

Learning pro-actively from the C-19 pandemic

by Spaza Hub, Amava Oluntu & Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures



Artist Credit: Unconditional, unconditional by Joana Choumal

LEARNING TO FLY DURING A PANDEMIC

by SPAZA HUB & AMAVA OLUNTU

with support by Nadia Sitas, Care Creative & Chas Unwin



Back: Nolubabalo Bulana, Asavuya Mantongomane, Theresa Wigley, Asanda Ndudula, Elona Mteto
Front: Nokubonga Nonkqayi, Claire Homewood, Nadia Sitas

This is a response to a call for narrative reflections on education, training and public / community education and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The small grant was to allow groups that have been doing substantive education, training and/or social learning work during the COVID-19 pandemic to reflect on, and write up the work that they have been doing to identify lessons that could be helpful for TESF research and praxis over the next few years. There was particular interest in early career researchers and / or community groups to apply for this small grant funding. The research is to provide insight into lessons learned from education, training, and/or social learning approaches applied or tried out during the COVID-19 period (between March 2020 - March 2021) in South Africa, with a focus on adaptations or innovations in education, training or social learning.

The following is a summary of some of our key learnings and methodologies that we used for the reflection process.



SPAZA HUB

We imagine a world where youth are inspired and equipped to create social change within their communities.

We started as a Covid response, with a mapping process that formed a network with the existing kitchens and created new kitchens within our community of Vrygrond/Capricorn. We supported the kitchens to run for a year. From this foundation, we have grown and gained support to implement our vision of the Spaza Hub, a place where we can support each other's dreams and visions for a better future. We have evolved in order to understand how we can use this Covid response movement towards long lasting change.



AMAVA OLUNTU

We are a collective working together to create spaces that encourage reconnection of individuals to themselves, each other and the world.

South Africa has a huge diversity of everyday realities. We seek to create spaces of learning that honour these differences and recognize the multiple forms of wisdom we all have to share with each other. We create spaces where, by sharing individual experiences, we equip each other with the skills and knowledge to develop practical solutions that create more resilient and inspired individuals and communities.



TRANSFORMING EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

Our research addresses the role of education in climate action, decent work and sustainable cities. Addressing inequalities relating to poverty, gender and the status of indigenous knowledge are cross-cutting themes in our work, as are concerns for foregrounding marginalised voices and decolonising research.

Our aim is to develop new knowledge that can assist education policy makers, practitioners, non- governmental and community -based organisations to implement policies and practices in education that are transformative and can contribute to ensuring equitable, just and environmentally sustainable development.

“We believe that what needs transforming in the world and in our work, is our ability to connect with each other as humans. In the world today, there is so much division that connecting can be very difficult. The one thing that can bring us together though, is food. We came together to make sure that everyone in our community could get food through these difficult times. This did indeed create many amazing connections, across all kinds of divides, but it also created division, and brought up many community dynamics that were very painful and frustrating.

We were a little wary when we heard of this research project, because we have seen many researchers come into our communities and take what they want and then we never see them again. They also use jargon that silences and alienates us. When we discussed how we would like to do this research, we agreed that it should be in a way that is accomodative of everyone.

We are still learning to work together. We have struggles internally and in the greater community, but we continue the difficult journey, and focus on our own growth and transformation, so that we can become better able to connect within our larger communities.

What we bring to larger TESH circle is our youth, and our curiosity, and our desire to learn better ways of doing things than the ones that got us where we are now.”

- Spaza Hub

RESEARCH.
WHAT DOES
THIS MEAN
TO YOU?

"I think of people who come in white coats and speak in a lot of jargon that we don't understand and this silences and alienates us. This is very triggering. Then they take what they want and leave and we don't see them again or know what they are doing with that information" - Nolubablo Bulana

"Some of these questions, they are too big. You narrow yourself to the space you are in. Speaking globally, it's quite massive. First, the change needs to be in us, and then in our community being free in the space to work together - which is not easy. Talking about the world is not easy. First we must change where we are at, then we can spread our wings."

"Research being done through us - how do we deal with different systems and spaces and language - hard to respond when we can't understand. How can researchers come to a person with clear language so we can share our thoughts, so we can all learn from intentions about community upliftment?" - Asanda Ndudula

"I'm longing for open minded and inclusive ways of research into coming out in how the research is structured and who gets access to the research and how it gets given back to the external world." - Nolubablo Bulana

"The tools that are useful for research? Google, cos every question has to be googled to understand it." - Nolubablo Bulana

"I am looking for coming to the ways to connect people and understand their views and opinions about how the world is driving us and how we can find a way to sustain ourselves." - Nokubonga Nonkqayi

"I don't understand the question when you say what codes of knowledge are we using for our research. I mean what codes are there? I'm a first time researcher, so the codes and all that, I don't understand. Hayi, we didn't get given the codes." - Nolubablo Bulana

Group Call Research Reflections

The team found it comforting to hear the shared (but welcomed) discomfort of the broader group made up of people mostly comfortable in the research space but still sharing uncertainties of charting the shared journey ahead:

- “How to embark on something that you have no idea how to do?”
- “What can we do with what we have where we are right now?”
- “...Invading spaces without invitation...”
- "these platforms give us courage to learn"
- “Activism is being polarised”
- “How can community become well?”
- “How do you train activists to be protecting of the community?”
- “Use the indigenous knowledge practice....rather than coming with new terms and big words”
- “Include formal and non formal learning”
- “We are trying to act ethically, in an incredibly unethical world”
- Researching vs reflecting:
- “What does *research* now introduce into existing initiatives?”
- “What does *reflection* now introduce into existing initiatives?”



2020.

**HOW WAS
THE YEAR
FOR YOU?**



Reflections took place at Silvermine Reserve in the form of questions, followed by solo walking, then group sharing. The team shared how relaxing and safe the environment felt, and how this radically improved their ability to reflect.

The Frustrations

“Mostly it was how the element of the pandemic came and the laws from government. You live in a space where there are less resources of looking after yourself. How they implemented the laws of lockdown was quite difficult for our environment, which it makes it hard to work in that space. I remember even the time when we were trying to put up information like posters - people were very confused with those laws and all that stuff. It frustrated me so much.” - Asanda Ndudula

“Not being allowed to even visit friends cos you don’t know what will happen, you can’t see what you are dealing with, you can’t even touch what you are dealing with. It’s just a sickness that has very minor symptoms. In townships you don’t take a fever so seriously. Now you need to go to clinic, and at the same time you are not allowed to go to the clinic. And when you are moving around there are police everywhere, there are soldiers everywhere, it was really a frustrating thing for me.” - Asavuya Mantongomane

“I can think of many things that frustrated me last year, there were so many, but the main thing that comes to me now is being unemployed, not knowing how I would provide for my kids.” - Nokubonga Nonkqayi

*“Working with people is also a frustration cos everyone has different personalities and different attitudes, so you just have to understand people and where they come from. That is not an easy job. Also trying to convince people to see what you are trying to do, and trying to convince them so they can understand your vision and mission, and that you are not just doing it for your personal benefit, but you are doing it for the benefit of the community.”
- Elona Mteto*

The Beauty

"The most beautiful thing I have witnessed during lockdown, I witnessed and experienced how it feels to be a father to someone, because that is when I started to spend more time with my daughter. Ya, its been something that was new to me and I have enjoyed each and every moment of it, being there each and every day, night, waking up next to her, it was just amazing. And to see my capabilities of being a better man that I can be to my daughter."

- Elona Mteto

"First of all I was very shy to speak in front of a crowd, I was not brave enough to speak in front of people, but now, baby steps, I can. I used to answer with very short sentences but now I can illustrate what I want to say and I'm even a good listener too. Now I am a problem solver, I can solve problems in the group, I can raise up some topics that we can talk about and share and come up with solutions and I'm a team worker."

- Nokubonga Nonkqayi

"The connections that I have made throughout the Spaza Hub movement, I have met people that are doing such great and amazing things. I now feel like I can even do more than what I am doing, that nothing can stop me to do what I want to do. I have gained much experience"

- Elona Mteto

"Finding something to do after a long time. It was an inspiring thing to do to find something to do in the middle of a pandemic while everyone is just complaining, to find something to do that is going to be productive - that was an amazing feeling to meet people that are inspiring."

- Asavuya Mantongomane

"I would say that what was beautiful about last year is life itself, cos we are still living. I am still strong. And the first call of the building of CANS, seeing communities building groups, it was quite beautiful to see that kind of movement being established. Creating networks, mapping your own community in terms of how do you create easy access for resources and knowledge for how to deal with the pandemic."

- Asanda Ndudula

The Hopes

“Most of us we’ve met because we are all passionate about community and us as individuals and the different skill sets we have. We still learning the space, learning to understand each other. Its not easy but we try to find a common sense of working in an environment of respect and also by your heart knowing you are not doing this for individuals but you are doing this to serve, also to gain knowledge” - Asanda Ndudula

“What I was hoping when I joined the group, at first I thought it was just a Covid Response and I wasn’t hoping for much, I just did it out of love, love for helping people, and when I joined the group I was just enjoying it, so excited that finally I fitted somewhere, and doing what I like, as I’ve been in search of myself so many years, not knowing what I do really like and what I want to do” - Nokubonga Nonkqayi

“Seeing these people, very passionate, who have heart, we are faced by racismsms and many challenges and when you deal with a certain race it can be difficult, but working with people who have a pure heart of unity and wants to make change, it gave me strength to continue, to keep that strength to have that movement for the future.” - Asanda Ndudula

“As a young youth I hoped that we could start something new, something fresh in our community. Something that was youth led, an organisation or a movement, that could have different kinds of activities for learning ways of making informal businesses in a formal way.” - Elona Mteto

“The first time I joined with the group I was hoping to find an environment that I was just going to enjoy working, and I was so lucky because I found even more than I was hoping to find. I was hoping to find a home away from home, and I found exactly that. An environment where I would just enjoy working without any pressure to meet deadlines, but, just enjoying working in a space where we could just be ourselves. So it is true that when you think of something very hard it finally manifests.” - Asavuya Mantongomane



After the reflections, Care Creative facilitated a River of Life process where the team plotted their journey of 2020, identifying challenges, fears, dangers, triumphs and learnings they encountered along the way.

DOING
NOTHING

WITH THERESA WIGLEY



We took a day to go to the beach. Not to think about anything, or process anything, purely to relax and have fun. Why? Because the value of nature spaces, safe spaces, clean spaces, beautiful spaces (spaces that feel safe enough to completely relax in) have proved time and time again to have profound effect on the quality of our interactions and observations.

(We also spoke about the difference between those who can afford these luxuries regularly, and those who seldom experience them, and the impact that this has on ones life.)

THE
3 HORIZONS
APPROACH

WITH NADIA SITAS



We started our session with a walk from Muizenberg to St James where we paused, looking out at the tidal pool and rocky shores. We were all tasked with finding something to bring back with us from this walk: something physical, a visual image, a memory, a metaphor....

- Grain of sand: a feeling that sometimes we are so small compared with the enormity of the challenges we face
- Photo of water on hands: a feeling of power and connection
- Wet skirt: immersing oneself in the water knee deep - carrying the salty weight and the wetness for the morning
- Memory of walking over sharp shells: painfulness and tiredness
- Dune spinach: nature's gifts are all around us
- Octopus: sometimes need to camouflage to cope, to blend in, to transform with the surroundings
- Sentimental previous gift of a shell from one team member to another
- View of a mountain: you can see the success and beauty at a distance, but getting there takes time



Setting up for the 3H process at The Commons Studio. Nadia Sitas, Nolubabalo Bulana, Elona Mteto

Three Horizons provides a visual framework for thinking about how issues play out over time within short, medium, and long-term time horizons. The three horizons are defined as:

1ST HORIZON

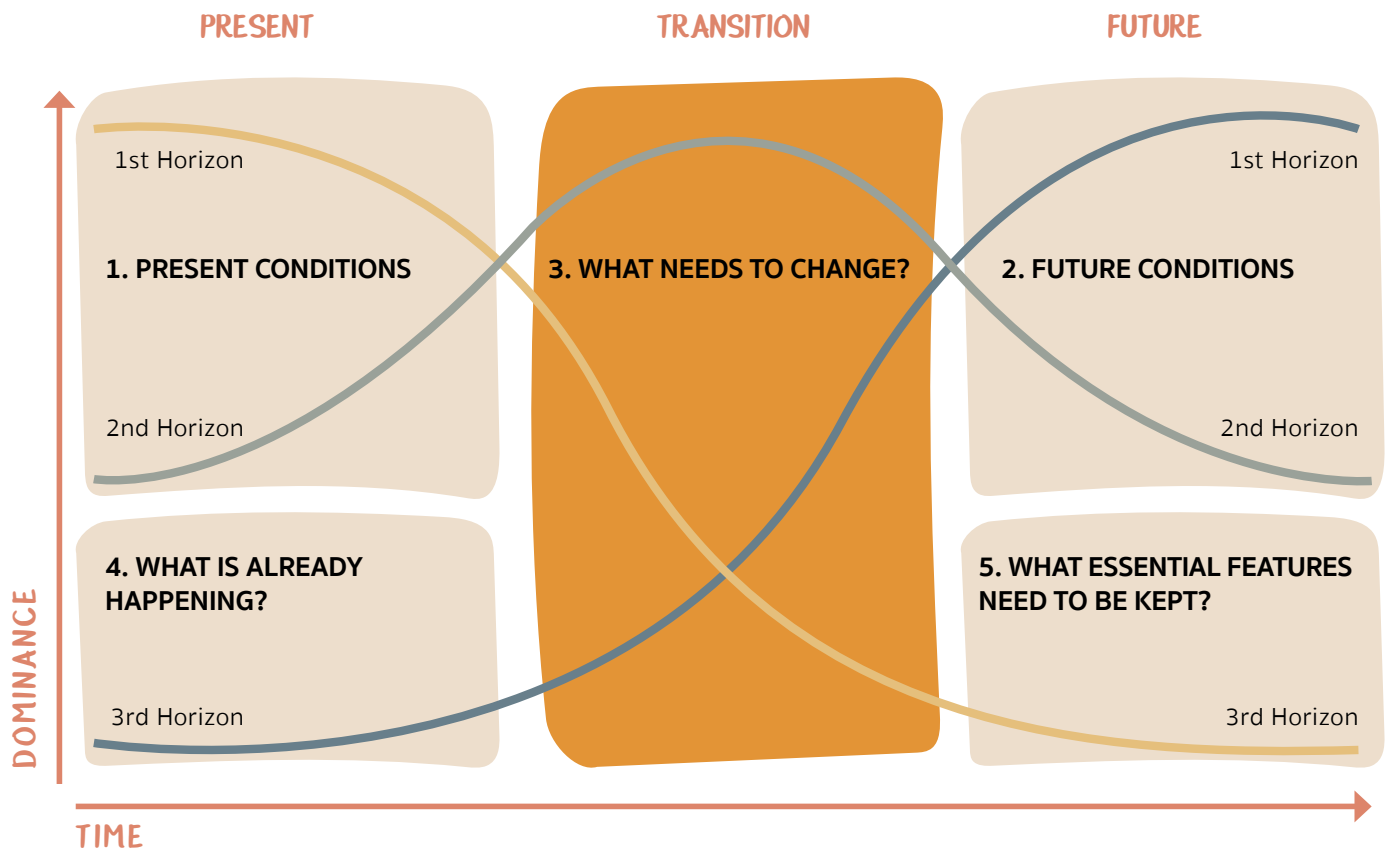
This horizon emphasises what's known, what's taken for granted, what we (often wrongly) assume 'will always be with us,' and focusses on maintaining stability. This is the current model that is in decline and will be soon outdated.

2ND HORIZON

This horizon emphasises incremental adaptation, actions resisting change, and practical new innovations to create opportunities from change. It may provide a more approachable alternative to the declining 1st horizon, but it is a transition to the 3rd horizon.

3RD HORIZON

This horizon emphasizes the new, the transformative, the visionary, and the break with past traditions and current assumptions. This is a clear sign of the future we can see today, of emerging practices which are not yet quite ready to become mainstream.



PRESENT

SpazaHub is a youth-led incubational space that strives to make change in the community

TRANSITION

SpazaHub is a youth-led incubation space that strives to make a difference in our community, we want to have dialogues around social issues and bring awareness

FUTURE

SpazaHub is a youth-led organization that is uplifting the youth of Vrygrond with skills and entrepreneurial learning for them to sustain themselves

1. PRESENT CONDITIONS

- Broader situation in Capricorn
- Can't change people
- Freedom of expression
- Dishonesty
- Jealousy within and outside
- No direction
- Sugar coating
- Finding our space
- Bad vibes, jealousy
- Elephants in the room (\$)
- Undermining
- Ageism
- Anger
- Run away
- Movement- we're not saving the community
- Rumors
- Personal issues
- Not coming with solution- end of fight
- Conflict of interest
- Jealousy
- Anxiety
- Obstacles along the way
- Rage
- Switch off
- Belittled
- Low energy & passion
- Sad
- Caring about someone else's feelings
- Vendetta, attitude
- Gossiping
- Frustration
- Movement as change- from being part of community
- Consensus on who we are
- Punctuality & deadlines: I hate it when people are not being reliable- e.g. when you are not delivering on something promised
- External: group conflict, money, attitude/behaviour, community politics, pressure for failure
- Self: Tired, sad, fed up, anxiety, giving up, bottling things up

4. WHAT IS ALREADY HAPPENING?

- Supporting community kitchens
- Received funding
- Communication strategy
- Coalition
- Dialogues on GBV
- Looking & visiting existing initiatives

3. WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

- Revive talents
- Bring in more hands
- Find out what community wants
- Fair challenges
- More learning
- Success & Money
- Collaboration
- Focus attention and energy
- Time
- Training next generation of youth
- Rain, rich soil, learning to nurture growth
- Build Skills: communication & confidence, facilitation for holding spaces, mentorships, learning opportunities, mediation, conflict resolution
- Build trust
- Talk around Gender Based Violence (men and women groups)
- Constructive engagement
- Opportunities to raise concerns
- Opportunities to collaborate
- Following up
- Convene spaces for dialogues: women & girls circles (GBV), brotherhood/sisterhood, Imbizos, mens circles
- SpazaHub: equipment (containers) space, move from temporary to permanent, more hands, vibe & energy, be able to move driven by mission
- Ignore the negative energy, but still focus on community engagement and empowerment
- Knowing when to listen & ignore - stay connected to community

2. FUTURE CONDITIONS

- No corruption
- Putting Capricorn on the map
- Employment
- Unique and strong youth movement
- Be seen
- Justice
- Music
- Fun
- Spaza Hub - link in accessible community space
- Revive the passion
- Accessible working for good
- Engagement
- Umbrella
- Playful
- Established: operating, registered, legal space
- Excitement
- Coalition of change- SpazaHub at the centre
- Harmony
- Understanding
- Be like kids
- Sparking conversation
- Spirit of Ubuntu
- Love
- Change
- Care
- Conflict resolution
- Friendship: sisterhood/brotherhood
- Feel free & Be free
- Smooth way of working together
- Success
- Responsible
- Money
- Resilient
- Education
- Independence
- Other people can take over
- Be an example for leaders/youth
- Impact
- Motivate
- Employment
- Collaboration
- Equity
- Unity

5. WHAT ESSENTIAL FEATURES NEED TO BE KEPT?

- Fire
- Passion
- Spirit of Ubuntu
- Leading by example
- Links
- Love
- Care

**HOW
DO WE WANT
TO PRESENT
OUR FINDINGS,
AND TO WHO?**

“When one dances there are different ways that one can express themselves, through our research we have share our emotions and our feelings. Through dancing we can depict our learnings effectively and successfully. Through dancing we can share our journey through our dance moves. We can dance with our community watching. It can be another way of engaging with the community. While we are dancing we can make a video out of us, then we share our video on social media to reach more audiences. The community at large can be the ones seeing us. When we are dancing we will be enjoying ourselves and it will be fun.”
- Asavuya Mantongomane

“I think we can communicate with people in research by writing on social media as well as correspondence that can be spread locally or hold regular public meetings to share information. The people I think we can share this information with I would say first is” we “as spaza and then go to the kitchens as well as the community and look at world at large, because we said something has to start within us and we can look on the out side world. And we can even publish it into local community radios and also public transportation and we can reach people at large, maybe handing out flyers hosting events in our neighbouring communities...” - Nokubonga Nonkqayi

“As for me I have many interest in terms of sharing our learnings, when one speak about theatre I get excited a lot. However I also have interest in writing a blog about our learnings and that alone I think it can help with our social media and thats where we can easily get the audience even those that are far (The World) can see what we have been doing and learning till this far.” - Elona Mteto

“For me, I would share our learnings via songs or musical plays. Music is always a great way of learning and sharing information. To share with the world I would write letters addressed to pen pals and share the plays or songs via video.” - Nolubabalo Bulana

**COLLECTIVE
EXPRESSIONS:
A SPAZA HUB
OPEN SPACE
CHAPTER**

WITH CHAS UNWIN



Chas Unwin, Asavuya Mantongomane, Nolubabalo Bulana, Nokubonga Nonkqaji, Elona Mteto

I facilitate civic space ritual art events with groups and individuals.

The artworks are short (five minutes maximum) and highly concentrated.

'Civic space' designates any open public space approached from a civic stance, i.e. a stance relating with non-ideological expressions of the interhuman intrigue. 'Stance' refers to a mode of existence arrived at through focused conceptual and practical training. 'Civic' refers to an underlying intent to nourish and support collective understanding and awareness through the work, rather than confront and contend via received social dramas relating to a deadly historical politics. The only shout is one of joy. This does not mean evading trauma but treating it as a dense mass of materials capable of expressive symbolic transformation in the artwork. A surprising joy seeds change.

A conversation with Theresa Wigley led to being tasked with facilitating a public presentation by the Vrygrond Spazahub Collective of their experience and research during the Covid pandemic. To prepare whatever it was going to be we would have two sessions of three hours together. The group had thought to use dance or movement.



(The group used the River of Life exercise to explain the journey of the previous year to Chas.)



The workshop focus turned to shaping and practicing the parts; I selected two gestures to be enacted, one from them, and one from my own research. Theirs was of birds; they would become birds. Mine I call embryonic; the whole body folds in on itself as if under attack or going into incubation. Both these 'gestural postures'; embryo and bird, carry multiple meanings to explore physically. Between the two gestures the performer does transitions; the body goes to neutral standing, grounding and becoming self-present before moving again. The act-transition-act-transition structure in this case repeats two gestures to give us a refrain to play with that can be internally explored and externally interpreted in multiple ways. I then designed a spatial geometry for crossing and covering the performance area. Because walkers are using this crossing-space, covering the space geometrically means being porous.



On the chosen Friday we worked in the Muizenberg studio and on the brickwork outside before driving to the central city and Thibault Square. Parked on a nearby street we visited the site for a recce. Security people directed us to the company which manages the site; at first protesting it was not possible, the manager allowed us to go ahead.

Learnings: Notes on Ritual

A key learning for me in this project concerns the relation to ritual of this mode of public space performance. The stance I took during the process led to realising I need to take a more investigative approach around what motivates the work, with ritual as only one of its components. Overall what matters are the effects the work may have on its participants (more than on audience), and in this ritual operates as a useful technology for organising self-affect. However the social face of ritual presents very complex crossflows in southern Africa, and I am rethinking the articulation of ritual in the work.

"With the dancing I felt it was a different experience. It was really good to try new things, and also to be out of the comfort zone. I really enjoyed each and every minute of it. When we were practising I felt like I was releasing something because he interpreted very well the river of life that we drew so that he could understand what we were trying to say."

- Asavuya Mantongomane

"At first when we started the research there was a lot of like writing - we were looking back to where we came from, the challenges and struggles, we were sort of taking everything out while we were busy writing, it was healing, like deep relief in a way. I never thought the research thing would end up in the form of compiling everything into the moves. It was fun and just to be doing something that I thought I wouldn't do. The dance in the public it was kind of weird before but after doing it I felt like I can do it again again and again." - Elona Mteto

"At first it was like what to expect I don't know how to do it, how to move, but the way he dances or performs was an expressive art and it was very much expressive for me with our river of life and what we have been experiencing. It was also for me very therapeutic, I kind of just was looking forward to go - to put everything else at the back of mind and just focus on my body and soul. I loved it." - Nolubabalo Bulana

"It was amazing, absolutely amazing. I enjoyed every minute. Honestly it was great experience. I thought we were just expressing what we went through and then we forget about it. I never knew we could use our past experience into the healing experience through the dance. It really gave me an attention of how people could be so creative and mind wise."

- Nokubonga Nonkqayi

"One thing which didn't sit me well and I didn't like it, was when he started saying it's a ritual and all that and then I was not comfortable with that." - Elona Mteto

"While I was busy performing I felt connected with the dance and I was quite impressed with how I got warm while I was dancing and then my heart skipped a beat very fast. I felt in love with the dance itself and I felt like I needed it for a long time. Honestly I felt I was doing something that I knew because I was feeling very warm after I did it. And I just had the feeling after we danced if we could just have another chance to do it again." - Nokubonga Nonkqayi

**ART AS
LANGUAGE**

WITH CARECREATIVE



Art exists to connect and communicate with ourselves, each other and our environments. Speaking in pictures, expressing with movement, painting words into poetry, creating a rhythm. Art gives us ways to express, teach, show, heal, envision and inspire. With paint, charcoal, dance, meditation, process or voice.

On this reflective journey, we painted the 'River of Life': the timeline of events and experience in this last year. We painted it twice. The first time was after time spent in nature writing & reflecting. The canvas was big and buckets of paint could be splashed, pens could write down the important bits. Things could be rubbed out, added on or gone over. The story was recorded. The second time was about drawing the 'River of Life' to explain and step into movement. Was this going to lead to performance? Storytelling? How would the choreography be?

"We painted a river of life – we took all the anger, frustrations, sadness at different incidents that happened and emptied ourselves"



A last process to express was to paint on a canvas board. Each to create their own. Think about the past, the future and the reality of now. But be free to create as you feel. Free as a bird with paint. Closer to shared intention becoming real.

"There's a sunflower in there and the sun is shining and there are 3 clouds - with thunder, with rain, and with sun, significant of all the stages we went through, which also makes us grow which helped me to know me and who I am and what are my limits. You can see the roots are longer, cos I feel like we are grounded now and able to see as we reflect that we actually do have roots. Not just because of Covid but its always been there within us."

- Nolubabalo Bulana

"And you can see these two lions in front they represent those that just sit and watch us waiting for us to do a bad move so they can attack us. Above them is an eagle that is very brave and very stronger than before, flying high. That is us."

"That lady dancing resemble me with that afro there. I just dance my problems away and release every bad spirit I have." - Asavuya Mantongomane



How can these paintings and this process reach the public?
 How can we give a window into our experience? What are the important things to communicate?

And so a little booklet developed. With a sprinkle of words, we made a public creative sharing with some useful information.

THANK
YOU

ADDENDUM:
REFLECTIONS BY THE SPACE HOLDERS

TERESA WIGLEY: REFLECTIONS ON THE REFLECTION PROCESS

It was, and always is, very difficult for me to know when to add my own voice to these processes, and when to be quiet to allow other voices more room. After much deliberation I kept my voice out, and even retracted on the Key Learnings that I thought would be a distillation of the process through my own voice. The thought that made me not do it, was that this research would be going forth to other researchers, and they themselves might distill the key learnings from it, essentially making it triple distilled, and I'm not sure if research is like whisky that gets better with every distillation, or if it dilutes?

Anyway, upon invitation, I would love to add some of my own thoughts.

TIME

Firstly, it felt really good to be offered the space to reflect. 2020 didn't allow a minute for it, and while I'm conscious of my own choice to over commit and over work, it didn't feel fair to expect the same from others, and so on one hand, whilst I wanted to offer as many opportunities to those I was surrounded by as possible, I found myself asking if I was offering too much, thereby getting others into a state of unhealthy busyness, ironically the reflection space itself becoming a demand for time. Luckily, the nature of the sessions were mostly very restorative, and I guess this was my biggest taking there: How do we make our every day work restorative instead of exhausting? And if I am being exhausted by restorative work, what am I doing wrong?

TRAUMA

When as a collective we carry generations of trauma, as well as our own very trauma ridden lives on top of that, any work that we do, requires very caring attention. This is the part that exhausts me. Teaching Print Making, Storytelling, Communication Skills, conducting Reflective Research, these things are tiny, in comparison with the level of attention that is required to everyone's emotional well being and growth. Being able to speak it out loud to each other requires so much trust, bravery, energy and commitment, that the simplest tasks become huge.

OPPRESSION

Then there is another layer on top of that, where I recognize that when your whole life has required all your attention just for your survival, it may have come at the expense of your emotional growth, and you may not yet have built the pathways that lead you to believe you are equal and perfectly entitled to express your true thoughts within the platforms you are engaging in. Centuries of conditioning doesn't just disappear, it requires huge amounts of work. I feel aware that the fact that I am white and have lived a life of privilege, means that many won't feel comfortable enough in my presence to express completely honest thoughts, and my very presence changes the narrative in the room.

DANCING WITH DISCOMFORT

Some moments of discomfort for me arose around the dance process. Asavuya had found a dance teacher on Instagram that she suggested we use to help choreograph the dance process. This itself is an act of ownership of the process. Then I had a chance encounter with Chas, and when I explained my work and he explained his, it sounded like a perfect fit for the dance reflection, and so I suggested him to the group, and it was agreed we should try him. At this point I wondered if that wasn't a mistake - putting my choice over the groups, undermining the ownership that had been claimed, and the group agreement being as deference to my teacher role?

Second discomfort was around the framing of the dance as a ritual, which has also been reflected on by Chas and Elona. My personal choice is never to frame the work I am doing under any religious or spiritual framework, as I am aware that most groups I work in hold a huge cross section of spiritual beliefs, and so in respect to these views, I keep it human.

Third discomfort was when Chas decided to join the dance. My immediate reaction was that he was putting himself at the center of someone else's story, but upon reflection with the group, many shared that his presence actually helped to make them feel safe enough to do this public act of bravery.

Whilst observing the dance, through my own lenses, it seemed there was resistance in the movement, it wasn't completely embodied. The feelings expressed by the group immediately after the dance were very unanimous in wanting

to do it over, again and again, and I think that that's where it would become more owned and embodied. So some learning there around things not needing to be perfect the first time round (or indeed ever) but an awareness that often we are just creating gateways into future learnings.

ART AS THERAPY

The art processes all seemed to bring about deep relaxation and much release. Words can be very intimidating, and the opportunity to just express yourself without there being a right or a wrong answer felt great. The description of the river of life process "we poured out everything we were feeling" summed that up well.

SAFE SPACE

The huge difference in the quality of reflections we had in beautiful, safe, nature spaces was apparent to everyone, and makes me more determined that regular access to these spaces should be a priority to allow enough healing to happen to enable us to actually be able to deal with the root causes of our issues.

TERESA BOULLE: ORGANISATIONAL REFLECTIONS

There is so much that we have learned in the last year as Amava Oluntu. A lot has happened and we are so glad that we all made it through it with so much support, trust and with the belief in just futures. The focus of this research project was on the reflections of Spaza Hub, I will just list some major points of our own learnings:

1. MOVING AT THE SPEED OF TRUST:

We did not have any systems in place before lockdown. We believed in moving at the speed of trust, coming up with new plans from day to day, co-creating a new network of carers and volunteers. The fact that we were not a developed organisation actually helped us to get going without thinking of any bureaucratic hurdles or things that could have been in our way. Our very small team and low hierarchical structure enabled us to come up with this Covid response over night.

It was exhausting to develop new things 24/7, not being able (for all of us) to be out there on the ground and having physical distancing, but we knew how important it is to bridge divides in new ways and that any new systems may be able to last... it was such an important moment to #buildbackbetter, we could not have been holding back or remained silent. Being part of the Community Action Network helped us all realize that we are in this together and that each neighborhood can make a huge difference in helping each other to fight the virus and the extreme unequal situations.

2. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The first 2 months were filled with the ubuntu spirit - we all proved that co-creative, resource-oriented and people-led development is the way to go. Community based help within and beyond our own neighborhoods was something some of us were longing for and now it was like a moment of opportunity to connect more people and networks, and to build lasting friendships and relationships.

The fact that we were not extremely involved with the Vrygrond Community Trust and the existing 'traditional' structures before allowed us to do what we did. Our Covid-19 response resulted in a joint initiative because some of our participants of a running changemaker project were wondering what they could do to fight the pandemic. We did not think too much before getting active with the youth from Vrygrond, Theresa took all her energy and time to get active together with the youth because it was the right thing to do at that moment. There was no time to think nor to be strategic about things. I dare to say that if we would have known about the extremely corrupt and complex circumstances in the community before, we might have not done that step.

The fact that we, an external entity, entered the community with donations and funding led to difficult developments which we did not foresee. We learned that especially in this small and diverse community, systemic issues and scars from the past have left people with deep sorrow, trauma, jealousy and anger which are hard to deal with, especially as an external and 'new' stakeholder. The community is suffering from poverty, violence and unemployment and as soon as money is involved, people tend to become greedy or jealous.

3. YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

I second what Theresa said about how much time and efforts it takes to deal with the personal trauma and problems that our youth carry from day to day. We have accompanied the group from day 1 and have extreme respect for what they have come up with and how resilient they have been. There have been a few moments when we sat together and did not know what to do, after harassment by community leaders or threats by community members. Is it worth it to continue if youth are not appreciated and acknowledged? Shall we support them in this struggle or is it a push into the wrong direction of self-destruction?

We do keep on telling them that they have the power to change and that they have done so well thus far. We try to teach them communication and conflict resolution skills that will help them in the future. The time of reflection has helped us to give them the chance to learn more about the significance of reflection and to realize the key learnings which are so powerful. We have been trying to connect the team to specific mentors and trainers, e.g. on leadership trainings as we could not take on everything and there is just so much need for training and mentoring... we feel that it requires more people getting involved themselves, connecting with youth directly, taking their own initiative.. it's a societal responsibility to restore relationships and share our skills and knowledge.

4. ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT

We really appreciated the way you from communicated with us. We felt appreciated and heard. As an organisaiton with a focus on supporting youth from Vrygrond but not being based there, we keep ourselves in the background and don't want to talk much about the work we actually do. It felt good to get acknowledged by receiving this funding - to get the precious time to sit and reflect on so many things. It was a big gift.

5. PHILANTHROPY (FOCUSING MORE ON THE LOCKDOWN)

The pandemic enabled a new way of giving: people started to help in different ways - with time, talents and money in their very local neighborhood. A lot of people from Muizenberg expressed that they can't be on the ground but they really appreciate our work and that they know that their donation enables us helping our direct neighbors. People started to give with trust without much expectation. This allowed us to use donations more freely without feeling like we have to report back necessarily (which is obviously important but it requires administration and communication which requires capacity that is not always there). The covid-19 response strengthened our credibility in and around Muizenberg. Donations started to fade quickly but we know that if there is a crisis, the whole community of Muizenbergs is an incredible support for those in need.

There are many more learnings we take away as an organisation - on the micro, macro and meso level - so many experiences we could share about the covid-19 response in general, however, I think it is here more about the deep learnings and experiences we take away as individuals and those stories have already been shared.

CLAIRE HOMEWOOD / CARE CREATIVE: REFLECTIONS

WITNESSING:

Sharing a studio with Amava Oluntu in the lead up and beginning of Lockdown allowed me to witness the group shift their focus from Vukuzezele to kitchens and Level 5 response. I observed, listening mostly into Theresa's experience as it unfolded. My own response felt like it intuitively needed to hang back, observe and allow time for things to sink in before I took any action.

BEING INSPIRED:

The action I took was directly inspired by what was happening in Vrygrond and the way Amava & Vrygrond United for Change was approaching food security and support. Muizenberg's initial response of packing food boxes (to get people through 21 days) didn't really make sense for me. I waited until what felt like a more purposeful response. I was inspired by the way the group was working together, meeting the challenge and weirdness of what was happening. The idea of mobilising kitchens, bulk buying ingredients and cooking in bulk made sense to me as a more sustainable approach than handing out limited boxes of ingredients. Muizenberg Community Kitchen was born through direct inspiration from Vrygrond.

ENGAGING:

Through our kitchen efforts we criss crossed with the Vrygrond crew. Supplies were coming through our kitchen base, the unpacking, packing and unpacking of food supplies was all happening at a rate. It required substantial people power. Relationships were being built.

HOLDING SPACE:

I remain in awe and respect of what Spaza Hub developed and held. I was very happy to be part of this reflective process. I had some idea of what they had been/ were going through, but would never attempt to say that I could understand fully. I enjoyed all our sessions together and getting to know the group more. It's hard to hold space for things that feel beyond/ above/ way bigger than me. Layers of complexity that need multiple unravels to fully emerge, let alone heal. But the process was good and I think the diversity of spaces, conversations, nature connects and activities gave the reflection the much needed time it deserved and what a gift to have had that time.

CREATING TOGETHER:

I love creating with others, I love creating opportunity for others to create. I loved the creative process of the reflection. Loved getting messy with paint on the vleis or offering multi coloured writing implements to get the story down. But my favourite was when the team themselves asked to create. We set up a studio for the morning.... art supplies, snacks, tunes and good vibes. I loved the morning and witnessing everyone in their own creative space, happily making sure they had what they needed. I think their paintings were beautiful and they led directly into the making of the booklet, with a sprinkle of words by Nolu (she missed the painting, but drew at home).

NADIA SITAS: REFLECTIONS

HOW THIS PROJECT LANDED FOR ME- SHORT PERSONAL PRELUDE TO THE PROCESS

Over the lockdown period I became increasingly in awe of the Amava Oluntu and SpazaHub team- we had worked collectively through networking around food solidarity and support through my involvement in the Muizenberg Community Action Network- but my efforts paled in comparison to the dedication that emerged as a groundswell from Vrygrond & Capricorn and in support of the Vrygrond kitchens. As the academic and research world which I've been immersed in for over a decade needed to pivot to semi-function within new modes of online, remote working, I was approached more and more by collaborators and funders in the global North to help them document what we were witnessing and living through in the global South. Data still needed to be collected, research still needed to happen and most of it seemed extractive, opportunistic and 'othering'. I distanced myself from most of these requests and felt disconnected to my research world. I work in the field of understanding resilience, transformation, complexity and change, and it was playing out before my eyes: in the big pots that were being sourced, bought and swiftly put into use feeding hundreds, the new solidarity networks sparking, the truckloads of vegetables being sorted through chains of people, the innovation and responsiveness to new realities, but 'researching it' felt wrong. I felt I would be unduly benefitting from the hands and hearts working at the frontline to keep food flowing in my neighbourhood- these were not my stories to tell. When the TESH call was sent through I thought, here is an opportunity to maybe leverage some of my privilege in understanding the research & funding world to provide a space for the team to take a (supported) breath and reflect and (re)imagine how their futures could be shaped by pockets of experiences in the present. It seemed like an intentionally gentle offering to collectively slow down after a year on the go.

I made an offering of running a futuring process with the team, but otherwise I was there to support the process, without a research agenda, and would facilitate whatever needed to surface to find space to emerge.

THE UNCERTAINTY OF 'BEING RESEARCHED'

For many this was the first time they had been part of a research project. Questions on what research is surfaced. Is it four white walls, sitting across a metal table, people in suits with clipboards? Apprehensions around the performative nature of being a research subject emerged, as did concerns about extractive research. There was a big collective exhale when this project design and methodology was mentioned- "can we just sit and relax into this?" We arrived at an agreed goal that these shared weeks need to be a process that is useful for those participating- every and all voices count in shaping this process, in suggesting alternatives, putting on the brakes when things are unclear and sharing as openly as they were able to in that moment. There was an unspoken agreement that this process was SpazaHub's- it needed to be as authentic as possible in terms of voice and representation. This was hard on the broader group TESH calls when there was a feeling sometimes that we should be offering more - especially the non-SpazaHub participants of the research team.

JARGON! - ACADEMIC WORDS USED (UN)INTENTIONALLY TO SILENCE AND ALIENATE

There were awkward silences in the beginning when words were used flippantly with the expectation that everyone has a shared dictionary. We, as a core team, made a pact to call these words out, to isolate them- to name and shame them, and decided to rather use words that could unlock and surface unspoken thoughts that had been bumping around in our brains, or simmering slowly, to spark discussion and open up spaces for shared sense-making. It was a challenge to leave my comfort blanket of big words and crafted sentences behind that showed my knowledge of literature and theory- my perceived value that I thought I brought to the space- and find new ways of communicating away from my conditioned and engrained ways of engaging in conversations linked to transformation.

TRANSFORMATIVE METHODOLOGIES

The range of methods chosen to unearth and spark reflections, and learning, enabled the sense of flight which surfaced as a metaphor so often when reflecting on this work. There was an intentional design for reflections to be immersive- to be coupled with sights and textures within nature, with colours from paint and pens, with bodies and sounds for dance - opportunities to explore new forms of expression. I was amazed at how these suggestions were welcomed and embraced with every turn, and still the team reflecting seemed unsatisfied and wanted more opportunities to dance and draw and swim again. It was in some of these moments that there were small glimpses of more honest and authentic responses

that seemed a little freer from the trappings of responding to research questions and everyday realities of how power plays out in visible, invisible and hidden ways. How can we weave these practices into the everyday? and into this crazy new world we are facing with remote and online engagement- is it possible to do this type of work without being face-to-face? How can we use creative practices for not only surfacing reflections but also creating moments for interrogating the more systemic change many of us long for?

EMBRACING HUMBLE VULNERABILITY

I will hold the bravery that I witnessed in many of the hard reflections and pain that surfaced for people as they spoke about the year that was for many years to come. There was a level of trust shown in me that I was not deserving of. How can we hold that pain and trauma and discomfort – in all its messiness and confusion- and still move forward? How do we know when to voice our discomfort when we feel things unfolding in ways that seem misaligned to us- or when to sit with the discomfort, because voicing it would burden others and shift the gaze to fixing our discomfort? How can we give voice to others to voice their discomfort? I wasn't sure how to report on this work, as a researcher, that is terrifying. Researchers analyse, synthesise, generalize, link to theory, craft an output- our currency & worth is being able to do this. For this report a decision was made to take ourselves (non SpazaHub team members) out of the report and let the reflections from the youth of SpazaHub speak in ways that emerged during the weeks of engagement. This felt to be the most authentic way to honour the process, voices and time and not claim this process as ours. As researchers, how can we weave reflections together so they remain intact and true to the lived realities they came from?

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