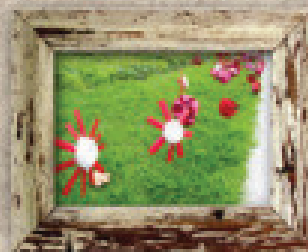
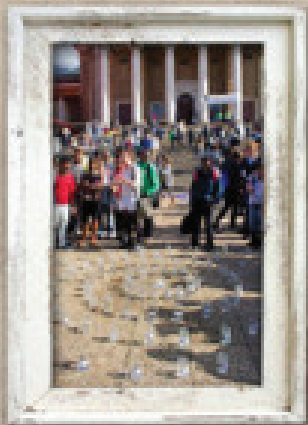


'HOW DOES WHAT I DO NOW INFLUENCE WHAT I DO TONIGHT?'

An innovative, integrated approach to developing HIV/AIDS engagement among 17 to 25 year olds.

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BACKGROUND

Institutions need to consider the channels through which knowledge is generated to produce new thinking about HIV and AIDS education that influence safer behaviours among youth. One such example is of a project designed by the Michaelis School of Fine Art and HAICU (HIV/AIDS and Inclusivity Coordination Unit) at the University of Cape Town. The project developed in 2012 (and repeated in 2013) involved first year fine art students creating art installations about HIV stigma and risk among students. These pieces were different to dominant HIV/AIDS messages in South Africa and created safe spaces to start conversations about the perception of the disease. This paper shows what outcomes were generated and indicates the role universities can play in shaping the rhetoric in AIDS prevention work among vulnerable youth.

METHODS

HAICU and The Michaelis School of Fine Art collaborated to create a curriculum project initiated in 2012 and revised and rolled out in 2013 that taught art students about both HIV and socially responsive art. The result of the process was a HIV communication campaign for all UCT students by students. The first year fine art students were lectured about HIV/AIDS stigma as well as relevant contemporary artistic projects. The class was divided into 8 groups and each group created temporary installations that tried to challenge HIV stigma within the UCT community. Students received feedback on how artworks operate in relation to public space and viewer participation as well as how the artworks can act as communicative gestures or tools to encourage desired behaviour changes amongst the student population.

The artworks was installed at the Jameson Place for the duration of 1 day, in an open space on the main campus during lunch time. Students going about their daily routine interacted with the art and engaged with the UCT HIV/AIDS peer educators and creators of the artworks. A focus group was held with the art students to discuss the key aspects of this project.

RESULTS

The data was analysed for themes using grounded theory, to allow the researchers to ascertain the key components. The responses showed that the art students grappled with the meaning of living with HIV in a complex way which allowed for insights that may not have resulted from a more traditional and didactic lecture. The students also learnt about their role as social commentators.

What did you learn from the projects in HIV/AIDS?

A lot of people that you interact with on a daily basis might be HIV positive. It is my opening to realize that.

To learn that people actually look down and stereotype people on campus, wow! This project actually brought it into our everyday [lives]...It was quite nice as it put it in a personal perspective.

What did you learn from this project in relation to art and the issue under discussion?

This project was trying to illustrate that the artist's role is not one only of solitary confinement within the studio space. It also of social responsibility, to react to these social conditions and illustrate that further for the public to encourage further awareness and conversations about the topic.

I found it really hard to convey the message in art. I thought it is that I am not really exposed to AIDS...and I didn't experience it myself as an artist.

Their lives are exactly the same. Everyone has the same thing in the cupboard - except the ARV. We were trying to show the link between someone who is positive and someone who is negative, to show people that they are not different, they are not supposed to be ostracised....

What do you think about using art to educate people?

Art makes it accessible... People were talking, why is it there? It was very subtle, but people were talking.

Texts are finite - Art makes you think, makes you engage with it.

What was it like to prepare the art and engage with the topic at hand?

Expressions of the people passing by, they were wondering what is going on?... How does music represent AIDS. How music does represent stigma? People were walking calmly by. Oh wait, should I stop on it? And 'Is it right to stop on it?' Some people walked by and then realised and went back to it. Let them form their own links and meanings.

CONCLUSIONS

This project demonstrated how organically constructed knowledge formed through young artists expressing themselves and educating others in non-didactic structures, with minimal resources, can facilitate the understanding of factors that influence behaviour. Data from the evaluation provides inputs for scaling up the project to other youth programmes.



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