

## **“You know the homophobic stuff is not in me, like us, it’s out there”. Using Participatory Theatre to challenge heterosexism and heteronormativity in a South African school**

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*Forum Theatre (FT), a participatory improvised theatre form, raises consciousness, enables debate and critical reflection, and encourages a democratic form of knowledge production that engages the audience in their own learning and unlearning. I used FT as a platform to understand how 15- to 18-year-old learners, in a co-educational school in the Free State, experience and respond to heterosexism and heteronormativity. In this article, I explore whether FT sessions, based on the sociodramatic theories of Boal, are a sufficient enough construct to challenge heterosexism. Data collected for this article included videotapes of the performances, discussions, and field notes. The FT scenes and subsequent discussions suggest that young people bemoan heterosexism and heteronormativity in their school and demonstrate a commitment to challenge extreme examples of prejudice and behaviour by their teachers and peers, yet ignore or shy away from everyday examples of heterosexist exclusions and privilege. I argue that a participatory process, such as FT, can be a useful construct to challenge heterosexism, but it is not in itself liberatory, as the issues of socialisation, privilege, and context cannot be bypassed simply through ‘participation’.*

**Keywords:** Forum Theatre; heterosexism; heteronormativity; South Africa

### **Introduction**

In an article, *School’s gay policy under fire* by Selloane Khalane (2013:1), the following was reported:

*The Creare Training Centre in Bloemfontein has been strongly criticized for indicating in its prospectus that it assists homosexual with changing their sexual orientation. According to the prospectus homosexuals will not be allowed to enroll in the centre unless they are willing to embrace heterosexuality. Creare will “minister” to those who want to change their sexual orientation. Volksblad interviewed pastor Cornelis van Heyningen of Creare yesterday after the Sunday Times had reported on the training centre. “We believe that humans are precious in God’s eyes and that he has a fantastic dream for each of them. Discrimination should therefore not be tolerated. No one has the right to judge another or harm them in any way.” “All individuals are entitled to exercise their human rights when deciding on their sexual orientation whether it is based on their conviction that they were genetically so predisposed or motivated by external circumstances or events. Similarly, individuals can exercise their human rights by choosing to*

*change their sexual orientation". Van Heyningen said that since the training centre functions primarily as a developmental centre specializing as a Bible, Arts and Missionary School, it is a fairly unique ministry and as such falls under the authority/auspices of the congregation. "We believe that we must be able to facilitate the human rights of the person who wishes to change his/her sexual orientation because the human rights of these individuals are often negated". "This facilitation of human rights should be able to take place in an environment which supports the process of change." According to Braam Double, a gay activist and professing Christian from Bloemfontein, asking a homosexual to become heterosexual is the same as asking a Black person to become White. Doubell says that not all Christians agree on the topic of homosexuality. According to him, the Centre is undermining the Constitution – the highest authority in the country. "The Academy could be taken to court." Doubell says that it is ridiculous to believe that homosexuality is a matter of choice. "We do not choose to be gay, we are born gay", he said.*

*An expert on the constitution, Prof. Pierre de Vos said that the institution might be violating the law on the promotion of equality and the prevention of unfair discrimination of 2006. "People are still ignorant of the fact that the law prohibits private discrimination." The spokesperson for the Human Rights Commission, (HRC), Isaac Mangena, says that the exclusion of homosexuals by the Centre is unconstitutional as it discriminates against them (Khalane, 2013:1).*

In this article, I explore whether FT sessions, based on the theories of Boal (1979), are a sufficient enough construct to challenge heterosexism and heteronormativity. My previous writing in this field, to a large extent, described research on how teachers position themselves on the teaching about sexual diversity (Francis, 2012) and my own activism and teaching in challenging heterosexism (Francis & Msibi, 2011; Francis, 2010). My research papers point out how schools promote compulsory heterosexuality and that homosexuality is something to be hidden and kept separate from teaching, learning and daily school life (DePalma & Francis, in press; Francis, 2012). For the present article, I used Selloane Khalane's (2013) piece, mentioned earlier, to start a dialogue with Grade 11 learners at a school in Bloemfontein, Bloemsig High. I asked them how they felt about the Creare Training Centre's stance on lesbian and gay learners. The learners unanimously mentioned how outraged and appalled they were at the article and they were very critical on the school's position: "the school was something from the dark ages ... the school's position was not in line with the constitution ... the school was guilty of a human rights violation". In asking the question, I positioned students as knowers who had views and opinions on the issue of heterosexism and heteronormativity. Using the students' initial attack on the school's heterosexist position, I engaged them in Forum Theatre (FT), as a vehicle to raise consciousness about heterosexism and to provide opportunities to try out action plans to challenge heterosexism and heteronormativity at Bloemsig High and beyond.

Much of the research studies on Lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB)<sup>1</sup> youth in South African schools is focused on homophobic harassment and assault (Butler, Alpaslan, Strümpher & Astbury, 2003; Msibi, 2009, 2011, 2012; Richardson, 2006) or the invisibility of homosexuality in schools (Bhana, 2012; Butler et al., 2003; DePalma & Francis, in press; Francis, 2012). Despite the increase in research on LGB issues in education, the writing mainly deals with youth who identify as heterosexual, targeting youth who are LGB. These research studies are necessary as they highlight the plight of LGB youth and the need to create safe schools. However, they do not pay the same attention to the resilience of LGB youth and their heterosexual allies who challenge heterosexism and stand up against homophobic abuse and victimisation (Griffin & Ouellet, 2003). For the purposes of this article, I use and understand the term heterosexism as referring to the oppression of people who are (or perceived to be) LGB (Griffin, D'errico, Harro & Schiff, 2007); the term heteronormativity as the process whereby heterosexuals become constructed as the norm and everything against it constructed as deviant (DePalma & Atkinson, 2007; Msibi, 2012; Ngo, 2003), and the term homophobia as the irrational fear, hatred, and intolerance of people who are or presumed to be LGB (Pharr, 1998; Richardson, 2004).

In responding to the special-issues call for papers to initiate a debate on the manner in which participatory methodologies can contribute to knowledge generation in the field of education, my article is less about content of the FT dialogues that emerged and more about the participatory liberatory process of FT. In other words, I am dwelling less on analysing the content of the performance and discussions, but rather explore the usefulness of FT as a construct to respond to heterosexism. In doing this, I focus on the students and my learning and unlearning in a participatory FT process focused on unpacking heterosexism and heteronormativity at Bloemsiig High.

Using theatre nomenclature, I have framed my article in several acts. As a prologue, I give an overview of the literature on social justice- and art-based methodologies. Then I present the first act, a précis of Boal's (1979) FT. The art-based method of inquiry I used to collect data is described and constitutes act two, and I present the dialogues (data) of the participants in act three. For the epilogue, I conclude with the argument that a participatory process such as FT can be a useful construct to challenge heterosexism, but not without its own complexities.

### **Social justice- and participatory art-based methodologies**

Lee Ann Bell (2007:1) explains social justice education as both a process and a goal. The goal of social justice is the "full and equal participation of all groups in a society mutually shaped to meet their needs". The process of attaining this goal, Bell (2007: 1-2) argues, should be "democratic and participatory, inclusive and affirming of human agency and human capacities for working collaboratively to create change." There are numerous understandings of social justice education (see, for example, Ayers, Hunt & Quinn, 1998; Hooks, 1994; Nieto, 2004; Vincent, 2003), but I draw on Bell's (2007)

definition because of her emphasis on collective participation and social justice education being process-oriented. In tackling heterosexism and heteronormativity, educators and researchers, taking a social justice perspective, draw on these characteristics identified by Bell (2007) together with an examination of the effects of systems of oppression in school organisational policy and practice (Griffin & Ouellet, 2003). In a special social justice and the arts issue of *Equity and excellence*, Bell and Desai (2011:288) suggest that the arts helps us to “remember, imagine, create, and transform the practices that sustain oppression as it endures across history and locality”. They (Bell & Desai, 2011:288) continue that the arts confront “how we have learned to see and provide new lenses for looking at the world and ourselves in relation to it.” Ngo (2003:123) suggests that examining youth discourses about LGB issues is crucial, and emphasises the need to “open ourselves to imagining and practicing creative and innovative ways of teaching and addressing homophobia, heterosexism and other forms of oppression”.

In the South African context, the notion of the arts playing a role in bringing about social change is not a new one (Davis & Fuchs, 1996; Hauptfleisch, 2007; Mda, 1993). Theatre, for example, has been a powerful form for addressing social inequality in South Africa, with a history of protest theatre, worker theatre and theatre produced as a means of resistance (Marlin-Curiel, 2004). In my experience, I am encouraged that, in its application, the arts has the potential to raise consciousness, enable young people to take social action and to realise the goals of social justice in ways that are accessible and entertaining (Francis, 2010; Francis & Hemson, 2006). In this specific intervention, I assumed that a participatory art-based learning process, such as FT, rather than a transmission model, would enable open engagement and safety for challenging heterosexism at Bloemsig High.

#### Forum Theatre (FT)

Augusto Boal's (1979) Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) is inspired by, and draws on Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). In acknowledging Freire's (1970) consciousness-raising approaches, Boal's (1992, 1995, 1998) FT activities address oppression by focusing on image and sound. FT, a participatory improvised theatre form, raises consciousness, enables debate and critical reflection, and encourages a democratic form of knowledge production that engages the audience in their own learning and unlearning. In FT, Boal (1998:52) repositions the audience as “spect-actors” or active participants who raise consciousness about how oppression works and who enact scenarios that challenge antagonists and oppressive dynamics to create a more socially just environment. The joker or facilitator in Boal's (1979) FT engages the spect-actors in thinking of, and performing scenarios that offer solutions to challenge the antagonists. This participatory process enables participants to enact and engage with issues rather than ignore opposing arguments. Although spect-actors, as individual agents, and the joker have the potential to determine the flow of the scenes,

the emphasis of FT is on social learning. As Boal (1992) argues, FT is a participatory form where the audience and the actors learn together. It is not didactic theatre where the performers transmit knowledge and the audience passive recipients. FT supports learning and offers multiple positions and solutions rather than precise and single answers to oppression and other social issues.

#### Participatory art-based inquiry

For this article, I draw on qualitative participatory art-based methods, specifically FT, and focus group discussions. I advertised the FT sessions at Bloemsig High during a Grade 11 assembly where I spoke about FT and how it can be used to promote social justice. Bloemsig High is a desegregated suburban co-educational school attended by African (97%), Coloured (3%) and Indian (0.7%).<sup>2</sup> The school fees are R380.00 (approximately 38 USD) per annum. I have used the school fee to designate Bloemsig High's economic context rather than poverty quintiles, which lack reliability as indicators of the poverty level of the school community.

I initiated FT sessions at Bloemsig High after I had read the article by Khalane (2013). The Create Training Centre's position troubled me, not only because of its extremity, but also because it made explicit the pervasive heterosexism in our schools. I have a strong interest in social justice education, specifically anti-heterosexism teaching. As a teacher, activist and researcher, I also favour participatory art-based methodologies. I am a former ballet dancer, drama graduate and teacher and current visual artist. I have learnt that art and activism can be a powerful tool in the challenging of oppression. As a former drama teacher, my anecdotal use of FT has been useful in taking youth through a process of social learning and unlearning of issues of power and privilege. I have used my grounding and knowledge of the arts to enable a participatory process to bring about critical dialogue for social change. Art-based methodologies are useful to engage young people in a friendly non-judgemental way. I find using Boal's (1992, 1995, 1998) theatre exercises, games and improvisations useful tools to develop a relation of trust and to allow me, a forty-three-year old Black male researching youth, access into their social world, especially to discuss a topic where there is much silence (see Morrell, 2003).

The sample comprised 16 Grade 11 16- to 18-year-old African<sup>3</sup> and coloured learners in Bloemsig High, a co-educational school in Bloemfontein, of whom 12 were girls and four boys. Like Reddy (2005:12), I worked within the dominant culture of heterosexuality, although I did provide opportunities for other forms to emerge. Given the culture of compulsory heterosexuality promoted by schools and families, as well as peer policing of heterosexuality, it was clearly not going to be possible to deliberately seek out lesbian and gay learners within the school (Reddy, 2005; Richardson, 2006). Participation was excellent, with only four participants missing a session over the six-week period.

The site chosen for the FT was the school's multipurpose room. One of the participants filmed all the sessions. Participants took turns to handle the video camera

while also participating in the FT. For example, someone filming may decide that she would like to participate in the scene at a critical point and then someone else would take over the camera. Using the young participants to film the scenes gave privileged access to what they chose to 'zoom' in on. Over the six-week period, volumes of data were generated: video recordings, my field notes and transcripts of the discussions.

A typical FT session would be as follows. The participants and I would start with a warm-up activity, such as theatre games, to generate participation. The games were facilitated in a manner that encouraged participation and enabled the participants to construct a collective or shared reality. For example, each participant would choose a critical incident from her life story on when she first learnt that she was different, and depict this by creating a body sculpture. The sculpture would then be used as a stimulus for discussion. Another example would be the participants responding to a heterosexist situation at the school. A group of about five would perform a scene and the other eleven participants would be the audience or what Boal (1998:52) called the "spect-actors". The scenes lasted between two to five minutes. If the spect-actor did not agree with something in the scene or believed that the scene should be performed differently, the spect-actor or spect-actors would shout "stop" and the performers would freeze. The facilitator or joker would then ask the spect-actor why she had stopped the performance and invite the spect-actor to intervene and perform a more effective strategy. The antagonists in the scene would make the scene difficult for the spect-actor to intervene in order to show how difficult it is to challenge an embedded structural oppression such as heterosexism. Boal is clear that it is not finding the correct solution that is important, but the collective "process of criticizing, observing and trying to find solutions" that is critical (Paterson & Weinberg, 2002:3).

Throughout the scene, the facilitator or joker would raise questions, change the scenario or even introduce a new character into the scene. The FT is set up to encourage the spect-actor or participants to explore and rehearse the numerous scenarios in order to challenge the oppressive dynamic. As the weeks went by, I would ask the participants to suggest scenes to be performed.

In using FT, many young people enjoyed animating their performance, having fun and being listened to. The FT allowed sensitive issues to be spoken about and enabled young people to raise questions about their experience and concerns. Often the questions, performance, and discussion were accompanied by laughter. In presenting the data, I have kept the "ums" and "ahs" to capture the liveliness of young people's enthusiasm and their engagement with issues of social justice but, most importantly, not to let the dialogues (data) read as sanitised and sterile.

Permission to conduct the study at Bloemsig High was negotiated at several levels that included the Provincial Department of Education, the school governing body, the principal, the parents and the participants. The ethics of the project had been approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education Research Committee at the University of the Free State. The names of all participants and the school are pseudonyms.

### The dialogues

FT gave me access to listen to youth on their terms and to learn about their experience and enactment thereof on issues of heterosexism. I have arranged the findings under three headings.

#### *Times have changed*

Many of the scenes constituted very strong arguments for the inclusion of LGB learners in the school and for acceptance and equality. In the scenes, the young participants were very candid in challenging teachers or learners who discriminated against lesbian and gay learners. For example, when Israel wants to take his same-sex partner to the matric dance and the teacher refuses, all the spect-actors respond that, if the school does not change its position on discriminating and excluding Israel, none of the learners will attend the dance. Other participants threaten to take “the case to the human rights courts” and some participants go as far as suggesting that they would “leave the school”. When a discussion followed on how practical “leaving the school” would be, the participants suggested that, if learners left the school, it would “paralyse the school financially” and this would force the school to change. They argued that leaving the school would be better than colluding with homophobia. In their argument, the participants cited the “constitution”, “human rights”, “that times have changed” and “social justice” as reasons why the discrimination against LGB learners would not be tolerated. The following scene is an example of a learner who challenges heteronormativity.

The scene starts with three learners on the playground, namely Elias, Tholo and Juliet. Three males enter, throwing a rugby ball at each other. They stop and yell at Elias.

Male 1: *Hey sissy boy and I see you playing house with your girlie girls.* [Two of the three boys laugh. One of the boys makes a few exaggerated effeminate movements.]

Juliet: *Leave him alone. He doesn't want to play with you guys.*

Male 2: *Oh he does want to play.* [Throws the ball onto Elias head.] *Catch moffie!*<sup>4</sup> *Catch sissy boy?* The ball knocks Elias down and he starts to cry.

Males 1 and 2: *Stand up and be like a man eh you girl. Ja why don't you act like a man juh moffie.* [Elias is on the floor and starts to cry.]

Males 1 and 2: *Look at the moffie cry. Crying, crying, crying. kgwete.*<sup>5</sup> *Crying, crying, crying. kgwete* [They sing.]

Male 3 [confronts males 1 and 2]: *Leave him alone. What's you guys problem?*

Males 1 and 2 [confronting Male 1 with confusion]: *Are you also a crybaby sissy boy?*

Male 3 [confidently]: *Yes I cry sometimes when I am hurt and afraid and I am sure you do to and what's the problem with that. Uh?* [Male 3 bends down and helps Elias up.]

[Male 3, Elias, Tholo and Juliet leave.]

What is useful about FT is that, after scenes like the one described above, there is usually a discussion about the strategies that were effective and why some strategies were complicated and less effective (Boal, 1979). Many concerns were raised after the scene was performed. The boys in the group wanted to know whether boys would really stand up for the performer who experienced homophobic bullying and whether Male 3 would do this “knowing the punishments he would receive and that he would be treated in the same ways as the gay”. This generated a lively and conflicted discussion on the costs to standing up against heterosexism. It is interesting to note that, when one of the female participants raised the question “What would be the cost if we as boys did not step in and challenge the homophobic bullying”, participants were reluctant to consider this question. This is where the participants were stumped. In fact, when I intervened as the joker, one of the participants named his own awkwardness and suggested: “Why can’t we move to the next scene I am so amped for the acting more than the discussion.” I will return to this point later in *heterosexism is out there not in here*.

#### *Reinforcing rather than challenging heteronormativity*

In the following scene, one of the male learners asks a teacher whether he could bring his same-sex partner to the matric dance. The teacher and some of the learners in the class are hostile to the request.

Mosifane [very exaggerated effeminate movement]: *Sir I would like to eh eh bring my boyfriend to the dance* [Loud laughter from Makara, Lerato and Masieng.]

Lerato and Masieng: *Ha-ha-ha, I didn't know that a boy could take a boy to the dance. What's this world coming to? What are you going to wear? Who is going to wear the dress? You ha-ha ha.* [Laughter and loud hand-clapping and banging on the desks.]

Mosifane [swinging his handbag over his shoulder]: *It doesn't mean if you are gay you wear a dress you noob.* [Again even more laughter from the performers in the scene.]

Makara: *So what are you going to wear? Anyways you can't bring a boyfriend to the dance. You must find a girlfriend.* [Again loud laughter and banging on the desks.]

Mosifane: *Well the constitution is clear.* [Lots of hand gestures.] *You can't discriminate against me on my sexual orientation. I can sue the school for discrimination.* [With very exaggerated movements, Mosifane takes his seat.]

Teacher: *What constitution mambo jumbo nonsense. This is (Bloemsig High) and we have our own constitution and the parents, the governing body and god's values determine it. All this gay nonsense can be at other schools but not at this one. This school that has a Christian values and all the homo mambo jumbo stuff is against the bible. It is a sin. Have you read Leviticus? Have you read the bible? How can we allow your sinful ways in this school? I will not tolerate this and I*

*will speak to the principal and she will not tolerate your sinful ways here.*

*Lerato: Hawe my brother. Looks like you need to get yourself girl soon. No boyfriend friends welcome to this school's matric dance. What you are going to do gay boy?*

*Spect-actor: Stop!*

Throughout the scene, when Mosifane speaks, the spect-actors laugh. At one stage, as the joker, I stopped the scene and asked the spect-actors why they were laughing. A spect-actor responded that Mosifane's mannerisms and his stereotypical representation of a gay man were "funny and hysterical". Other spect-actors mentioned that the way Mosifane "flaunted himself in such gay fashion with his handbag was too funny". I then asked Mosifane why he had chosen to depict the gay character in such a way and if there were other ways in which he could have represented the character. Mosifane responded: "I had to portray the character um like a gay so that everyone would know that he was gay, um it's just the way gays act". I asked the spect-actors the question whether there was anyone else who would play the character of Mosifane differently. None of the males offered to play the character. I asked the males why there were no takers and there was silence until Mosifane said: "I can't act like a gay any other way". Again, I asked how do gays act and another male participant gestured very effeminate characterisations. Eventually and after much discussion on the issue, one of the female participants stepped onto the stage and portrayed, again, an extremely effeminate gay character. The scenes and ensuing discussion demonstrated how the participants held onto very fixed notions of gender and sex identification and reinforced this process of heteronormativity. This rigid characterisation of lesbian characters as butch and gay men as very feminine remained, despite my asking many questions of the participants to generate data for discussion and critical thinking. In many ways, consistently through the performed scenes, it was obvious how the participants, in their depictions of people who are lesbian and gay, sustained systematic heteronormativity. These heteronormative assumptions are so rooted that "obviously" gay men can only be performed as effeminate or lesbians as butch. This conflation of sex, gender and sexuality ignored the fact that these are, in fact, separate aspects of human identity and experience (DePalma & Atkinson, 2007:65). What this dialogue brings to the fore is that, while FT has the potential to challenge heterosexism and heteronormativity, as noted in how the learners challenge the homophobic bullying, it also has the risk of reinforcing heteronormativity. In my role as joker/facilitator, I felt at times awkward in trying to pursue challenging the reinforcement of heterosexuality as the norm. At times, I believed that the participants felt that I was being critical of their performance and characterisation and started to participate less. In one of the sessions, after one of my interventions as the joker, there was silence and participants were trying to understand, again, what was wrong? Out of frustration, one participant asked me: "Well, you tell us how we must play the gay character, because we just don't know. It's just the way they are", and walked out. This is one of the challenges of creating a critical space

where such issues are not ignored but confronted. I learnt from this experience that, while there is the tendency to feel compelled to challenge such heterosexist attitudes by the participants, I also need to accept that the participants are agents and that the decision to let go of such attitudes belongs to them and not to me. Perhaps the emergent frustrations also had more to do with lack of a discussion framework or an appropriate vocabulary to articulate issues, and the limited time.

### *Heterosexism out there, not in here*

Throughout the sessions, the participants were very strong on challenging institutional and individual heterosexism in the performance scenes, but lacked the same enthusiasm and activism in the discussion sessions. For example, in one of the scenes, when the teacher mentioned that homosexuality is a sin, Masieng, one of the spectators challenged the teacher, saying that, by judging Israel, the teacher was “committing a bigger sin”. When I intervened as the joker and asked for her to say more, she argued that, by judging that “homosexuality was sinful and wrong”, the “teacher is being judgemental” which, compared to homosexuality, was more sinful. I challenged Masieng to recognise that she still believed that homosexuality was a sin, although a lesser sin than “judging”. Often, in their passionate plea against homophobia, the participants’ own heterosexism surfaced. For Masieng, homosexuality was still a sin, even though lesser on the continuum of sins. In another session, which explored heterosexual privilege, very few of the learners wanted to recognise that there was such a thing as heterosexual privilege. What does this reveal about FT as a participatory process to tackle heterosexism? FT enabled a space for the participants to be critical of institutional and others’ individual heterosexism and perhaps did not offer a frame for introspection, articulating and dealing with one’s own heterosexism. Throughout the FT sessions, the participants often raised arguments to support their personal position. It seemed for the participants that heterosexism and homophobia were out there and not within themselves as is evident in Dino’s comment “You know the homophobic stuff is not in me, like us, it’s out there”.

### **Discussion**

Whether FT was a sufficiently participatory medium to engage this community of learners, I would argue that, to some extent, it did, but not without limitations. On reflection, there is the tendency for participation in FT to be explained at a theoretical level without specific guidelines for intervention and practice. Durden (2011) writes that participatory theatre is a much-branded construct and that there is an ongoing debate of what is and is not participatory. Durden (2011) continues that participatory theatre, in many ways, leaves the facilitator to decide how participation is implemented. I would agree broadly with Durden (2011), as I was an outsider who initiated the intervention, used the article by Khalane (2013) as a stimulus for discussion and, in many ways, ‘controlled’ the proceedings. However, the young participants were positioned as agents and knowers in a participatory democratic process as opposed to a

transmission classroom situation.

Under what conditions can the joker or facilitator (in this instance, me) from the outside portray a community's (in our case the Grade 11 learners) challenges and encourage participants to become the focus point of the intervention? Based on my application of FT, I would argue that an outside approach does not have to be useless, as practitioners from within communities do not always have the capital or advantages that outsiders have in applying a critical consciousness to the difficulties faced by a community (Mda, 1993). I would caution that a participatory process, whether facilitated by someone from within or outside, is not in itself liberatory; the issues of power and authority cannot be circumvented through 'participation'.

Was FT a useful construct to generate learning about heterosexism? I believe that FT provided critical incidents for learning about heterosexism and heteronormativity and that the learners had numerous opportunities to recognise and rehearse their agency by enacting opposition to heterosexism and, therefore, bring about positive change to their school. My FT intervention also opened up layers of complexity to confronting heterosexism. First, the learners' eager openness to challenge institutional and individual (in their peers and teachers) manifestations of heterosexism, yet a reluctance to engage with their personal heterosexual privilege and own heterosexist socialisation and assumptions. Clearly, commitments to changing the social context without personal introspection and change do not suffice to bring about social justice. Findings in this regard may point to the possibility that FT alone is not enough to enable young people to be introspective and engage with their own prejudices and discrimination. In many ways, a participatory FT process is similar to the social justice education classroom where students do not want to believe that they harbour prejudices about groups of people (Hardiman & Jackson, 2007).

Finally, from this experience, I have learned that the outcome of a participatory FT process had much to express about my own praxis. I recognise that the social justice classroom is a learning environment that provides trust and non-defensiveness, so that participants can change and correct language and behaviour within the group (Adams, 2007). The performance scenes show that the participants used the Boalian platform in order to perform many of their own heterosexist learning and beliefs and, in this regard, FT was an appropriate safe learning environment. However, without a framework and vocabulary for questioning and challenging everyday heterosexist practices, many of the participants portrayed stereotypical beliefs and myths about LGB people in a way that seems to suggest that it was "natural" or "just the way they are" without question. From such scenes and ensuing discussions, it became evident that heteronormativity is deeply rooted at Bloemsig High. Such performances seemed to reinforce heteronormativity without really challenging it. DePalma and Atkinson (2007) argue that to teach queerly involves asking ourselves and each other irresolvable and disturbing questions rather than resting with easy answers. After much reflection, a future consideration is Gourd and Gourd's (2005:416) suggestion to have

provided the learners with more scaffolding to develop the vocabulary, knowledge, and confidence to engage them in dialogue that explicitly addresses oppression. Perhaps with language and more time (our sessions lasted one hour over six weeks), there would have been more classroom safety, understanding and ease to dealing with our learning and unlearning of oppression, and consequently a more evolved critical consciousness.

## Notes

- 1 At a recent colloquium on homophobia and transphobia in schools (Wits, September 2012), there was a discussion about the cursory use of T in LGBT and the invisibility and lip service paid to people who identified as transgender in academic research. There was a clear challenge to researchers using the T in the acronym LGBT and the suggestion is that researchers rather leave out the T from LGBT when there is no focus on transgender experiences. Like De Palma and Atkinson (2007), I am concerned that my use of the T may also be interpreted as “empty exclusivity” in that I do not specifically address the experiences of people who identify as transgender. I respectfully accept this argument and, as issues of transgender identity did not emerge in the dialogues or discussions, I shall use the acronym LGB.
- 2 The desegregation of South African schools produced a knock-on effect. The entry of African learners into Indian and coloured schools precipitated a flight of the middle class into white Model C schools. This in turn stimulated the departure of the middle class whites to the more expensive, and therefore more exclusive public and private schools (see Carrim & Soudien, 1999:163-164).
- 3 I asked the young learners how they identified and they named themselves as coloured and African. I use the terms accordingly.
- 4 Afrikaans slang derogatory word for homosexuals, usually male.
- 5 Sesotho term for homosexual; literally somebody who is beautiful and unique.

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