



Making each other human: The Mobile Arts for Peace Project

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“This project is called Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP). It wouldn’t be called that, unless there was a problem with peace. The cultural arts can make each other human; it can make us feel each other. I think this is the major problem today, that people don’t feel each other. In the cultural arts this is our role; to help people feel each other. Only then will we have peace.”

Those were the words of Hope Azeda from Mashirika Creative and Performing Arts at the start of her workshop during a three-day symposium with cultural artists in Kigali, Rwanda from 15 – 17 March 2018. Her workshop invited participants to delve into their personal wounds so that they could feel and to see each other from a deeper level, so that as artists they could mirror, represent and carry the wounds of others. Azeda stated: ‘Unless we are able to truly feel and to identify with the pain of others, we have no place standing on a stage dealing with the stories that might threaten peace.’ This comment reflected earlier research conducted with grassroots association members who stated that they initiated their associations between perpetrators and survivors because they shared suffering; that they could see the other was suffering as much as they were. (Breed 2014) The methodology of Azeda contrasted with another earlier workshop led by Elisee Niyonsenga from Future Vision Acrobats who stated:

“When I do my acrobatics, I forget that I’m hungry. I bring my art to children so that they can be happy.”

Here, we have a tension between the use of cultural arts to evoke pain and happiness; between the darkness and the light.



The main objectives of the symposium were:

- To explore how cultural forms can be adapted for dialogic purposes.
- To develop a multi-disciplinary arts-based curriculum for young people.
- To build alliances with organisations with similar values, working towards transformational goals for longer-term effects.
- To build upon existing knowledge and experience of good practice.
- To support each other in identifying the issues that concern us.

In preparation for the symposium, cultural artists from organisations including Future Vision Acrobats, Niyo Art Gallery, MindLeaps, Niyo Cultural Centre, Kwetu Film Institute, Umuduri Band, Kigali Centre for Photography, Mashirika Creative and Performing Arts, Music Mind Consult, and Eric Onekey were asked to demonstrate an exercise from their cultural form (music, dance, theatre, visual arts, video and film, poetry) that could be adapted for dialogic purposes. Exercises ranged from bleach painting, to drumming, to traditional and contemporary dance, to photography, to film and to acrobatics. Each workshop focused on guiding participants to explore how their art form allowed them to express something about their world and in that expression, to identify from the self to other, from the internal to the external and from the local to the global. The workshop generated ideas, questions and concerns.

One aim of the Changing the Story project is to explore how participatory arts practices can build safe, inclusive and progressive societies. These terms are open to interpretation and vary widely from one context or culture to another. In order to generate a baseline understanding of these terms, we designed an exercise in which these three terms were written on three separate pieces of paper and handed out to the artists. We asked the artists to place these terms in order of importance. The results varied widely, dependent on the values of the individuals. For instance, one artist noted that he placed inclusivity at the top of his list because it is most important to demonstrate that everyone is welcome. Then, to be fluid as an educator, facilitator and artist approaching each child equally; building relationships to create a safe space between the educator and the youth alongside the young people developing relationships with each other. He noted that once you have safety and inclusivity, that a progressive society follows naturally. In contrast, another artist stated that he was tempted to remove safety from his list altogether, as his work was driven by progressive thinking and promoting inclusivity through diversity and challenging restrictions on free speech. Most of the artists agreed that inclusivity was key towards building safe and progressive societies.



Here is a snapshot of the mood and sense of community formed within the few days together: bleach turned black ink into images that reflected our worlds; umuduri instruments triggered spontaneous song; drums talked and allowed us to speak in different ways; market places moved our pencils to express the lives of vendors; cameras translated our thoughts into the images of others; and juggling encouraged us to believe in ourselves.

During our closing circle, we asked participants to share something that they appreciated alongside a question that remained. A majority of participants stated that they questioned how the arts could be used to create safety and commented that for many of them, this was the first time that they had worked across disciplines. One stated objective from the symposium was to create a Creative Arts Network between the cultural organisations.

The symposium with cultural artists was hosted at the Mashirika Creative and Performing Arts Centre in Kigali, Rwanda and was designed and facilitated by Ananda Breed from University of Lincoln and Kurtis Dennison from Mashirika. Exercises from the cultural workshop will be integrated into a manual used for a training of educators and youth workers (June 2018) and youth camp (August 2018) in the Eastern Province of Rwanda.

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