

ARROWSA , Art, Culture & Heritage for Peace: Bechet project 1st quarter 2012

Who am I? Positive Hands and Feet



By Luthando Ngema

The ARROWSA hub based at Bechet High School in Durban has had an exceptional start to the year of 2012. The programme this year was to be planned around the theme of “*Who am I*”. This theme was explored through using different parts of the body to define who we are as individuals and who we are as a group. In the spirit of the theme, we used different parts of our bodies to explore the depth descriptions of who we are. The first activity that the group participated in was the hand mapping exercise (based on the concept of body mapping started with Aids Society Research Unit in Cape Town). This was part of using hands as a source to display aspects of oneself in the palm, wrists and fingers of the hand.

This was not only a fun filled exercise, but it also worked to dig deep down into each person’s emotions. Mary Lange (Director of ARROWSA) facilitated this exercise. The participants sketched their palms on a sheet of paper, and reflected on the questions that followed. The results were a kaleidoscope of hands that showed a true individual reflection of their being. The questions asked were: What positive qualities do hands symbolise and What positive acts can you do with your hands (written in the palm); what or who supports/inspires your positive acts and qualities (written in the wrist); what positive acts or qualities do I want to move towards (in fingers). Following this exercise was the making of posters. The Hand Maps were placed together against a black board, which made a good metaphor of the different hands coming together, forming one vision of unity.



The hand exercises continued through Hand Games. The Hand Games are a fast paced sing and clap exercise, which requires two or more players to add to the fun. As the ARROWSA Bechet group is formed by participants from diverse cultural backgrounds; through Hand Games we learnt that there are more similarities than differences within our cultures. Each learner had to teach the group a game that they grew up with and the group reflected on that particular game. We also discovered that the Hand Game exercise was not only for fun, but the message in the song carried a story. Mary taught us a game which warned about *talking to boys*, it sang: “My mother told me that she would buy me a rubber dolly, if I was good, but when I told her, I kissed a soldier, she would not buy me a rubber

dolly”. Another game involved a Zulu song, which warned about *Road safety*. It sang: *Bhasobha leyo moto izokushayisa, ulale esibhedlela, uthole amaphilisi, kabili, kathathu....* (Be careful of that car, it will hit you. You will sleep in hospital, and get some pills. Twice, three times....). In the process of the Hand Games, we discovered that we can play the games as a group; this made it more entertaining as the whole class participated in the different hand games that had previously been played separately in smaller groups of two. Both the pair and large group work emphasised a theme of ARROWSA: the need of working together or *Interdependence* for success.



There was a spontaneous exercise of storytelling that occurred after Mary, Sana and Bhekithembi (one of the groups’ senior members) attended a writing workshop with the Maskew Miller Publishing Company. This sparked a workshop for the ARROWSA participants to adopt the same process to explore further “who we are” through the use of creative writing. The workshop set a scene where the participants had to describe their first time at school. The first phase was to describe their first time ever in a school environment (that is entry level of primary school). The second phase was to describe the first time in high school and the third time was to describe their first time out of high and entering tertiary level. The larger ARROWSA group was separated into smaller group of four to five learners, and each had a story to share about their different experiences. As most of the learners are still in high school and have not reached tertiary level, they used the power of imagination to describe their experiences as their older selves. The result of the workshop required the groups to act out scenes of the different phases. There were huge similarities, in that at the first phase, the sketches reflected a shy and timid self as this was a completely new experience. The general view of the second phase was that the characters were growing and getting used to the idea of sharing space and time, with others, through friendship and play. The final phase reflected that the individual was now in full control of their life and was looking forward to building their life as a grown up. It was not only an educational exercise, but a fully entertaining exercise that required creative skills and also ensured team work in the process.

In the process of searching as to ‘who we are’, we continued with the exploration, by using our feet as an expressive tool. “Our feet carry us”, “they take us to different place”, “some things would be impossible without our feet”- were some of the comments uttered by the group when describing the uses of their feet. The exploration began with various games which required a lot of foot movement. Mary taught the ‘hokey cokey’ game, as a warm up exercise and that led the proceedings to the challenging Line Game. This is a game played through the use of a string, where two people stand opposite each other with the elastic string forming a bridge, which the other players have to jump over. The challenge is when the height of the string ascends to the upper parts of the “human poles” holding it up. It was a great game, where skills of “foot-styles” were explored, where each group member showed an example of a

‘jump’ and the group having to learn a trick or two of the game. This game was further culturally unifying and also greatly emphasised more similarities than differences in a culturally and social diverse group of participants.



In the spirit of exploring through our feet, the highlight of the term has been learning different dance moves that are mostly popular in South Africa. Luthando Ngema, ran a workshop through a short discursive presentation titled “Why is Dance an Important part of Society”. Through this discussion, we discovered that dance is not only an art form but is a form of communication. Dance is part of culture as well as a form of identity and therefore it plays an important role in contributing to our heritage. The dance craze then took over the session, as we each performed popular dance moves that promotes our individuality. Through dance we were able to laugh and learn that dance actually unites individuals, and the different dance forms can be merged to form one piece that tells a story.

To further the knowledge of dance, we explored the Gumboot Dance as a dance form popularised during the apartheid regime in South Africa. The spirit of Gumboot dance embraced unity, solidarity and escapism of harsh realities that the mine workers were faced with. This dance is referred to as Gumboot Dance because of the Wellington boots worn during the dance. This trend was taken from the mine workers in South Africa, who used wellington boots to protect their feet under the ground. It is a fast paced dance, which is rhythmical, percussive, with a great ‘stomp’ as the end result. At the end of the session, the group had formulated an excellent Gumboot dance piece, which worked around the theme of “Siyanqoba” which means, “We are winning”.

The ARROWSA group is currently working on a dance presentation, which will be used as a recruiting tool to inviting more students of Bechet High school to join and grow the group. The dance piece incorporates a popular township dance style, called *Kwaito*; Hip-Hop; and Indian fusion dance which are popular dances in the Durban area which constitutes members of black, white, mixed race (referred to as coloured in South Africa) and Indian descent. One of the group members’ Tasha Mchunu is facilitating this process and it has proven to be extremely exciting!

We look forward to also finding out ‘Who are you?’ through projects already initiated with Zimbabwe, Chile and the United States or with any other African or global communities who share the goal of Arts, Culture and Heritage for Peace.