



CHANGING THE STORY



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#5

Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP): Curriculum for Music, Dance and Drama in Rwanda

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INTRODUCTION

Sorghum seeds made from scrunched up pieces of papers were cast onto the floor as other performers tilled the soil through the pantomime of heavy hoes. A cow in the form of two men hunched over with the lead performer holding splayed fingers out in the shape of horns, lumbered across the hall. A dancer proclaimed poetic verses as a soundscape was created by performers behind him. The sights, sounds and environment of Rwanda emerged as performers from the Gicumbi and Huye districts of Rwanda presented their Regional Shares to welcome one another through cultural representations of their regions at the start of the MAP training of trainers.¹

This essay will examine the use of interdisciplinary arts-based approaches to peacebuilding through the Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP) project in Rwanda funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) through an overarching project entitled Changing the Story: Building Inclusive Societies with and for Young People in Five Post-Conflict Countries.² The authors of this essay will provide an overview of the project design and research methodologies of MAP; serving as a reflection of creative approaches in conflict transformation processes to strengthen individual and community-level tolerance for paradox and ambiguity. We will be using this reflection process to inform our knowledge and understanding of how MAP might contribute to the subject of Music, Dance and Drama in the National Curriculum Framework of Rwanda. The primary benchmarks of the National Curriculum include: a) to improvise and Act Out Role Plays in Kinyarwanda; b) to improvise a range of situations and act out their own sketches; and c) to stage and present a short, clear and coherent performance for an audience. This paper was produced as a collaborative exercise, working across professions (academia, educationalists, psychosocial support and artists) and disciplines (performing arts, education studies, childhood studies and political science) with authors based both in the United Kingdom and Rwanda. In this sense, it is an attempt to extend the co-produced nature of the MAP project into the realm of publication while bringing together different forms.



MAP serves as an arts-based research method to both inform a process of skills-based knowledge acquisition in the performing arts for adult educators and young people alongside the reflection on cultural frameworks and indigenous knowledges that inform epistemological frameworks for dialogic processes in relation to peacebuilding approaches. Arts-based research can be defined as: ‘...a set of methodological tools used by researchers across the disciplines across all phases of social research, including data generation, analysis, interpretation, and representation’ (Leavy, 2015, p. ix). Performance can serve as a research methodology of data generation and analysis as well as a (re)presentational form (Worthen, 1998) alongside providing a conceptual framework of the data within the rehearsal and play building process and dissemination of research through the performance (Saldana, 2005, p. 15). The curation of the project alongside the delivery of the information and dissemination of research follows a methodological framework that begins with the collection of information and needs-based analysis; followed by the rooting of the methodology in the cultural context in which MAP is operating and the exploration of practices that promote dialogic processes including the building of trust and establishing a mixed-methods approach to conflict analysis and the sharing of stories. Within this context, there is also the consideration of how stories and memories are shared within the timeframe of post-genocide Rwanda and the articulation of arts-based approaches in relation to mechanisms of transitional justice.

Between 2004 to 2012 a transitional form of justice called gacaca (justice in the grass) was implemented in Rwanda to adjudicate genocidal crimes following the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi. During the information gathering phase in 2004, there were mandatory meetings to collect information concerning the events of the genocide in terms of who was living in each house, crimes committed during the genocide and the whereabouts of anyone who was no longer living in that community. Following the collection of initial information, the official gacaca courts were implemented. Every citizen was mandated to attend weekly gacaca court proceedings in their communities. Often, they were located in the grass under a tree, but they were also conducted in community halls, shelters made out of corrugated metal, or district offices, for instance.

There was no age limit for those who attended these meetings. Thus, citizens from infants to elders were in attendance. During the gacaca proceedings, individuals were required to provide testimony concerning the events of the genocide including where the crime was committed, who was involved in the crime, and any looting involved. The National Jurisdiction of Gacaca Courts had implemented a sensitization and mobilization phase to educate the population about the gacaca courts; theatre was one vehicle used to inform the nation about the gacaca courts through a performance directed by Kalisa Rugano concerning how the courts would operate. This paper is situated in the wake of the gacaca courts in which over 1,958,634 cases were tried in over 14,000 courts. During initial research conducted by Breed between 2004 to 2012 that explored gacaca as a performative that constructed the concept of Rwandanicity alongside arts-based practices to inform initiatives related to justice and reconciliation, it was evidenced that there were numerous grassroots associations that used performance as a vehicle to provide an alternative space for perpetrators, survivors and the community at large to forge new relationships (Breed, 2014).³ The MAP project seeks to build upon the success of the grassroots associations and potential for arts-based approaches to create a space of dialogue. In particular, members of a youth-based grassroots organization entitled AJDS are currently involved as Master Trainers and the former site of AJDS has been turned into a primary School entitled Friends of the Children International School that actively engages over 500 young people in MAP activities on a weekly basis.

MAP operates across three core components including: a) project design and delivery; b) research; and c) arts-based practice. Each of these core components operates alongside one another. Initially, a scoping visit was conducted to establish relationships with key stakeholders alongside the formation of baseline data and needs assessment through a curriculum workshop with cultural artists. Based on the generation of information from phase one, a manual or toolkit was developed. Education and cultural specialists reviewed the manual and toolkit to ensure that local and indigenous cultural frameworks were integrated through translation into the local language and the integration of cultural concepts and key terms that establish epistemological frameworks.

For instance, the Kinyarwanda terms for youth, memory, conflict and story have a range of meanings specific to the cultural context and situation. The specific cultural terms framed explorations of peacebuilding approaches. Curriculum materials led to the implementation of a residential week-long training of trainers conducted for adult educators, cultural artists and civic society organisations. During phase three, the adult educators from local schools who served as trainers implemented the methodology into their schools and community settings and conducted professional development workshops. Youth leaders were selected from each of the schools and a week-long residential Youth Camp integrated the young people as trainers as well, providing a framework for the young people to lead MAP Clubs in their schools and to help support the delivery of MAP as co-facilitators alongside the adult educators within the classroom environment. At this point in the implementation of MAP in Rwanda, we have achieved Phase One through Phase Three. Upcoming activities will aim to implement Phase Four to advance the acquired knowledge into impact and advancing knowledge on a broader scale through the creation of digital curriculum and policy briefs based on conflict analysis and communication structures to both inform policy and receive policy responses through MAP Clubs. The MAP Clubs further disseminate policy-based themes through performances that establish dialogue about these issues in the local community and then feed their responses back to policy-making bodies.

Phases	Project Design and Delivery	Research	Practice
Phase One	Scoping Visit	Needs Assessment	Curriculum Workshop
Phase Two	Manual/Toolkit	Cultural Frameworks	Training of Trainers
Phase Three	Curriculum	Conflict Analysis	Youth Camp
Phase Four	Digital Curriculum	Policy Impact	MAP Clubs

The project partners who have actively been engaged with the design, delivery and implementation of MAP in Rwanda includes a range of researchers, cultural artists, psychologists, government officials, non-profit organization workers, educators and young people. MAP has been working in partnership with the Institute of Research and Dialogue for Peace (IRDP) and the Rwanda Education Board (REB) to shape the National Curriculum in Music, Dance and Drama. REB is an agency of the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) with a mission to fast-track educational development and grow the education sector (Ministry of Education, 2018).

The following section provides an overview of the Competence-based Curriculum in Rwanda followed by the implementation of MAP to meet this objective.

Overview of National Competence Based Curriculum in Rwanda

In 2016, REB transitioned from a teacher-centered pedagogy to a learner-centered pedagogy through the introduction of a Competence-based Curriculum for Sustainable Development (CBC). This curriculum was introduced in public schools over the course of three years from 2016-2018, going into full effect in 2018. REB identified twelve competencies including lifelong Learning, critical thinking, creativity and innovation, research and problem solving, cooperation, interpersonal management, life skills and communication. The curriculum introduced cross cutting issues to be instructed in most classes indicated in the curriculum framework. Peace and Values Education was one of these crosscutting issues to better understand the root causes of conflict while also supporting student's development of values of peace (REB/MINEDUC, 2015, p. 23). MAP addresses the CBC for sustainable development goals through the integration of student-centred approaches through Music, Dance and Drama alongside the peace and values education through conflict analysis, critical thinking and problem solving.

The subject Music, Dance and Drama was introduced nationally as an optional elective to promote a culture of peace and to emphasize Rwandese and universal values of justice, peace, tolerance, respect for human rights, gender, equality, solidarity and democracy (REB/MINEDUC, 2015, p. 8). In alignment to this objective, the syllabus for Music, Dance and Drama states:

[Music, Dance and Drama] reflects and creates social conditions including the factors that either facilitate or impede society change. It is powerful at the level of social group because it facilitates communication which goes beyond words, enables meanings to be shared and promotes the development and maintenance of group, cultural and national identities. Through music, dance and drama the learners share an emotion that sharing connects them with each other (Rwanda Education Board, 2015, p. 9) ARIM

The syllabus suggests the teacher act as a facilitator in order to transform learning (Rwanda Education Board, 2015, p. 14). The noted syllabus from REB has observable challenges in regards to design, structure and required materials. The CBC framework included a report from the National Curriculum Conference that stated the need to develop a highly structured curriculum with details of lesson delivery. The report also noted the conditions of most classrooms as being low resource, without electricity and having overcrowded classrooms (REB/MINEDUC, 2015, p. 13). The syllabus expects trained teachers to interpret the outlined units into tangible lessons. The syllabus emphasized the need for both instructed theory and learner practice, but the lack of teacher capacity in the arts is an additional deficit.

MAP will address these challenges through the integration of arts-based methodologies to inform the subject of Music, Dance and Drama while also assisting the management of large classes, the lack of resources, and inclusion of peacebuilding within the curriculum. Additionally, the integration of student and youth-centred approaches enables learners to activate critical thinking and leadership through the development of facilitation skills. In terms of peacebuilding, MAP integrates exercises that enables learners to discuss community-based issues and their solutions through performance.

Stage and present a short, clear and coherent performance for an audience

‘These are stories from our lives that represent real problems in our community’, commented one of the adult educators who served as an audience member of a forum theatre performance about poverty.⁴

The Mobile Arts for Peace project (MAP) in Rwanda organized a training for trainers (TOT) from 20 July – 8 August 2019 where a total of 80 high school teachers (20 teachers from each of the four provinces including Gicumbi, Huye, Rubavu, Kicukuru) who attended the two week, seven-day residential trainings hosted at St André Hotel (Kabgayi) in Muhanga district; Southern province of Rwanda. Two provinces were paired over the course of each seven-day residential including Gicumbi and Huye in week one and Rubavu and Kicukuru in week two. One of the objectives of the training was to initiate participants to stage and present a short and coherent performance for an audience.

This section documents the process through which secondary school educators were trained to stage and present a short and coherent performance for a given audience. The training process comprised a number of stages. Firstly, trainers were divided into four groups and given a MAP master trainer who was originally trained in the Eastern Province to serve as their coach. The second stage involved making a choice of the topic performance. Next, the group crafted the performance by distributing roles and responsibilities. Finally, the group presented the performance to a large audience. In this section, an emphasis is placed on the presentation phase. The choice of this phase is motivated by the fact that it might be considered as the dissemination phase of research; as it encompasses, assumes and finalizes all other phases.

Three moments characterized the presentation phase. In the first moment, the group presented all the scenes of the performance based on a true story related to a community-based issue. The performance ended with the climax and the audience was invited to think about possible solutions to the staged problems. The facilitator of dialogue between the audience and performers asked the audience a host of questions in chronological order: Who is the protagonist– the person being oppressed? Who is the antagonist – the oppressor? What is the problem being highlighted in the performance? How can this problem be resolved at the family, community, and national levels? In what ways could the protagonist have applied a different choice or action to create an alternative outcome to resolve the issue?

In paragraphs to follow we highlight two sample performances with a focus on the brief summary of the story, the noted problem or issue, and sample interventions proposed by audience members.

Theater Performance One

School dropout leads to early pregnancy

Summary: A high school young girl named Mutoni (protagonist) experiences financial constraints to pay tuition fees and school materials. Since her family cannot afford to pay tuition fees and to provide necessary school materials, Mutoni decides to leave her family located in a rural area to try her chances in the city.

The young girl goes to a pastor looking for a job. The pastor assigns Mutoni to prepare the bed that he uses for his siesta and asks her to accompany him during upcountry missions. In the long run, the pastor uses Mutoni as his private sex worker. When Mutoni tells the pastor that she is pregnant, he refutes the claim and lifts a chair to demonstrate gender-based violence during the final scene.

Audience interventions

Following the performance, the facilitator asked the audience a series of questions. Mutoni was unanimously identified as the protagonist and the pastor was identified as the antagonist. Next, drawing on the performance, participants attempted to qualify the nature of the problem. To some the problem informing the performance was seen as poverty, fake religious leaders, and lack of self-acceptance (on behalf of the young girl). According to others the real problem at stake in the play was lack of parental involvement in addressing children's problems, and poor school leadership (limited or lack of contact with parents).

Possible solutions

Audience members were asked how the problem could be solved on a family, community and national level. In relation to the family level, participants suggested the following actions: a) involving parents in the education of their children and to have regular meetings with the school leadership; b) enforcing integrity in school leadership, as reference is made to the headmaster who kicked the young girl out of the school; and c) initiating education insurance so that students from destitute families can afford the cost of education.

At the community level, suggestions included: a) involving parents in community saving groups (ibimina) to sustain their income; and b) putting in place education community workers to advise families with children who are likely to drop out of school or have dropped out of school.

At the national level, solutions included: a) reducing the distance between the family and schools by constructing several schools in the community; b) establishing severe punishments for sexual violence culprits; c) adopting family planning; d) initiating income generation activities to fight against poverty; e) creating job opportunities in order to reduce unemployment; d) reinforcing the 'evening for parents' (umugoroba w'ababyeyi) where issues prevailing the community are addressed and; e) establishing a counselling room in schools for students to voice their concerns and to receive guidance and support.

Reflection

In terms of engaging with the Curriculum Framework, MAP trainers were able to stage and present a short, clear and coherent performance for an audience. More importantly, it is worth noting that the staging created a safe space for participants to display some of the key burning issues in the current Rwandan community, which would not usually be discussed in other platforms. With this in mind, the researcher and evaluator for MAP, Sylvestre Nzahabwanayo, noted: 'The methodology illustrates immense potential to serve as an epistemological instrument to uncover social puzzles ravaging the current Rwandan society. MAP might be envisaged as a social investigation tool and a peacebuilding instrument.' The MAP performances allowed participants to reflect on and to foreground solutions to these problems. Embedded within the creation of the performances were exercises based on conflict analysis including Spectrogram, Across the Room, Story Circle, Director Sculpt and Obstacle Tree. In this way, MAP served to address benchmark criteria for the subject of Music, Dance and Drama alongside cross cutting values education in terms of peacebuilding through the identification and analysis of conflict issues and the development of critical thinking.

Stories and Memory

Stories are central to the MAP methodology. Varied frameworks for storytelling are employed within MAP, including the use of images and narrative to construct and reconstruct experiences that can be used for peacebuilding processes in the community and more widely. Stories are shared during an exercise entitled story circle, which involves a small group of people along with a facilitator and co-facilitator.

The facilitator guides participants to share a story of a personal experience in which an individual has had a goal, but there were a series of obstacles that stopped him or her from achieving that goal and for the story to relate to wider community stories that they want to resolve. The facilitator stresses the importance of deep or active listening and there is a counselor present to support any participants who become upset during the sharing of stories. Once all participants have shared a story, the group select one story to be used as a community story that the teller will provide as a framework to think through the issue and fellow participants and the audience will become involved to find solutions. In Rwanda, since the concept of memory is often associated with the politically-charged Kinyarwanda term Kwibuka in relation to the anniversary of the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi, the team wanted to find a context specific term that could engage with the transformative experience that MAP participants had noted; that once you told your story it often changed the teller and the listener simultaneously.⁵ Additionally, that the past informed the present and the future. In this way, memory wasn't necessarily in relation to the past. During the discussion, the participants eventually agreed to the term isangizanyankuru which connects the notion of stories and storytelling, with that of memory. For example, master trainer Florence stated:

When we share, there are links to what people are telling others. This connects between past, present and future. This composes stories that can be sad stories, happy stories and connects to what is a story. A story is something that has happened in the past, present and future. [...] When we say Isangizankura it means to share with others.

Memories are therefore constituted as part of a shared encounter (Moss, 2010). As master trainer Jean-Marie commented:

When we share our stories or tell others our stories, we connect these stories to other stories that have been told. Of course, we will put these stories together. To connect, it is to make a link between these stories. When we share stories, we connect the stories.'

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In this context, memories are 'connective' (Hirsch, 2012; Hoskins, 2016) not only socially or collectively, but also temporally, as expressed by master trainer Germain: 'This word [isangizanyankuru] connects to the future. What happens from the past to the present helps us to think of the future.' Moreover, isangizankuru expressed the sharing of memories not only through oral forms, but also through images and signs and symbols. Jean Marie stated, 'I can describe Isangizankura as a message that can be shared with signs or symbols' to which Esther added, 'It [isangizankuru] can be defined as a channel of ideas that can be past, present, and future. The way to tell the story can be written or spoken.'

Following this discussion, MAP participants devised a series of research questions that they are continuing to explore through a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project, adapting the MAP methodology to a practice-as-research project, focused on the term isangizankura. Some of the questions that they devised included: How can sharing memories/stories affect the individual or the community? What are the challenges of sharing your memories/stories? What kind of memories/stories can be shared with others and when? How can we know the memories of others, especially those coming from different backgrounds? The PAR project is being led by the MAP youth facilitators and is using arts-based methods, including image theatre, Forum Theatre, photo elicitation, alongside methods such as observation, interviews and focus group discussions.

Conclusion

The MAP project provided an opportunity for stakeholders including cultural organizations, civil society organizations, peacebuilding organizations, adult educators, young people and the community at large to think through the relevant structures that both inhibit and promote peacebuilding practices. In this way, the noted framework of MAP was delivered across the three core components including: a) project design and delivery, b) research, and c) arts-based practice to co-produce the varied outputs including a manual or toolkit, impact documentary produced by partner Kwetu Film Institute alongside a mobile filmmaking workshop that was conducted with MAP adult and youth trainers and the dissemination of the research through practice, i.e. delivery of workshops through the training of trainers and youth camps and performances.

This paper serves as a reflective tool that was generated during the training of trainers conducted in Muhanga between 20 July – 5 August, thus illustrating the intention to ‘think through’ the project and to co-produce knowledge.

The authors of this paper come from a range of disciplines including performance studies (Breed, Dennison), childhood studies (Pells), and civic education studies (Nzahabwanayo). Some of the varied recommendations of practice for future MAP activities includes the exploration of pathways to impact, including our project partners and cultural artists into the design of peacebuilding approaches that inform the use of culture for dialogic purposes working with and for young people in post-conflict contexts.



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