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## **An African-Centred Community Psychology in Operation in Education Development: The Case of GADRA Education<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are centrally positioned in the development discourse. Here, we consider the work of an NGO in Makhanda in the Eastern Cape of South Africa from an African-centred community psychology perspective. In the context of complex socio-contextual challenges and poor educational outcomes, this longitudinal mixed-methods study considers the role of GADRA Education, Makhanda's oldest NGO, in the educational landscape of the city. We report on findings from three data sets: a Foucauldian analysis of annual reports between 2016 and 2022, statistical meta-analysis of Makhanda's school exit-level educational outcomes over the past decade, and an analysis of 13 organisational member's narratives. An African-centred community psychology lens reveals the NGO's values-based and participatory work, which contributed to destabilising prominent productions in the city's educational landscape. In contrast to conceptions of education NGOs who work in the public schooling sector making little progress to challenge the status quo, we demonstrate the techniques of resistance leveraged by this local NGO. The narratives reveal the impacts of the NGO's work on the subjectivities of youth in Makhanda in driving educational change in the city. We illustrate how values-based and participatory work contributes to transformative change in public schooling in South Africa.

**Keywords:** non-governmental organisations, African-centred community psychology, exit-level outcomes, educational change, Makhanda, South Africa

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## Introduction

In the critical development literature (e.g. Sakue-Collins, 2021), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are strongly critiqued for their role in reproducing neo-colonialist domination in Africa. They are accused of being ahistorical and non-political (Shivji, 2006), viewing continued poverty and suffering in Africa through the lenses of charity and paternalism, rather than working towards emancipation and justice (Matthews & Nqaba, 2017). Thus, NGOs are criticised for deploying technocratic approaches to poverty—constructing poverty in technical terms, rather than in political terms. However, NGOs have also played a crucial role in the enactment of political reformation following South Africa’s colonial and apartheid histories (Habib & Taylor, 1999; Rammutele, 2003) as well as in the current post-democratic dispensation (Paczyńska, 2023). Education-focused NGOs in South Africa have advanced access and equity in the education sector, collaborating with the state to improve educational opportunities for all (Mundy, 2008; UNESCO, 2007), and promoting inclusivity (Pather, 2019). They have played a key role in advocating for policy reformation to advance both access to education and quality in education (Mundy, 2016).

Education is contemporaneously constructed with development in South Africa’s national discourse (Msomi & Akhurst, 2023). Education and development are a central focus of the health and progress of the country post-apartheid (National Planning Commission, 2011). Focusing on the Eastern Cape province of South Africa, Nomsenge (2018, 2019) has provided incisive analyses of the work of education NGOs in Makhanda, positioning NGO intervention within the contentious development discourse (Msomi & Akhurst, 2023) and argued that NGO intervention occurs within existing structures of inequity and exclusion in the country. Nomsenge argued that NGO initiatives in Makhanda reproduce rather than destabilise these structures. In addition to problematising the role of NGOs in facilitating youth participation, Nomsenge (2018) further argued that organisational urgencies have tended to supersede reformation imperatives. Thus, to enable their legitimacy and survival, their relation to governmental institutions such as Rhodes University (RU) result in moderating, rather than shifting, inequities in education. Nomsenge extended Helliker’s analysis of NGOs “dancing around the same spot” (2018, p. 9), arguing that they demonstrate “zero sum philanthropy” (2018, p. 1)—techniques of legitimacy and survival (Neocosmos, 2017). Defining themselves in statist terms thus renders them unable to contribute to emancipation, in the opinion of Nomsenge and Neocosmos.

## An African-Centred Community Psychology Perspective

In this paper, we take an African-centred community psychology perspective on NGOs in education development. Broadly, community psychology can be understood as a worldview and approach to action and research (Riemer et al., 2020). Kagan et al. (2020) described it as focused on principled social change that addresses pressing social issues. More specifically, we situate ourselves “here,” which is “not just a place” (Ratele, 2019, p. 8).

Here, Africa(n)-centred is not about geographical location, but about epistemic situatedness—capturing the experiential, phenomenological and material fields that are of and from Africa, but speaking constantly to adjacent fields outside of Africa. (Ratele, et al., 2021, p. 48)

African-centred community psychology (Ratele et al., 2022) advocates an approach that takes cognisance of both the broader systemic issues and the associated inter-relational productions at a more local level. It argues that “effective political change in colonial contexts requires action on both subjective (i.e. psychological) and objective (i.e. social, material, economic) levels” (Hook, 2004, p. 102). This form of community psychology locates causation of mental distress firmly in the systemic factors that lead to unequal and sub-optimal environmental conditions that shape communities’ and individuals’ lives (Jimenez et al., 2019), limiting access to both material and symbolic resources. It insists on addressing the needs of Africans (without being reductionistic or homogenising differences)—those who have been deeply affected by the legacies of historic oppression and discrimination (Ratele et al., 2022). In order to tackle these challenges, it is necessary to confront the exercise of power, both manifest and subtle, employing action and research that are interventionist and participatory to disrupt the status quo. Through identifying where power lies and how it is exercised to maintain privilege and promote discrimination against particular groups (Fisher et al., 2007), values-based and participatory work through forging alliances is recommended (Akhurst & Msomi, 2022). Building upon the expertise and knowledges of participants, and creating opportunities to rethink and reconstruct systems of knowledge and practice from the perspective of the marginalised majority potentially transforms relationships and leads to collective action (Kagan et al., 2020).

It is through this disciplinary lens, that we consider institutional change within GADRA Education, an educational NGO in Makhanda, South Africa. We consider its impact on the local context over the past decade. We reflect on how the operationalisation of an African-centred community psychology (Ratele et al., 2022) can make important contributions at the nexus of theory and practice to community regeneration via education and, ultimately, to social change. We offer insights on how values-based and participatory work contributes to transformative change in public schooling.

## **The “Education Hub” of the Eastern Cape**

Education is positioned as an important site for the liberation and well-being of South Africa's majority (Msomi & Akhurst, 2023); however, the country's state of education is marked by stark and persistent inequalities (Spaull, 2013, 2019b), also reflected in Makhanda's educational landscape. Located in the rural Eastern Cape province, Makhanda (formerly termed Grahamstown) is a relatively small city in the Sarah Baartman District. It is located inland, north-east of, and about 130 km from, Gqeberha (formerly Port Elizabeth). The municipality has described itself as "one of South Africa's premier educational centres with a large number of world-class secondary and tertiary educational institutions" (Makana Municipality, n.d., para. 1). It is commonly characterised as "the cradle of education in South Africa" and an "education hub" (Westaway, 2012), capturing the dense networks between educational establishments within a geographically compact environment. However, this is a questionable characterisation considering the historically low exit-level educational performance of most of its schools (e.g. Hendricks, 2008; Lemon, 2004), as well as the multiple provincial interventions and various governance, administration, and financial failures of the city (Chamberlain & Masiangoako, 2021).

Available census data a decade ago estimated the total population of Makhanda to be about 70,000 of whom only about 15% had tertiary education (Ncanywa, 2015 as cited in Msomi, 2024). Educational resources and positive school exit-level outcomes in Makhanda have tended to correspond with spatial areas formerly reserved for so-called White and Coloured people in the Eastern Cape (Hendricks, 2008; Lemon, 2004). The small city is commonly described as a microcosm of nationwide inequalities. On the map in Figure 1, Hoefnagels et al. (2023) illustrated the production of contemporary segregation (Westaway, 2012) in Makhanda's geospatial and educational landscape. The city is broadly constituted of two main geographical areas: the higher-income Makhanda-west, with many low-income households in Makhanda-east.

**Figure 1**

*Location of Makhanda and its Education Institutions (Hoefnagels et al., 2023, p. 273)*

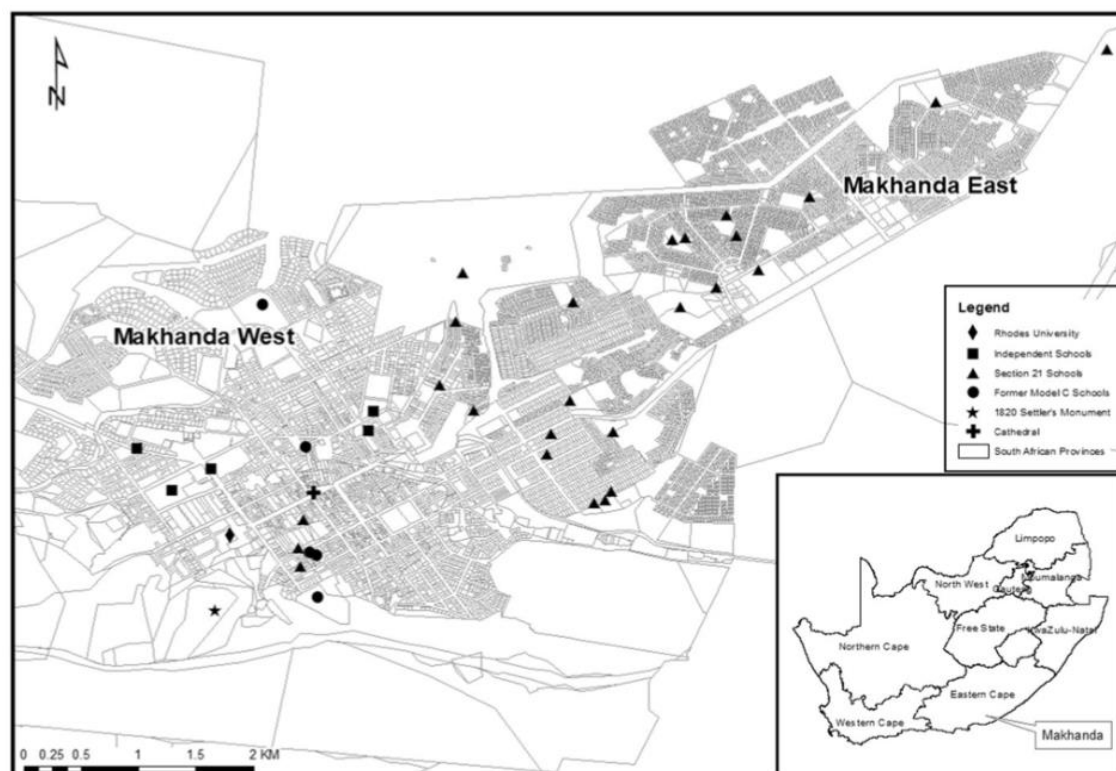


Figure 1 also illustrates the location of Makhanda's schools. GADRA Education, as well as RU, are located in Makhanda-west. Three prestigious private (or independent) schools are located in Makhanda-west, together with so-called former "Model-C"<sup>2</sup> fee-paying schools. All of Makhanda's non-fee-paying schools are located in Makhanda-east, catering for the large majority of persistently marginalised youth. Fee-paying schools have tended to achieve good educational outcomes whilst non-fee schools have achieved poor results.

At present, Makhanda is home to 18 state-aided primary schools and nine state-aided secondary schools (Westaway, 2022). The school exit-level educational outcomes in South Africa are commonly called "matric results." In 2013, the beginning of the study period, the Eastern Cape achieved a 64.9% matric pass rate, the lowest of all the nine provinces. Analysts found stark differences between outcomes in non-fee-paying and fee-paying schools (Grocott's Mail, 2014). Whilst non-fee-paying schools in the province achieved an average pass rate of 56%, fee-paying schools achieved 70.8%. Eleven percent of secondary schools in the province were responsible for 70% of matric passes, and 80% of schools appeared effectively dysfunctional. The provincial pattern was replicated in Makhanda, with non-fee-paying schools achieving

<sup>2</sup> These are state-aided schools. Christie and McKinney (2017, p. 11) clarified that "in public discourse, 'Model C' . . . has come to be used to designate former white schools, admitting students of all races under the guidance of their governing bodies."

53.8% compared to a 97% pass rate in fee-paying schools. Non-fee-paying schools thus performed 23% below the national average, whilst fee-paying schools performed 20% above it (Grocott's Mail, 2014).

The above stark fissures in Makhanda's educational landscape, which rendered RU inaccessible to local youths has been a central focus of Professor Sizwe Mabizela's tenure as vice chancellor (VC) of RU. In their inaugural address, Mabizela (2015) underscored the need to reposition the university to be of and for Makhanda, rather than being merely in Makhanda but inaccessible. It was thus the VC's intention to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the city, making Makhanda a centre of academic excellence. Basic education<sup>3</sup> was identified as a key site for intervention in the city and thus the Vice Chancellor's Initiative (VCI) was established in 2015, and managed by GADRA Education.

### **The Case: GADRA Education**

GADRA Education, the NGO under study, was founded in the 1950s and located in Makhanda. It operated as Grahamstown Area Distress Relief Association (GADRA), now GADRA Education. Our analysis begins shortly after the Board of GADRA Education had appointed a new management team (2010), in response to institutional difficulties and sustainability challenges. The organisation's expenditure exceeded its income and its funder base was eroding rapidly. The new management team formulated a new strategic plan (including revised vision and mission) in response to a situation analysis (Westaway, 2014) that highlighted a deep crisis in education, understood to derive from poor teacher performance and inadequate school leadership. Using the lenses of race and class, the document exposed two of the most obvious fault lines that divided the system: White and wealthy learners performing considerably better than Black and impoverished learners. The plan then laid out the following to inform practice:

Vision: Education in Grahamstown is fundamentally transformed within the next ten years. That is, by 2020 all children and young adults in Grahamstown benefit from good quality and relevant education at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels.

Mission: The mission of GADRA Education is to provide relevant, strategic education services in Grahamstown, and to advocate for transformation across the locality, in an effective manner.

The advocacy work will be undertaken primarily by mobilising the community of Grahamstown behind the transformation agenda, with a particular emphasis on key stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and education leaders.

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<sup>3</sup> Basic education in South Africa denotes early childhood development (i.e. schooling for children from birth to age nine), primary schooling (Grades R to 7), and secondary schooling (Grades 8 to 12).

Values: GADRA Education seeks to function in such a way that befits its purpose as an agent of transformation in education. It embraces the principles and practices of collective activism and social justice, such as humanity, equity, diversity, empathy, solidarity, direct responsibility, and participation. (GADRA Education, 2016, p. 9)

Msomi and Akhurst (2024) utilised the concepts of social capital to demonstrate GADRA's various modes of intervention during its repositioning period, contributing to reform in Makhanda's educational landscape with greater bonds, bridges, and links between various educational stakeholders. Although Nomsenge (2018) asserted negligible impacts of education NGOs in Makhanda, the findings reported below indicate a level of educational regeneration in the small, bifurcated city. Through them, we argue that critical psychological theory can enable a deeper understanding of impactful community organisation and intervention in the country's education sector and, specifically, how values-based and participatory work contribute to transformative change in public schooling.

## Methodology

This paper is developed from a larger single-case study of the NGO (Msomi, 2024), which received ethical approval. We utilise a mixed methods approach to illustrate educational regeneration in Makhanda, with a focus upon GADRA Education. Following on from the findings reported in Msomi and Akhurst (2024), the case study of the NGO below illustrates educational regeneration by utilising three research methods: a Foucauldian discourse analysis of annual reports 2016–2022, a quantitative meta-analysis of Makhanda's school exit-level educational outcomes over the past decade, and an analysis of 13 organisational member's narratives.

Foucault's (1972) conceptualisation of discourse illuminates it as a site of power relations that have implications for subjectivity. It was used as a site to consider the discursive constructions of education in GADRA's annual reports from 2016 to 2022. Additionally, the concept of *dispositif* (Tamboukou, 1999) was applied to trace the historical dimensions of educational inequity in Makhanda as well as current practices, and to formulate the relations of power within the educational landscape and their implications. Willig's (2013) stages of a Foucauldian discourse analysis guided the analysis of the discursive constructions contained in GADRA's annual reports and strategic plan.

The second aspect of the findings is the statistical analysis of publicly available data related to matric results in the city between 2013 and 2022. The longitudinal matric data are presented below to trace the achievements of Makhanda's public schooling system. It is worth noting our insistence on a balanced set of indicators. Specifically, an analysis of matric performance should consider both quantity and quality, and both numbers and percentages. The two key indicators of quantity are cohort size (number of students

writing the examinations) and the pass statistics, whilst the most important indicator of quality is bachelor statistics, as illustrated.

The final section of the findings draws on the narratives of GADRA members and stakeholders (with pseudonyms for anonymity). Participants were recruited through purposive sampling (Bryman, 2016). The NGO's staff members were well placed to recommend potential participants due to their working knowledge of their members and were contacted via email to notify them about the research. Members who responded were sent the relevant information and consent documents via email or physical delivery. Individual interviews were thus conducted with alumni, parents, teachers, principals, and donors. This enabled a diversity of voices to be heard regarding their experiences of the NGO. All participants were 18 years or older and had the capacity for consent. Wengraf's (2004) methodology guided individual interviews with participants, which began with a single question: "Please describe your experiences with GADRA Education in Makhanda. You may include as many stories and examples as you would like." Once the participant had responded fully, the interviewer could then encourage further reflection through questions responding to the material presented. The narratives were subsequently analysed to consider the relationship between organisational practices (i.e. what GADRA does) and the effects on members' subjectivity (i.e. thoughts and feelings), within the material context of these experiences (Willig, 2013). *Hope Interventions* and *GADRA Generations* became identifiable as prominent discursive constructions across the interview data. We report on selected member narratives below to illuminate the impacts of GADRA's ways of doing on the subjectivities of members within the context of Makhanda's educational landscape.

In utilising mixed methods (Frost & Shaw, 2015) as outlined above, the authors wished to use different lenses to gain a deeper understanding of the work of the NGO. We believe that these different perspectives gained through triangulation enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings by combining both qualitative and quantitative data analyses. This leads to findings that more accurately reflect the phenomena, integrating different data sources and interpretations.

## **Findings**

### **Foucauldian Analysis of Reports**

Below we present a brief account of the findings of the Foucauldian discourse analysis of the annual reports of GADRA, 2016 to 2022. The analysis revealed two phases during the period, as well as the prominent discourses circulating.

The "repositioning" phase had occurred in the context of new leadership in the organisation 2012 to 2015 (Msomi & Akhurst, 2024). During this phase, discourses of transformation and crisis constructed the

educational landscape, whereas discourses of participation, collaboration, and access constructed the development of a community–university partnership (Fongwa et al., 2022). This period of repositioning, embracing the principles and values of an African-centred community psychology, began to contribute to the production of the revitalisation of schooling in Makhanda. The next period, 2016 to 2022, is characterised as the “regeneration” phase. Discourses of crisis, national development, human capital, participation and access, as well as collaborative partnerships produced new interventions conceptualised and managed by the NGO.

### **The Regeneration Phase**

Collaborative partnerships between NGOs (as non-state actors) and state actors are heralded for their role in the context of complex socio-contextual challenges and poor educational outcomes (Fongwa et al., 2022). During 2016 to 2022, GADRA retained an awareness of the socio-contextual challenges prevalent in the city and summoned discourses of crisis and national development to highlight the conditions of local and national governance, which were constructed as failing. In this second phase, the discourse of collaborative partnerships consolidated the Makhanda-GADRA-Rhodes University construct. GADRA Learning (2017, p. 4), in its 2016 annual report, constructed Rhodes University (RU) as the "premier university of the Eastern Cape" and three years later, as "the province's leading university" (2020, p. 7). The NGO anticipated that there would be "numerous beneficiaries of the institutional partnership . . . [state] school principals, teachers, and learners across the schooling system" (GADRA Learning, 2017, p. 2).

During this period, RU’s sizable capacity was constructed. GADRA (2018) noted that involving the RU student body allowed for large-scale implementation. For example, their Nine-Tenths mentoring programme "require[d] approximately 100 trained university student volunteer mentors" (GADRA Learning, 2018, p. 6), pairing Makhanda school-going learners with RU students in a structured relationship. It was described as the cornerstone of the overall VCI to revive public education in Makhanda (Rhodes News, 2022). Although they had previously initiated a successful pilot mentoring programme with senior NGO staff and mentors, "GADRA recognised that a major constraint to upscaling and even sustaining the intervention was human resource capacity. The organisation realised that the VCI offered a solution to this problem, in the form of untapped student power" (GADRA Learning, 2022 as quoted in Msomi, 2024, p. 152). The establishment of the VCI, and the organisation’s role in its management, enabled them “to harness student agency and tap into the considerable intellectual capacities of the university's academic community" (GADRA Learning, 2022 as quoted in Msomi, 2024, p. 152). In the reports, GADRA constructed the outcomes and widespread success by noting that the Nine-Tenths programme "played a key role in enabling Makhanda's public schools to achieve record matric results in 2021" (GADRA Learning, 2022 as

quoted in Msomi, 2024, p. 152). “Thus, what can initially be read as circulations of the human capital discourse revealed itself, through its productions, as the discourse of participation” (Msomi, 2024, p. 152).

The circulation of collaborative partnerships within the community–university partnership (Fongwa et al., 2022) produced imperatives for civic participation amongst RU students. This discourse further produced bridges for local Makhanda school-going youths into RU. In addition, GADRA reported producing bonds between state school actors at a basic education level, for example, the feeder relationship between secondary schools and the GADRA Matric School (GMS), and bridges to tertiary education (Msomi, 2024). The prominence of the collaborative partnerships discourse thus consolidated the Makhanda-GADRA-RU construct, and the discourse of participation established bonds and bridges within the educational landscape (Msomi, 2024) to produce “unprecedented academic achievements” (GADRA Learning, 2017, p. 2). During this time, the NGO reported “Grahamstown public high schools on the rise!” (GADRA Learning, 2019, p. 6), and later a “meteoric rise” in educational outcomes (GADRA Learning, 2022 as quoted in Msomi, 2024, p. 154). This produced the construction of regeneration across public schooling in Makhanda.

During the repositioning phase, the discourse of crisis was summoned to construct dysfunction in South African education, as well as a weak and stratified educational landscape in Makhanda. Deploying the discourse of transformation during the regeneration phase, this upward trajectory (“on the rise”) was contrasted with failures in local and national governance. The NGO reported that “in a context of government failure, it is a relief that organisations such as GADRA Education provide outstanding service to communities and individuals who cannot afford to engage the private sector” (GADRA Learning, 2020, p. 2). What began to emerge here are sentiments regarding GADRA’s contributions to national development: “GADRA has long prided itself on its positive contributions to people of the Eastern Cape over several generations” (GADRA Learning, 2019, p. 2). The organisation underscored its “longstanding commitment to community upliftment and development” (GADRA Learning, 2019, p. 2). In this way, the construct of GADRA Education emerged as a technology of resistance against state service delivery failures (Msindo, 2015). Albeit contested, this starkly contrasts critiques of NGOs as technologies of (post-colonial) power. The organisation referenced their modes of support as holding up a mirror to the prevailing education system (GADRA Learning, 2022 as cited in Msomi, 2024).

We thus see that in more recent years, the NGO has repositioned itself as an apparatus of resistance (Tamboukou, 2008), specifically in education. Since 2010, GADRA Education has worked collaboratively with other education actors to destabilise productions that bar the majority of Makhanda youths from access and participation in higher education—as will be illustrated below.

### **Statistical Analysis of Makhanda’s Matric Results (2013 to 2022)**

The matric results, the school exit-level examinations outcomes, occupy a particularly prominent position in discourse about South African education (Msomi & Akhurst, 2023), and are used as a barometer of the health of the country's public education system (Department of Basic Education, 2021). When considering the quantity and quality performance indicators, both the hard numbers and percentage of success should be considered, not neglecting either the size of the cohort or the proportion of the large group who succeed. Cohort size is a crucial indicator of quantity because it speaks to the ability of the basic education system to retain its learners from school entry in Grades R or 1, through the grades until the final exit point, the NSC examinations. In Makhanda, approximately 1,200 children enter the schooling system annually. Thus, one can calculate the local retention rate by dividing the number of students who write the final examinations by 1,200 and multiplying by 100. Three distinct periods can be delineated.

1. 2013 to 2015: This period preceded the implementation of "modularisation,"<sup>4</sup> which artificially reduced the cohort size. During these three years, the average retention rate was 54%. This can be regarded as the typical retention rate in Makhanda of that era.
2. 2016 to 2020: The misguided modularisation policy was implemented for five years. This policy effectively barred "progressed"<sup>5</sup> learners from writing the full set of examinations and thus eliminated them from the statistics. During these years, the average retention rate was 45%. In other words, this engineered rate was nine percentage points lower than the un-engineered rate.
3. 2021 to 2022: After modularisation, the retention rate has increased. The average over the past two years is 60%, above that of 2013–2015. One explanation of this is that the impact of interventions to boost literacy and numeracy at the Foundation (Grades R to 3) and Intermediate (Grades 4 to 9) Phases, implemented since circa 2010, are beginning to show results.

The pass rate is the most frequently used measure of performance. The culmination point is when the country's Minister of Basic Education announces the results annually in January, unveiling the national pass rate. In Makhanda, the pass rate has increased significantly, from 61% in 2013 to 85% in 2022. In the initial years, there is a clear linkage between cohort size and percentage pass rate. In 2013 and 2015, the cohort sizes were large, and the percentage pass rates were low. When the cohort size was smaller, such as in 2014, the pass rate increased. What therefore makes the pass rates of 2021 and 2022 remarkable is that both the cohort sizes increased to their highest ever, and the pass rates reached record highs. In 2013,

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<sup>4</sup> The modularisation policy stipulated that certain learners were not permitted to write their National Senior Certificate examinations in a single block but rather, in two distinct modules in October/November and May/June of the following year.

<sup>5</sup> The progression policy requires that learners who have already repeated a grade cannot repeat for a second time in the same phase (for example, Foundation Phase). Rather, the second time that they fail a grade they are progressed into the next grade (Republic of South Africa, 2012).

416 young people from the city obtained matric: in 2022 the number of successful candidates increased by 60%, up to 664.

The noteworthy improvement in the quantity measures has been matched by considerable gains at the top end of performance. In 2013, the public schools produced 187 bachelor passes, whilst in 2022 this number was 63% higher, at 305. Remarkably, post COVID-19 in 2021, the 300 mark was surpassed for the first time, and this was repeated in 2022. In other words, the quality advances have all been achieved since 2018 (after stasis in 2013–2017). Despite the recent increases in the cohort size, the quality gains are also reflected in the percentage bachelor pass rate. In the period 2013–2017, the average rate was 31%, whilst over the period 2018–2022 the average bachelor pass rate climbed to marginally over 41%. The performance indicators are tracked over time in Table 1 and Table 2 below.

**Table 1**

*Overall Performance Indicators for Makhanda Matric Performance 2013–2017*

|                      | <b>2013</b> | <b>2014</b> | <b>2015</b> | <b>2016</b> | <b>2017</b> |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Cohort size          | 688         | 562         | 688         | 580         | 504         |
| Retention rate       | 57%         | 47%         | 57%         | 48%         | 42%         |
| % Pass rate          | 61%         | 73%         | 62%         | 71%         | 75%         |
| Number of bachelors  | 187         | 193         | 179         | 171         | 197         |
| % Bachelor pass rate | 27%         | 34%         | 26%         | 29%         | 39%         |

**Table 2**

*Overall Performance Indicators for Makhanda Matric Performance 2013–2017 (Source: Westaway, 2023 as quoted in Msomi, 2024, p. 51)*

|                | <b>2018</b> | <b>2019</b> | <b>2020</b> | <b>2021</b> | <b>2022</b> |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Cohort size    | 558         | 540         | 540         | 663         | 785         |
| Retention rate | 47%         | 45%         | 45%         | 55%         | 65%         |

|                      |     |     |     |     |     |
|----------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| % Pass rate          | 78% | 76% | 80% | 83% | 85% |
| Number of bachelors  | 238 | 187 | 230 | 313 | 305 |
| % Bachelor pass rate | 43% | 35% | 43% | 47% | 39% |

The quality narrative in Makhanda is incomplete without reference to GMS, GADRA’s flagship project. The school caters for students seeking to upgrade their matric results. It accommodates over 250 young people annually. Its biggest feeder schools are the four top-performing non-fee-paying public schools in Makhanda. If one considers the numbers of marginalised local students securing access to full-time study at RU, by adding the number of successful applicants from the non-fee-paying schools and GMS, this number increased more than tenfold from 2011–2022 (from 11 to over 120).

In summary, dissimilar to previous years (e.g. Grocott’s Mail, 2014; Hendricks, 2008; Lemon, 2004), the past decade has seen major improvements in matric results in Makhanda, as evidenced by both quantity and quality indicators. The deliberate intentionality of Mabizela and the leadership of a range of NGOs to transform basic education in Makhanda are bearing valuable fruit, considering the key performance indicators of the public-school matric results over the past decade. By no means or measure has the city “danced on the same spot” (Nomsenge, 2018, p. 9). On the contrary, it has risen from being one of the province’s worst performing areas to the best performing centre from 2020 to 2022.

Based on the analysis above, there is a positive relationship between GADRA’s modes of intervention and improvements in educational outcomes for persistently marginalised youth in Makhanda. GADRA has been involved in changing the objective educational conditions through deliberately addressing one of the most fundamental systemic and structural challenges facing marginalised youth, namely, a lack of quality educational opportunities (National Planning Commission, 2011; Spaull, 2019a). In Foucauldian terms, the findings above suggest that the NGO, in the context of complex socio-contextual challenges and collaborative partnerships developed in response, has functioned as a technology of resistance (Tamboukou, 2008) and contributed to the destabilisation of productions that bar the majority of Makhanda youths from access to higher education institutions, through achieving improved bachelor passes.

### **Narratives of GADRA Members**

In this final section, we explore how the evidence of GADRA’s work at the objective level was complimented, supplemented, and underpinned by its work at the subjective level. Here, particular focus is placed on how the principles and values of an African-centred community psychology circulated prominently within the organisation over both the repositioning and regeneration periods. This values

base is driven from a position of care and compassion that prompts solidarity, through being accomplices to promote all participants' agency (Ratele et al., 2022), to confront the problems as identified by various education stakeholders. The relationship-based work that is emphasised in community psychology is built from embracing variance within and across communities. This is contrary to some forms of psychosocial research, where lip service is paid to collaborative participation (Kaisler & Grill, 2021) but the power remains firmly in the ambit of the researchers. Here rather, situated forms of collective action promote facilitated work towards shared goals, where all role players feel respected and heard; and the differing contributions of each, and their various access to resources, are recognised (Kagan et al., 2020).

### ***Hope Interventions***

The members interviewed by the first author (in Msomi, 2024) shared their experiences of how involvement at GADRA had sparked hope. Cherrington (2017) highlighted the link between hope and education. They argued that education is a strategic site for mobilising hope practices that foster youth well-being and contribute to social change (Cherrington, 2018a). They further presented a framework for Afrocentric Hope (Cherrington, 2018b) conceptualising hope on four levels: *Contextual hope* is rooted in the socio-contextual conditions that enable subjective feelings of hope, focusing attention on the macro-interactional conditions necessary for hope to arise. *Personal hope* centres on survival and mastery, which enable a sense of belonging, when one's values are validated within the socio-cultural environment. It is within these conditions that an ethic of care (Foucault, 1997) begins to emerge, enabling resilience. This ethic enhances hopeful feelings, thoughts, and actions and affects relations with others. Cherrington (2018a, p. 8) labelled this third occurrence as *Relational hope*—the “doing of hope with others.” Finally, *Collective hope* is produced when one pursues collective well-being for all, wherein values and actions of togetherness, harmony, social justice, and mutual respect are evidenced (Cherrington, 2018b). As reflected in member narratives below, we see these practices of hope encoded in GADRA's educational activities across various programmes.

As noted above, effective political change in post-colonial contexts requires action at both an objective (as reflected by the statistical objectives above) and subjective levels (Hook, 2004), as will be discussed further. Discourse, the site of power relations, has implications for subjectivity (Foucault, 1972). Here we focus upon the NGO as a site that fosters conditions for the above forms of hope (Cherrington, 2018b) to arise.

In the excerpt below, a GMS alumnus reflects on the ways in which the disappointment they experienced, “things not working out,” following the matric results, transformed into hope through involvement at GADRA.

Now that I've reflected . . . GADRA is literally the best thing that has ever happened to me. I think that's what I'm getting from this interview, that sometimes things not working out your way are actually working out your way. They are working for you. (Nomsa, 2023 in Msomi, 2024, pp. 127–128)

In the context of disappointment, Nomsa reflected on the ways in which GMS enabled personal hope to arise. Nomsa matriculated with a diploma pass from one of the local public high schools. They enrolled at GMS and then progressed to study a Bachelor of Commerce at RU. They are presently a GMS teacher. During the interview, Nomsa also spoke about the desire to contribute to the lives of other local youth via their professional efforts as a teacher. This desire to contribute to others professionally, as cultivated during the years of involvement at GADRA, is also echoed in the next narrative:

I remember having discussions with *imenter yam* [my mentor]. . . . Like exposing maybe weaknesses that I had, weaknesses such as not being able to understand or grasp certain subjects. . . . So, GADRA and the Nine-Tenths programme gave me that platform to be able to understand that, okay if I wanna tackle this, I can do it in small chunks and the summary . . . for me was something that I used in my Grade 12 as well as in university as well . . . I still use it now when I prepare for my online certificates, for my career basically. I'm currently a data-engineering specialist now. (Gcobani, 2023 in Msomi, 2024, p. 181)

Gcobani is a Nine-Tenths alumnus, who then became a RU graduate. Personal forms of hope were cultivated through the mentoring relationship as a local youth interacting regularly with a RU student mentor. Through a non-judgemental space for discussion, we see mastery growing in the ways that Gcobani thinks of their educational efforts. This sense of mastery (using the summary methods in Grade 12, university, and beyond), the art of reflection (identifying strengths and areas of development to pursue), as well as chunking (breaking up tasks into component parts), have persisted into their professional career. In the context of the regular forms of bonding between a student and local learner afforded by the Nine-Tenths mentoring programme, there is evidence of an ethic of care (Foucault, 1997) that begins to emerge. This ethic has implications for the individual themselves, as well as for their relations to others. Thus, the mentoring relationship becomes a site for cultivating relational forms of hope (Cherrington, 2018a).

The excerpt from Nandipha's narrative below points to the altruistic characteristic that can emerge from the relational programme aimed at supporting educational development. Nandipha matriculated from a local public high school with a diploma pass. They enrolled at GMS, were admitted into RU's Extended Studies Programme, participated in GADRA's Tertiary Bursary Programme, and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts and Postgraduate Certificate in Education from RU. They are now a GADRA staff member. Through Nandipha's experience of the practices of hope encoded in GADRA's mentoring programmes, produced by prominent circulations of the discourse of access and participation, the disappointment felt after being

unable to first gain entrance into RU transformed notions of “a waste of time” to “purpose,” expressed below:

I think also, it was grounded from, coming from an area where you can literally count who furthered their studies. Not necessarily went to university, but did something, didn't drop out after or drop out in high school . . . I think that is one of the reasons why, that I took the whole mentorship serious. Because I was like . . . I'm not just doing it for myself, I'm doing it for the little ones who are still growing to see that, you can do something, it is possible even if they fell pregnant, they can still continue, they can be something out of themselves. So, I think that's the reason why I was like, with the whole mentorship programme . . . with all the support that I got from the student [mentor], that's where I was like yay. Because she literally supported me, she shared the resources, she'd take me to Rhodes University where she showed me the ropes, showed me the library and all the labs. So, I was encouraged from that to say, okay actually it wasn't really a waste of time. There was a purpose for me to divert and not go from high school to university. (Nandipha, 2023 in Msomi, 2024, p. 182)

Nandipha has had extensive involvement with the NGO over the years, being regularly exposed to, and having experienced, the organisation's practices of hope. They noted the socio-contextual conditions of upbringing in which very few Makhanda youths “furthered their studies” and went on to “[do] something.” Having experienced accompaniment and practices of hope in their various roles as mentee, bursary holder, student volunteer, leader and ambassador, as well as board member, they reported taking “the whole mentorship serious[ly]” as a form of doing hope with others and role-modelling.

Nandipha's narrative also signals collective forms of hope encoded in GADRA programmes. They reported that their commitment to an ethic of care, developing personal mastery in life and supporting others in their development, was modelled by a mentor who “supported [them],” “shared resources,” and “showed [them] the ropes.” Their success at university, as well as in securing employment, “put her family name on the map,” with graduation and participation in community life modelling hope for younger people. Nandipha thus asserts their commitment to collective forms of well-being and hope.

Sindiswa reflected below on the ways in which the practices of hope encoded in GADRA's mentoring programmes, through witnessing mentors' interactions, produce an ethic of care that is both personally rewarding, as well as contributing to engaged citizenship:

*Bayakhula babengabantu* [they grow up to be decent human beings] and when you see that, that's their reward, that's the reward. Because through them, multiples, like many people, many people's lives are changed. Ja, that's their reward. (Sindiswa, 2023 in Msomi, 2024, p. 183)

Sindiswa has worked in youth development for over two decades. They began their involvement as an administrator at GADRA, and now forms a key part of GADRA's management team. They note that in their experiences with GADRA

I feel like I belong, I feel like I belong here, I'm supported you know. As young as I am, I'm not made to feel ignorant, not experienced but I'm just embraced. (Sindiswa, 2023 in Msomi, 2024, p. 183)

The above accounts reveal that the strong circulation of the discourse of participation at GADRA shapes practices of hope that have transformative implications for members across various positionings within the organisation. The forms of contextual, personal, relational, and collective hope (Cherrington, 2018b) produce keen socio-contextual awareness, a sense of belonging, an ethic of care, diffusing power inequities; in turn, these produce impetuses to actively contribute to social change. The reported mentoring relationships were characterised by practices of hope (Cherrington, 2018b). This counter-discourse to the crisis in education has contributed to regeneration in areas of social life that were previously rendered inaccessible to the majority of Makhanda youths in public schools.

### ***GADRA Generations***

The discursive construct of "GADRA generations" first emerged in the annual reports during the repositioning phase, with references recurring across subsequent reports. In the 2016 annual report, the NGO reported that "three former [bursary] recipients are now employed by GADRA" (GADRA Learning, 2017, p. 7) as administrative and teaching staff, and that organisational practice is "changing life trajectories of thousands of young people," (GADRA Learning, 2017, p. 3), as illustrated below.

In the excerpt below, Nandipha recounts their involvement with GADRA over time:

Then thereafter I decided to be a mentor here at GADRA, mentoring other students. So, that's when I started the whole uhm student volunteer under RUCE, volunteering here at GADRA . . . I was also a student leader at some point for GADRA. I also did some other things in between, more like an ambassador where like, days when they releasing out results for Grade 12 . . . we'll be going outside approaching the matriculants and everything, assessing their results and encouraging them if they want to go to university to come and improve here at GADRA, so I did that as well . . . I was also in the GADRA Board . . . whilst I was still at Rhodes University . . . those are the stories that I have about GADRA . . . oh now I'm an administrator for GADRA. (Nandipha, 2023 in Msomi, 2024, p. 184)

Nandipha's development in Makhanda's educational landscape is marked, at various points, by GADRA's modes of support. This suggests that the efforts of various educational stakeholders in Makhanda, operating in the context of collaborative partnerships, has progressively, over time, had implications for members at a personal, relational, and collective level. Nandipha noted above how their entrance into higher education, their multiple RU graduations within the expected timeframes, and subsequent employment at GADRA have been instrumental in their life, and the life of their family and community.

Both Nomsa and Nwabisa are present-day educators in the Makhanda educational landscape. They both experienced a form of GADRA's modes of support: Nomsa is a GMS alumnus and Nwabisa a previous

Nine-Tenths mentee. As a local youth, Nomsa matriculated with a diploma pass at one of the non-fee paying public high schools in Makhanda. They noted that

Going to GADRA was never, like, part of the plan. I hardly think that anyone plans to do grade 12 twice you know [*laughs*]. . . . It's almost like a setback; like you're doing the same thing twice; you're wasting time, you know, and delaying. But I think uhm the staff and how everyone is so keen on being part of your educational plan, being hands on, helping you out right through . . . it really makes it, I don't know, worth it. It makes it like, you're not really lost, you're not so off the track, this is not the end. (Nomsa, 2023 in Msomi, 2024, p. 188)

Nomsa noted that although they initially thought of enrolling at GMS as a setback, a delay, and waste of time, that experiencing the organisation's practices of hope made it worthwhile. GMS acted as a bridge into RU. Following graduation within expected timeframes, they remained in Makhanda's educational landscape as an assistant educator at a local high school before re-entering the organisation, as a GMS educator.

Nwabisa matriculated from one of the local public high schools and did not attend GMS. However, they did experience GADRA's Nine-Tenths programme as a mode of support whilst at school, as a mentee during their matric year. Their experience of being "given a chance" and being "chosen to be part of that programme" is reported below.

So for me, I don't know, maybe I'm just an emotional person, I don't know. But I feel like I was given a chance once, that Nine-Tenths programme. I've got a very big son— he's 9 years old now—and I was pregnant in high school. So my life didn't really—I wasn't on the straight and narrow. So, when GADRA, when I was chosen to be part of that programme, it almost felt like you know what, you're given a chance, so I always say that, because I got through that, passed with a bachelor, it was amazing for me. I never dreamt of that, for me humble beginnings again, coming from a place where it's either you worked to put food on the table now you've got a child also, and here I was given a chance. (Nwabisa, 2023 in Msomi, 2024, p. 190)

The experience of being involved in GADRA's mode of support sparked personal forms of hope that enabled her to dream again. This was deeply impactful for them as expressed by being "an emotional person." They noted that "after getting that opportunity, after being allowed to, you know, experience a world where you don't have to dream here, you can dream further than just putting food on the table" (Nwabisa, 2023 in Msomi, 2024, p. 190) sparked relational forms of hope. They then thought, "why not show people that you know what, even for me, if I can do it, you can do it too" (Nwabisa, 2023 in Msomi, 2024, p. 190).

The selection strategy of education NGOs in Makhanda has been criticised. Nomsenge (2019) problematised youth participation in the development programmes of local education NGOs. However, Nwabisa's narration of their experience in the landscape shows that, rather than conceiving of

themselves as the cream of the crop (Nomsenge, 2019), they self-identified as not being “on the straight and narrow.” Nwabisa also spoke of a friend who “didn’t do so well in her matric and went to GADRA” (2023 in Msomi, 2024, p. 191). Nwabisa positioned this friend as not “on the straight and narrow” also but concluded “and now, last year, [they] actually graduated and [they are] now a radiographer at Settlers Hospital” (2023 in Msomi, 2024, p. 191). This suggested that, in the context of disillusionment with education and future prospects, involvement in GADRA’s modes of support enabled personal forms of hope to arise.

Following matric, Nwabisa volunteered at a local education NGO and remained in touch with their Nine-Tenths mentor. They then went on to graduate at RU within the expected timeframes and remained an education stakeholder in Makhanda, gaining employment at a local primary school. Nwabisa’s experience of being accompanied by their Nine-Tenths mentor fundamentally impacted their orientation towards themselves, as well as their commitment to “doing hope with others” (Cherrington, 2018a, p. 8).

During the interview, Nwabisa reflected that

I love my job, I love what I do, I love seeing new ways of teaching, especially when people come in and say, I’ve got a student teacher also if you’ve noticed . . . I’m giving him also ideas because the other day . . . I sat here, skipped my break, showed him and he just looked at me like okay, they didn’t show us. I’m like, it’s fine just ask, I’ve been there, I was there not so long ago. (2023 in Msomi, 2024, p. 192)

In this way, the practices of hope that Nwabisa experienced as a mentee now inform and shape their practice as a student-teacher mentor: practice in the mentoring of emerging teachers that have unexpected benefits for others in the future.

The analysis of the exit-level outcomes in Makhanda over the last decade, these “GADRA generations,” as well as self-identifications by members like Nwabisa suggest that, in fact, amidst organisational practice that engenders hope, there have been shifts to the (re)productions that previously left the majority of Makhanda youths out (of access to higher education).

The organisational practice that enabled this, an apparatus of resistance to productions of exclusion in the Makhanda educational landscape, characterised by values-based and participatory practice, have had implications for Nandipha’s and others’ livelihoods. The narrative reports gathered further illustrate the various points at which a GADRA-linked intervention or engagement was also significant for Sindiswa, Nomsa, Nwabisa, and Gcobani. In the context of the politics of the work of NGOs, the forms of hope inspired as well as the GADRA generations formed within Makhanda’s educational landscape, indicate that the conditions required for participation and change have been cultivated.

## Concluding Comments

In this paper, we have provided evidence of the work of GADRA Education, an NGO based in Makhanda. GADRA analysed and responded to issues resulting from systemic influences that had produced unequal and sub-optimal environmental conditions, leading to complex socio-economic challenges and poor educational outcomes. A discourse analysis of its annual reports over the course of a decade, illustrate evolution through a repositioning phase towards regeneration of education in the city. We evidenced its impact objectively through exploring the changes in matric results over a decade, and subjectively in stakeholder narratives. What is evidenced through the narrative accounts above are conditions that enable local youth to participate meaningfully in the education landscape of the city, and to contribute to education activities as mentors, volunteers, ambassadors, and graduates. Some become board members, administrators, mentors, and educators in the organisation. This illustrates the participatory practices that foster belonging and bring about educational change.

The narratives highlight ways that individuals' lives changed through having their needs addressed by local solutions that included mentoring, having a second chance through GMS, developing coping skills, being supported, and encouraged to value their own knowledge. The resonances in the narratives point to Afrocentric hope interventions (Cherrington, 2018b) on personal, relational, and collective levels as well as accompaniment by various people. A number of participants illustrated how their roles shifted as they became part of GADRA generations. Thus, values-based and participatory work (which characterise community psychology) were evident in the reports of people who had been part of the marginalised majority, leading to transformed educational relationships.

In response to the interviews, participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to reflect in this way, with some noting that they had not previously had the chance for this sort of reflection on their experiences. It would be valuable to take this research further through participatory means, disseminating the findings amongst participants, and exploring how these ideas could then be taken further in the context. Given that this research focuses upon a case study of one educational NGO, we would recommend that similar research be conducted on others, utilising methods of triangulation to increase the trustworthiness of the resultant findings. In addition, comparative research into similar NGOs working in different contexts would also enrich the evidence about transformative work taking place in various settings.

The evidence and argumentation that emerge from the above analyses challenge conventional critiques of NGOs, as well as Nomsenge's (2018) assertion that Makhanda's education NGOs have made negligible positive impact. Moreover, the paper suggests that GADRA's recent inclinations and ambitions align with an African-centred community psychology perspective, where transformation through collective activism resulted from building effective networks and relationships of trust (thus alliances were forged). These evolved into collaborative partnerships with key education role-players, including strategic ongoing work with RU. GADRA thus employed interventionist and participatory research and action to disrupt the status quo. In addition, the evident ethic of care for participants and solidarity with them enabled increased accompaniment on their journeys, leading to greater civic engagement and the potential for educational development through the various modes of support provided.

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