

4. Becoming Social Activist Leaders - Stories of Passion, Motivation and Bold Ideas from the Township of Khayelitsha in Cape Town, South Africa

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Abstract

The chapter from the South African site reports on how the youth researchers initially understood the concepts *Tikkun Olam* and civic engagement, and how they developed their understandings during the research and at the symposium. We then reflect on the Participatory Action Research (PAR) process and challenges with the methodology as we experienced it in South Africa. A major focus of our chapter will be on presenting, discussing, and analysing the findings from the research. We will conclude with highlights and lessons learnt, and reflect on the influence the Symposium had on all of us.

Keywords: Multiple youth activisms; civic engagement, social justice; consciousness, leadership

*Youth activists are singing;
are acting out;
listen;
my mother was a kitchen girl
'my father was a garden boy*

*that's why I am an activist
an activist, an activist'
(sung in IsiXhosa again)
'Umama wam wayesebenzi khitshini
Utata wam wayasebenzi gadini
Yilento ndiliqabane
Ndili qabane, ndili qabane'*

This chorus was sung in both English and IsiXhosa at the Tikkun Youth Symposium in Canada during the Artnote presentation by the South African research team. The Artnote presentation was a means of celebrating the voices of youth from the five sites of research and chosen by the team instead of a keynote address; it is defined as, “presenting data as performance to engage youth, researchers, and the audience in meaningful discussion, and further, to develop an experiential understanding of the data presented” (Rabideau & Roland, 2019, p. 53). Through the chorus, the youth researchers sketched a story of the oppressive material conditions which led them to join Equal Education and become youth activists in the township of Khayelitsha in Cape Town. Whilst they are singing, the atmosphere is sombre but uplifting as Phelokazi’s soprano voice moves us deeply and there is a recognition by the audience that personal histories are formative in who we become. The youth researchers were documenting their journey and the intense passion of activists in the township whom they had interviewed, all of them wishing to improve their lives through access to an equal and liberating education.



Figure 1. South African research team in the Artnote.

Introduction

The South African research team consisted of six youth activists all of whom were members of an educational social movement called Equal Education (EE) – a community and membership-based organisation that advocates for quality and equality in the South African education system (Equal Education, n.d.). EE is a forerunner in youth leadership development and the organisation’s campaigns are based on detailed research and policy analysis, aimed at achieving quality education for all (Equal Education, n.d.). One activist was a staff member of EE and an academic from the School of Education at the University of Cape Town.

Amanda Maxongo, Aphiwe Tomose, Lona Mtembu, Phelokazi Tsoko, Siphemathi Fulani, and Sisanda Khuzani were all attending high school in Khayelitsha for the duration of the Tikkun Youth Project while at the same time undertaking activist work as *Equalisers* – active youth members of

EE. One of the ways their activism took shape at EE was through their involvement in the project [Amazwi Wethu](#) (isiXhosa for “Our Voices”), a youth media advocacy and arts programme run by the organisation (“Our Mission,” n.d.). This film project mentored these young people to further build on their story-telling skills, to create socially conscious documentary films that elevated youth issues, and to use these skills in their activism through interactive film screenings. Since Equal Education’s core focus is around addressing the inequality in the South African education system, all the films deal in some way with, or raise questions about, access to quality education and how it is related to the well-being of youth. As all the students had previously been involved as Equalisers before joining Amazwi Wethu (AW), they had already been engaging with questions related to politics, justice, and the legacy of apartheid in addition to participating in various campaigns related to the current conditions in their schools and schools across the country. They came to the Tikkun Youth Project with first-hand experiences of inequality and the challenges related to struggling for social justice in the current South African context.

The project coordinator of the Amazwi Wethu and the Tikkun Youth Project was Ms. Lyndal Pottier from EE. Dr. Salma Ismail from the University of Cape Town initially came in as an advisor, but became part of the project and together with Lyndal taught the research methods and supervised the research. The funds were held at the University of Cape Town and therefore Salma managed the funds.

Khayelitsha

The township of Khayelitsha is about 25 km south-east of the Cape Town city centre. The history of the area is hinted at in its name which is isiXhosa for “[new home](#)” (South African History Online, 2013). Approximately 391,749 people live there, the majority of whom are Black African, isiXhosa speakers (Strategic Development Information and GIS Department, 2013). This concentration of similar people has its roots in South Africa’s apartheid history of segregation and economic exploitation of Black people. According to the Census which was conducted in 2011, just over half of those of working age – 15 to 64 years old – are employed and 74% of households have a monthly income of R3 200 or less (approximately equivalent to \$404 at the

2011 exchange rate¹). Just over half the households (54.6%), live in informal dwellings or “shacks,” which are structures made predominantly out of metal sheeting. In terms of educational attainment, only 30.7% of the population had a Grade 12 and only 4.9% a higher education degree in 2011 (Strategic Development Information and GIS Department, 2013); access to equal and quality education continues to be a struggle for the youth of Khayelitsha.

Aside from the racial profile, the other legacy of the apartheid era is the high levels of violence and crime associated with the forced removals and resettlement of people into Khayelitsha and the pervasive brutality of that time. In a [recent investigation](#) into the current links between crime and policing in Khayelitsha, one witness commented on this legacy:

At a less visible level it left behind untold, and as yet unexplored, psychic wounds and unarticulated resentments. These lie deep in the hearts and memories of thousands of black African citizens in the city, many of whom, together with their families, voluntarily or involuntarily resettled in Khayelitsha where they, once again were faced with rebuilding a sense of home and place in the city. (Khayelitsha Commission of Inquiry, 2014, p. 34)

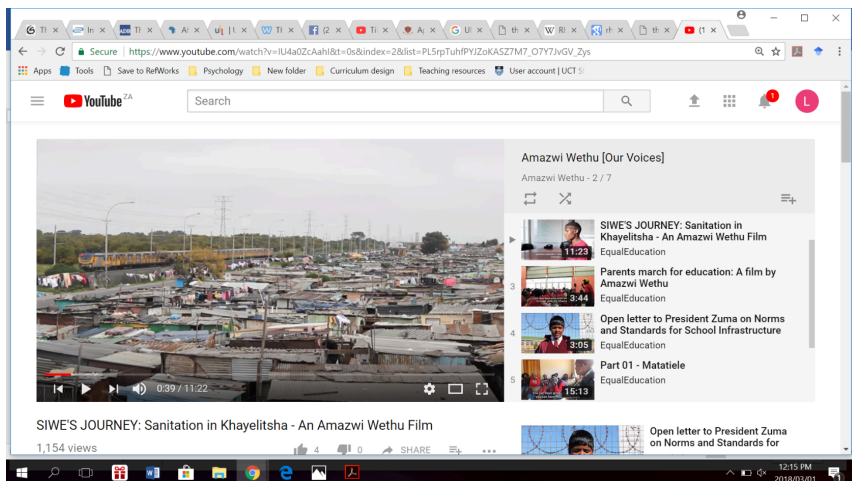


Figure 2. Screenshot of the AW film *Siwe's Journey: Sanitation in Khayelitsha* showing photo of Khayelitsha.

How We Came to the Tikkun Youth Project

In 2012, Dr Yvette Daniel approached Equal Education with the idea of the organisation supporting a youth research project, originally titled the Active Youth Citizens Leadership programme. Over the years, the project morphed from focussing on female youth who were interested in becoming teachers to the theme of youth leadership and the emergence of the concept of Tikkun Olam as an umbrella theme for the project. There was also a shift in terms of how and who would implement and coordinate the project at each of the sites. Once the project had settled into its final form as the Tikkun Youth Project, it was agreed that the Amazwi Wethu students would benefit from participating in this project given the nature of the work they were involved in – research-driven film work. At that point the AW participants were involved in an exploratory fiction film rooted in issues of gender-based violence and domestic abuse which they identified as pervasive in their communities, and which were negatively impacting youth's well-being and participation in school. The Tikkun Youth Project (hereafter referred to as “the project”) opened an opportunity for them to cast their net beyond the organisation and their form of activism (as Equalisers and film makers in training) and hear about the issues other youth were engaged in and how.

On introducing the project to the youth, their initial reactions ranged from excitement to an openness to learn, share, and co-create new knowledge. Here are some ways in which the youth expressed themselves in written reflections:

Excitement was written on my facial expression when I learnt about the opportunities of this project and when I was down, I thought about this project which made me happy. (Siphenathi, August 2017)

The introduction of the Tikkun project and engagement of what it was all about was exciting and I was keen to gain more skills by learning to do research. (Sisanda, August 2017)

When I started this project, I was a 17 year old who enjoyed deep house music and knew little about politics and activism, but I stretched my imagination and saw this as a great opportunity to learn and to enlarge my knowledge. (Aphiwe, August 2017)

When I started the project, I was 16 years old and learnt that Tikkun is a project working on healing the world because of the history of a particular country, for example in South Africa it was the apartheid era and I learnt how – through civic engagement – we can move forward to think about changing the world for a better place. (Lona, August 2017)

I'm all about bringing positive change. When Tikkun came into my life I was so keen and excited because it was an opportunity to stretch my arms and contribute to a better world. It was so exciting because I had my peers to do that with. (Amanda, August 2017)



Figure 3. AW youth at the introductory workshop held in January 2015.



Figure 4. AW youth at a second workshop held at the old Equal Education office in 2015. Here, we began to tackle research concepts.

Research Process

The research project was in a sense given to us; we did not participate in its conception but agreed to participate as we were very interested in working internationally on the topic of civic engagement and interested in the philosophy of Tikkun Olam. This concept resonated with the current African humanist philosophy of creating with others – Ubuntu. We were keen to explore different ways to engage in social activism that reflected the new democratic political context in South Africa with youth, academics, and creative artists from all over the world.

PAR methods were new to our group of youth researchers, and Salma and Lyndal ran workshops on the design and skills of qualitative research using interviews by going through the project’s training guide which was a resource that was very well set out, clear, and methodical. We went through

the worksheets provided by the project and worked through these in a step-by-step way. Sisanda says of these workshops,

The introduction of the Tikkun project by Salma and the engagement of what it was all about created excitement and we all concentrated together. I was excited to know that I will be doing research and learning how to interview people, and gain more skills; I was impatient to start. (August 2017)



Figure 5. Early days, Lona and Phelo practice interviewing each other.

The main challenges with the PAR approach for us was that although the lead researcher in Canada tried to keep us informed and together as a group, the communication with all the sites was erratic. The reasons for this were: the time difference between the various countries; weak Internet connection because South Africa has a low band width; the youth have minimal access to the Internet and computers, and no money for transport to get to Internet

cafes meaning this site could not meet all the requests to participate in the Skype meetings and discussions for the Symposium. The result was that most of the communication was between Salma, Lyndal, and Yvette. However, when possible the youth researchers read a lot on Facebook about the other sites.

Reflecting on the research process Lyndal (2018) said,

Many experiences come to mind. I will share two of these and the learnings that they generated or understandings which deepened for me. Identifying youth activists: In the initial stages of the project we encouraged the youth researchers to identify youth activists in their communities who they felt were addressing social justice issues and who they felt could be described as active citizens as per the project focus. The initial group of activists that they identified were involved in sports, arts, and/or cultural activities. Along the way, however, the youth struggled to pin down interviews with these individuals. Given that we had to move along with the research, they unfortunately could not wait for their schedules to coincide and so were unable to include them in the study. I thought this was an opportunity lost as it seemed that these were the instinctive choices of the young people and would provide interesting insights as to the challenges facing young people and the creative ways that youth activists are addressing these. In terms of participatory action research with youth (with significant material constraints) this was really a lesson for me that those supporting them need to have sufficient time available to do so, where support could mean driving them to an organisation during a taxi strike when transport is not easily available to make an appointment with an interviewee, meeting with them individually to discuss the project and clarify any questions they may have about the process (especially in the conceptual and field-work phases), and keeping them “in the loop” when they missed sessions in the midst of their teenage activist lives. This experience also supported the view that participatory action research needs to employ a flexible research process.

The second reflection centred on the learning and relationship building that happened through PAR process:

I couldn't easily separate my role as AW and Tikkun coordinator

neatly in terms of how these created conditions for my relationship and learning with the AW Equalisers/youth researchers. One distinction that does stand out though was a greater sense of being a co-participant with them in my Tikkun research coordinator role. An example of this was how in the first few interviews I asked them, 'Can I help you to prepare?', 'Do you want me to sit in on this with you?' and the answer was 'No'. They were keen to 'own' that space, even though later they mentioned that sometimes they felt intimidated by those they interviewed. The first time this happened I was a little nervous: would we get 'the right/enough information' from the interview? My controlling coordinator hat on, I was concerned with deadlines and the pressures of setting up follow-up interviews should the need arise given our already pressed schedule. This moment was fleeting though as I remembered that this was their process and my role was one of support. By them putting up boundaries of when they needed my involvement and when they didn't, I felt this gave them a different sense of power in our relationship and enriched it. (2018)



Figure 6. In Addis Ababa waiting to board the plane.

Further barriers for all were institutional and time, as this project was above our usual work load. The youth were in their final school year, and involved in the film project and EE activities so they had to manage their time very well. It was often difficult to meet regularly, and after long periods of absence we had to refocus and rebuild interest and motivation for the project. However, the benefits of strengthening our research skills, meeting with and learning from other local activists, journeying out of the country for the first time to the Tikkun Youth Symposium, meeting members from all the other sites, and engaging with multiple ideas and creative activities, outweighed the challenges we experienced. Amanda comments on the research process:

Doing the actual work was so exciting and challenging but it was also very educational. As I've learnt new words that could help me as an activist like 'civil engagement, injustice' and throughout the research process I met a lot of activists and that empowered me and I grew as an activist. (August 2017)

Reflecting on the experience Siphenathi commented,

The most important things for me over this period was the excitement and happiness that I never forgot and the opportunity (i.e. Amazwi Wethu and Tikkun). All to say that these two projects have played a big role in my life - I experienced doing formal interviews and it was my first trip on a plane. (August 2017)



Figure 7. Siphonathi, Lona, and Phelo waiting to take off.

Gathering Data

The research set out to explore the journey of youth activists engaged in social justice issues and individual interviews were used to gather data from six current youth activists in Khayelitsha and Langa.

Some of the questions which were asked by the youth researchers to youth activists in the study included: What motivated them (their histories, socio-political contexts, family, teachers, etc.); what were the issues that they focused on, the reasons for choosing these issues, and the nature of their activism; and how they saw themselves bringing about social justice in their communities.

Each youth had the responsibility to conduct at least one interview; however, because the youth were first time interviewers, they were paired

up and did the interviews in groups of two or three. The youth researchers made their own choices of who to interview and so we asked them to name an activist and to give a reason for the choice. The basis on which they made this choice conformed to the following criteria: that the activist be a youth involved in civic forms of activism, and the activist was from the community or their activism was inside the community of Khayelitsha.

We provided the youth with the necessary skills and information as said above and along with equipment such as audio-recorders, batteries, and stationery. The recorders were tested and youth practiced doing interviews using the recorders. They set up times for the interviews which were done in the home language of the interviewee which was often isiXhosa. We had one transcription lesson with the youth so they were aware of the process, but it would've taken far too long for them to transcribe the interviews because of the expertise involved and their limited access to computers. Therefore, we employed an isiXhosa language teacher who transcribed and translated all the interviews into English. For the first two interviews, the youth researchers compared the translated transcriptions from isiXhosa to English, but we could not sustain this comparison for the other four interviews.



Figure 8. Translation workshop at UCT labs.

The usual ethical procedures were followed. The research proposal was sent to University of Cape Town's (UCT) ethics committee where it was approved. The youth sought informed consent for the interviews and permission to record. On the issue of confidentiality, the activists that were interviewed gave permission for their names to be used in the texts and the youth felt more comfortable to use the real names of those interviewed. Reflections followed the interviews and the challenges of the interview were discussed as well as the excitement it had evoked. Permission to use photographs in the text was given by all who participated in the research and in the Symposium.

Reflection on Challenges of the Interviews

One of the key challenges was that some of the youth researchers felt intimidated by the knowledge and commitment of some of the interviewees. Aphiwe and Amanda said that they initially felt inadequate to do the interviews with such important activists. The activists appeared very confident, passionate, and committed in their work, and had great ideas for social justice work.

Sometimes there was embarrassment when the tape recorder was off while the interview was in progress and this was because as Lona said embarrassingly, "We forgot to switch the on button on or the batteries were flat."

Another challenge was finding suitable venues which could be reached easily by public transport by both participants and youth researchers, and which was quiet enough to conduct the interview. This was not always achievable as Sisanda noted, "Because of the background noise outside, it was sometimes difficult to hear one another" (August 2017). At one point during the research period, there were several crime related incidents which also made it unsafe to meet at the EE offices.

Transportation was another challenge as there were various minibus taxi strikes during the research period making it dangerous to travel sometimes, and at other times it was difficult to find a taxi operating on the necessary route to reach interviewees.

Data Analysis and Presentation

The analysis of the data was done by first reading through the data several times, highlighting and identifying key words and phrases, and then coding these into categories. We wrote up the categories on newsprint then checked for similar and different themes. The themes chosen were Background; Interests and Important Issues; Activities (what, when, where, and how); Challenges; and Use of Social Media. We wrote these themes up onto newsprint to present at the Symposium. The findings are presented in this format in this chapter.

Phelokazi describes her experience of coding the data: “On the long flight to Canada, I sat with many interviews in front of me and highlighted important issues and from the interviews I learnt how civic engagement is happening in our country” (August 2017).



Figure 9. Phelokazi reading over interviews.

Lona reflects, “The interviews showed how activism can be different and activists do something positive for the community and tomorrow’s generation. Activists we interviewed were usually leaders” (August 2017).

Research findings

Who Are the Youth Activists and What Are Their Different Forms of Activisms?

Mase Ramaru. Kealeboga Ramaru, also known as “Mase,” was born in the Northern Cape and came to Cape Town to study at the University of Cape Town. She qualified with an honours degree in Gender Studies. She is 23 years old and at the time of the study was the Deputy Head of Equal Education in the Western Cape. She comes from a politically active family who have an African National Congress (ANC) background. The ANC is the governing party in South Africa. Mase is not affiliated with the ANC, but is active in student movements such as the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements. These two student-led movements reject the continuing institutional racism present in South African universities. They mobilised to decolonise the physical spaces and the curricula, and to secure free tertiary education for South African students. In 2018, a significant gain was made as the government confirmed that it would be introducing fully subsidised, “free higher education and training for poor and working-class families” (The Department of Higher Education and Training, 2018, p. 1); this will be phased in over the next five years.

Mase became a confident speaker and honed her debating skills in high school as an active participant in debate societies, drama, music, travel, and plays. In all of these public activities, she interacted with people and her confidence grew. She is interested in the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student movements; she also did a lot of organising work including organising protests and doing the groundwork for meetings. Mase’s particular interest is to work towards Black youth’s access to university which involves protesting against fees, and for a decolonised university and curriculum. She says she loves this brilliant quote from the

#FeesMustFall movement: “If it’s expensive and inaccessible, then it’s not revolutionary” (Mase Interview, April 2016).

In EE, she is active in taking up gender issues and says, “In gender activism you have to be an intersectional person and you have to treat each struggle with equality and not one better than the other.” Mase is inspired by Audre Lorde; she states,

There’s a brilliant feminist author. Her name is Audre Lorde. She says something beautiful ... she says that your silence won’t protect you (Lorde, 2017). For as long as we are quiet and silenced and we are inactive in our own spaces and we see the injustice taking place that doesn’t protect us from the harm that injustice brings.

Following on this precept, Mase developed her motto: “Even if your voice shakes, say it. Tell the truth. Speak it. Call out injustice. Work for justice around you” (April 2016). For her, civic engagement means the importance of consultation and having open conversations at a grassroots level because, “conversation allows us to engage and think of solutions to problems and this will create a kind of social activism that creates spaces for youth to establish themselves.”

For Mase, social justice work is about observing and respecting the humanity of others, and supporting their autonomy. She states, “The *Equalisers* do amazing work on a daily basis ... I think what we do is facilitate a space for that to happen and the rest is up to them.”

Mandilakhe Lungile. Mandilakhe was born in the Eastern Cape and moved to Cape Town when he was 10 years old to continue his primary school education in a “coloured” township called Mitchells Plein, where he was one of four Black African children in his class. Later he enrolled in a high school in Khayelitsha, which made a significant impact on the kinds of activism he chose. During his primary school, a teacher singled him out as someone with leadership potential and suggested that he be the class captain. From there he went on to initiate and lead various projects. Thus, from this experience he regards teachers as important role models as they have the potential to influence learners’ lives. This experience informed his choice of civic activism and social justice projects.

One of Mandilakhe’s main concerns is that there are not enough role models for young people in the community who can motivate them to complete their schooling; another concern is the low pass rate in the final school year also known as matriculation. These two concerns led him to form the New Hope Community Programme which began its work in his old high

school, Kwamfundo Secondary School in Khayelitsha. Speaking of the work of New Hope, he stated, “If you ever need help, we are available and willing to uplift your spirit, motivate you and give you skills that you need” (December 2016).

The programme initially involved tutoring high school students and out of school youth trying to improve their matric results and motivational speaking. It then grew to include donating clothes as Mandilakhe stated,

In life there are people less privileged than us. I took that and I thought ‘If every one of us in these [tutoring groups] has old clothes, instead of throwing these away or burning them we should gather them and donate to a charity or to those less fortunate.’

His reference to burning clothes may suggest a youth sub-culture in the township which is characterised by buying expensive brand name clothes and then burning these as a performance of their identity (Howell & Vincent, 2014).

Mandilakhe expressed his deep appreciation for the group of people who have been drawn to the project and have formed a team together with him. He noted that the biggest challenges he faces with the programme is the negative peer pressure exerted on youth, such as gangsterism, drugs, peer pressure to play truant which result in lateness, non-attendance, and negative attitudes among youth.

His views on civic engagement and social activism are linked to improving youth’s education, mentoring young people, and being a role model for them. He is appreciative of students who volunteer their time to help others and says, “You can start with small things – for example, just be encouraging.”

Siyabulela Sophi (better known as “Mocca J.”). Mocca J. grew up in the Eastern Cape and in describing his upbringing he states, “I come from a very disadvantaged background, where my mother was a cleaner and my father works as a gardener,”echoing the chorus sung by the youth researchers in the Artnote: “They supported all my dreams and would ask what I want to do” (October 2015).Mocca J. considers himself a social entrepreneur: “one of the people who are called social innovators around Khayelitsha.”

On completing his studies, Mocca J. connected with five other youth who were in a similar position as he was: returning from tertiary study to the community in which they grew up, asking themselves how they could give back to the township. Out of this reflection, Makhaza Lifestyle was formed. Makhaza is the name of the suburb in Khayelitsha that he lives in. Mocca J. explained, “Makhaza Lifestyle is an immediate solution to the current

economic challenges such as youth unemployment and crime.” He feels strongly that youth should follow their dreams and strive to find their own solutions and not wait on the government.

The vision of the Makhaza Lifestyle team is to develop access to information for youth in the township; they undertake various projects to meet and reach this vision. Mocca J. uses his own life as an example when explaining this vision in which access to information and career guidance may have kept him from making the wrong study choice. He was angry that he couldn't attend a career guidance session at the university since he had no money to get there and without thinking about his interests, enrolled for a diploma in Office Management and Technology.

To solve this problem for youth in the township and so they do not experience this frustration, one of the activities undertaken by the group is organising a Career Exhibition in the township. The group also provides financial assistance to students by paying their registration and tuition fees. Money for their work is raised through selling caps and clothes labelled with his brand name Makhaza Lifestyle. His brand has also become popular because of his music – Mocca J. is a DJ.

Mocca J. strongly and confidently believes that people should be positive and follow their dreams. He makes an example of his own path: “I wanted to be a leader so I joined the Social Justice Coalition to learn about leadership which is principled.” He also had dreams of becoming a social innovator, so he joined workshops at the University of Cape Town at the social innovator hub. From all of this, he has learnt that if the community and youth were to take him seriously and respect him, he needed to be mindful of how he behaves in public.

His ideas of social justice and civic engagement illustrate that he is strongly motivated to engage with youth to achieve their dreams and to become self-sufficient through education and social projects which can also be entrepreneurial so as to bring economic development into the community. He excitedly says,

So, the biggest challenge for me was to get a team, a team that would support the idea and the dream of bringing a positive economic change to Khayelitsha ... people who were friendly and positive about bringing about a new change because my ultimate goal was ... community development.

He is passionate about his projects and emphasises that these are not for his individual benefit, but for the community.

Lucas Siphelo Ntabeni. Lucas was born in Cape Town and grew up in Khayelitsha. From an early age at primary school and high school he was involved in youth issues and several organisations; one of these was Global Development Peace and Leadership. In high school, he was also an Equaliser and was active in Equal Education. At the time of the interview, he was working in Equal Education as a Community Leader and head facilitator for his community; his work here was to ensure that youth were mobilised to be aware of the problems in schools, and to help them take these issues up and focus on quality in education. He also spoke about xenophobia as many foreigners from other parts of Africa who live in the township are often victims of violence. He was angry about “this hateful attitude and behaviour to foreigners” (September 2015) and urged young people not to discriminate against other African nationals.

Lucas, like Mocca J, was also passionate about youth following their dreams and to inculcate a spirit of positivity within them. He therefore mentored students to develop their leadership qualities. It was important for him that teachers reflect on the knowledge they share, and he emphasised the importance of parents as role models and the different parenting styles. He used a metaphor of the three-legged pot in African cooking to say that, “All three legs support the cooking of one meal, so too in life the three important people who mould the youth are parents, teachers and their peers.”

For Lucas, social justice and civic engagement is about bringing change through education. He ends the interview with these words: “People must talk and engage with one another and make sure they learn and move forward.” Very sadly, Lucas became ill and passed away in December 2017.

Zuko Ngoma. Zuko grew up in Langa, one of the oldest townships in Cape Town and is now studying at the University of the Western Cape. When he was 18 years old, he served a prison sentence for robbery; this experience motivated him to become a social activist. He joined a social movement called Langa Youth Conscious Movement and for him, this project is critical as the *conscious talks* make youth aware of the history of slavery, of the writings of Steve Biko, and of the links to the Black Consciousness Movement. Conscious talks refers to an education methodology used in this movement; for example, youth come together to a screening of a documentary on slavery, and afterwards discuss and debate issues raised by

the film, such as the history of slavery. These talks are undertaken with the aim of changing the consciousness of youth. Their work is inspired by Steve Biko, the founder of the Black Consciousness Movement. Zuko wished that he had been exposed to such talks and social analyses earlier in his life. For him, the conscious talks are also a way to engage with youth and to inform them of his traumatic prison experiences with the intent to deter them from committing crimes.

Zuko is also involved in a group that educates youth about life in prison as a way to deter them from making bad decisions, such as joining gangs or stealing. One of the actions that they take is the “museum prison.” This is an actual prison cell with a bed and an adjacent container with an exhibition about a fictional boy called Thando; one side of the container tells a story where he makes good decisions and the other in which he makes bad decisions. The focus of the exhibition is to engage young people to ask questions about crime and life in prison, and to bring to them a perspective that gangsterism is not a solution to poverty.

Apart from the talks and drama, Zuko realises the scope and the value of social media. He is using this medium to educate himself on the different youth struggles, such as #FeesMustFall. He is also part of a communal garden project, where they plant vegetables for people and in the process, hope to make others conscious of their environment and their immediate surroundings.

His vision of the Langa Youth Conscious Social Movement is to, “build a communal system that serves the community and to this end we have people talking about issues such as culture and health to bring out different perspectives and consciousness so that people can achieve their vision in the long term.” He is confident that such a vision can be realised.

Monde Kula. Monde describes himself as follows: “I’m an organic-change agent, someone who advocates for change in any means necessary” (June 2016). He is the deputy director of Inkululeko in Mind, meaning Freedom in Mind. He grew up in poor living conditions in Khayelitsha and these social conditions motivated him to work towards change. For him, people change when there is a shift in their consciousness, from thinking about themselves as victims to agents of change. He wishes to develop youth who are aware of their surroundings. Therefore, he encourages debates, discussions, poetry, and use of social media so that young people can envision a more positive society, even though he is aware that the Internet is not accessible to everyone.

Monde has been involved with many different organisations such as Equal Education, The Treatment Action campaign (which fought for free anti-retrovirals for people living with HIV/AIDs), and Political Life for Peace. For him, civic engagement is to advocate for change and social justice which should go beyond single-issue based movements which he experienced while being an activist in the movements mentioned above. He says these movements have a narrow view of change, meaning he is in favour of systemic structural change. While speaking of Inkululeko in Mind, Monde states, “It’s an idea that originates in Khayelitsha and its created by young people of Khayelitsha to speak to the ills of the society that affects young people and the behaviour of young people within society so it’s an organisation that deals with consciousness.”

He holds the view that the purpose of changing people’s consciousness or creating freedom in the mind is important for behavioural change. Civic engagement in the forms pointed to above were key to unlock the consciousness and according to Monde, is critical for social justice work.

Discussion and Analysis

The key findings from the research show youth’s motivation for activism ranged from growing up in poverty to growing up in a middle-class political family, from experiences in prison and at tertiary institutions to teachers acting as role models and the influence of peers in organisations such as Equal Education. About half of the youth interviewed came to Khayelitsha from poorer parts of the country to either attend school or to access tertiary education in Cape Town.

The findings illustrated that there were diverse forms of youth activism which ranged from welfare work to more militant forms. The welfare approaches included donating old clothes to poor people, tutoring learners in school subjects, and workshops on career guidance and social entrepreneurship. The more militant forms included raising consciousness about identities, gender, Black consciousness, forgoing issue-based politics, and involvement in student movements which were protesting for free tertiary education. Modalities used to advocate for these changes were discussions, debates, conversations, music, drama, poetry, and social media because these offered creative pedagogies to mobilise youth who live in

tenuous social conditions. Important too are role models – parents, teachers, and peers – when providing support, necessary information, and guidance.

Most of the youth activists were concerned with empowering youth to be positive and to follow and realise their dreams as a goal in itself, but also to improve the economic, social, psychological, and environmental conditions in their community. This view arises from their own experiences and from the social conditions in the townships as described earlier which are characterised by high levels of crime, unemployment, and the high school drop-out rate.

For the activists interviewed, civic engagement meant having engaging conversations, introducing challenging ideas, motivating youth to take responsibility for themselves, getting physically involved in social justice work, and undertaking different forms of creative expression. The thread that seemed to run through these activisms was that of giving back by contributing to the lives of others, changing attitudes, ways of thinking and ways of being amongst youth, to encourage further study, being a role model to other youth, supporting youth to have agency in their lives, and plugging their activism into youth culture.

These activists felt that the youth were the entry point to building powerful communities and to improve the quality of life in the townships. Personal experiences were important influences on their choice of activism and social justice projects; they all had a strong and passionate response to the interview questions and showed an eagerness to illustrate their commitment to this work through civic engagement.

Reflections on Symposium and Artnote

During the Tikkun Youth Symposium in Canada, we encountered and learned about different forms of social injustices experienced in First World and Developing countries in addition to the activisms associated with these. The first-hand accounts of youth struggle that were shared, the weaving of these stories into a collective performance – the Artnote – as well as the various opportunities for informal socialising created a camaraderie in this community and helped form tentative bonds of friendship which we hope will continue to be built beyond this project.



Figure 10. Backstage at the Artnote.

Initially, the concepts of Tikkun Olam and civic engagement were not in the South African youth's vocabulary. Before the symposium, we did some theoretical input into the meaning of these concepts and related this to the history of the struggle for democracy in South Africa and the current struggle for basic services. Gradually, these concepts were accepted and included in their research and conversations on social justice and youth activism.

Lona said that she learnt to relate to the values in Tikkun from the cultural aspect of Ubuntu which in the African language means "humanity" but more literally translated into "I am what I am because of who we are." Ubuntu is a concept that was widely used during the struggle for freedom by Nelson Mandela. After the first democratic elections in 1994, Bishop Tutu reinvigorated it to signify reconciliation. Ubuntu fits well with the concept of Tikkun Olam which is also about forgiveness.

Below are further expressions of expanding imaginations and conceptual

understandings of the South African youth after the symposium. Phelo reflecting on the Artnote stated,

I learnt from the experiences of the different activists and their issues and what was happening in other countries. I was excited about telling our stories and showing our talents. It was exciting and I was very happy about it. However, the day of the Artnote, we heard some very sad stories from the youth of Syria. It really touched us all and many were crying; this made me feel very committed with others and I felt loved and we experienced healing from the Tikkun project.

Lona went on to say, “In doing the Artnote we opened up and shared stories and ideas and worked together and through this we supported one another. I felt welcomed, free, listened to strangers who became friends, and became the Tikkun project.”

Reflecting on the experience more broadly, Sisanda stated, “I learnt in the youth symposium that youth in other countries are fighting for the same things as we in SA, learnt about working with people from other places with different personalities, goals and learnt about a diversity of perspectives.”



Figure 11. Sisanda and Lona with the Windsor team.



Figure 12. Aphiwe with Fatlum and Aid from Kosovo.



Figure 13. In Toronto, already missing the Thunder Bay team!

Reflecting on what he learnt from the other youth researchers, Aphiwe noted, “For me, I learnt that civic engagement includes communities working together in both political and non-political actions, the goal of such engagement is to address public concerns and promote the quality of life in the community.”

The remarks made from the youth about the Artnote and Symposium rang true for both Lyndal and Salma. Reflecting on the youth, Salma noted, “The youth learnt a lot and visibly grew in confidence from the time they left the Cape Town airport.”

Besides their participation in the Artnote, the youth researchers also screened their documentaries which gave the audience a glimpse into the life of Black youth in the township and the challenges they face at school. Commenting on the richness of the experience Lyndal said,

Over the three years that we were involved in the project, our relationships were tested and nurtured by, among other things, events in our personal lives, the social justice work that we were involved in, and the material

conditions of our different class positions. Notwithstanding, being an adult in the relationship (with years of formal education, work experience, and informal learning as a mother under my belt), as we faced different experiences together, I often felt that I learnt more from the youth than they learnt from me. During the research work, my understanding of the nuances of each of their activism grew which enriched my understanding of the nature of youth activism in post-apartheid South Africa.

Conclusion

Since the youth researchers are in an organisation which does research and advocacy on social justice issues and they see their identities as activists or “Equalisers,” these two concepts were familiar to them, and during their research and participation in the Symposium these concepts were expanded on and given more impetus. The interviews with different activists exposed us to diverse forms of activism for social justice, inspired us, stretched our imaginations, and gave us bold new ideas for social justice work and civic engagement.



Figure 14. Research team arrives in Toronto.

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¹ Census 2011 was conducted from 9 to 31 October 2011 (STATS SA, 2012).

Exchange rate at that time was approximately \$1 to R 7,9208 (Pound Sterling Live, n.d.).