme called Leadership in HIV Prevention.

Following the recruitment of the 16 peer educators, the secondary school's management, the learners' parents or guardians and the learners themselves granted informed consent for learners' participation in the project. An informed consent form and letter of information detailing the project was handed to parents/guardians and both the DUT and *Imizamo* peer educators. Key issues addressed in these documents included: (a) child protection; (b) the sensitive nature of issues covered in the project, and the need for careful debriefing and support to those with questions and/or in difficult circumstance; (c) care and consultation about inappropriately exposing young people's behaviours to adults and authorities; (d) memorandums of agreement and intellectual property with participants; (e) safety of participants and the secondary school's management, the learners' parents or guardians and the learners themselves, and (f) strategies for conflict resolution. Further assistance, advice, debriefing and psychological support was sought for the peer educators from psychologists working at the DUT's Counselling Unit. The International Centre for Non-Violence (ICON) located within the DUT also offered conflict resolution and debriefing support during workshops.

Initially, the DUT peer educators acted as mentors to the secondary school participants to promote GBV prevention and career planning. Each university peer educator was assigned two mentees from the school. We tasked the two groups to work collaboratively in developing and implementing a gender-based violence prevention curriculum for the secondary school. The first author was the project's coordinator. After the recruitment

process in January 2014, both sets of peer educators were trained over three days in HIV prevention methods, prevention of gender violence, and sexual and reproductive health, facilitation and basic counselling skills.

Following the peer education training the first series of workshops commenced. The workshops took place in different sites within the university, including the boardroom of the university's Department of Student Counselling and Health. These workshops were the core that shaped the project. Active participation as well as confidentiality and mutual respect were encouraged and practiced from the initiation of the project. We encouraged all the participants to use any language (English and isiZulu) they preferred. As a result, both English and isiZulu were used interchangeably throughout the intervention.

First, to gain an understanding of the participants' knowledge, behaviours, attitudes and needs around issues related to gender violence, we administered a survey to the learners at the school. This was followed by two focus group discussions with randomly selected female and male learners focusing on the issues uncovered in the survey. Armed with data from these two sources, the first author held a series of workshops (six hours each over five consecutive days) with all 16 peer educators. The workshops were aimed at developing a curriculum for addressing gender-based violence in the school. During the curriculum development workshops, the participants were invited to share their experiences of violence as perpetrators, victims or witnesses. As a take-off point, two questions guided the discussions:

1. How do you feel about violence in relationships? Is it ever justified?
2. Women are also attacked generally in society in the form of intimidation, harassment and rape. What do you think about this?

We were informed by the notion that optimal learning occurs only when the learner feels a sense of responsibility towards contributing to the process, has a sense of empowerment and trusts that his or her ideas are important (see Meyers, 2008). Therefore we agreed to settle for a curriculum that reinforced collaborative learning, rather than the traditional "banking model" of teaching (a method that relies on a presentation and where students are considered as recipients of information)

(see for example Nagda *et al*, 2003). Working with the participants' responses on the two questions above, the group of 16 peer educators discussed possible strategies for addressing violence, and the kind of curriculum content and structure, that could be implemented as a gender violence prevention initiative at the school. Furthermore, participants debated who would teach the curriculum and what teaching strategies or pedagogy would be most effective. Together, we agreed that if, through the curriculum, we wanted to achieve transformation, we needed to view all secondary school learners as active participants capable of identifying issues that impact on their lives negatively and potential strategies for addressing them.

The 16 participants, through the use of a variety of participatory teaching and learning methods, including role-play, self-reflection and small group discussions, explored their personal experiences, feelings, beliefs and positions about gender violence. The first two days focused on anger management, self-esteem and assertive communication. In days three and four, the participants shared their experiences regarding gender-based violence (as either victims, witnesses or perpetrators). The last two days were used to develop a curriculum that would be used to raise awareness and address gender violence at the secondary school. Workshops² with 200 learners (separated into five groups of 40 learners each) were held thereafter at the secondary school over five consecutive days (six hours each day) during the 2014 winter school break.

On the first day, the groups were separated by gender to encourage open discussion and on the remaining four days each group consisted of mixed gender learners. Acting as facilitators, the 16 peer educators implemented the intervention with the 200 school learners. The curriculum content included sex education, self-esteem, self-awareness, human rights, strategies for identifying, preventing and talking about gender violence, as well as leadership skills, and gender and sexual equality. The workshops also used a variety of transformative teaching and learning methods including role play and poetry.

As feminists and supporters of transformative pedagogy, we encouraged a teaching style that addressed the power differential between the researchers and the peer educators (Meyers, 2008). For example, the first

author, who worked closely with the peer educators and attended all the workshops, became a participant throughout the project, and never assumed a superior role, unless otherwise stated in agreement by all the other participants. As a result, each of the 16 peer educators was given the opportunity to facilitate any session during the workshops. Also, we avoided the typical classroom set up of a 'theatre seating' arrangement; instead throughout the intervention we sat in a circle or in the form of a 'horse-shoe'. This personalisation continuously reinforced trust and openness in the impersonal realm of classroom teaching and learning. In addition to facilitating the workshops, the DUT peer educators were also tasked with monitoring and evaluating the intervention, including evaluating and assessing the 200 learners' knowledge before and after the workshops held at the secondary school.

Participants' experiences of violence

In this section, we reflect on the participants' (the 16 peer educators) views on gender violence at the beginning of the intervention. Informed by feminist and transformative pedagogies, we understood the initial discussions on the participants' experiences of violence as critical for the development of the gender-based violence prevention curriculum. This is supported by literature highlighting the importance of such discussion in fostering students' collaboration, assisting in challenging social norms and encouraging tolerance of difference (see for example, Levitt, 2008).

An idea that resonated with all secondary school participants was that men had a right to inflict violence on women and other men to show their manhood or masculinity. This was reflected in what one of the participants, a grade 11 learner, gave as a response at our first meeting:

"I always beat up my girlfriend so that she will respect me (sic). If I tell her that I will meet her at a specific place at a certain time and she arrives late, I beat her up so that she does not make me wait again. I become more aggressive if I see her standing with another guy even if it is her friend. I don't like to see her standing with any other guys that are not her brother or myself. I also punish her if she makes me



DUT and Imizamo Secondary School Peer Educators in one of the workshops at DUT
Photo: Mondli Mzulwini

wait for her in the sun" (Sourced from facilitator notes).

Violence was perceived as a normal rite for men. Likewise, gender violence, and sexual violence in particular, was a form of exerting control, objectifying women and almost an 'owning' of them. The quote above further highlights the role of masculinity in perpetuating aggressive male behaviour against women, and the normalising of such behaviour. The 'punishment' of women was perceived as a requirement to 'correct' any attitude or behaviour that did not fall within male expectations, both of male and female behaviours. Therefore, these participants suggested that boyfriends and other males had a right to dictate the role of women in the secondary school context and to use violence where they saw the need.

Surprisingly, all the female participants (including those from the university) agreed with these sentiments. They expressed their hopelessness in addressing harassment, intimidation and violence; suggesting that it had become a normal part of their lives at home, in the community and at school (including the university). The female participants at this stage of the project took a more subservient and submissive role that rendered them unable to challenge their male equals. In speaking about violence against women, the

female participants felt that men had a right to beat up their girlfriends for not behaving in an 'acceptable' manner. Moreover, rape within intimate sexual relationships was not considered a form of sexual abuse; instead it was normalised and treated with silence and acceptance. This was reflected in what one of the female university participants said:

"I live with my boyfriend at res, and he often beats me. He used to beat me if I didn't want to sleep with him, so now I just do it even if I don't want to. But I guess he has a right to do that as the head of the relationship" (Sourced from transcript of workshops).

Throughout the introductory sessions it became evident that young men lacked anger management skills, while females lacked self-esteem and assertive communication skills (skills that would help them challenge abuse). At this tone-setting moment, we sought the assistance of two psychologists from the university's Counselling Unit to facilitate sessions on assertive communication, anger management and self-esteem.

Reflecting on these exercises was a major element in the process. For example, after a discussion on gender violence it became evident that the peer educators had experienced some form of gender violence; the

women experienced it as victims and/or witnesses while the men experienced it as either victims, witnesses or perpetrators (or all of them). These experiences were most common at home (enacted by an older relative or parent) and at school by both the teachers and other students. Through emphasising participation, mutual respect and tolerance, each person was able to share their experiences with the group. These varied from being a victim, a witness, a perpetrator, or all three. One of the grade 12 females spoke about victimisation by a relative since the death of both her parents:

"I live with my cousin in his house, and his wife lives and works in Pretoria. I depend on him for everything. So whenever I ask for anything, including food, or money for books he tells me to sleep with him first. When I refuse he locks all the food cupboards and the fridge. So I have no choice but to sleep with him. I have been pregnant once, and he forced me to terminate the pregnancy" (Sourced from the facilitator's notes).

Like many of the females in the group who had been sexually abused, she had not questioned her abuser's behaviour believing that it was acceptable in the family and the community. The quote highlights the extent of disempowerment of young women that leaves them with 'no choice' but to succumb to sexual victimisation and rape. It was striking to find that none of the female participants had ever reported their abusers to the police as they felt nothing would happen to the perpetrators. The learner quoted above went on to state how an older female relative reproached her for trying to report her abuse by her cousin. She was harshly told to keep it a secret to protect the family's dignity and not to compromise the financial support he provided. Many of the women participants described violent acts as normal, and some, even as expressions of love (when enacted by their male sexual partners). One university participant noted:

"I personally have been in an awful situation; abusive boyfriend. It was in the back of my mind at all times but thought it was normal for a guy to hit you" (Sourced from transcript of workshops).

After a few sessions, four of the men reported being sexually abused, while the remainder disclosed that they had at least once in their life perpetrated, collaborated in, or supported acts of gender violence. The raping of men and violence against men was noted as underreported, because it was embarrassing for men to admit they were rape victims and they were not taken seriously. As one of the young men in the initiative, who once lived in the streets and was gang-raped by three men, highlighted:

"Reporting the incident was something I didn't even think of as I was embarrassed and felt ashamed. I felt I wasn't man enough for not fighting back even though they were stronger than me. I also thought that people would laugh at me and not take me seriously, so I kept the incident a secret" (Sourced from the facilitator's notes).

Another male participant who, together with his brother, was sexually abused by an uncle in a rural household echoed these sentiments. He felt that reporting would have shamed him and his family. This participant also felt that reporting would fracture his family's relationship and unity. This might explain why, most of the male participants directed their anger and violence towards their peers and frequently their girlfriends.

After reflecting on their experiences, the participants agreed that violence caused major psychological and physical harm to both victims and perpetrators. For them as peer educators, the reflection process helped in identifying and shifting individual points of view, and created a common goal of educating the school community about gender violence and its implications. Informed by this understanding, they set out to develop a curriculum and strategies they would use to address violence at the school and the immediate community.

Participants' experiences of the intervention

Overall, feedback from both the peer educators and the school learners about the project, and its teaching and learning style in particular, was positive. The peer educators

noted how the project helped them to reflect on their context and how their experiences had shaped the success of the initiative. What they saw as most rewarding was their personal reflections as this process enabled them to face the realities of their past and think positively about the future. The men acknowledged their position in relation to gender violence, and how they could identify and address it in their own life spaces. They further reported a positive shift in their views and attitudes regarding sexual violence; suggesting that they would no longer participate in or encourage sexual violence. Likewise, they were encouraged and committed to sharing their experiences as victims and perpetrators of violence. Additionally for all the participants, a success was being able to listen to the life stories of others and grow a sense of empathy and build connection through adversity. One of the male peer educators from the school highlighted this elaborately by saying:

"This programme taught me how to listen to other people and how to deal with other people's problems. Also how to counsel a person, maybe he or she was raped or abused physically, emotionally or sexually... Being in contact with DUT has made me empathetic towards other people and talk about my own experiences. I initially thought in the programme we would be taught like at school, I didn't expect that I would also contribute to something so big. It was so helpful" (Sourced from participant's evaluation of the initiative).

This quote perhaps highlights how the male participants started to acknowledge that gender violence cuts across biological sex and that young men, although to a lesser extent, are also vulnerable to abuse by other men. Also, the male participants reported and displayed a sense of empathy towards their female counterparts regarding their sexual abuse. Another realisation was how connected, albeit in different ways, the participants felt because of their experiences. What this highlights is that we achieved the goal of integration. A particular comment noted the coming to a deeper understanding of other people, through listening and understanding how they had been shaped through their social contexts. The emphasis on 'self and others' came through clearly from a female DUT peer educator:

"At first I was just taking chances submitting my CV for peer education programme, but tables turned when I realised how much one can gain from offering one's self into instilling change and empower one another. Through this programme I have learned to know myself. In a space of three months, I managed to get myself out of an abusive relationship and couldn't be happier. Something tells me that if I did not take a chance I wouldn't have met the individuals that have empowered me to change myself before I could even change someone else. Meeting the high school students has given me hope that there is still a chance for that boy and girl child in our societies. I wake up everyday with hope and wishing to influence others in the long run. Now I can proudly say I know myself" (Sourced from participant's evaluation of the initiative).

For this initiative it was important to destabilise power relationships, for example, between us as researchers, as well as between male and female peer educators, and between the DUT group and school-based peer educators. Both the secondary school and university peer educators felt like they were part of something important, and that their roles were equally significant. None of the participants reported feeling inferior or superior (or even discriminated against) because of their education level, their gender, age, experiences or sexual orientation. It was also evident that putting the experiences of others at the centre became a way of extending each individual's thinking and sense of possibilities, transforming the interaction of participants into something that created value for each other and the group. One DUT female peer educator reflected:

"I have been able to be inspired by people my age and those much younger than me, and I have inspired other people. I have learned to communicate effectively with others and interact with different people and understand them" (Sourced from participant's evaluation of the initiative).

A conclusion can be drawn that there is value in creating safe learning spaces within which alternative and hopeful realities can be visualised and then realised. In drawing this conclusion it is helpful to distinguish how transformative pedagogies differ from those



Gender Violence workshop at Imizamo Secondary School. The workshop was facilitated by both DUT and Imizamo Peer Educators
Photo: Ndumiso Daluxolo Ngidi

that rely primarily on cognitive outcomes or skills in academic literacy.

Lessons learned from using transformative and feminist pedagogies

The intervention has developed a practical model for responding to gender violence in a resource-poor secondary school. Using university and secondary school students as a resource, the entire process has also offered a model for preparing participants as leaders committed to social justice (Brown, 2004). Through weaving together transformative and feminist pedagogies the participants learned to reflect on the negative impacts of GBV and on various strategies for addressing it. This is in line with the work of Paolo Freire, for example, which highlights processes of:

“critical self-reflection that can be stimulated by people, events, or changes in context that challenges the learners’ basic assumptions of the world” (Brown, 2004:84).

By being part of the intervention, the participants have taken on the responsibility for growth by questioning their own positions and beliefs on sexual violence (Meyers, 2008) and coming up with means of

addressing the problem in the school. In this particular initiative, the pedagogies have contributed to the creation of a supportive learning community among the participants (Elenes, 2001; Gibbs *et al*, 2014), a climate of acceptance (Meyers, 2008), and an environment where participants have transformed their sexist views and practices and identified ways to challenge sexual violence (Nagda *et al*, 2003; Brown, 2004).

Historically, education has been perceived as a key socialising arena for preparing students to become active citizens (Nagda *et al*, 2003). Transformative pedagogy requires that researchers and educators become active facilitators and co-learners who go beyond simply meeting the expressed needs of the learner (Brown, 2004; Meyers, 2008). Using these paradigms we have provided the secondary school and researchers with a useful theoretical perspective to guide their efforts (Meyers, 2008). Through analysing the participants’ evaluations we found evidence that the project had facilitated their critical thinking, self-examination, and civic engagement. Advocates of feminist and transformative frameworks have argued that “programmes grounded in these approaches recognise that the challenge in educating for social change is more than instilling new knowledge” (Nagda *et al*, 2003:167). As a result, we also focused and relied on the participants’ knowledge and

personal experiences of gender violence. Therefore, the intervention contributes to the literature on transformative and feminist pedagogies, creating and promoting as it does so, a process of transforming the environmental, cognitive, and pedagogical contexts in which teaching and learning about sexual violence occurs (Elenes, 2001; Nagda *et al*, 2003; Meyers, 2008).

Conclusion

We have described here an initiative that is located within the feminist paradigm and draws largely from transformative pedagogies. We highlighted the pedagogy's value in addressing gender violence among learners in a secondary school. Among its many highlights, the project analysed in this article successfully included young men and women in its implementation. Likewise, it enabled both the 16 peer educators and the 200 secondary school learners to voice their views on and share their experiences of gender violence. The initiative further enabled the DUT and *Imizamo* peer educators to contribute towards developing strategies for addressing sexual violence. Through the use of a transformative pedagogy, and in particular youth-led activities throughout the intervention, the participants developed a sense of ownership of the initiative. As researchers, we also realised the value of students as a resource, which extended our understanding of gender violence as a phenomenon in the school and communities, as well as the importance of pedagogy, in this case, transformative pedagogy, in addressing it.

Our findings suggest that the project enabled a high sense of safety for participants within the intervention (through the development of a common set of values from the ground up), and fostered interaction among the peer educators. This enhanced their confidence in not only identifying gender violence in their own lives and the lives of others, but also in identifying and developing strategies for addressing it. In addition to the positive feedback about the workshops, some of the 200 learners involved in the workshops at *Imizamo* Secondary School realised the value of peer educators in their school and, through letters, started to communicate about various issues affecting them. In these letters, the learners shared their experiences of abuse, and together sought ways of handling and

addressing it. A referral system was created with Child-Line (a non-governmental organisation [NGO] that supports and protects abused children) to support learners at the school. A striking letter was from a female learner, who had been continuously sexually abused by a stepfather and was forced to terminate three pregnancies. The letter expressed gratitude towards the project:

"I'd like to thank you for your wise words and honesty. Your strong and sweet words built my confidence. I'm glad that you don't see me as abnormal and foolish, but as a person. Thank you. I have always wanted an opportunity to talk about my story. People like you are scarce. I also didn't think you faced the same hardships. Now I know that I am not alone. Your programme has saved my life" (Extract from the letter).

As an intervention, *Inyathelo Lethu* was very rewarding and engaging for the participants and the researchers. For example, the participants commented on the degree of personal development that they had achieved in such areas as self-esteem, assertiveness and communication, as well as in identifying and addressing gender violence in their various contexts. The secondary school management further reported an improvement in academic performance among the secondary school peer educators. For us as researchers, the project reinforced the value of transformative pedagogy, in particular, in creating a safe space where we could work on an effective change in thinking among our participants and ourselves. Departing from the traditional view of young people as 'problems' and in need of saving, the transformative pedagogies we used throughout the project saw the role of young people as resources not only in identifying issues that are negatively impacting their lives (such as gender violence), but also in finding strategies for addressing them. This article, and the intervention in particular, highlights the potential value of transformative and feminist pedagogies in addressing gender-based violence, and particularly sexual violence among learners in secondary schools.

Notes

1. Public schools in South Africa are categorised into five quintiles based on the poverty of the

- communities they serve, with quintile 1 schools serving the poorest and quintile 5 serving the least poor communities. Schools in quintiles 1-3 have been declared no-fee schools, while quintile 4 and 5 are fee paying schools.
- The secondary school peer educators held more workshops throughout the year with interested learners at the school. These workshops took part after school for two hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The DUT peer educators offered mentorship support through phone calls, text messages and irregular meetings if and when they were needed. The first author continued visiting the school on a weekly basis for the remainder of the year to monitor the project's progress and impact and to offer advice and direction to the *Imizamo* peer educators.

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