

Curriculum-in-Motion: Bringing Community Education to Life through Community-Based Participatory Action Research

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Abstract

This article presents a case study of the process of bringing community education to life as it was developed by the Community Education Programme at the Centre of Integrated Post-School Education at Nelson Mandela University. The article argues for a learning programme that co-creates learning starting from the experience of participants (curriculum-in-motion) as opposed to a learning programme and curriculum structured around systematised knowledge. The article describes in detail the process of developing a learning programme from the lived experience of marginalised and excluded communities through the process of community-based participatory action research, and argues for an approach to the development of community education and the curricula associated with its learning programmes as praxis—the process of engaged participation in intentional intellectual and practical work to construct an educational space for social change.

Keywords: curriculum; lived experience; community-based participatory action research; CPAR; community education

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Introduction and Background

At the end of 2013, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) published the *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training*. The new policy led to the establishment of community colleges—a new institutional form based on public adult learning centres. Community colleges were to continue offering General Education and Training Certificate and Senior Certificate programmes and, in addition, to expand the programme choices for prospective adult learners by providing a new National Senior Certificate for Adults (NASCA), adding new vocational and skills-development programmes and non-formal programmes. The White Paper added:

The community colleges should draw on the strengths of the non-formal sector—particularly its community responsiveness and its focus on citizen and social education—in order to strengthen and expand popular citizen and community education. (DHET 2013, xii)

Although the White Paper acknowledges the need for popular community education, its primary aim is job-focused education. The principal purpose of the post-school education system is seen as the development of marketable skills for the formal economy and of entrepreneurial skills for self-employment. “Everyone should be able to make a living for themselves and contribute skills to a developing economy” (DHET, 8). In doing so, it argues that the role of education in society is the advancement of the national economy by developing the competitiveness of industry, and by addressing poverty and unemployment through the development of skills to support sustainable livelihoods, self-employment, or the establishment of cooperatives.

This position has been criticised for commodifying education and people and for advocating as a universal truth the claim that investment in people through skills development not only brings an economic return for industry, but also increases employment and earning rates, possibilities for self-employment, and in this way addresses unemployment and inequality (Treat and Motala 2014). This instrumentalist argument ignores the value of education outside waged labour and disregards how the crises of capitalism drive unemployment (CIPSET 2018b; Motala and Vally 2014; Rubeson 2005; Tett 2017; Vally and Motala 2014). Indeed, as Klees (2020) has argued, unemployment is not a worker-supply problem, but a structural problem of capitalism, and it is unlikely to be addressed by skills development alone.

In many ways, the conceptualisation of community education in existing policy is contradictory. It is primarily positioned as second chance education. By expanding both access and choice, the government hopes to draw into education the 18 million youths and adults (Nzimande 2017) previously pushed out of basic education. While the driving motivation is what Fitzsimons (2015) refers to as “labour market re-activation”, further aims are addressing the historical and ongoing class, racialised, gender-based, and geographical inequality in access to schooling, and facilitating a “route out of poverty for individuals” (DHET 2013, 5). An underlying assumption of this view of education

is that key drivers to the problems of unemployment, poverty and inequality lie in the nature of education and can be resolved through educational reforms that ensure equality of educational opportunity for all South Africans.

In the sphere of non-formal community education, the White Paper's conceptualisation of community education at times employs a narrow concept of empowerment: community education is about the knowledge of "how to deal with government departments or commercial enterprises such as banks" (DHET 2013, 10), or "will have to link directly with the work of public programmes to provide appropriate skills and knowledge" (DHET 2013, 22). By developing an individual's skills to engage business and government departments and to participate in government programmes, community education is situated as personal empowerment. A danger that exists in such forms of empowerment is that it places the responsibility to engage on individuals, whereas the empowerment agenda remains largely non-negotiable. In this way, empowerment is disconnected from a critique of existing power relations and the articulation of an alternative view of society (Shaw 2011). Moreover, the Department's view obscures capitalist social relations in lifelong learning and work: it is capital's exploitation of labour in its drive for profit that produces the need for skilling, reskilling and specific forms of knowledge, and it is also the profit motive that renders the majority of people disposable (Harvey in Risager 2016).

At the same time, the White Paper also situates colleges "within communities", arguing that the education they offer "will contribute to local needs and local development, building social agency and social cohesion" (DHET 2013, 22). In doing this, the White Paper argues that community colleges should "build on the experiences and traditions of community and people's education developed by non-formal, community-based and non-governmental organisations over many decades" (DHET 2013, 10). From this perspective—of community education as "people's education"—it is possible to envisage community education positioned as a public good, benefiting society rather than servicing the labour market, and drawing from historical, emancipatory, community-based roots. This view of community education encompasses an educational philosophy that counters views of education as labour-market reactivation or as personal empowerment (Harley 2015).

People's education introduced a perspective of the educational process that is political, based on a systematic critique of "bantu education" and of the necessity to construct people's education as an alternative system to be "controlled by and to advance the interests of the mass of the people" (Kruss 1988, 19). Drawing on Freirean thinking, the purpose of people's education is the development of critical consciousness, which "prepares people for full participation in all social, political or cultural spheres of society" (Mkhatshwa 1985, in Kruss 1988, 12). Harley argues that:

People's Education was consciously about more than confronting the state's race-based policies; it was about envisaging an alternative economic society as well, a society rooted in Marxist humanism. (Harley 2015, 64)

Working from this tradition, the Community Education Programme (CEP)¹ at the Centre of Integrated Post-School Education at Nelson Mandela University has argued previously (CEP 2018, 24) that community education:

- Is a political process that critiques and makes visible the existing arrangements of power in society, including that of capitalism.
- Assumes that all people are equal, because they share a common humanity (Harley 2015).
- Enables the interest of the “mass of the people” to surface through wide participation in “community based and community devised alternatives” (Hawarden 1986, in Kruss 1988, 9).
- Enables new positions and alternatives to emerge that address the social allocation of power.
- Makes possible the development of critical consciousness.

The contradictory views of community education in policy imply that the possibility of building a progressive community education exists simultaneously with the danger to close down alternative forms of community education. It is this reality that gave urgency to CEP's objective to build a practice from which to explore the prospects for a community education that encourages the development of civic agency, pushes back against the domination of people and nature, draws on socially and ecologically useful community knowledge, and supports solidaristic forms of organisation and work (Senekal 2015).

Community-Based Participatory Action Research

CEP used community-based participatory action research (CPAR) as a research approach to support the development of non-formal education programmes with marginalised and excluded communities. The assumptions of CPAR converged with CEP's objectives of establishing a community education practice that accepts that those who have been systematically denied education or have been excluded carry specific illuminating insights into the history, structure, consequences, and fracture points in unjust social arrangements (Church et al. 2008; Narayanan and Rao 2019). CPAR sees all participants as knowers, learners, and researchers—all have the authority to interrogate and construct knowledge (Darder 2018). It therefore embodies a democratic commitment to break the monopoly on who holds knowledge and for whom social

¹ While the CEP has also explored developing curricula connected to productive and socially useful activities and from social movement interests, this is not the focus of this article.

research can and should be undertaken. CPAR also deliberately inverts who frames research questions, designs methods, interprets and presents findings.

CPAR thrusts into prominence the role of the marginalised as architects of critical enquiry—the originators of knowledge for social change and collective praxis. The ability to do research on one’s social world is considered a basic human right, “the right to research” (Appadurai 2006, 167), and so is the right to the tools through which any citizen can systematically increase that body of knowledge they consider most vital to their survival as human beings and their claims as citizens (Appadurai 2006; Wakeford and Sanchez Rodriguez 2018).

Working from this perspective extends traditional qualitative research practice. Research becomes a collective undertaking, with researchers from different backgrounds using a range of critical approaches and associated methods to support their enquiry (Elias 2017; Fine 2018). CPAR is also more likely to position researchers as insiders. Additionally, CPAR connects the process of research and learning at multiple points to critical reflective dialogue, which is “poised to inquire and act” (Camarota and Fine 2008, 5). The knowledge becomes generative and forms the basis for renewed cycles of reflective dialogue and action. This dialogical process enables a critical epistemology that “redefines knowledge as actions in pursuit of social justice” (Camarota and Fine 2008, 6). Finally, the presentation of “findings” from CPAR can take a variety of forms, which are more likely to connect with the multiple learning styles and cultures among the intended community.

The Community Research Team

Identifying community-based participants to join the small band of university-based researchers and postgraduate students required several meetings with managers, at what were then public adult learning centres,² and with community-based organisations. The CEP consciously worked to recruit participants outside the ward-based structures of political parties. It was keen to develop a non-sectarian group of people, who might have different (or no) party political affiliations, and who joined the programme because of a curiosity about and interest in community education.

The work started by building a collective of 25 community-based and university researchers. A few community members joined as volunteers from a local environmental justice organisation, while the majority were learners at public adult learning centres in neighbourhoods surrounding the Missionvale Campus of Nelson Mandela University. Some were seasoned political and community activists, and others were ordinary community members whose organisational experience came from participating in sports clubs, church groups or in stokvels. With the exception of three

² Public adult learning centres (PALCs) are known as community education and training centres since they were transferred to the Department of Higher Education and Training in April 2015 and incorporated into the newly proclaimed community colleges.

members, all community researchers were unemployed with incomplete schooling and indicated that they were keen on exploring alternative approaches to education. The university-based group of researchers comprised postgraduate students employed as research assistants while completing Master's and Honours degrees and two contract researchers with experience in community, adult and worker education within and outside the academy. The majority of the research team spoke isiXhosa as their mother tongue and had good conversational competency in English. Four researchers spoke English at home and had differing abilities to work across languages. These differences in language, education and experience, and employment and unemployment, combined with gender, class and racialised distinctions to bring the full range of social and economic contradictions of South Africa to the group.

The Community Education Programme's initial work aimed at investigating participants' experience of education, interrogating what was then the Green Paper on post-schooling and formulating a collective vision of the kind of education the CEP hoped to build. This process led to the development of digital short stories documenting different social and educational experiences among the group. It was from this diversity of experiences that the group drew principles and commitments towards a different approach to education and expressed this as a *Community Education Manifesto* (CEP 2017).

Inevitably, the contradictions of life in South Africa, with its high levels of poverty, unemployment, and inequality, surfaced in the group. Past and ongoing traumas came to the fore. Yet the group stuck to their commitment articulated in the *Community Education Manifesto*: "We want to support one another when the work is hard, emotional or difficult" (CEP 2017, 9). Through shared and sensitive reflection, research team members began to reframe their stories. For example, a group member situating herself as a "drop out" could, after group feedback, reframe her story of having to leave school to have and care for a child as a teenager as being "pushed out" of schooling rather than "dropping out". This brought her (and other group members) to the recognition of how gender discrimination and patriarchal values in families and communities contributed to the shame and marginalisation she (and others) experienced, and how this could influence her sense of herself.

The process of investigating, sharing, and documenting own histories was supported by a psychologist experienced in approaches to community psychology. Group members decided to what extent they were willing to share personal information with the whole group. Some members of the research group used the opportunity for individual counselling. The group also developed collective practices of reflection and shared care through a buddy system. This work enabled bringing the group to work and learn collectively as life histories were explored. Some shared very personal stories, such as caring for sick family members or learning to read and write as an adult; others reflected on less private aspects of their lives, such as the importance and joy of practising sport.

This early work continued into the later stages of the programme. For example, training opportunities were organised and space to step out of the work was facilitated. Celebrating birthdays and shared achievements became important moments in acknowledging individual researchers and the group as a collective and getting to know one another.

It also required a real ongoing commitment from the research team as a whole to create and recreate the space for democratic participation. Building a collective through strong participation as a challenge to the common hierarchies of power in top-down systems of research and educational administration is critical to CPAR processes.

In their perceptive discussion of CPAR projects situated in academic institutions, Ospina et al. (2004) problematise several contradictory spaces in trying to extend the room for collective authority and democratic practice between academic researchers and community co-researchers. Some of these include:

- How both academic researchers and particularly community co-researchers can co-design a process when joining into a project that is already designed and funded elsewhere in the academic research management space.
- How to find a balance between voluntary participation and the expectation of all fully committing to a collective participatory process.
- How to negotiate the administrative and academic mandates of the institution to which the academic researchers are bound (even if they may also question these) and the views and needs of community co-researchers (Ospina et al. 2004, 49).

CEP researchers based in the academy and community co-researchers acknowledged the power relations implicit in these issues. They also understood that a CPAR process may not be able to fundamentally change the institutional embeddedness of these social relations. For example, the research group agreed that community researchers should receive an income for research work based on the argument from community co-researchers that their three day per week participation in the programme limited their availability for other livelihood activities. University-based researchers used this argument to lobby for a re-arrangement of institutional budgets so that community co-researchers could be compensated for their time and work. Accordingly, after six months of voluntary participation where travel costs and meals were covered by the research project, community co-researchers were appointed on contracts for time periods corresponding to that of the university-based research team. Their appointment within the university system enabled the development of a shared identity—co-researchers of the Community Education Programme. It also gave community co-researchers access to university resources such as computer laboratories and internet, the library, and staff training programmes.

The research group also attempted to mediate power differences through agreed practices such as monthly meetings where the agenda was set by the community co-

researchers, and the meetings were chaired by the community co-researchers. At these monthly meetings, academic researchers' participation rights were limited—they could attend the meeting, place items on the agenda and provide input, but finally decision-making remained with the community co-researchers. Balancing this authority to set the direction of the research project (what should be the focus of investigations, for example) were the limits and mandates set by the administrative mandates of the institution and overall research project, which community co-researchers acknowledged provided an overall framing, reporting and planning mechanism for the project. This balancing act between authority and democratic practice did not resolve all conflict. Differences of opinion emerged within the community co-research group and between the community co-researchers and academic researchers. These difficulties were talked through, and different ways of decision-making were explored; the clarification of roles and the allocation of work responsibilities were reviewed and agreed upon. Most often, it was the joy of doing this work, a shared commitment to a different form of education, and an acceptance that these slow process issues are critical to shared learning that helped to carry the whole team through moments of disagreement.

Nevertheless, over time, the initial research team shrunk, with some members leaving to take up studies elsewhere, finding full-time employment as adult educators, or to take up other work opportunities. Sadly, one member passed away. The complexity of developing democratic practice and accountability among the members of the research group is explored in more detail by Eccles, Jaftha, and Senekal (2015) in the article, "Power, Participation and the Process of Curriculum Making".

Co-constructing Community Education

The CEP research team aimed to understand what issues and problems members of local communities deemed important, what situations or circumstances they would like to change, and how a non-formal community education programme could be developed around the experience and lives of community members:

We aimed to work with people who are excluded from the labour market and wanted our work to talk to their lived experience. We wanted to understand from the perspective of people who are marginalised and excluded, what knowledge and skills they consider worthwhile learning in building a more equal, just, and sustainable society. (CEP 2018, 2)

The CPAR process CEP followed incorporated a number of activities that loosely mirrored the Freirean process of co-investigation, coding and decoding in the development of a learning programme, and its accompanying reflection-dialogue-action cycle as described by Freire (2000) and Kirkwood and Kirkwood (2011). CEP's investigative approach hinged on three linked questions from Anne Hope and Sally Timmel's approach to "training for transformation" (Hope and Timmel 1996) through which our activities cycled:

- What is the world like?
- Why is the world as it is?
- What could be done about it?

These questions set in motion a process for action, learning and reflection. Through the various CPAR actions, CEP's process clarified, and it is discussed below.

Preparation

A community research team was formed comprising community researchers, university-based researchers, and community participants from the area in which the investigative process and future community education event would take place.

CEP had developed a CPAR workbook³ with learning material and basic research protocols for community-based participatory action research. A *preparatory phase* started with the community research team working through the learning material together and using it to plan different transect walks guided by interests and questions that smaller groups among the research team defined (see Figure 1). The groups were voluntarily formed and would self-organise. Sometimes groups of women or youth formed, but most often, the groups formed based on combining people who lived in the area with people bringing an outsider view.



Figure 1: Community researchers from the Soweto-on-Sea community in Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality prepare their maps for the transect walks. (Picture credit: CEP)

At the same time, meetings with local ward-based structures of the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality council and community-based organisations as well as talks about the

³ This resource and other educational resources from CEP's work can be found here: <https://cipset.mandela.ac.za/Additional-Resources>.

objectives for the community education process on community radio stations initiated a process of *community mobilisation*.

What Is the World Like?

The research team conducted walks along a pre-planned route through local communities. They used typographical maps and the experience and knowledge of community members to plan the routes. During these transect walks, the researchers took photographs, interviewed community members, and used all their senses to observe situations and circumstances they considered interesting or that were pointed out by passing community members.

They documented these walks by writing field notes after completing the walk, most often at a field site in the local community where the walk took place (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: Community researcher, Vusumzi Meta, facilitates the writing of field notes with participating community members after a transect walk in Veeplaas, Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality in a local church. (Picture credit: CEP)

The CEP university-based researchers supported the groups to write up their observations and interviews by asking the group to tell the story of their day. As people were sharing information, the CEP community co-researchers asked questions that helped the community participants organise their information along the basic questions: What happened or what was observed? Where and when did it take place? Who was involved? How do you understand what you saw? How did you feel about what you saw?

After a short interval (usually enough time to print photographs and type up field notes), the whole community research team (CEP co-researchers and community participants) would meet to do a more detailed data analysis over several days. These two steps were part of *coding* the data thematically. The researchers worked in small groups of two to three people focusing on a neighbourhood or an issue, for example, access to electricity or waste in the community.

On the first day the group “sorted” *picture-based data*. Small groups received different photographs and grouped *photographs* by neighbourhood or issue and wrote short descriptions (Figure 3). They then grouped the photographs thematically and wrote labels for the themes. This was followed by feedback to the whole research team on how each small group organised their photographs, followed by questions and discussion.



Figure 3: Community researcher, Siphokazi Matsolo, and participating community members sort picture data thematically and write explanatory notes. (Picture credit: CEP)

This process was further facilitated through a structured *dialogue* among the whole research group facilitated by CEP co-researchers. The group discussed similarities and differences across the smaller data sets. They used their emotions to reach towards understanding one another’s point of view or to develop a contrasting view by reflecting on what surprised, delighted, or shocked them, or what was affirmed for them in the presentations across the groups.

Why Is the World as it Is?

While sorting or coding initiated the process of “naming the world” (Freire 2000) by describing what the world is like, *decoding* involved the researchers looking at how

their descriptive analysis might help them develop an understanding of why the world is the way it is (Hope and Timmel 1996). Community researchers started writing up their observations as a narrative, weaving together the interviews they had conducted. Usually, they worked in pairs or in small groups of three people, but a few people chose to work individually. Although all interviews were conducted in isiXhosa because this was the dominant language in the community, each writing pair decided on the language in which they wanted to write up their interview. Some narratives were written in isiXhosa and some in English. Each narrative tried to focus on the issue examined and to explore the activities that happen in the area and to examine the relationships, views and attitudes of the people who were interviewed.

Next a story circle was formed, and members listened to one another's stories and offered feedback. They also discussed what other views there were of the issue at hand and explored who held these views, and what ideas or concerns informed such views. They explored what power the group held to disturb and question the accepted (dominant) story in and of the community or issue. They asked what the key ideas are that lie behind the groupings of photographs and the photo stories. They considered what might be missing across all the stories. They reviewed their decision-making about the photos that were discarded. They also considered what knowledge could be added to the emerging story by looking at information from other knowledge sources. Throughout this process, the group members compared and contrasted individual stories and perspectives and looked for contradictions and offered clarification. Each person who wrote a narrative could then use the feedback from this discussion to return to their own narrative, revise or add to their story. This process extended narratives based on individual experience and knowledge by surfacing other experiences and understandings of the world.

Community researchers and community participants recorded their *final narratives* using a range of methods—poems, photo stories, chapters, popular booklets, and plays.⁴ For example, Masixole Mageje, a community participant in a CPAR process investigating waste in the community, wrote the poem, “The Shack”, in response to his experience of the transect walk in Veeplaas, Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality.

4 A more detailed account of the process is set out in the Report on the Community Education Programme (CIPSET 2018a), which describes, among other issues, the process of mobilisation around participation in the programme, the nomination by communities of the participants and convenors, identifying issues and areas for closer study, the route for the transect walk, how interviews were to be conducted, and the process of note taking and documentation.

The Shack
by Masixole Brian Mageje

The shack is my home background that determines the way "I am"
"The shack my beginning, the shack is my ending"
Losing hopes and dreams that leach through the soil
As we keep on dumping waste material.

The shack is my home background
That keeps me warm during rainy floods of days,
While lifting heavy buckets to throw away water marks,
That left behind floating shoes.

A winsome saint of smell that attracts insects is the wisdom of daily practice,
Our father can you forgive us for our sins
As we forgive those who punish us,
and give us our daily bread that provides
the sustainability to our early childhood development,

The shack is my beginning,
The shack is my home that determines the history behind my soul,
"As we keep on praying for better tomorrow" willing find forgiveness.
We lay, we get, we spend but little we see on the nature.

What Could Be Done?

Preparation for a *community education event* followed each CPAR process. These community education events would be open to any interested community member to attend and would be offered at a community hall in those communities where the CPAR process was conducted. Each event was repeated for two to three days, with different groups from the same community. An event could be attended by as many as a 100 people daily. CEP community researchers directed the administration and management of the event by developing a logistical plan and budget, allocated tasks, and held follow-up meetings to monitor progress.

Structuring a Learning Programme: The CEP Process

An extended period (four to six weeks) was spent developing educational materials and preparing the learning programme for the community education event after the CPAR process concluded. CEP co-researchers reviewed the codes developed as part of the CPAR research by starting to imagine activities for the community education event. They experimented with popular education methods to find ways to present their findings. They asked: What were the learning outcomes for the event? What sequence of picture and story codes would best support learning?

This process began the organisation of the documents generated through the research process into systematised educational resources, accompanying activities and guiding

notes by community co-researchers, who now merged their role as co-researchers with that of popular educators. Thematically coded photographs were organised and sequenced into a display of posters of photographs and photo stories, reflecting the findings of the research process, and acting as prompts for discussion with community participants.

Practical activities and workbooks that involved community members in learning, for example, how electricity works for a community education event on energy justice, were developed and material for experiments were collected and set up for small groups. These activities would bring other forms of knowledge to the process alongside local community knowledge, which the community education event surfaced through a group discussion of the photo and story prompts. Sense-making activities to explore ways of understanding all this information through music, poetry and popular theatre were developed. Facilitators' guides were prepared to accompany the learning material.

Through this systematising of knowledge generated through CPAR, supporting learning activities, and guidance to popular educators, the “curriculum” was generated. The CPAR process and the guiding questions (What is the world like? Why is the world like this? What could be done?) created and held a space for curriculum-making, which can be adapted across different local contexts and issues. The questions themselves

give momentum to a spiral of repeated activities that drive us to ever deeper understanding and transformation of ourselves and our world. They are not prescriptive, sequential steps that are each completed before moving on to the next element, in the way of a conventional content-based curriculum. A starting point and further connecting activities, come from educators and learners co-designing the learning programme through these problem-posing questions. How activities are selected and sequenced, with what learning objective in mind, should emerge from ongoing thoughtful dialogue between learners and educators. They are offered as possibilities for shared learning and activity. (CEP 2018, 2)

This process can be conceptualised as a “curriculum-in-motion”—a transformative, adaptive process, which is socially embedded, responds actively to a local context, and brings different forms of knowledge into conversation and at times contestation.

Community Mobilisation

An important step in organising a community education event was the mobilisation of a small geographical community. *Community mobilisation* included formal and informal communication. Letters were written to local councillors, managers of adult education personnel, unions, and community-based organisations, explaining the nature and purpose of the event. Slots on community a radio were negotiated to talk about the CPAR process and to advertise the community education event. Pamphlets to invite community members to the planned event were distributed, and finally, on the day, educators walked through the area using a loudhailer to remind people of the event.

Co-researchers as Popular Educators

Each event started with a display of the photographs, photo stories, or digital stories that their investigations generated. Community researchers would accompany small groups of community members through the display or projected digital stories. They asked participants what they saw or recognised in the visual and text resource materials and facilitated a sense-making dialogue among the group of what they saw, in so doing connecting the participants' experience and knowledge to that of the research group (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Sense-making dialogue with community members during a community education event in Soweto-on-Sea, Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality. (Picture credit: CEP)

Practical activities and accompanying workbooks added new information related to the experience of the participants. Such information was not only explored as new content. Through the question, “Why is the world as it is?”, the group developed its understanding of different explanations of the “world as it is” and they compared these explanations or theories to their own experience and to ideas of what the world could be. In this way, they deepened their understanding and added to their knowledge from other perspectives.

CEP events might start with a discussion that surfaced lived experience in isiXhosa (sometimes based on instructions for the activity in English); documentation might be in a mixture of isiXhosa and English. Idea and word lists were developed and translated from isiXhosa into English. A discussion might start with a word code used in that community and enable unpacking the deep knowledge and understanding that is crowded into this concept and the power relations that the use of specific terms reflects:

for example, *umsebenzi*, meaning “work”, including culturally based work, and *ukuphangela* (working for someone else).

Each community education event culminated in a final session that brought all the small groups together in a plenary discussion around the question: What could be done? The CEP group frequently used popular theatre to facilitate such discussion. They chose this approach because popular theatre does not use drama to convey messages (Vittoria 2019). Instead, it sets up a question through drama, which the “audience” has to resolve. The audience moves from being spectators to active participants in the play, directing its conclusion (see Figure 5).



Figure 5: Community researchers present a play at a community education event based on their transect research on unauthorised electricity connections. Here the play culminates in a community meeting on unauthorised electricity with participants at the event becoming part of the play. (Picture credit: CEP)

Behind the Wires

The example that follows explains how community education unfolded in practice.

Under the generative theme⁵ environmental justice, the CEP research team identified access to energy as a key issue. In local communities, transformers had exploded because an overload of electricity was drawn from them, and the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality was conducting inspections and fining households with unauthorised connections. An extended CPAR process of three communities, Rolihlahla, Soweto-on-

⁵ Peter Mayo (2004) explains that a generative theme is a focus for shared learning and action that emerges from and is connected to the life worlds of learners and surrounding social and political contexts in which these life worlds unfold.

Sea, and Ramaphosa, led CEP researchers to explore access to and use of energy resources. The CEP research group also set out to educate themselves about the generation of energy, how it is fed from the grid to households, the role of transformers, how an electrical circuit works, how much energy different household appliances use, and how overload along an electrical connection can occur, and what the consequences are. This process then led to the development of a range of learning resources, a workbook, various photographs, illustrations, text-based stories from interviews and popular theatre.

The community education event started off with CEP popular educators accompanying community participants through the display of photos and photo stories. They then discussed how the display or the photo stories confirmed or upended their own experience of access to and use of energy sources.



Figure 6: CEP popular educators facilitate discussion of photos and photo stories of energy justice at a community hall in Zwide, Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality. (Picture credit: CEP)

In these small groups they debated how access to energy sources may have changed over time. They explored what differences might exist within their own community and across the city. They explored different understandings of the term *izinyoka* (literally snakes) and asked how it came to be used to refer to community-installed connections to electricity or to an informally settled area, *ezinyoka*. They discussed the terms “illegal connection” and “unauthorised connection” and asked what perspective each term conveyed about people’s relations to energy sources.

They also participated in small group activities that mirrored the CEP's own learning journey by using the energy workbook (see Figure 7d) and by conducting experiments with a lemon battery to learn how an energy circuit is set up (see Figure 7a). The group constructed and used workshop sets with small lights to set up an energy circuit connected to a standard battery and to experience safely what happens to an electrical wire when there is an overload (see Figure 7b). They also explored other sources of energy, for example, making a light work through generating kinetic energy and boiling water with a home-made rocket stove, which uses small sticks of wood as fuel.



Figure 7a: Learning how an energy circuit is set up using a lemon

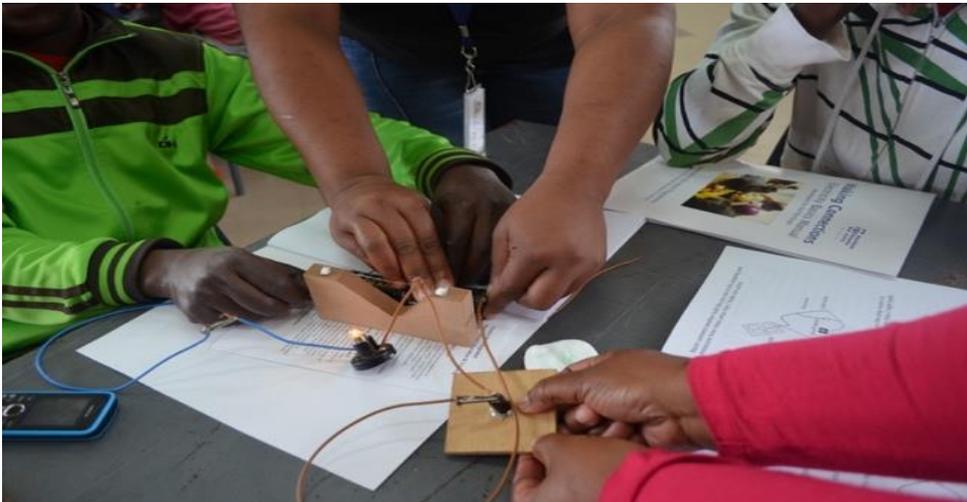


Figure 7b: Experiment to see what happens to an electrical wire when there is an overload

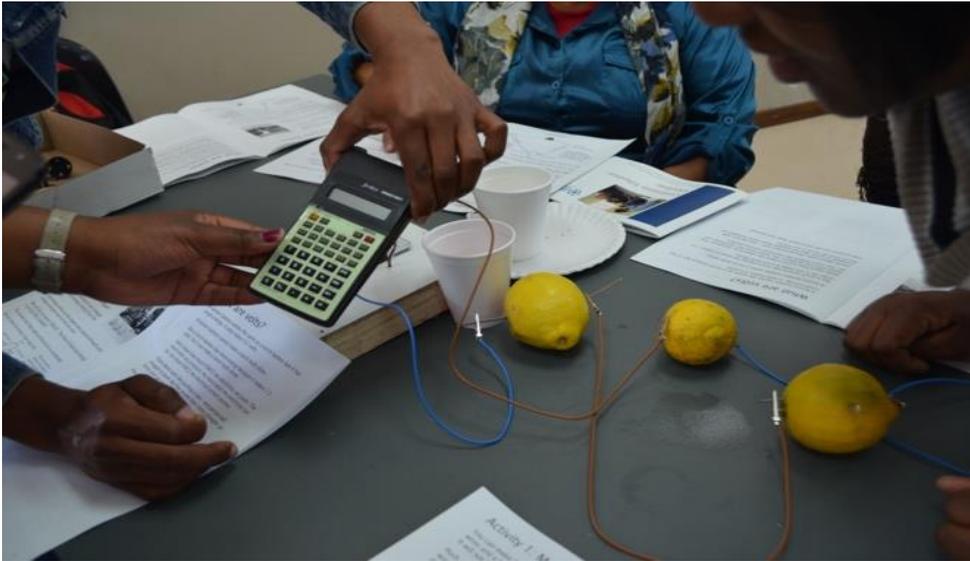


Figure 7c: Participant powering a hand-held calculator with a lemon battery



Figure 7d: Energy justice workshop experiments and learning

Throughout the process community members generated their own questions to apply their new knowledge. Asking why their pre-paid electricity is used up quickly, some members calculated the ampere hours appliances in their household use. A young man in one group expanded the lemon battery activity and connected five lemons in an electrical series, creating more than 1.5 volts of battery power. He then successfully used this to power his hand-held calculator (see Figure 7c). Delighted with his

experiment, he announced to the other people at his table: “I’m a genius!” Everyone at the table shared his excitement and laughed and applauded in agreement.

Further activities explored alternatives to coal-powered energy by looking at generating energy at household or community level. Community members were drawn into an activity that generated energy using mechanical means. They explored the construction and efficiency of a rocket stove built from recycled material.

The small group activities were followed by a play, *Behind the Wires*, written and performed by CEP members. The play explored unauthorised electricity connections and the power relations in the community that supported unauthorised electricity connections. The play ended in a community meeting to discuss options for safe access to electricity.



Figure 8a: *Behind the Wires*, an energy justice play performed in Zwide, Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality



Figure 8b: The audience responded enthusiastically to *Behind the Wires*

CPAR as a Theory and Approach for Community Education

David Harvey, in an interview with Bjarke Risager (2016), argues that a lot of resistance to capital accumulation occurs not only at the point of production, but also through consumption and the realisation of value. As more and more workers are displaced from the production sphere through de-industrialisation and the implementation of labour-saving technologies, these same workers are being pushed into urban life and what Harvey refers to as the politics of the city. The capitalist dynamic is increasingly shifting to struggles over the realisation of value—over the politics of daily life in the city.

Against this background, community education needs to connect with politics and struggles for social and economic justice, and adult and community education for labour-market reactivation may appear increasingly irrelevant to community members.

Instead, curriculum-making needs to be approached differently to support a community education that emerges

from and become[s] situated in the lived and relational experience of a geographical community, so that it can surface this complexity, enable its critical examination, contribute to strengthening positive associational interests in that community, connect to meaningful activity in that geographical community and reach out in solidarity across interest groups and geographical boundaries to other communities. (Senekal 2015, 8)

CPAR presents a meaningful theory and approach for developing community education with communities that can meet this conceptualisation of community education.

Challenging Dominant Views

The CPAR process surfaces community experiences and knowledge during coding. Decoding enables the development of stories that disrupt the emerging picture even further. By juxtaposing these stories with other dominant narratives, further new stories can be told, which “reveal existing fault lines” and point to “where mobilization can begin and radical change is possible” (Weis and Fine 2004, xxi). It is in particular the interlinked processes of coding and decoding that provide a space for counter-analysis. Fracturing and counter-analysis are approaches that assist in decoding to reveal the historical pathways through which changes in power and privilege have shaped individual and group lives (Weis and Fine 2004). Here analysis might use critical race theory or feminist theory to look at difference—how the “whole” picture can be destabilised by an analysis that examines how social difference, privilege and power dislocates the initial surface view of what was previously understood as the whole picture. It might also use a political economy perspective to explore how structures of production condition social relations, political power, and cultural practice, and disturb dominant understandings and explanations (Youngman 1996).

Shifting the Role of the Educator

CPAR can also be regarded as a process of learning through research and action. In participating, the role of CEP co-researchers oscillated between research, learning and teaching. Facilitating learning and teaching through CPAR necessitates popular education approaches that recognise the knowledge that adult participants bring to learning.

After all, as Lave has argued:

It is not the case that the world consists of newcomers who drop unaccompanied into unpeopled spaces. People in activity are skilful at, and more often than not engaged in, helping each other to participate in changing ways in a changing world. Such participation can be thought of as a process of changing understanding in practice, that is, learning. (Lave 2009, 208)

Traditionally, “the educator’s role is to regulate the way the world ‘enters into’ the students. The educator’s task is to organize a process which already occurs spontaneously, to ‘fill’ the students by making deposits of information which he or she considers to constitute true knowledge” (Freire 2000, 76). In contrast, CPAR situates learning in the “socio-historical context” (Camarota and Fine 2008) of an individual and the community in which s/he makes a life. This is critically important to all adult learners.

Participation in CPAR

CPAR is not without challenges. Launching a CPAR process as a collaboration between the academy and marginalised and excluded groups unavoidably brings the social relations of the society in which participants are embedded into play. This requires sensitive facilitation of the process, finding ways to balance and mediate power differences between university-based groups and community participants, and accepting that leadership of the process will shift across different contexts.

Work associated with the Community Education Programme demanded participation across a number of spaces, not all of which worked to the principles agreed to in the *Community Education Manifesto*. It also required working with discomfort and welcoming dissent and challenge. All members of the group should watch out for moments where participation is more about compliance and be willing to search for ways in which power can be extended, especially where the institutional processes of the academy constrain participation. The conscious development of interpersonal skills and collective processes that over time support the development of trust, and through shared work, the advancement of a distinctive and shared character among CPAR participants, can help mediate power differences within the group.

Learning from Everyday Life

CPAR encourages us to see everyday life as changing understanding in practice, that is, as learning. Such learning is a collective process—we are situated in action and learning with others and our world. This situatedness is relational, place-based, time-based and future-oriented: learning happens with and between people and from the knowledge of others, within a local social context, at a specific historical time, and towards an imagined future (Carpenter and Mojab 2017).

Critical reflective dialogue is an important practice for framing and organising educational activities rooted in everyday life. CPAR enables critical reflective dialogue that is more than asking questions. It is a process of shared learning and working that involves respect and listening, and questions that uncover experiences, feelings, and assumptions, and which searches for the structures that shape our world. Critical reflective dialogue brings learners and educators together to name and explore issues they agree are important. As they add and interrogate new information, they develop and test their ideas, and find ways to challenge oppressive situations. Through such repeated cycles of investigation, critical reflective dialogue and action, shared learning happens; new knowledge is constructed and a deeper understanding and collective engagement with our world emerges.

CPAR draws on community-based researchers' deep social knowledge and on university-based researchers' academic knowledge. Bringing these knowledges into dialogue, rather than into a hierarchy of knowledge, enables co-learning and the exchange of capacities. The power relations that shape what knowledge is, and whose knowledge counts, enter the learning space, and can be examined and challenged. CPAR connects individual experience with collective experience and examines collective experience critically by linking such experience to the conditions and relations from which it arises. By doing this, the CPAR process generates “really useful knowledge” (Johnson 1988 in Crowther 2000, 485) for radical emancipatory practice.

Language and Learning

CEP's research processes and community education events brought together people with different home languages and schooling, and experiences of how language is used in education. Opening up dialogue among learners and between learners and educators in a way that encourages participation requires recognising that language is not a neutral issue and that language preference, and the dominance of English in our society, reflects power relations.

The CEP's curriculum-making process confirmed the importance of using language as a resource for defending, privileging and extending all the knowledge that is stored in the languages of participants, rather than only what is written in English. This understanding requires that the curriculum process should problematise language choices and preferences (Hult and Hornberger 2016).

Valuing Different Forms of Knowledge

A further aspect of making meaning is to examine how knowing is valued in society and the ways in which knowledge is used to strengthen social, political, and economic power. What can be learnt from different positions people hold? What do these positions reveal about their interests? Sometimes this process includes challenging strongly held ideas and beliefs or exploring ways to claim and reinforce the validity of marginalised forms of knowing. The process of making sense—upending thinking, rethinking, restating, and reclaiming—brought the CEP’s community research team to thinking about what knowledge is useful and helpful in opening up spaces for transformative learning. This surfaced the third question: “What is to be done?”

Curriculum-in-Motion—Moving into Action

At the same time that CPAR identifies issues to investigate, it encourages the belief that things can change. It is “active knowledge” (Cammarota and Fine 2008, 6). It is the very crisis or problem that provides the opportunities for learners to move from a position as objects of the crisis to subjects of its transformation (Freire 2000). CPAR enables community-based researchers to study problems and work with others to overcome obstacles. Cammarota and Fine argue that this “becomes critical knowledge for the discovery of one’s efficacy to produce personal as well as social change” (Cammarota and Fine 2008, 6). Thinking through possibilities for “action” also suggests a participatory investigation to identify and evaluate alternatives that might exist within a geographical or cultural community but could also exist elsewhere.

“Action” also does not mean only activities that connect back into the community through mobilising, organising and collective work, and the learning this can bring. It can also be thought of as the shared processes of designing and implementing new learning activities that deepen our understanding or our capacity for action. The interlinked questions of Hope and Timmel (1996) that were used to investigate issues through CPAR led to the development of a curriculum that is not fixed and is instead a curriculum-in-motion—responsive to local contexts and generative of new areas for investigation and action. As such, the curriculum and learning process are both located within the learning group and embedded in broader transformative processes of being with others in community.

Policy and Adult and Community Education

Given the contradictory policy space within which this work emerged, the big question is: Can the existing practice of adult and community education in community learning centres support this work? There are real contextual difficulties within the government sphere. The main obstacles are the following: low budgets; the possibility that community education curricula are developed from a narrow “empowerment” perspective and reflect a list of “needs” drawn from government programmes and activities; that the existing skills regime within the Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) (and its associated problems) is imported as community education;

and, the current limits in the practice and orientation of adult educators whose experience is largely shaped by formal subject-based teaching.

The government would do well to take concrete steps to support forms of community education that draw on the historical roots of people's education. The practical implications of this proposal are:

- Developing a clear funding framework for non-formal community education.
- Formulating a plan for the development and implementation of critical transformative approaches to community education by:
 - Supporting the mentoring of adult educators in CPAR and developing transformative learning programmes at the nine pilot community college sites.
 - Supporting the development of learning materials and related resources to give effect to these programmes.
 - Supporting the administration and management of such programmes in conjunction with communities.
- Supporting ongoing research to articulate a critical theory of community education.
- Supporting and facilitating public dialogue on the role of community education that fosters transformative actions towards a socially and ecologically just society.

Conclusions

CEP research shows the value of CPAR as a praxis for the development of community education curricula from the lived experience and interests of local communities. It effectively employs critical reflection, dialogue, and enquiry as drivers of curriculum design and, in doing so, it interrogates and extends existing knowledge and connects lived experience with other knowledges. In connecting experiential knowledge with systematised knowledge, this approach avoids the fragmentation of knowledge in subject-based curricula. The research demonstrates CPAR as both a valuable theory and practice in the design of non-formal curricula for community education within a critical tradition. It enables the development of learning programmes that are contextually and linguistically embedded in the social world of communities. It foregrounds community knowledge and brings this into critical dialogue with other forms of knowledge. It fosters possibilities for social change. In a context of enormous growing social inequality, educational initiatives that promote concrete alternatives to the existing status quo are of critical importance to our society.

If we are courageous enough to make alternative curricular and educational spaces available, then the necessary freedom to create new knowledge and alternative decisions could open spaces to challenge the unequal and unjust arrangements of power in our society and encourage organisation and collective action to change this.

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