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## **What's it got to do with me? Arrow in South Africa.**

Mary Lange (ARROW coordinator South Africa)

*Desmond Tutu, the former Anglican archbishop, has reminded South Africans that reconciliation and forgiveness are still far from being attained. He said although racism and crime were still rife in the country, South Africa was still better off than many other nations. He added that South Africans should stand tall and thank God that we are where we are (SABCnews.com March 2005).*

### **Introduction**

I have come to see reconciliation as the grace to confront past and present personal and collective failures by looking within rather than glaring at others; the grace to confront past and present personal and collective acts, words and thoughts that are based on prejudices resulting from negative cultural stereotypes; the grace not to be defensive on this revelation of failure but when convicted to stand vulnerable and weak, and weep; the grace when cleansed not to be rendered useless or to slip into complacency or to forget, but to be strong enough to remember and yet to act and to readdress and to build with humility.

### **Pre 1994 South Africa**

The arts were effectively used to undermine, expose and attack the South African apartheid government. Artists' individual responses to their circumstances differed in intensity and approach. In a similar fashion to the fate of traditional leaders, according to a Zulu saying (Holomisa and Turok; 2005), some artists bravely tried to stand as trees against the floods of hate. In doing so they were uprooted. Some went to prison as political prisoners or conscientious objectors. Others went into exile. There, some died, some withered and others despite the hardships shot out new roots. Many did not have the financial means or political connections to leave the country. They stayed and bent like reeds, rooted in their beliefs and work. Such artists bore and still bear mental scars as victims of apartheid who were inhabitants of the black locations, or were soldiers or relatives of soldiers sent to Angola. Despite this, artists would continue to express their perceptions of society and flourish and multiply once the pressures subsided.

A sanctuary from political interference in the cross-cultural practise of the arts was found in religious institutions. Here, music and performance/rituals could be practised across racial boundaries. Outside their walls people of different race groups were not allowed to share the same stage or audience space. During the seventies and eighties even in Pretoria, the Parliamentary seat of Apartheid nationalism, Sotho voices sang out in the white suburban streets on Sundays where the garage of a parish was used for services held by a Presbyterian preacher (Lange; 2003). International celebrities who would only perform for integrated audiences sacrificed high techno performances using only their voices and acoustic guitars, and performed in Churches and church halls in South Africa. Sir Cliff Richard was one such celebrity who performed to a culturally integrated audience at Christian Brother's College in Pretoria in the seventies.

### **Artists and reconciliation today**

Some post 1994 individual artists chose to explore reconciliation through the dispelling of negative cultural stereotypes and or the exploration of conflict within a community through self-reflection (Fisher-Lange, 1997; Loots, 2005). Other artists addressed reconciliation through the creation of cross cultural dance groups such as the Zulu, Indian fusion group *Surialanga* (Govender; 1994). Artists also created theatrical productions, which brought dignity through knowledge. The content of such productions readdressed historical figures and events previously neglected or distorted for political reasons

Community arts and cultural institutions' outreach projects have used recorded oral history workshops as a springboard to creating multi media collage theatre (Lange, 2003; www.southroots.co.za). These productions were multi layered in their reconciliatory value. Dignity for the participating artists was achieved through the cultural pride achieved, economic benefits gained and the cathartic experience of performing and sharing both with fellow artists and an audience, sometimes painfully personal events. The conciliatory benefits of former adversaries sharing oral histories through story telling was given a greater audience through the creation of the epic style theatre productions performed in museums, theatres and churches, city and school halls. The production *Broken Shackles* promoted reconciliation not only through communal confrontation and forgiveness but also through self-reflection of the individual on his/her responsibility to celebrate and not abuse freedom gained after the bloodshed and hardships of those who came before.

### **CCMS, arts, reconciliation and the first people**

Various projects between 1995 and 2005 initiated by Culture, Communication and Media Studies (CCMS) under the leadership of Professor Keyan G. Tomaselli, addressed the arts and reconciliation. CCMS projects have focused on art, media and cultural stereotypes of the first people of South Africa in partnership with the !Xoo (Ngwatle, Botswana) and //Khomani (Northern Cape, South Africa) communities. CCMS students have explored and developed theories and methodologies which address the 'othering' of different cultural groups. The research teams have drawn attention to the present political and social circumstances of the first people mainly in autobiographic and reflexive publications (Tomaselli; 2003a and 2003b; McLennan-Dodd 2003a; 2003b.). Anthea Simoes recorded the identity associations of various individuals, factions and displaced communities among the !Xoo and the //Khomani (Simoes; 2001). She categorised their identities as fixed or fluid, and her findings supported theories of shifting identities (Hall; 1997) and as such addressed negative cultural stereotypes of the first people as a people fixed in time and culture i.e. a Stone Age people.

There have been small inter-cultural meetings yearly since 1995 between the //Khomani and !Xoo and Professor Tomaselli, South African and international students. During these encounters personal histories have been shared and relationships built. Reactions to CCMS visitors may vary from year to year according to the political climate and previous encounters experienced by the visited communities. Attempts at reconciliation from previous adversaries may not be welcome by all and therefore sensitivity, empathy, perseverance and maturity are traits required by the visiting CCMS group. There is also the need to ensure, in the First People's culture, that when artists are part of a reconciliation project, any direct benefits to these people, such as income for arts works, also lead to broader community well being.

In 1999 Katarina Scheepers/Meyer facilitated a community arts workshop for the South African San Institute with a group of //Khomani. During the workshops some artists, including Regopstaan Kruiper (Vetkat), addressed the marginalized and suppressed personal and

collective histories of the //Khomani particularly in relation to the loss of their families and traditional land. CCMS, under the leadership of Prof Keyan, facilitated art exhibitions at the Bergtheil museum, curated by Alvine Calboutin, for Vetkat and fellow artists and crafts people, from 2001 to 2004 (Tomaselli, 2003c; Lange, forthcoming). Exploitation of the indigenous knowledge of the first people of Southern Africa and their artistic heritage has long been inherent in the history of the West and South Africa. A reconciliatory stance of 'no financial gain' from the art exhibition was taken by both CCMS and the Bergtheil museum. The reconciliatory tone of the exhibitions was enhanced not only by the attendance of the artists themselves but also by the inclusion of a broad cross section of society. Cross-cultural communities were involved in all aspects of preparation, production and attendance of the exhibitions. The exhibitions became not only a reminder of the atrocities of the past and the wanting present circumstances of the first people but also a means of financial gain for the artists and craftsmen and a celebration of their continued artistic talents. The exhibitions addressed the negative cultural stereotype of a people of the past with no present and no future, a people whose artists had died with the last rock art painting and whose only relevance was linked to prehistory.

Learners in South Africa, of ten to twelve years, have and still have the lifestyle of the first people as part of their History syllabus. Emphasis in the syllabus in the past was on the first people as Stone Age hunter-gatherers. A CCMS cultural studies project in 2002 aimed to aid reconciliation between urban Durban learners and the first people through addressing negative cultural stereotypes. Simoes's research in 2001 formed the basis of a video made from amateur footage taken during Professor Tomaselli's field trips between 1995 and 2001. The video was theoretically rooted in identification theory and reconciliation, whereby, it is argued, if common human experiences were perceived then negative cultural stereotypes could be addressed. Elements were consciously built into the video, which would encourage learners from Durban to identify with the young student, Charlize Tomaselli, who visited Ngwatle, Botswana in the Kalahari as a child of eleven years and narrated the video as a 'cool' teenager of eighteen years. The research, Co-supervised by Professor Garth Allen of CCMS, included pre- and post-viewing art works, which were created by a cross-cultural group of ten and eleven year olds from five schools in Durban. The research indicated that media and art could effectively be used in addressing negative perceptions between two cultures. Contact, and sharing of knowledge between groups of similar age groups, could encourage identification and subsequent tolerance and understanding (Lange; 2002). These three concepts are central to the ARROW Project 'What's it got to do with me'?

### **Schools in South Africa**

South African government schools prior to 1994 were segregated racially and economically. The education budget favoured children with the lightest skins followed by those with darker skins and the smallest allocation was spent on children with the darkest skins. Private schools incorporated the arts as part of their curriculum during the apartheid era. Speech and Drama had a fixed slot in the school timetable. Not only were the arts part of these schools, but a cross-cultural representation of learners also separated these schools from the government schools. The legacy of segregation of government schools due to their location within racially and economically segregated societies continues ten years after schools were legally integrated. This influenced our choice of school for the ARROW Project.

Our challenge was to use the arts as a resource towards reconciliation within a chosen school in Durban, South Africa. The chosen school needed to reflect a good cultural and religious cross section of Durban; not be a privileged private or previously/ presently advantaged community

government school; must need technical upliftment yet have the basic infrastructure for computer technology; and needed to be situated in a non high risk security area accessible to the University of KwaZulu–Natal Howard College campus.

### **Bechet High School, Sydenham, Durban**

Bechet High School was previously a co-ed *Coloured* school i.e. for teenagers of mixed descent. The physical buildings of the school are a mixture of stark newly renovated buildings, a school hall, old drab prefab buildings and a very run down double story block of windowless classrooms. The school is situated on the outskirts of the city of Durban and now caters for learners of all cultures from mixed economic backgrounds. The learners come from homes with a 50% average unemployment. Half of the learners in the school are still from mixed descent that traditionally preferred to identify with their European ancestry and the other half is made up of learners who identify with a black African or Indian identity. We wanted to make the reconciliatory aspect of the project inherent throughout all levels. The learners chosen for the project represent a cross section of gender, race and religion. Other factors taken into consideration, when choosing learners to participate in the project were behaviour, geographical situation to the school availability in the afternoon and refugee status.

Africa Ngobo of Grade 10 was one of the learners chosen and he reflected on his participation in the ARROW Project in this extract from his poem:

*What does it have to do with me?*

*Why me?*

*Had I really been good?*

*Anxiously waiting for Thursday to be.*

*The day of a thousand smiles...(Ngobo; 2005)*

Bechet High is one of the fortunate 53% schools in KwaZulu-Natal that have telephone lines ([www.kzneducation.gov.za/strat-plans/strategicPlanFinal.pdf](http://www.kzneducation.gov.za/strat-plans/strategicPlanFinal.pdf)). Although the school has a newly fitted computer room with fifty computers the equipment is outdated and there is no Internet connection for the learners, teachers or office personnel. The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education and Culture's *Master Strategic Plan 2003-2006* describes one of its' chief challenges as: 'a lack of technological facilities to improve the quality of education in public schools'. One of the ARROW project's objectives is to improve technological facilities of the overseas participating schools (Oddie, 2003).

Technical upliftment at Bechet gave us the opportunity to link the local reconciliation efforts to provincial and national initiatives. We decided to try and boost the technical facilities at Bechet as much as possible beyond just the needs of the thirty learners involved in the project as this would meet the challenges set out by the Department of Education and the objectives of the ARROW project whilst disseminating the positive potential of the project to other learners, teachers and administrative personnel in the school.

Mr Padayachee, the Headteacher, allocated six teachers from Bechet School to the ARROW Project as assistants. The teachers were chosen according to their interest and expertise in appropriate learning areas i.e. Missy Smerdon, councillor; Nazeeda Cassim, drama; Richard Mthethwa, dance/movement; Colleen Manning, art and Michelle van der Merwe, music. Joy Seidle was chosen as coordinator for the Project and she said that teachers chosen 'were pleased to be acknowledged'. All the teachers come from communities previously

disadvantaged by the education system and with the CCMS Coordinator, and the Administrator, Susan Govender, represent a cross section of cultures, which adds an extra level to the reconciliatory process of the Project. It has become evident in formal and informal discussions that the Bechet teachers involved, whilst keen and competent to share their talents and skills, are as eager to benefit from the ARROW Project as are the learners. The teachers too wish to master certain areas of the arts, learn computer skills and gain knowledge of, and communicate, with overseas cultures.

The involvement of the Bechet teachers has also linked the ARROW Project at Bechet High to provincial and national initiatives. Schoolteachers' performances are appraised according to the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS). This system is aimed at making "a major contribution to improving the quality of education and will be used for salary progression assessments, including the allocation of reward to top performers" ([www.treasury.gov.za/documents/budget/2005/ene/vote%2015%20Education.pdf](http://www.treasury.gov.za/documents/budget/2005/ene/vote%2015%20Education.pdf)).

Extra curricular activities form part of the scoring system and, therefore, the Bechet teachers who participate in the ARROW Project will have enhanced scores and thereby increased salaries and grades.

### **'What's it got to do with me?'**

*Asibambanane*

*Interdependence*

*Forming a community*

*Uplifting one another*

*Asimbambanane*

*Interdependence* (Bechet ARROW learners and South Roots team; April 2005)

The theme of interdependence is inherent in the Project's methodology. This was very evident in the cooperation required between Bechet, CCMS and Arrow UK for the technical upliftment of Bechet to become a reality. The computer company that won the tender for the upgrading of the computer equipment, Datacentrix, entered the spirit of economic reconciliation by making the project part of their social responsibility skills transference program and as such providing all soft ware at cost price and training Bechet staff during installation. And another dimension of interdependence is the participatory action research approach CCMS staff, students and the personnel and learners of Bechet High School have adopted, becoming co-researchers who plan, act, observe and reflect together.

A planning session with Bechet teachers at the beginning of 2005 resulted in teachers volunteering to take responsibility for various sessions or sections of sessions in the first semester. The first session introduced the project to the teachers and learners through a story telling workshop based on the South African national motto *!ke e: /xarra //ke* (*unity in diversity*). Some of the learners were inspired to write poems after the session as reflected in this extract from a poem by Tamlyn Abrahams of Gr 9 (2005):

...

*So all across the nation*

*There is a celebration*

*A celebration that represents freedom, truth and life*

*And our heritage brings us no strife.*

This cycle of art inspiring art has formed part of the reflective process of the project. Weekly sessions are well represented by that led by Bechet teachers Missy Smerdon and Colleen Manning on intrapersonal exploration *Who am I?* Michelle van der Merwe led relaxation exercises at the beginning of most sessions. Learners defined what they saw using colours, words and pictures from magazines. Colleen remarked: 'The majority of learners had never used pastels before or only in Kindergarten. They were amazed at their own creativity when given the opportunity' (Manning; 2005). When the learners were asked to reflect on the exercise and share their experiences 'responses ranged from surprise at emerging feelings, the discovery of inner strengths, confidences ...to speak in a group for the first time' (Smerdon; 2005).

Our first semester has included sessions on the interpersonal 'Me and You' led by Joy Seidle. Her creative session promoted negotiation and group interaction skills. Joy provided 'an opportunity for them to socialise with all members of the group. The end product was a collective effort' (Seidle; 2005). Nazeeda Cassim and Michelle van der Merwe built on the intra and interpersonal, leading a session that combined drama and music wherein, Nazeeda described, 'learners had to use creative thinking, and group ideas' resulting in learners realising 'their own importance but also that they are an intrinsic part of a whole' (Cassim; 2005).

Teachers involved have also been encouraged to reflect on the extended impact or ripple effect the various sessions have had within their teaching or that of the school. Michelle requested copies of the traditional San stories performed at the first session for use in her English classes. Colleen envisaged the creativity unleashed through the session could 'be extended to the painting of murals on prefabricated classrooms' which would 'definitely uplift the school'. Joy reflected after her Interpersonal session that it provided an opportunity for 'building of team spirit for school projects'. Missy felt the response of the learners to the intrapersonal session affected her as an educator in the following way: 'I see the need to approach education holistically i.e. the need to develop the academic, emotional and psychological aspects of learners and establish their interdependency-only then can real and meaningful education/learning take place!'

Dance workshop sessions initiated by Dawn Melville, Project Manager, Arrow UK, were held to video and photograph for the ARROW website to initiate a dialogue between South African cultures and other participating countries. These sessions provided a wonderful opportunity to explore 'How we live' and also to address the dissemination objectives of the Project. Young people from another school outside of the Project were invited to teach the ARROW learners Indian dancing, gumboot dancing, Xhosa wedding dancing and free style dancing. Bechet teacher, Richard Mthethwa led the gumboot session and reflected that 'We dance to the same beat' and through combining the different dances in the same session, similarities in cultures were emphasized.

The dance workshops culminated in the holiday workshop and follow up session led by South Roots. The members of the South Roots team are also predominantly of 'Coloured' descent. Their first language, unlike the English speaking KwaZulu-Natal 'Coloureds', is Afrikaans. Afrikaans was and still is considered by many the language of the apartheid oppressor. The meeting of the two groups made some people readdress their negative stereotypes of all Afrikaans speakers and instilled pride in some who had carried 'the shame' of Afrikaans as their home language, a fact which they had for many years kept secret. ARROW learners used the following words to describe their encounter with the South Roots team: 'dramatic, mind

blowing, amazing, powerful, exciting, interesting, touching (emotional), guiding'. The encounter emphasized the positive power in contact through the arts between different cultures. The success of the dance and holiday workshops is reflected in this extract from their joint song:

...

*As we interact and communicate  
We support each other  
We serve through faith and trust  
Our actions speak louder than words*

*They say that no man is an island  
Just like the many strings on a violin  
You need love, yeah, that's the reason  
Understanding there's no treason  
Togetherness in unity  
A whole that seeks interdependency  
All we need is to communicate  
Talking to each other, yeah help us translate...*

(Bechet ARROW learners and South Roots team; April 2005)

### **Cross continent communication**

Local and international research students are keen to be part of this challenging but rewarding Project. CCMS lecturers and staff such as Professor Wade and, notably, Administrator Susan Govender have provided both professional and personal support to the Project. Furthermore, CCMS includes Entertainment Education (EE) as one of their postgraduate modules. Entertainment Education students Mahomed Junaid Khan and Nasreen Rasool were eager to be part of the ARROW Project and to conduct their EE project research work with the South African participating school learners. To this end Mahomed Junaid and Nasreen volunteered as assistants at the weekly sessions. Mahomed Junaid has especially played a highly significant contributory role both in filming our various sessions and as an advisor on Muslim culture. Two anthropology students from St Peter's College Oxford will spend three weeks in July gaining field experience on the South African ARROW Project in Durban. We look forward to consolidating the research experience of CCMS, the talent and enthusiasm of the Bechet team base and the technical expertise of Datacentrix and linking to the other countries within this Project. We look forward to sharing our lives with them and learning about their lives with a view to greater understanding.

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