

Chapter 14

Focusing on the Heart: Lifelong, Life-Wide and Life-Deep Learning in the Time of HIV and AIDS*

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Introduction

The key questions propelling this chapter are: How does the advent of the HIV and AIDS pandemic compel facilitators, trainers and educators to re-think and refine pedagogical approaches within a lifelong learning paradigm, particularly in countries of the South where medication may not be readily available for the majority? Are there new insights which have emerged that might relate to other contexts and which could enrich lifelong learning practices more generally? I will address these questions by reflecting on approaches that I, together with colleagues, have developed, over the last 10 years in Southern Africa. In particular, I will explore the courses we have designed and facilitated for community activists, educators, trainers and caregivers in HIV- and AIDS-saturated environments.

It is clear to us that lifelong learning in sub-Saharan Africa cannot ignore HIV and AIDS. In sub-Saharan Africa, no-one is unaffected by HIV and AIDS. It weaves through our personal, political and pedagogical lives. HIV and AIDS highlight some of the most difficult social, economic, cultural and personal issues that any adult educators have to confront. While it infects and affects children and adults, it is the women who are most susceptible. As Susser (2009: 45) says, ‘... biology, culture, social organisation, low incomes and lack of services conspire to render women extraordinarily susceptible to HIV infection’.

There is growing literature that tries to capture the complex interplay between individual behavior, politics, culture, economics, gender relations, power and history in HIV- and AIDS-saturated environments. In a seminal, 3-year study in a

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South African rural village, Steinberg (2008) pursues the question: Why are people dying en masse when they are within a short distance of treatment? He walks alongside a villager called Sizwe, over a 3-year period, to understand the fear and the stigma relating to the disease. He describes, for example, how some villagers sit outside clinics and note how long individuals take to get their HIV test results. The longer they take the more likely they are to be HIV positive and word spreads. This instant 'public megaphone' dissuades many from being tested as they are 'silently separated' from society. Steinberg (2008: 326) quotes Posel as saying 'sex itself becomes the vector of death', so the intimacy of home becomes contaminated and the morality of men is most acutely called into question.

Gevisser (2007), in his penetrating biography of former South African President Thabo Mbeki, analyses the complex interplay of the politics of race, sexuality and global inequality in the shadow of AIDS. He says (2007: 730):

What made AIDS even more difficult ... was the particular way that stigma around it had rooted in South Africa, where the first cases... had been gay men, but where, towards the end of the decade the 'gay plague' mutated into 'black death', as black people began to become ill and die. Given the sweep of the epidemic southwards, it inevitably acquired a xenophobic tinge...

Lees (2008) centres the importance of the impact of colonialism and apartheid, which have led to systematic dehumanisation of black Africans, on how HIV and AIDS are understood. The need to work to counter the legacies of these processes of dehumanisation infuses his approach to 'rethinking AIDS education'. He echoes Freire (1993: 25) who states that 'humanization has always been humankind's central challenge'. Lees contends that AIDS is about people not simply about the virus therefore an approach to AIDS education must include the economic, social, psychological, spiritual and cultural dimensions of people's lives.

While statistics are only indicative, they are significant in order to imagine the pervasiveness of trauma and grief in the daily lives of all communities but particularly impoverished communities through increased ill health, death, poverty and discrimination. According to Steinberg (2008), about 2.1 million people died of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa in 2006 while another 25 million are living with HIV. In South Africa, about 13% of the population is HIV positive, with an adult prevalence rate of 18.8%. Some 800–1,000 people die of AIDS-related diseases on an average day. However, in case the impression is created that this is a particularly African story, the discrimination against HIV positive people is pervasive as illustrated in the Mail and Guardian newspaper of 22 August 2008, where it was reported that 67 countries deny the right of entry or residence to people simply because they are HIV positive; treating all HIV positive people as if they are intentionally going to infect others. This discriminatory practice drives the disease further underground and makes it more difficult for individuals and communities to confront head-on.

The impact of the pervasive trauma and grief within HIV and AIDS-saturated environments can also be likened to other environments where trauma and grief are caused by other diseases, substance abuse, poverty, discrimination, migration and violence, which are often exacerbated in times of war, economic, political or climatic turbulence or uncertainty. Given the global uncertainties, it is fair to assume that

trauma and grief are widespread and therefore cannot be ignored by educators as we design and facilitate interventions.

It is for this reason that we have designed and facilitated continuing education courses for facilitators and adult educators entitled 'The art and heart of the educator'. I reflect back on the approaches we have developed, highlighting illustrative workshops from which we draw insights for lifelong learning.

I will begin with some general observations about lifelong learning within HIV and AIDS saturated environments before focusing more deeply on insights arising from the 'Art and Heart of the Educator' courses.

Lifelong, Life-Wide and Life Deep Learning

From our work, we realise that working with people infected and affected by HIV and AIDS brings into sharp focus the need for humanistic pedagogical approaches that include male and female, children and adults across generations (lifelong learning); recognises the importance of sustainable livelihoods (life-wide learning) and that engages with deeply personal issues relating to death and sexual relations, tapping into the cultural, spiritual and intimate aspects of people's lives (life-deep learning). We argue that while our major focus is on work with communities where HIV and AIDS are pervasive, our approach and insights may have more general relevance for education practice with the majority of women, whose key concerns are sustaining themselves and their children under difficult circumstances of trauma and loss and violence of various kinds.

A Feminist Sensibility

It is now commonly acknowledged that girls and women do experience particular social, cultural, economic and political circumstances that give them different abilities and opportunities to access learning and different experiences of learning when they get there. For example, even in well-resourced Western Europe, accessing adult learning is highly gendered, classed and raced. Research shows that of those women who do access training, it is usually the already highly educated who get the chance, and even amongst them, they find that they have to pay for their training out of their own pockets compared to many of the men who are sponsored by work. Women also have to cope with additional home and community responsibilities and they have less access to finances, which inhibits their learning possibilities. Poor and working class women's opportunities for learning are still more limited. Many women across social classes are subject to physical and emotional abuse and as Jenny Horsman (1999) elaborates, violence impacts learning and teaching in important ways.

Horsman's (2009) definition of violence is wide ranging, 'By violence I mean any way we violate the integrity and identity of another human being'. (See www.learningandviolence.net for articles on the subject). Her research which first

identified the pervasiveness of violence against women and how it impacted on their learning was undertaken in a rural part of Canada – a place popularly associated more with tranquillity than violence. In South Africa, as in many countries of the world, violence against women is widespread. It is reported that one in six women is in an abusive relationship in South Africa; one woman is killed by her partner every 6 days; a shocking 80% of rural women are victims of domestic violence and an estimated 500,000 women are raped every year (www.iss.co.za: accessed 20 January 2009). Levels of violence will impact all aspects of family and work life. Where levels of violence are so high, it may seem that we must put all energies into trying directly to end violence. As Horsman (2009: 9) says:

Although educational programmes seeking to prevent violence are definitely necessary, they are not sufficient. If we only focus on such programmes, the aftermath of past violence will continue to have impact on society and this will impact not only on low self-esteem and to learning failure, but also to ongoing cycles of violence. We need interventions which are both systemic and individual.

She argues that this is possible if we work within systems of education and training, changing both far reaching policies and day-to-day practices that enable people of all ages to participate in respectful, peaceful environments, where they can learn in community, developing curiosity and understanding about their own and other people's struggles. Through this, they can begin to experience success, increased self-esteem and greater connection with others. As she says, this can help the processes of healing wounds created through violence and other trauma.

Horsman's point is that given the extent of all forms of violence, it makes sense for educators to assume that learners have experienced violence in some form and that our teaching should take this into account. It leads to an understanding that a feminist sensibility, by women and men, which defends and respects the rights of all girls and women without qualification, needs to be the default position of educators. (African Feminist Charter November 2006). In an HIV and AIDS-saturated environment, we know that significantly more women are infected than men. This can be explained by both biology and social conditions. HIV is often spread through unwanted sexual intercourse or through other forms of gender subordination which limit the ability of girls and women to insist on safe sexual practices. Therefore, the vulnerability of girls and women is even starker and magnifies the importance of the need for a feminist sensibility which aspires to greater gender justice.

Girls, Boys, Women and Men, Learning Across the Life Span

The recent study by Schuller and Watson (2009) introduces the four life stages/transition points as a response to the demographic changes in the United Kingdom (UK). From an international perspective, the question of the changing demographics raises interesting, paradoxical issues for lifelong learning. A key observation in a middle income country like South Africa is the very large proportion of young people. The demographic profile is diametrically opposite to that of most of the

developed economies. For example, the 0–14-year olds in Australia are 20% of the population, Brazil 28%, India 33%, South Africa 32% and UK 18%. The 60-year olds plus are Australia 18%, Brazil 9%, India 8%, South Africa 7% and UK 21%. In addition, life expectancy at birth has been falling because of the HIV and AIDS pandemic in South Africa and in 2007 was 50 years. This compares with UK figures for 2004–2006 of 77 for men and 81 for women. These figures are also highly determined by social class and race/ethnicity; whereas middle class people's demographic profile in South Africa may be similar to UK, the majority of people who are poor will carry the burden of ill health and premature death (Walters 2010).

The most telling situation which challenges a notion of 'front end loading' of the education and training systems is the impact of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Steinberg (2008) shows how caring for the sick, dealing with the loss of economically active members of the family, mobilising to advocate and educate people around the epidemic, are all absorbing for many women, men and children in communities. There are more and more grandparents, and particularly grandmothers, who have to educate and support their grandchildren with their own children dying prematurely. This calls on social, economic and lifelong learning systems to support them to sustain themselves and their dependents.

At the same time, HIV and AIDS call into question what it means to be an 'adult' or more specifically an 'adult learner' aside from the notion of chronological age. The most significant dimensions in defining an 'adult' appear to be that adult learners carry 'adult responsibilities' through their economic, family or community commitments (e.g. Bourgeois et al. 1999: 3). They bring complex life experiences to the learning environments and their time is often very constrained precisely because of their multiple roles and responsibilities. The growing numbers of child-headed households, through loss of parents to AIDS or other illnesses, raise key questions as to who are 'adult', given that the children will be carrying 'adult responsibilities'. This then poses challenges for provision of learning opportunities for both children and adults. Contexts like this raise fundamental curricula questions for which capabilities are needed at each of the life stages to attain sustainable livelihoods. Therefore, researchers and adult education practitioners in the political South need to be wary of drawing down ideas too readily from curricula developed in UK-type contexts. In our workshops, we have women and men across a wide range of ages, and we facilitate communications, as best we can, across gender and age. Speaking inter-generationally and across gender differences is essential.

Sustainable Livelihoods

HIV and AIDS are essentially about life. An example which illustrates this is told by Heather Ferris, a community educator, who immersed herself as an action researcher within a poor community in Cape Town over a 6-month period. During this time, she was invited to develop a full-time, month-long, leadership development course for 17 unemployed women, who were working as community activists in their impoverished community. They wanted to help others who were also living in

poverty and confronting trauma through the loss of family and friends to AIDS. As Heather reflected in an interview with the author in January 2009:

Through spending several days a week, listening, engaging, and supporting the women and their organizations with as much care as I could muster, it soon became clear to me that HIV and AIDS is integral to life, and cannot be separated from achieving forms of sustainable livelihoods. This meant that the course needed to incorporate deeply personal issues relating to gender relations and healthy living; building capacities for running small businesses, from financial management, to marketing and communicating in English; organizational skills for planning and managing meetings and mobilizing communities; to knowledge of health and social welfare facilities, plus abilities to negotiate with local councilors. A central group assignment was to work together to analyze the needs in the community relating to HIV and AIDS and develop proposals to provide care to those who were infected.

The course illustrates the integral connections between personal confidence-building, civic skills and knowledge and economic activity which are all essential to sustaining life. Most importantly, it validated the centrality of experiencing 'being fully human' in a society ravaged by racism, classism and sexism. The integration of the heart, the head and the hands, which is emphasised within feminist popular education (Walters and Manicom 1996), was graphically illustrated through life-wide and life-deep learning which combines personal, economic, social and political elements. The centrality for the majority of people of foregrounding sustainable livelihoods in approaches to lifelong learning and education in poor communities is also well illustrated by Von Kotze (2009) in an article entitled, 'But what shall we eat?'

With these broad themes as a backdrop, I turn now to a more specific focus on 'the art and heart of the educator' as a key concern in HIV and AIDS saturated environments.

The Heart and Art of the Educator

In the last 3 years, in response to the context, we have designed and facilitated intensive 5 day continuing education courses for adult educators, community activists and care givers, from Southern Africa, ranging in ages from 21 to 70, which we have entitled 'The art and heart of the educator'. These courses focus on design and facilitation of learning processes in diverse, informal and formal settings, and foreground the importance of our own lifelong, life-deep and life-wide learning as 'educational practitioners'. I will begin by describing and elaborating the context and curriculum of the courses in order to tease out additional insights for lifelong learning.

Context: What's in a Name?

It is widely accepted that the current era of economic globalisation has hastened the process of the commodification of learning or what Mamdani (2007) calls the 'commercialisation of knowledge' that is transforming learning into a possession,

something to be traded for gain in the market-place. Happening at the same time – less visibly but nonetheless significantly – is the parallel processes of ‘learning as dispossession’, by which people are stripped not only of their individuality, but also of their very understanding of their own exploitation (Spencer 2007). Trowler (2001) describes how standardised units of learning are based on a market-place rationality in which knowledge is commodified and treated like money: it can be exchanged, transferred, ‘cashed in’ and assumed to be of equitable value irrespective of where and how it was ‘earned’. In South Africa, as in various other places governed by neo-liberal ideology, even the professional capabilities of educators have been commodified, as most graphically illustrated by the policy and practice to train and accredit assessors of learning programmes within ‘short courses’ of between 2 and 5 days, even when they have had no previous teaching experience. As this example testifies, professional competence often has been reduced to a set of ‘skills’ found in a ‘tool box’ which does not necessarily rely on the art and craft of an educator, honed over years which is integral to making sound professional judgements (Walters and Daniels 2009).

As a way of distinguishing ourselves and our understandings of what it takes to be an educator, particularly within an HIV and AIDS ravaged context, we entitled our course ‘The art and heart of the educator’, thus signalling that an effective educator requires much more than a ‘tool box’ of ‘skills’ – they need both ‘art’ and ‘heart’. However, we have had to accept that within the very constrained economic and social circumstances, educators, community activists and care givers, who are mainly women, have very limited time and resources to spend on their own continuing education. We have thus had to limit the course to 5 days, sometimes split into two parts, at venues that are easily accessible to the majority and which are inexpensive. While we have run some residential courses, which are preferred as they give participants more of a break from daily routines, this has not always been possible as many women cannot break away from their relentless domestic demands.

Curriculum: A Focus on the Art and Heart

During the workshop, participants reflect on and refine ‘the heart and art’ of facilitation and design. Opportunities for participants to practice designing and facilitating learning events are woven into the course. By the end, they agree that ‘the art is in the heart of the educator – you cannot have one without the other – as you can see from the spelling of “he(art)”!’.

For purposes of this chapter, I have decided to foreground the ‘heart’ which is a key notion within feminist popular education i.e. ‘seeing with the heart and speaking from the heart’. To see and speak from the heart refers to a focus on what matters to people; a path of learning that touches us at ‘the centre of our being’. No one can define this path for others, so one of the core aims of our pedagogy is to create space for the experience of stillness and deep listening, to encourage ‘mindfulness’ (Hyland 2010).

In our workshops, to set the scene for ‘seeing with the heart and speaking from the heart’, we ensure that there is the equipment available literally to sew red velvet hearts, which get filled with seeds. Seeing men and women, quietly and intensely concentrating on creating a heart, while also listening to serious discussion; hearing them talk with both excitement and contentment at their creative achievement; experiencing them holding the soft heart in their two hands as they lean forward sharing deeply emotional issues affecting their lives, is a useful way to bring ‘the heart’ into the centre of the workshop, using fun and creativity. These processes help to overcome senses of vulnerability and fear; to build trust and connection amongst the group which supports their abilities to share personal and sensitive issues and to learn more easily from one another.

The way we are using the notion of ‘the heart’ is to relate it to the spirit and to feelings. Eminent Buddhist psychologist John Wellwood (2002: 163) reminds us that in Buddhism heart and mind can be referred to by the same term (*chitta* in Sanskrit). Tibetan Buddhists refer to mind by pointing to their chests. Heart has nothing to do with sentimentality. Heart is the capacity to touch and be touched, to reach out and let in.

The course aspires to create a safe space to embrace the deep personal and communal concerns of each person by valuing mind, body and spirit equally in the activities; and encouraging silence, contemplation and reflection as a necessary part of each session. At the start of the course, facilitation of group norms which encourage deep listening, honesty and candidness, and courage to speak of that which is often not spoken, in an atmosphere of confidentiality, is very important to enable the creation of a safe container in which to work, play and be together.

As this course focuses on the educator, it emphasises the lifelong, life-wide and life-deep learning of the educators. The processes which we model for good facilitation echo many of those described by other colleagues’ work (e.g. Burke et al. 2002; Lopes and Thomas 2006; Lees 2008; Horsman 2009). Our own self-care and that of participants is seen to be central. In particular, we acknowledge that many of the participants have experienced violence, trauma and grief of various kinds, and an environment which recognises this reality is important. We understand *healing* in its multiple dimensions as central to pedagogy relating to people infected or affected by HIV and AIDS, where grief, loss, and trauma are ever-present.

Participants are introduced to a rudimentary understanding of ‘mindfulness’, which the Institute for Mindfulness in South Africa (IMISA 2010) describes as ‘simple in its essence, complex in its mechanisms, challenging in its practice, and transformative... mindfulness is a cohering human capacity, which is trainable through practice and which deepens self-knowing and connectedness’. As Simon Whitesman (IMISA 2010) elaborates, ‘The fundamental principles of cultivating awareness, kindness and non-judgement will deepen our connection to ourselvesthe deeper you connect to yourself, the less selfish you become’. Ways that we do this are to encourage awareness of the body through for example Capacitar (Cane 2000, 2005) forms of yoga and meditation which punctuate the programme. These body awareness exercises are introduced with cultural sensitivity as we cannot assume that all will relate to them equally. Participants begin to understand the

effects of trauma on their bodies and experience the cathartic value of working with their bodies. In the workshop, we remind participants that we can connect more deeply because of grief ‘as grief is full of heart, love and compassion’. We tend to freeze or harden against grief because it is so painful, and this manifests in our bodies. As my co-facilitator, Heather Ferris explains,

We encourage participants to practice the teachings that say, ‘Stay with the grief, see it as your link to all humanity’. In this way people begin to understand that grief is a doorway to life and hope. It’s important to stay with particularly strong emotions; the vulnerable open heart and loving mind and not harden over it (Pema Chödrön 2004: 33). We practice ways of breathing into the pain.

The first session each day focuses on quiet contemplation on issues of leadership and self-awareness and the last session is a reflection on the learning of the day in a ‘fish-bowl’ which enables participation by everyone. Through the workshop, participants are encouraged to journal, making observations and noting new insights for themselves. We also build in co-counselling activities which encourage deep listening to one another. Through these activities, the importance of self-knowledge by the participants, through quiet contemplation and critical reflective practice, is emphasised as crucial to being an effective facilitator.

In preparing for the activity of designing and facilitating learning interventions, various learning theories are taught, for example from Illeris (2008), O’Sullivan (1999), Taylor (2009) and Horsman (2009). They practice feminist popular educational approaches (Walters and Manicom 1996) which engage the heads, the hearts and the hands, like body sculpturing, and they ask ‘how do we engage the hearts of the people with whom we work’? This question is a constant reminder of the integration of mind, body and spirit in learning and teaching.

Several of the participants draw on their rich experiences within HIV and AIDS networks when designing and facilitating mini-workshops or learning events. One of the significant themes which emerges relates to sex and sexuality. It is clear that in different contexts, sexuality is addressed differently. A Malawian participant spoke about how in her ethnic group, young girls are inducted into sexual practices by older women and they are encouraged to see sex as pleasurable, not ‘as a service’ to their partner. The approach to sex and sexuality varies across cultures. There sometimes is a dynamic interchange amongst the older and younger participants. Those working with HIV and AIDS highlight the centrality of being able to work confidently with issues of sex and sexuality. This example illustrates the importance of the facilitators being able to work with deeply personal and often difficult issues.

The other themes that emerge relate to spirituality, heritage and culture, inter-generational relationships, importance of the facilitator ‘touching people’s hearts’ to encourage transformative behaviour, importance of working with boys and men, violence and trauma, health and healing. There is appreciation that the age range of participants, social class, cultural backgrounds, gender and degrees of wellness are all essential factors to be addressed when designing and facilitating successful programmes within an HIV- and AIDS-saturated environment. There was also recognition of the importance of opportunities to commune with nature in tranquil, peaceful, environments, especially for those who come from crowded,

noisy, busy township lives. This leads, for example, to drawing metaphors from nature by likening facilitation to a river, which is simultaneously soft and strong.

With this brief description of the ‘art and heart of the educator workshop’, within an HIV and AIDS saturated environment, and recognising the pervasiveness of injustice, poverty, disease, violence and trauma in many different places in the world, what can be gleaned to help to deepen theories and practices of lifelong learning?

Additional Insights

Pedagogy of Compassion

Prevalence of HIV and AIDS reminds educators of the fragility of health, well being and life itself. While HIV and AIDS are not unique in this way, its pervasiveness and, importantly, the politics around it, heighten educators’ awareness of the centrality of life, health and wellness. The context challenges us to re-think approaches to our professional practices. As educators, we are not only divorced from the environment but are also deeply affected by it ourselves. This emphasises the importance of self-knowledge, of being aware of our own points of strength and vulnerability, and of self care. If we are encouraging learners to be self-reflective and mindful, it means that we too need to engage in restorative practices of our own. It demands pedagogy of compassion – this is a term that has been used variously in situations of hardship, exploitation and oppression, such as racism, sexism and chauvinism of different kinds (Jansen 2008). While it is sometimes used in situations to build bridges with others across ethnic or religious divides, in this instance, I am using it to highlight compassion both for ourselves and others.

In working with deeply unsettling situations which many learners and educators inhabit, the line between facilitation and therapy can feel very porous. Educators are called on to tread carefully to create ‘learning sanctuaries’ (Lange 2009) – safe, nurturing spaces, which construct group norms carefully in which participants can reflect on their affective responses. At the same time, the intention of education is to challenge taken-for-granted understandings and provoke insights that will incite the tenuous and difficult steps of change. This brings into play the art of knowing when and how to intervene, to push, to hold back, to encourage and to challenge in ways which help people to stay connected to one another. These have important implications for facilitation and design of curricula in a diverse range of settings.

Hyland (2010: 518) has pointed out the criticisms of the ‘therapeutic turn’ by Ecclestone and Hayes (2008) and others. While these criticisms may have some currency in places like the UK, in South Africa and other low or middle income countries, I am inclined to concur with Hyland who suggests that the educational climate is seriously impoverished through dominance of the ‘skill-talk’ and ‘behaviourist competence outcomes’. The relationship between therapy and education has been a theme for a long time and the continuum between the two is one with which educators have to live, recognising the purposes of educational interventions,

learners' circumstances, and educators' strengths and limitations. In HIV and AIDS-saturated environments, as well as, for example, in situations of war, poverty, climatic catastrophes and violence, the need for people to have the resilience and capability to cope with the waves of trauma and grief requires a great deal of compassionate design and facilitation from educators as violence and trauma affect capacities to learn (Horsman 1999).

The use of contemplative techniques like meditation and mindfulness can help learners to go beyond a merely cognitive understanding of their responsibilities as citizens and to find an authentic motivation to serve both themselves and others. As Hyland (2010: 526) elaborates, quoting Thich Nhat Hanh, a world renowned Vietnamese Buddhist teacher, 'mindfulness involves attention to the present moment which is inclusive and loving and which accepts everything without judging or reacting'. As Hyland says, Kabat Zinn and associates have been largely responsible for transforming the original spiritual notion into a powerful and ubiquitous therapeutic tool based on forms of mediation and mindfulness practices.

Particularly from radical, feminist political positions, the contemplative practices can be troubling. Are these encouraging people to look inward, dissuading them from confronting the structural economic, social, political and cultural conditions that undergird social inequalities and injustices? Do contemplative practices stand in opposition to theoretical analysis and social action for social justice?

There are various belief systems and traditions, some of which are encapsulated in a notion of 'engaged spirituality', which would argue that it is the very connection of deep personal and social transformation that enables change to occur. Engaged spirituality encompasses people committed to social change from all the major faith traditions as well as people who refer to themselves as spiritual but not religious; a kind of liberation theology that so influenced Paulo Freire and the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, guides their form of engaged spirituality. The theme of spirituality also mirrors a significant trend in contemporary feminism which maintains that spiritual practice has the transformative power critically needed by radical and feminist political projects at this time (Fernandes 2003; Alexander 2005). Bell hooks (2010: 150) sees spirituality as providing 'the seemingly magical force that allows for the radical openness' needed for intellectual growth and transformative learning.

As O'Sullivan (1999) argues, we cannot adequately and effectively engage in the project of social change without addressing the spiritual dimension of our world and universe. The connection between the individual and collective is therefore seen as intimate as the deeper the compassion we have for ourselves the deeper our compassion for other life forms.

Individual/Collective

The recognition of interconnectedness between the individual and the collective is certainly not new. However, in many progressive political contexts, the collective subject has most often been privileged. Democratic organisations of civil society

and broader political movements have been foregrounded sometimes at the expense of the individual. Given that the grand narratives of how to achieve social justice for the majority no longer have the persuasive weight that they once had, insights for lifelong learning that arise within the context of HIV and AIDS, and other conditions of trauma and violence, challenge the tendency to privilege the 'collective' over the 'individual'. What is highlighted in our work is that the privileging of the one over the other is neither necessarily helpful nor clear-cut. The practice of 'placing the heart at the centre' and 'touching people's hearts' through the design and facilitation encourages a tendency for people to open up and move from a preoccupation either with the collective or with individualised concerns to feeling compassion for and solidarity with others. 'Placing the heart at the centre' is inclined to create concentric circles outwards – like a pebble being thrown into a still pond – from the individual to the collective.

Life in poverty and AIDS-affected communities involves daily struggles to meet basic needs to find meaning and life-giving energy to meet each moment. People cannot easily do this alone and the reminder that we have 'spiritual intelligence' that connects us to something vast and greater than ourselves brings comfort and hope. Singing and dancing in groups, deep sharing, praying and meditating, participating in healing exercises (such as Capacitar) and often in silence, the feeling of solidarity is palpable. People are relieved to discover they are not alone. It is in our humanness that goes beyond religion, culture, class, age, race and gender that we feel the connections with one another. It is these moments of non-separation which we believe contribute to healing.

In our workshops moving from individual to small group to large group processes, helps to build confidence and keep the heart focus for the day. How, in one workshop, the group responded to the news of the death to AIDS of a feminist activist in Zimbabwe 1 day during the workshop provides an example of this movement from individual to larger group compassion. Through the processes at the start of the day, the harsh realities of ongoing personal and political struggles were embraced and held to enable those most directly affected to be supported and for others to keep in view the magnitude of the individual and collective challenges and the importance of solidarity with one another.

A context which has present within it, grief, loss, trauma of various kinds, cannot privilege the individual or the collective; they nest within one another. The key is to set a tone of 'heart' that pays attention to the human beings gathered together. This integral container seems to invite and enable deeper learning.

Towards a Conclusion

I have argued that lifelong learning in the context of HIV and AIDS, and related situations of trauma, poverty and violence, has to include people across all ages; must connect with the 'life-wide' social and economic concerns of women, men, boys and girls; and must tap into the intimate which is deeply personal and 'life-deep'. Learning within an HIV and AIDS context cannot ignore any aspect of

people's lives individually or collectively. Jenny Horsman (1999, 2009) highlights the centrality of violence in many societies around the world and its impact on learning and how essential it is to acknowledge this when designing and facilitating learning. Where violence is endemic for the majority of the population, educators and learners need to understand how to work with trauma (their own or others), if they are to overcome the enormous barriers to successful learning which violence of all kinds can cause. It means recognising the role of spirituality which is educationally, ethically or politically invested and involves self- and social transformation. As Fernandes (2003: 109) sees it, 'spirituality is linked to a continual process of learning and understanding the world as well as the historical and contemporary forms of social justice'. For educators, 'our art is in our hearts', and this has significance for our engagement in a wide range of lifelong learning contexts.

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