

*Intergenerational conversations,
collective wisdom and ownership in
South Africa: teachers, pupils and
families engaging with the age of
AIDS*

James Lees & Tania Vergnani
University of the Western Cape



...we denounce with righteous indignation and dislike men who are so beguiled and demoralized by the charms of pleasure of the moment, so blinded by desire, that they cannot foresee the pain and trouble that are bound to ensue; and equal blame belongs to those who fail in their duty through weakness of will, which is the same as saying shrinking from toil and pain.



WE CARE
ONS GEE OM
SIYAKHATHALA

These cases are perfectly simple and easy to distinguish.



In a free hour, when our power of choice is untrammelled and when nothing prevents our being able to do what we like best, every pleasure is to be welcomed and every pain avoided. But in certain circumstances and owing to the claims of duty or the obligations of business it will frequently occur that pleasures have to be repudiated and annoyances accepted. The wise man therefore always holds in these matters to this principle of selection; he rejects pleasures to secure other greater pleasures, or else he endures pain to endure worse pain.



Roman orator and statesman Marcus Tullius Cicero
1st century B.C.



We are not free. In South Africa, this is not a free moment.



Intergenerational conversations, Collective Wisdom and Ownership in South Africa: Teachers, pupils and families engaging with the Age of AIDS

or...

How do we get South Africa into the age of AIDS?

Dr. James Lees & Prof. Tania Vergnani

Fourth Advanced Colloquium on Building the Scientific Mind

Stellenbosch

8 March 2011



The age of AIDS is a time when individuals, families, communities, institutions and government are fully engaged in dynamic and collective processes of **discovering** their relationships to HIV, to themselves and each other, **critically** asking themselves and each other how and why they have contributed to risk, **consciously** seeking to **heal** whatever may be wounded within, between or **before** them that contributes to risk, **owning** the problem of HIV, seizing the **opportunity** of HIV as a mirror and guide, aware of their **wisdom together**, **free** to collectively imagine and create their own ways around the risk of HIV infection and **free to imagine and create** themselves differently into the future.





<http://hiv aids.uwc.ac.za>



University of the Western Cape
HIV&AIDS programme

WE CARE • ONS GEE OM • SIYAKHATHALA

**Copying everyone else all the time,
the monkey one day cut his throat.**





<http://hiv aids.uwc.ac.za>



University of the Western Cape
HIV & AIDS programme

WE CARE • ONS GEE OM • SIYAKHATHALA



<http://hiv aids.uwc.ac.za>



University of the Western Cape
HIV&AIDS programme

WE CARE • ONS GEE OM • SIYAKHATHALA



<http://hivaidswc.ac.za>



University of the Western Cape
HIV & AIDS programme

WE CARE • ONS GEE OM • SIYAKHATHALA



<http://hivaid.s.uwc.ac.za>



University of the Western Cape
HIV&AIDS programme

WE CARE • ONS GEE OM • SIYAKHATHALA

Recognized that...

- Much of HIV prevention education that exists on the ground and in classrooms today does not look much different than it did in 1990.
- Biomedical story still the dominant story.
- AIDS 2031 panel states that without new thinking, AIDS will continue to be a substantial global pandemic in 2031.



Believe that...

- Need to talk about HIV, AIDS and the AIDS pandemic.
- The pandemic is a story about us.
- Fear and shame undermine learning.
- The most important questions about the pandemic evolve around our ability to care about ourselves and each other (our capacity to generative life into the future).
- We need to recognise what has undermined many people's ability to care about themselves and others in South Africa.



Believe that...

- Have to leave the language of combat behind.
 - Don't look where you fell. Look where you tripped.
 - Our version: Look where you WERE tripped.
 - Diane di Prima: "The only war that matters is the war against the imagination. All other wars are subsumed by it."
- Need Visions of where we are going that will draw us all forward
 - Motorcycles
 - Karate
 - Martin Luther King



We believe in...

- Collective wisdom.
- The ability of families and communities to recognise their challenges, imagine different ways of being and create solutions to those challenges.
- Rahman's 'creativist' vs. 'consumerist' development.



But we know that...

- Colonialism and apartheid trauma undermined imagination, creativity and the sense that one can creatively affect their life and the life of the community.
- Most South African families and communities are wounded and in that sense not free (rabid dog story).
- 'Interventionist' thinking does not draw on diverse experience and circumstance, nor does it promote imagination, creativity and reliance on the collective wisdom of local communities and families. In fact, it is threatened by these things.



And we fear that...

- Interventionism that seeks out 'solutions' that can be 'taken to scale' is nothing less than commodity brokering paternalism that fears relinquishing power and reproduces racist colonial images of African people as unable to help themselves, all in the service of carrying on with foreign agendas imposed upon, but not responsive to, African people's lives. (see George Bush's abstinence-only programme funding) This obsession with scale extinguishes local ways of knowing and is a continuation of the extinguishment of the multiplicity of 'African' ways of knowing practiced by – and so dear to – missionaries, colonizers and development experts.



We see that...

- HIV prevention and AIDS education are about people making.
- The dehumanisation imparted by colonialism and apartheid did not heal in 1994, nor it is healed in 2011.
- Need to understand what this means.
- Talking about our hearts is important – Freire's notion that it is about people learning to love better. But the contemporary heart-talk is just not enough.
- It is about much more than hope. It is about hard work, healing and discovering collective visions that can draw us all forward to a more 'human' future.



Virginia Satir – Peoplemaking 1972

- *Over the years I have developed a picture of what the human being living humanly is. He is a person who understands, values, and develops his body, finding it beautiful and useful; a person who is real and honest to and about himself and others; a person who is willing to take risks, to be creative, to manifest competence, to change when the situation calls for it, and to finds ways to accommodate to what is new and different, keeping that part of the old that is still useful and discarding what is not.*



Virginia Satir – Peoplemaking 1972

- *When you add all this up, you have a physically healthy, mentally alert, feeling, loving, playful, authentic, creative, productive human being; one who can stand on his own two feet, who can love deeply and fight fairly and effectively, who can be on equally good terms with both his tenderness and his toughness, know the difference between them, and therefore struggle effectively to achieve his goals. (Satir 1972: page 2 & 3)*



WE CARE
ONS GEE OM
SIYAKHATHALA

But this is not who we are.
Not at the moment, anyway.



WE CARE
ONS GEE OM
SIYAKHATHALA

Going forward means recognizing what it means to have
been de-humanized for 300 years.

*When there is no enemy on the inside, no enemy on the
outside can harm you.*



WE CARE
ONIS GEE OM
SIYAKHATHALA

It means creating new avenues for individual and collective healing.



WE CARE
ONS GEE OM
SIYAKHATHALA

It means reclaiming, restoring and healing
imagination.



WE CARE
ONS GEE OM
SIYAKHATHALA

So that when people are traumatized, they are able
to find their voices and act, not just sit in silence.



WE CARE
ONS GEE OM
SIYAKHATHALA

It requires innovation, not intervention.



WE CARE
ONS GEE OM
SIYAKHATHALA

It requires true technology – intelligent conversation plus art – rather than the technical solutions that do not require us to look honestly at ourselves and change.



Setting up Shuga

- MTV film
- Nairobi story
- Promote intergenerational conversations
- Prep by reframing HIV and pandemic:
 - About us & ownership
 - HIV as teacher, no need to fear it
 - Listening to the virus (Ed Duran, Herman Hesse)
- Create FLAPs – an uproar! – re-storying ourselves



Setting up Shuga

- Challenge to teachers to walk the talk.
- Challenge to teachers: you cannot stand up in front of a group of young people and talk about HIV if you have not done your work at home first.
- Recognises that sometimes, teachers are part of the problem.
- Sees schools as more than just delivery sites for interventionists' goods.



Questions

- How do we create healing spaces in teacher training programmes?
- How do we do the same in schools, families and communities?
- How do we all become free to imagine, to create and to own our own lives and each of the challenges that threaten us?



Propositions

- Human sustainability is not possible until and unless people are truly free.
- The road to freedom is a healing road.
- If the medicine is in the wound, then the world can still learn a great deal from South Africa.
- In South Africa, the AIDS pandemic is not the wound. It is a symptom of our greater wound.



Finally

- AIDS Education and HIV Prevention are about:
- **Learning** more about ourselves and each other;
- **Building** better relationships;
- **Creating** a world where our ability to care and our collective wisdom is not undermined;
- **Reclaiming** our humanness, imagination and creativity;
- **Expanding** our capacity for/to love;
- **Strengthening** what ties us together;
- **Healing** what is broken within, between and behind us;
- **Needing** everyone to be a part;
- **Celebrating** what is good about us; and
- **Re-discovering** who we can be as individuals and as the collective human species.



Thank you!



WE CARE
SIYAKHATHALA



<http://hiv aids.uwc.ac.za>



University of the Western Cape
HIV&AIDS programme

WE CARE • ONS GEE OM • SIYAKHATHALA