

# Curriculum from below: bringing Community Education into existence



A report to the Programme for Support to Pro-Poor Policy Development

Centre for Integrated Post-school Education and Training,  
Nelson Mandela University

May 2018

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Acknowledgements: The Centre for Integrated Post-School Education and Training (CIPSET), Nelson Mandela University thanks the Programme for Support to Pro-poor Policy Development (PSPPD) for their financial support for this project. We would also like to thank Farrell Hunter, DVV-international for funding policy retreats and popular booklets that added to the formulation of these Policy Issues.

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This publication forms part of the Research and Engagement Programme of the Centre for Integrated Post-School Education and Training (CIPSET), Nelson Mandela University. This publication is funded by the Programme for Support to Pro-Poor Policy Development (PSPPD), an EU-funded research and capacity building initiative within the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation. The ideas, opinions or policy recommendations expressed in this publication are strictly those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent and should not be reported as those of the funder.

Published in 2018 by CIPSET.

**Acknowledge us as follows:**

CIPSET, 2018. *Curriculum from below: bringing Community Education into existence*. Port Elizabeth: Centre for Integrated Post-School Education and Training, Nelson Mandela University



## **Abstract**

This report seeks to explore the work of the Community Education Programme through the lens of curriculum. It documents the process of curriculum design from lived experience in local communities. It argues for an approach to curriculum as praxis – intentional intellectual and practical work to construct an educational space for resistance and social change. It proposes a process of curriculum design that speaks to alternative social relations based on a new conception of the relationship between education, work and society.

# Contents

1	Introduction .....	1
2	Background .....	2
3	Methodology.....	4
3.1	Community-based Participatory Action Research.....	4
3.2	The social context of our work .....	5
3.3	Community researchers.....	9
4	Curriculum from below .....	11
4.1	Preparing for CPAR.....	11
4.2	Doing community-based participatory action research .....	11
4.3	Sharing our findings.....	17
4.4	Structuring and sequencing learning activities.....	20
4.5	Policy dialogue.....	21
5	Findings.....	22
5.1	Working from lived experience.....	22
5.2	Critical pedagogy .....	22
5.3	Knowledge .....	23
5.4	Language.....	23
5.5	Fostering possibilities for action.....	24
6	Conclusions.....	24
7	Bibliography .....	25

# 1 Introduction

This report is a preliminary reflection on the process of curriculum making in the Community Education Programme (CEP) at the Centre for Integrated Post-school Education and Training (CIPSET), Nelson Mandela University. The report sets out key arguments in the debate about curriculum that starts from lived experience as opposed to a curriculum based on systematised knowledge. This reflective report describes in detail the process of the development of curriculum from the lived experience of marginalised and excluded communities. The report also explores the policy implications for non-formal community education.

Whilst our work has also looked at curriculum connected to productive and socially useful activities and from social movement interests, this is not the focus of this report.



*Community educators reflect on their experience of education*

## 2 Background

At the end of 2013, the Department of Higher Education and Training published the White Paper for Post-school Education and Training. The new policy led to the establishment of Community Colleges, a new institutional form based on Public Adult Learning Centres. Community Colleges were to continue offering GETC and Senior Certificate programmes and in addition expand the programme choices for prospective adult learners by providing a new National Senior Certificate for Adults (NASCA) and adding new vocational and skills-development programmes, and non-formal programmes. The White Paper adds that:

*“The community colleges should draw on the strengths of the non-formal sector – particularly its community responsiveness and its focus on citizen and social education – in order to strengthen and expand popular citizen and community education.” (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013, p. xii)*

Thus, whilst the White Paper acknowledges the need for community education, its primary aim is on job-focused education. The principal purpose of the post-school education system is seen as the development of marketable skills for the formal economy and of entrepreneurial skills for self-employment. “Everyone should be able to make a living for themselves and contribute skills to a developing economy” (ibid., p, 8). In doing so, it puts forward the argument that the role of education in society is the advancement of the national economy by developing the competitiveness of industry and by addressing poverty and unemployment through the development of skills to support sustainable livelihoods, self-employment, or the establishment of cooperatives.

This position has been much criticised as commodifying education and people and as advocating as a universal truth, the claim that investment in people through skills development not only brings an economic return for industry, but also increases employment and earning rates, and possibilities for self-employment, thus addressing unemployment and inequality. (Motala & Treat, 2014). This instrumentalist argument ignores the value of education outside waged labour and disregards how the crises of capitalism drive unemployment (Rubeson, 2005; Motala & Vally, 2014; Vally & Motala, 2014; Tett, 2017; Baatjes, 2017). Klees (2017) argues that unemployment is not a worker-supply problem, but a structural problem of capitalism.

In many ways the conceptualisation of community education in existing policy is contradictory.

With the focus on second chance education, government hopes to draw into education the 18 million youths and adults (Nzimande, 2017) previously pushed out of basic education, by expanding both access and choice. Whilst the driving motivation is what Fitzsimons (2015) refers to as ‘labour market re-activation’, further aims are addressing the historical and ongoing class, racialised, gender-based, geographical inequality in access to schooling, and facilitating a “route out of poverty for individuals” (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013, p. 5). An underlying assumption of this view of education, is that key drivers to the problems of unemployment, poverty and inequality lie in the nature of education and can be resolved through educational reforms that ensure equality of educational opportunity for all South Africans. Such a view obscures capitalist social relations in lifelong learning and work: it is capital’s exploitation of labour in its drive for profit that produces the need for skilling, reskilling, and specific forms of knowledge and it is also the profit motive which renders majority of people as disposable. (Harvey, 2014).

In the sphere of non-formal community education, the White Paper’s conceptualisation of community education at times employs a narrow concept of empowerment: community education is about the knowledge of “how to deal with government departments or commercial

enterprises such as banks” (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013, p. 10), or “will have to link directly with the work of public programmes to provide appropriate skills and knowledge” (ibid., p, 22). Community education in this view becomes individual empowerment through the skills to engage business and government departments and to participate in government programmes. A danger that exists in such forms of empowerment, is that they push the responsibility to engage down to individuals, whilst the empowerment agenda remains largely unnegotiable. In this way empowerment is disconnected from a critique of existing power relations and the articulation of an alternative view of society. (Shaw, 2011).

At the same time, the White Paper also situates colleges “within communities” in a way that “they will contribute to local needs and local development, building social agency and social cohesion.” (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013, p. 22). In doing this, the White Paper argues that Community Colleges should, “build on the experiences and traditions of community and people’s education developed by non-formal, community-based and non-governmental organisations over many decades.” (ibid., p, 10).

From this perspective, it is possible to envisage a community education which draws from historical, emancipatory, community-based roots, and which is positioned as a public good, benefiting society rather than servicing the labour market.

People’s education introduced a view of the educational process that is political, based on a systematic critique of ‘bantu education’ and of the necessity to construct people’s education as an alternative system to be “controlled by and to advance the interests of the mass of the people” (Kruss, 1988, p. 19). Drawing on Freirean thinking, the purpose of people’s education was the development of critical consciousness, which “prepares people for full participation in all social, political or cultural spheres of society.” (Mkhatshwa 1985, in Kruss, 1988, p. 12). Harley (2015) argues that

*“People’s Education was consciously about more than confronting the state’s race-based policies; it was about envisaging an alternative economic society as well, a society rooted in Marxist humanism.”*

Working from this tradition, a number of principles can be elaborated to inform community education. Community education:

- Is a political process that critiques and makes visible the existing arrangements of power in society, including that of capitalism
- Is based on the assumption that all people are equal, because they share a common humanity (Harley, 2015).
- Enables the interest of the ‘mass of the people’ to surface through wide participation in “community based and community devised alternatives” (Hawarden 1986, in Kruss, 1988, p. 9)
- Enables new positions and alternatives to emerge that address the social allocation of power
- Makes possible the development of critical consciousness

The contradictory views of community education in policy mean that the possibility of building a progressive community education exists simultaneously with the danger to close down alternative forms of community education. It is this reality, that gave urgency to our objective to build in practice and explore from this practice, the prospects for a community education which encourages the development of civic agency; solidaristic forms of organisation and work that lie outside of the domination of people and nature; and in socially and ecologically useful community knowledge (Senekal, 2015).

### 3 Methodology

#### 3.1 Community-based Participatory Action Research

We have used Community-based Participatory Action Research as a research and educational methodology to support the development of non-formal education programmes with communities. Our research proposal to the Department of Higher Education and Training argued that:

*CPAR assumes that those who have been systematically denied education or have been excluded, carry specifically revealing wisdom about the history, structure, consequences and fracture points in unjust social arrangements. It sees all participants as knowers, learners, and researchers - all have the authority to interrogate and construct knowledge. It therefore embodies a democratic commitment to break the monopoly on who holds knowledge and for whom social research should be undertaken.*

*CPAR deliberately inverts who frames research questions, designs methods, interpretation and products. It propels into prominence the role of the marginalised as architects of critical enquiry – the originators of knowledge for social change and collective praxis. The ability to do research on one’s social world is considered a basic human right – the right to research; or the right to the tools through which any citizen can systematically increase that stock of knowledge which they consider most vital to their survival as human beings and their claims as citizens.*

Working from this perspective, extends traditional qualitative research practice. Research becomes a collective undertaking, with researchers using a range of critical approach and associated methods to support their inquiry. Researchers are more likely to be positioned as insiders. CPAR connects the process of inquiry at multiple points to critical reflective dialogue and is “poised to inquire and act”. (Cammarota & Fine, 2008, p. 5) The presentation of research findings can take a variety of forms. Such knowledge forms the basis for renewed cycles of reflective dialogue and action. It uses a critical epistemology that “redefines knowledge as actions in pursuit of social justice.” (ibid., p. 6).



*Workshop to prepare for transect walks to investigate community and environment*

## 3.2 The social context of our work

### 3.2.1 The sites for our work

Our work has been situated in urban neighbourhoods surrounding the Missionvale Campus of the Nelson Mandela University.

We have worked with community participants from two informal settlements Ramaphosa established on an old waste dumping site and Rolihlahla, an informal settlement that developed on land initially owned by the university and then sold to the municipality. Two communities, Veeplaas and Soweto-on-Sea were informal settlements established during apartheid along the flood plain of the Chatty river and which has been upgraded to formal housing in the past fifteen to twenty years.

All sites include households that are amongst the poorest in the Nelson Mandela Metro and in all the areas unemployment is high. Services in the informal settlement areas are limited to the provision of water at communal standpipes and a bucket system or pit latrines for human waste removal, whilst basic services are provided in the two other areas.

### 3.2.2 Demographics and Living Conditions

The table below sets out key statistics for the NMBM metropolitan area (StatsSA, n.d.). Whilst the population has grown somewhat between 2001 and 2011, and the average household size has declined slightly, the number of households has grown considerably over ten years. The unemployment rate shows a decline between 2001 and 2011, but this figure excludes everyone who has become discouraged and is no longer looking for work. The number of people, who are not in employment at all, will be considerably higher. Young people are most likely to be without employment. Access to education has improved marginally but vast numbers of citizens remain with incomplete formal schooling. Living conditions, with the exception of refuse collection, have improved steadily too.

Key Statistics for NMBM	2011	2001
Total population	1,152,115	1,005,779
Young (0-14)	25,5%	26,2%
Working Age (15-64)	68,5%	68,5%
Elderly (65+)	6%	5,3%
Number of households	324,292	260,799
Average household size	3,4	3,7
Female headed households	40,6%	38,6%
Dependency ratio	46%	45,9%
Growth rate	1,36% (2001-2011)	0,73% (2001-2011)
Unemployment rate	36,6%	46,4%
Youth unemployment rate	47,3%	56,3%
No schooling aged 20+	3%	6,8%
Higher education aged 20+	12%	8,9%
Matric aged 20+	30,5%	24,8%
Formal dwellings	87,2%	75,2%
Housing owned/paying off	61,4%	59,4%
Flush toilet connected to sewerage	87,4%	77,6%
Weekly refuse removal	82,9%	86,1%
Piped water inside dwelling	74,1%	47%
Electricity for lighting	90,5%	75,2%

### 3.2.3 Settlement histories

*Ramaphosa* developed next to and on top of what was a municipal waste disposal site for townships that fell under the apartheid structure of the iBhayi Municipality. The site was situated at the edge of a natural wetland system that drained into the Chatty River. At the site, the iBhayi municipality compacted household and industrial waste, together with earth, rocks and building rubble and abandoned the site after community protests. The wetland system is bordered by industry, a large set of single men's quarters for municipal migrant workers and by working class housing. A primary school and crèche separated middle class housing in New Brighton from the waste disposal site.

Today the area is an informal settlement with minimal services. In January 2013, 300 families lost all their possessions when a fire burnt down their shacks. People remain living here despite the hardships, because the area is close to work opportunities, schools and health facilities.

This is how community researchers explained settlement and living conditions:

*This area was a municipal landfill long before 1994 and it stopped being used as a landfill because people complained about the smell and the health hazards it causes...People living in this area invaded the land illegally. The municipality tried to stop the people from invading the land but people refused to be stopped.*

*The place [Ramaphosa-Chris Hani] is a very over populated informal settlement made up of very old houses (shacks) that are built from zinc, wood and hardboard. There is no infrastructure, people are using the bucket system and they fetch water from communal taps (Ramaphosa; Living on a Landfill)*

*Ramaphosa kwakuyindawo yokulahlela khona inkunkuma ziinkampani ezahluka-hlukeneyo kwaye namacandelo karhulumente. (Ramaphosa was a place where rubbish was dumped by different companies and government departments) (Ramaphosa; Ramaphosa)*



*Access road leading into Ramaphosa settlement. In the background are the buildings of the Struandale campus of Port Elizabeth TVET College*

*Rolihlahla* informal settlement was established on ground that belonged to Vista University now the Nelson Mandela University. The settlement is bordered by the Mandela University's Missionvale campus, a graveyard, new RDP houses and the busy national road to Uitenhage. Children cross the national road daily to get to local primary and high schools and road accidents at crossings are a frequent occurrence. The settlement is on a steep hill and access by vehicle into the settlement is difficult. This compromises access for services like refuse collection and also makes access for sanitation workers difficult. Accordingly, most households use pit latrines, which sometimes collapse and overflow when the soil becomes saturated after heavy rains. Fire trucks too have difficulty accessing the site when fires occur and residents attempt to control

fires themselves (Sobuwa, 2013). Households are earmarked for resettlement at Joe Slovo, about ten to 15km away. Residents are demanding relocation to serviced sites and there has been conflict between the DA and the ward committee structure which represents the community over the management of the relocation process.

Community researchers describe the area:

*Xolisile Ngqomva (age 26 years) lives in a 3 room shack with 7 residents. The house does not have windows they used a piece of cardboard to close the windows and they use a MacGyver stove to cook food for the family. No-one is working, they don't have [authorised] electricity. (Rolihlahla; Since 1999...)*

*This is the story of Mrs Nomvula Ndabane who lives in 2VTO 255, Rolihlahla. She is the mother of two children, living with them and her husband in a two-room house. They are unemployed and are only surviving through child support grants. They live in a house with no toilet, electricity or water. They are using the neighbour's toilet, because they do not have the material to build their own. They are using a radio which works with small batteries. They are using paraffin and candles to light and cook. Their shack is built from different materials, thus when rain comes, they are not safe. There is a dumping site in front of their yard which forces them to close the door, due to the bad smell. And when there is wind, they are not safe, because the road is grave, and the dust affects their eyes. (Rolihlahla; Dumping Site In front of Yard)*



*Young boys walking home from school in Rolihlahla informal settlement*

*Soweto-on-Sea* By the 1960s the apartheid government had demolished informal dwellings in Korsten, relocating more than 40 000 people to New Brighton. The enormous pressure on existing housing stock and more forced removals saw Soweto-on-Sea established in the mid-1970s. Soon it became one of the largest informal settlements and continued to grow as households rented out space in back yards and people settled outside the iBhayi demarcated areas closer to the river. (Berry, et al., 2004)

After the floods of 1983, the Cape Administration started moving 500 families off the 1 in 50-year flood zone to a transitional settlement in what was to become Motherwell Township (White, 1984). Initially aggressive policing prevented re-settlement, but soon people re-settled the area.

In 1992, in-situ upgrading of the area began which resulted in high density development with individual housing units on very small plots and no or very limited public spaces. Estimates from 1994 indicate that the area was home to about 80 000 people (Solomon & Viljoen, 2003). In one area, the pressure on land saw, people settling on a graveyard dating back to 1947. During the upgrade, contractors, establishing sewage and storm water drainage, allegedly “dug up some of the graves that were in our yards and threw them in the river in order to lay sewage pipes. Coffins were removed with bulldozers and human remains were all over the place.” A community member told a reporter (Sizani, 2011). From the year 2000, government started building RDP homes in the area and more recently, a rectification process was started to improve sub-standard homes. Residents say contractors simply dump large amounts of building rubble from this process along the river bank.

Community researchers tell the story of forced removals:

*The story is based in Soweto-on-Sea in the area called Khiwane. The people who came to live in this area were removed from Korsten and the place was called Mgababa then. In 1976 the area name was changed to Soweto-on-Sea by the new isibonda called Ferreira (white guy). People where living in the informal settlement then. In 2000 the RDP houses were built. (Soweto-on-Sea; The area called Khiwane)*



*Street corner in Soweto-on-Sea, where dumped building rubble has morphed into a rubbish dump*

*Veeplaas* was formally established in 1879, initially as agricultural garden plots. Within a relative short space of time the number of dwellings, primarily wood and iron, increased dramatically (Berry, et al., 2004). Following these early beginnings, the development of *Veeplaas* followed a similar pattern to that of Soweto on Sea. Residents settling here were primarily people unable to find housing with the Port Elizabeth township areas with a small number of migrants from the former homelands and displaced farmworkers. Swilling estimated that 85% of housing for Africans was built before 1970s and 63% before 1960 (Swilling, 1994, p. 86). Water was available from communal standpipes and sanitation.

*Veeplaas* families, as at Soweto-on-Sea, were moved off the floodplain after the huge flood of 1983 to Motherwell Township (White, 1984) and here too, people soon re-settled the area. The in-situ upgrading of 1992 saw few families relocated from the area. The upshot was that *Veeplaas* houses were built on very small plots and there are very limited public spaces and very narrow roads between houses. As in Soweto-on-Sea, the area has seen the rectification of houses and dumping of building rubble along the embankment and on the floodplain. Attempts to use

the floodplain for recreational activities were only partially successful and the area has been resettled to some extent. The floodplain remains an important grazing area for families who keep cattle.

*They are four living in the house. No one is working and they have to walk about 30 minutes to the bus stops and taxi rank. To survive, they depend on the R310 per month from the social grant for her granddaughter; nothing else brings in income. (Veeplaas; Family lives in one room)*

*Ma' Msimang has had cows since 1976. She said: "I'm doing this out of love and passion for the livestock and my parents were stock farmers so that's where I learned and gained experience of farming"...[the herd] was [started] a long time ago, a man wanted to buy a car, then he sold them the cow so that's how the farming started – with one cow." (Veeplaas, The story of Ma'Msimang's cows)*



*Ma'Msimang's cattle grazing along the Chatty river. Building rubble dumps along sections of the wetland shows in the background*

### 3.3 Community researchers

Identifying community-based participants to join our small band of university-based researchers and students, required several meetings with managers, at what was then Public Adult Learning Centres<sup>1</sup>, and with community-based organisations. We consciously worked to recruit participants outside of party political ward-based structures. We were keen to develop a non-sectarian group of people, who might have different (or no) party political affiliations, and who joined the programme, because of a curiosity about, and interest in community education.

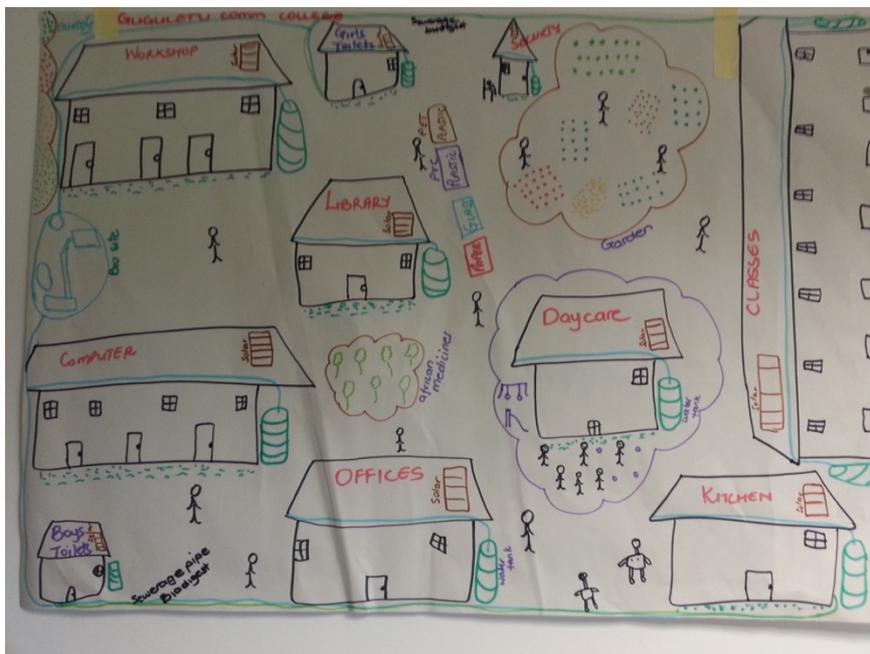
Our work started with developing a collective of 25 community-based and university researchers. A few community members joined as volunteers from a local environmental justice organisation, whilst the majority were learners at PALCs in neighbourhoods surrounding the Missionvale campus of Nelson Mandela University. Some were seasoned political and community activists, and others were ordinary community members, whose organisational experience came from participating in a church group or in a stokvel group. With the exception of three members, the all community researchers had incomplete schooling and were keen on exploring alternative approaches to education.

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<sup>1</sup> Public Adult Learning Centres are now known as Community Education & Training Centres. They were transferred to the Department of Higher Education & Training in April 2015 and incorporated into the newly proclaimed Community Colleges.

A key focus of our initial work aimed at investigating our own experience of education, interrogating what was then the Green Paper on post-schooling and formulating a vision of the kind of education we hoped to build. This process led to the development of a Community Education Manifesto (Community Education Programme, 2014) and to us making short digital stories that presented our life histories. The themes that surfaced from these stories included gender relations; the experience of being pushed out of schooling; and care work for sick and disabled family members.

Building a collective with strong participation as a challenge to the common hierarchies of power in top-down systems of research and educational administration, was critical to the CPAR process. It required a real commitment to creating and recreating the space for democratic participation. See also our discussion of participation in the process of curriculum making (Eccles, et al., 2015).



*Community researchers' vision for community education in a community school. An earth-friendly ecological design unites learning with productive work and community care work. Resources such as day-care for children enable active participation from women.*



*Brainstorming issues to include in the Community Education Manifesto*

## 4 Curriculum from below

We were interested to understand what issues and problems members of local communities deemed important, what situations or circumstances they would like to change, and how one could develop a non-formal community education programme from the experience and lives of community members:

*We aimed to work with people who are excluded from the labour market and wanted our work to talk to their lived experience. We wanted to understand from the perspective of people who are marginalised and excluded, what knowledge and skills they consider worthwhile learning in building a more equal, just and sustainable society. (Senekal, 2015)*

The CPAR process incorporated a number of activities that loosely mirrored the Freirean process of co-investigation, coding and decoding in the development of a learning programme, and its accompanying reflection-dialogue-action cycle as described by Kirkwood and Kirkwood (2011) and by Freire. (Freire, 2000; 1985). Our investigative approach hinged around three linked questions through which our activities cycled:

- What is the world like?
- Why is the world as it is?
- What could be done about it?

### 4.1 Preparing for CPAR

During the *preparatory phase*, we developed a draft training manual with basic research protocols and ‘trained’ ourselves in how to ‘do’ participatory action research by conducting our first open-ended CPAR process and subsequent community education event where we presented our findings to adult educators and community members. From this first CPAR process we identified four broad generative themes<sup>2</sup> that we wanted to explore in our work: environmental justice; food and hunger; children and families; and critical citizenship. Subsequently, we agreed to work in two broad thematic areas: environmental justice, and food and hunger. Under the theme, environmental justice we conducted two large scale CPAR processes that investigated energy sources and access in the community; and environmental health and waste in the community. Our work around food and hunger led to a CPAR process investigating the possibilities for productive socially useful work connected to community schools.

### 4.2 Doing community-based participatory action research

Through our various CPAR actions, our process clarified. This is now set out below.

We started the CPAR process with *community mobilisation*, holding meetings with local political and community-based organisations, and talking about our objectives for the research on community radio stations

We conducted walks along a pre-planned route through local communities. We used typographical maps and the experience and knowledge of community members to plan the routes. During these *transect walks*, we took photographs, interviewed community members and used our senses to observe situations and circumstances we considered interesting or that were pointed out by community members.

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<sup>2</sup> Embedded in the lives of community members and of great concern to them, generative themes are concrete representations of complex ‘knots’ of ideas, concepts, values, feelings and problems and the possibilities for change they represent. Generative themes enable problem posing and critical dialogue and the opening of space for social action

We documented these walks *writing fieldnotes* immediately after completing the walk, most often at a field site in the local community where we walked. Community researchers would describe in as much rich detail as they can situations that were most interesting or important to them. They added to these descriptions, how they experienced what they saw and felt and what questions or thoughts emerged for them from this situation. We would repeat these walks in other neighbourhoods.



*Community researchers write fieldnotes in the hall of a church in Veeplaas*

After a short interval (usually enough time to print photographs and type up field notes) we would meet to do a more detailed data analysis. Whilst it is acknowledged that analysis started during the documentation process, a more detailed and intentional process supported data analysis over two or three further days: first in an area-based group and then in a plenary group. These two steps were part of *coding* the data thematically.

We worked in small groups of two to three people focusing on a neighbourhood (if our investigation did not look at a pre-determined issue in detail) or an issue (if the investigation was focused on a specific broad issue, such as community access to electricity or waste in the community).



*Small groups code photographs*

On the first day we meet to “sort” our picture-based data. We would look through photographs by neighbourhood or issue and write short descriptions. We would then group the photographs thematically and write labels for the themes. Bigger groups formed and looked across the themed photographs, removing duplicate labels, and replacing their labels with a preferred label from another group. They would also select what they considered the most “important” photographs – the photographs that would most strongly enable someone else to recognise the issue they want to highlight. Throughout the process, the group would engage in dialogue with one another, exploring each other’s interpretations and views and at times contesting views. The

group would then display (against a wall or on a display board<sup>3</sup>) their final data set of photographs and thematic labels. They would place the discarded photographs in a corner of their display. Then it was time for all the small groups to gather as a single research group. Each small group guided the rest of the group through their data sets.

A more structured *dialogue* with the whole group followed. The group discussed similarities and differences across the smaller data sets. They used ‘affect’ to reach towards understanding each other’s point of view or to develop a contrasting view by reflecting on what surprised, delighted, or shocked them, or was affirmed for them in the presentations across the groups. The group developed their ideas in small groups and each small group wrote their views on cards (with a single issue per card) which was then stuck on a wall and thematically sorted by the whole group. At times the group used ranking techniques (individuals voting by placing a small sticker or tick) on themes and ideas that they believed provided the strongest description or explanation.

The next day, researchers would connect their field narratives to a photograph or a group of photographs. They would use the photograph to review their narratives, extending or focusing the original narrative. They worked in small groups again, reconsidering their field narratives from a range of perspectives of different groups in the community. Researchers read their narratives to one another. Group members listened and offered feedback using techniques that helped the writer structure her or his narrative. In some groups, we used role play to explore different views and consider what the researcher’s story would look like if told by another role player. Researchers again revised and/or expanded their narratives. We organised these narratives thematically too and added them to the photographs.



*Small groups share and interrogate field-based narratives*

We developed another level of analysis on the third day, by looking across the narratives and the photographs. We asked what are the ‘stories’ and ideas that lie behind the groupings of photographs and photo stories? We considered what might be missing from our stories. We reviewed our decision-making about what photos we discarded.

Whilst the process of sorting or coding initiated the process of naming the world by describing what the world is like; *decoding* started when we began to look at how our descriptive analysis might help us develop an understanding of why the world is the way it is. We asked what other views are there of the issue at hand? Who holds these views? What ideas or concerns inform their views? What power does this group hold to shape the accepted (dominant) story in and of the community? We also asked what knowledge we could add to our emerging story by looking at information from other knowledge sources.

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<sup>3</sup> We painted doors with white emulsion paint and connected these as portable display board. This ‘technology’ borrowed from student art exhibitions, allowed us to work easily in community spaces that are not normally set up for education. See pictures on page 12.



*Decoding - community researchers develop their analysis across initial codes*

This process looks for contradictions and offers clarification. By comparing and contrasting individual stories and perspectives, we moved from individual experience and knowledge to a collective community experience and understanding of the world, we extended this understanding again by adding perspectives from critical theory. Fracturing and counter-analysis are approaches which assist in decoding to reveal the historical pathways through which changes in power and privilege have shaped individual and group lives (Weis & Fine, 2004). Here analysis might use critical race theory or feminist theory to look at difference – how the ‘whole’ picture can be destabilised by an analysis that examines how social difference, privilege and power dislocates the initial surface view – the whole picture. It might also use a political economy perspective to explore how structures of production condition, social relations, political power and cultural practice (Youngman, 1996).

We recorded the findings using a range of methods – poems, photo stories, reports, popular booklets and plays. For example, the illustration below emerged from an investigation of access to energy sources in the community. It was stimulated by a photograph showing the multinational company BASF with access to electricity and large overhead power supply lines passing by the informal settlement known as Ramaphosa, where access to electricity is through unauthorised electricity connections. The photograph prompted as part of the analysis process, further investigation into the how the electricity supply in the city of Port Elizabeth is allocated and what this tells us about power relations in our society. A young researcher documented his insights in the drawing which he called the electricity cake. It calls on community members to demand equity.



*The distribution and use of energy resources – BASF and Ramaphosa*



To illustrate the process further, an excerpt from a report on our research on environmental health and waste in the community (Community Education Programme, 2017) follows below.

Community mobilisation to nominate community participants to join the research process, helped to introduce the initiative to local ward structures and the local councillor, and community members in general.

Following their nomination through community meetings, 30 community members finally joined the core research team of 28 members from the CEP. In the week following their election community members attended a three-day training workshop that included practical experience in using the research instruments. During the workshop each area-based group nominated a convener that secured a central meeting point from which the fieldwork would proceed and where subsequent documentation would take place. The convener also provided the link between the university-based researchers and participating community researchers.

During the training the group also mapped out their own community and began to identify routes for observation that would enable a rich range of data to be collected. Prior to starting the data collection, each area-based group first split into groups following specific routes and then into sub-groups of pairs making observations and conducting interviews around either environmental health or waste in the community.

The transect walks were conducted for between two to three hours at each of the sites. On 18 November two groups walked along different routes through Veeplaas; on 19 November three groups walked through Soweto-on-Sea and on 21 November two groups walked through Ramaphosa and Chris Hani making observations and

conducting interviews. Along each of the routes, one smaller sub-group focused on observing environmental health issues and another sub-group focused on waste. The researchers were asked to use all their senses during the observations and to take note of how they felt when upon seeing something of interest.

The extracts below, from community researchers fieldnotes, are illustrative of the process of selecting an issue for observations:

*On the 18th November 2014, we were doing Community Mapping, walking in the Veeplaas Area. The route of the transect walk started at the bridge of the Chatty River. The sun was very hot about 30°C. The flies were all over the place especially on our route because it was near the dirty, smelling river. As we were walking following the route of the transect walk, we were talking and making observations and our minds were struck when we saw a shack far from other shacks. (Veeplaas; Family lives in one room)*

*Our observations were on an open field filled with a series of dumping sites and grass near Chatty River...The people we met were curious about what we are doing, and whether we offer solutions to the problems we are asking people about. (Soweto-on-Sea; The Story of Thembinkosi Frans)*

*We observed shaking bodies [of young boys swimming in the polluted river] due to cold water and a few boys had scratches with a rash. We asked how does this water make you feel? (Veeplaas; The Environment of the Chatty River)*

As researchers walked along their route, they chose purposefully to interview community members, because they noticed something of interest that they wanted to investigate further.

*We started the transect walk at Hlanganani Street, where we came across a mixture of newly developed RDP houses and shacks. People were moving up and down the street and were curious about what we were doing. As we passed by the corner of McBride St, we met a woman chatting to her neighbour at her gate. I stopped to greet her because I was astonished at the recycling bags that filled her yard. (Soweto-on-Sea; The Story of Nyameka Boo)*

Requesting an interview was not always easy and researchers had to win the trust of the person they wanted to interview by explaining where they come from and what the purpose of the research was. They also had to overcome their own uncertainty.

*...the owner of the house arrived asking me who am I and what do I want? I tried to calm him down and introduced myself to him saying I'm a community investigator from NMMU (Vista) and I'm doing community research and that is why I am at his home. His name was Velile Landu and he is 59 years old. He became so interested after I introduced myself... (Soweto-on-Sea; The house on Bafana Street)*

*Firstly, we were a bit lost about how we would approach the lady to ask her to do the interview with us about the environmental injustice which she clearly lives with on a daily basis. Sibusiso asked for water from the lady that stays there, as it was very hot and we were thirsty for some water. She was very happy to help us and she went inside the house and brought a 25-litre water container and a shiny metal cup. (Veeplaas; Family lives in one room)*

Immediately after completing a transect walk the groups following different routes met and started the process of documentation. They first completed all their observation notes. The CEP university-based researchers supported the groups to write up their observations and interviews by asking the group to tell the story of their day. As people were sharing, the university-based researchers asked questions that helped the community-based researchers to organise their information along the basic questions: what happened/ was observed? Where and when did it take place?

Who was involved? How do you understand what you saw? How did you feel about what you saw?

Quickly and with much enthusiasm researchers started writing up their observations as a narrative and weaving in the interviews they had conducted. Usually they worked in pairs or in small groups of three people, but a few people chose to work individually. Although all interviews were conducted in isiXhosa, because this was the dominant language in the community; each writing pair decided on the language in which they wanted to write up their interview. Some narratives were written in isiXhosa and some in English. Each narrative tried to focus on the issue examined and to explore the activities that happen in the area and to examine the relationships, views and attitudes of the people that were interviewed. A few researchers wrote poems that expressed their feelings about their experience of the transect walk.

Immediately following on the data collection, each area-based group met at the university to continue writing up their narratives. The groups evaluated and revised their own narratives. The groups described the problem they identified from the point of view of a range of community members, including waste collectors, small and big business, and local government. They then shared these in plenary and got feedback from the group on how to strengthen their narratives. In one instance (Veeplaas) this meant group members going back to community members and checking their understanding of a situation or conducting further interviews. 50 narratives were created. During this workshop, the groups did a first level thematic analysis of the more than 2000 photographs. The following themes emerged: housing; sanitation; water & water-infrastructure; waste; recycling; livelihoods; impacts on children; impacts on natural systems.

After all the transect walks and the first round of analysis were completed, all the area-based groups came together for a one-day workshop to do a meta-analysis. The purpose of this work was to develop explanations for what they had observed and heard in communities. The groups examined sets of photographs from different communities and presented explanations of the problem from a range of viewpoints held in the community or about the community. The explanations surfaced common sense perceptions and assumptions about the environmental issues communities face. These views were then critically examined by presenting short plays bringing explanations together and through asking further questions. From this work two broad themes were identified from which to explore environmental health concerns: “Unequal distribution of resources and harm”; and “Injustice towards nature”. The group focusing on waste in the community, chose to present three thematic case studies: “The lives of waste pickers”; Household waste in communities; Waste and the local government response.

### 4.3 Sharing our findings

The process of decoding also prompted thinking about how we would share what we were learning with community members and groups that were not part of our investigations. How could we use on our findings in a way that encourages a critical understanding of the world?

Community education events provided us with a platform to share and again interrogate our research findings. These community education events would be open to any interested community member to attend and would be offered at a community hall in those communities where we conducted our research. Each event ran over two to three days.

#### 4.3.1 *Preparing for the event*

The first step in organising a community education event was the mobilisation of a community in a local area. Community mobilisation included formal and informal communication:

- A letter would be sent to the local councillor explaining our activities and requesting a meeting. Meetings were held with area-based community structures and the local councillor. These meetings were critical in providing access to community resources under the control of the councillor, such as access to the community hall, a kitchen, tables and chairs.
- We communicated with adult education managers and the adult education union, inviting educators and learners from local adult education sites to the event.
- Community based organisations were met and invited.
- We talked about our work and the event on community radio.
- We developed and distributed pamphlets in isiXhosa explaining the programme.
- On the day before the event, we again walked through the area using a loud hailer to remind people of the event and inviting them to attend.

At the same time community researchers got involved in the administration and management of the event by developing a logistical plan and budget for the event. Planning the logistics included booking the hall venue for the event, arranging materials for cleaning the hall and ablution facilities, planning for and buying refreshments, and managing our budget for the event. We developed checklists, allocated responsibilities and reported back on progress.

#### 4.3.2 *The community education event*

An extended period (four to six weeks) was spent developing educational materials. We reviewed the codes developed as part of our CPAR research by starting to imagine activities for the community education event. We experimented with popular education methods to find ways to present our findings. We asked what sequence of picture and story codes would best support learning? What were the learning outcomes for the event?

And so, each of the events started with a display of the photographs, photo-stories or digital stories our investigations generated. Community researchers walked small groups of community members through the display or played the digital stories to them. They asked participants what they saw or recognised in the photographs or photo-stories and facilitated a sense-making dialogue amongst the group of what they saw.

At this point, new information could be added that also relates to the experience of the participants. Such information is explored not only as new content. Through the question, “Why is the world as it is?”, we develop our understanding of different explanations of the world as it is and we compare these explanations or theories to our experience and to ideas of what the world could be. In this way, we deepen our understanding and add to our knowledge from other perspectives.

The event culminated in a final session that brought all the small groups together in a plenary discussion around the question, what could be done? We frequently used popular theatre to facilitate such discussion. Popular theatre does not use drama to convey messages. Instead it sets up through drama a question, which the ‘audience’ has to resolve. The audience moves from being spectators, to active participants in the play, directing its conclusion.

The examples that follow, tells briefly how two community education events were structured.

*Example 1:* At our first community education event, community participants listened to the digital stories on education, after which community researchers facilitated a

discussion asking participants what was similar or different in their own experience of education? The participants talked about the responses of those in the story to their circumstances and explored what needed to change to stop people being pushed out of formal schooling. They discussed what could be done by different groups in society: parents, school governing bodies, teachers, and government.

This was followed by short input about the White Paper on post-schooling that has just been published. Drawing on their earlier discussion of education, participants assessed the opportunities that existed in the policy to create an alternative education. They explored what they saw as barriers to the realisation of this alternative.

*Example 2:* At the community education event that looked at access to and use of energy resources under the generative theme, environmental justice, community participants also walked through the display of photos and photo-stories. They then discussed how the display or the photo-stories confirmed or up-ended their own experience of access to and use of energy sources. They debated how access to energy sources may have changed over time. They explored what differences might exist within their own community and across the city. They explored the different term “izinyoka” and asked how it came to be used to refer to community installed connections to electricity. They discussed the terms “illegal connection” and “unauthorised connection” and asked what perspective each term conveyed about people’s relations to energy sources. They participated in three small group activities using material generated during the CPAR process that introduced basic technical knowledge about access to energy: how energy is supplied within a municipality; what volts are; what amps and amp-hours are; and how overload happens within an energy system. The group constructed a lemon battery to learn how energy was conducted and connected small devices to their lemon battery to look at what happens when an energy system experiences overload.

Throughout the process community members generated their own questions to apply their new knowledge. Asking why their pre-paid electricity is used up quickly, some members calculated the amp-hours appliances in their household used. A young man in one group expanded the lemon battery activity and connected 5 lemons in an electrical series, creating more than 1.5 volts of battery power. He then successfully used this to power his hand-held calculator. Delighted with his experiment, he announced to the other people at his table: “I’m a genius!” Everyone at the table shared his excitement and laughed and applauded in agreement.



*Community members walk through the photo display discussing what they see with the community researcher*



*Community members constructed a lemon battery. One member of the group, tests the voltage generated on her tongue!*

Further activities explored alternatives to coal-powered energy, by looking at generating energy at household or community level. Community members were drawn into an activity that generated energy using mechanical means. They explored the construction and efficiency of rocket stove built from recycled material.

The small group activities were followed by a play “Behind the wires” written and performed by community researchers. The play explored unauthorised electricity connections and the power relations in the community that supported unauthorised electricity connections. The play ended in a community

#### 4.4 Structuring and sequencing learning activities

Each event mirrored our process of investigation. Again, we used the three framing questions of our research process to organise and sequence learning activities:

- What is the world like?
- Why is the world as it is?
- What could be done about it?

In an introductory section to the workbook for the generative theme, food and hunger, we explain:

*We see these questions as giving momentum to a spiral of connected, repeated activities that drive us to ever deeper understanding and transformation of ourselves and our world. They are not prescriptive, sequential steps that are each completed before moving on to the next element, in the way of a conventional content-based curriculum.*

*The starting point and further connecting activities, come from educators and learners co-designing the learning programme through these problem-posing questions. How activities are selected and sequenced, with what learning objective in mind, should emerge from ongoing thoughtful dialogue between learners and educators. They are offered as possibilities or starting points, for shared learning and activity. (Community Education Programme, 2018)*

The diagram at below sets out the process we followed structuring a learning programme. The inner circle outlines the activities for structuring learning, whilst the outer circle captures the learning process through a reflection-dialogue-action cycle.

Structuring a learning programme



A further aspect of making meaning is to examine how knowing is valued in society and the ways in which knowledge is used to strengthen social, political and economic power. What do we learn from different positions people hold? What do these positions tell us about their interests? Sometimes this process includes challenging our own ideas and beliefs or exploring ways to claim and reinforce the validity of marginalised forms of knowing. The process of making sense - upending thinking, rethinking, restating and reclaiming – brought us to thinking about what knowledge is useful and helpful in opening up spaces for transformative learning. This connected us with the third question: “What is to be done?”

Thinking about ‘action’ suggests a participatory investigation to identify and evaluate alternatives that might exist within a geographical or cultural community but could also exist elsewhere. From our new understanding, we assess what the possibilities for change are. We ask ourselves, what power we have in our own hands? We look at what resources and strengths, abilities and qualities we have as a community or group. We look at the possible risks and difficulties our initiative might face. We organise ourselves and identify roles and responsibilities. We allocate tasks and say by when these tasks should be completed. We follow up to see what has been done and hold each other responsible. We reflect on our progress and consider what activities we need to adapt or change or stop all together.

Exploring possibilities and spaces for action can shift the focus from local issues to finding global connections and examples of resistance. However, ‘action’ does not necessarily mean only activities that connect back into the community through mobilising, organising and collective work and the learning this can bring. It can also be thought of as the shared processes of designing and implementing new learning activities that deepen our understanding or our capacity for action. These interlinked questions spark learning that is both focused within the learning group and embedded in broader transformative processes with others in a community.



*Community members discuss the picture codes presented at a community education event*

#### 4.5 Policy dialogue

The Community Education Programme has presented its work in a range of policy dialogue forums organised by the Education Policy Consortium and also by DVV International, the international cooperation arm of the German Adult Education Association. These spaces facilitated open discussion and engagement with officials in the Department of Higher Education and Training and with fellow researchers in the post-school sector in South Africa.

## 5 Findings

Our research shows the value of CPAR as a praxis for the development of community education curricula from the lived experience and interests of local communities. It effectively employs critical reflection, dialogue and inquiry as a drivers of curriculum design and in doing so, it interrogates and extends existing knowledge and connecting lived experience with other knowledges. In connecting experiential knowledge with systematised knowledge, this approach avoids the fragmentation knowledge in subject-based curricula.

### 5.1 Working from lived experience

David Harvey in an interview for the magazine, *Jacobin*, argues that a lot of resistance to capital accumulation occurs not only at the point of production, but also through consumption and the realization of value (Risager, 2016). As more and more workers are displaced from the production sphere through deindustrialisation and the implementation of labour-saving technologies, these same workers are being pushed into urban life, and, what Harvey refers to as the politics of the city. The capitalist dynamic is increasingly shifting to struggles over the realization of value - over the politics of daily life in the city.

In this context, adult and community education for labour-market re-activation may appear increasingly irrelevant to community members. Instead,

*...community education needs to emerge from and become situated in the lived and relational experience of a geographical community, so that it can surface this complexity, enable its critical examination, contribute to strengthening positive associational interests in that community, connect to meaningful activity in that geographical community and reach out in solidarity across interest groups and geographical boundaries to other communities. (Senekal, 2015)*

CPAR as a research and educational methodology supports the development of this conceptualisation of community education and presents a meaningful theory and tool for making learning programmes with communities. It is in particular the interlinked processes of coding and decoding that provide space for counter-analyses. Coding surfaces community experiences and knowledge. Decoding enables the development of stories that disrupt the emerging picture even further. By juxtaposing these stories with other dominant narratives, further new stories can be told which “reveal existing fault lines” and point to “where mobilization can begin and radical change is possible.” (Weis & Fine, 2004, p. xxi)

### 5.2 Critical pedagogy

Traditionally “the educator's role is to regulate the way the world ‘enters into’ the students. The teacher's task is to organize a process which already occurs spontaneously, to ‘fill’ the students by making deposits of information which he or she considers to constitute true knowledge” (Freire, 2000, p. 76)

In contrast, CPAR, situates learning in the ‘socio-historical context’ (Camarota & Fine, 2008) of an individual and the community in which s/he makes a life. This is critically important to adult learners. After all, as Lave has argued:

*“It is not the case that the world consists of newcomers who drop unaccompanied into unpeopled spaces. People in activity are skilful at, and more often than not engaged in helping each other to participate in changing ways in a changing world. Such participation can be thought of as a process of changing understanding in practice, that is, learning.” (Lave, 2009, p. 208)*

CPAR encourages us to see everyday life as changing understanding in practice, that is, as learning. Such learning is a collective process – we are situated in action and learning with others and our world. This situated-ness is relational, place-based, time-based and future-oriented:

learning happens with and between people and from the knowledge of others, within a local social context, at a specific historical time, and towards an imagined future.

Critical reflective dialogue is an important practice for framing and organising educational activities rooted in everyday life. CPAR enables critical reflective dialogue that is more than asking questions. It is a process of shared learning and working that involves respect, listening, questions that uncover experiences, feelings and assumptions, and which searches for the structures that shape our world. Critical reflective dialogue brings learners and educators together to name and explore issues they agree are important. As they add and interrogate new information, they develop and test their ideas, and find ways to challenge oppressive situations.

Through such repeated cycles of investigation, critical reflective dialogue and action, shared learning happens; new knowledge is constructed and a deeper understanding and collective engagement with our world emerges. The power relations between educators and learners shift.

### 5.3 Knowledge

CPAR draws on community-based researchers' deep social knowledge and on university-based researchers' academic knowledge. Bringing these knowledges into dialogue, rather than into a hierarchy of knowledge, enables co-learning and the exchange of capacities. The power relations that shape what knowledge is, and whose knowledge counts, enter the learning space, and can be examined and challenged.

CPAR connects individual experience with collective experience and examines collective experience critically by linking such experience to the conditions and relations from which it arises. By doing this it generates 'really useful' knowledge for radical emancipatory practice.

### 5.4 Language

Our CPAR processes and community education events brought together people with different home languages and schooling and experiences of how language was used in education. Opening up dialogue amongst learners and between learners and educators in a way that encourages participation, requires that we recognise that language is not a neutral issue and that language preference, and the dominance of English in our society, reflect power relations.

For example, our events started with a discussion that surfaced lived experience in isiXhosa (sometimes based on instructions for the activity in English). In our CPAR sessions, we wrote down this discussion in a mixture of isiXhosa and English. We put up a newsprint sheet where any participant (learner or educator) can write down key ideas from a discussion that is in isiXhosa or in English.

At the end of a session, we reviewed this list and translated these terms. Or we started a discussion with a word code used in that community and unpacked the deep knowledge and understanding that is crowded into this concept and the power relations that the use of specific terms reflects: for example – *izinyoka*, illegal connections, unauthorised connections.

Our curriculum-making process had confirmed the importance of using language as a resource for defending, privileging and extending all the knowledge that is stored in the languages of participants, rather than only what is written in English. This means that we must problematise our own language use and preferences. (Hult & Hornberger, 2016)

## 5.5 Fostering possibilities for action

At the same time that CPAR identifies problems, it encourages the belief that things can change. It is “active knowledge” (Cammarota & Fine, 2008, p. 6). It is the very crisis or problem, which provides the opportunities for learners to move from a position as objects of the crisis to subjects of its transformation (Freire, 2000).

CPAR enables community-based researchers to study problems and work with others to overcome obstacles. Cammarota and Fine argue that this “becomes critical knowledge for the discovery of one’s efficacy to produce personal as well as social change.” (Cammarota & Fine, 2008, p. 6)

If we are courageous enough to make alternative curricular and educational spaces available, then the necessary freedom to create new knowledge and alternative decisions, might open spaces to challenge the unequal and unjust arrangements of power in our society and encourage organisation and collective action to change this.

## 6 Conclusions

Our research demonstrates CPAR as both a valuable theory and a practice in the design of non-formal curricula for community education within a critical tradition. It enables the development of curricula that are contextually and linguistically embedded in the social world of communities. It foregrounds community knowledge and brings this into critical dialogue with other forms of knowledge. It fosters possibilities for social change. In a context of enormous growing social inequality, educational initiatives that foster concrete alternatives to the existing status quo, are of critical importance to our society.

Given the contradictory policy space within which this work emerges, the big question is, can the existing practice of adult and community education support this work?

There are real contextual difficulties within the government sphere. The main obstacles being: low budgets; the possibility that community education curricula are developed from a narrow ‘empowerment’ perspective and reflect a list of ‘needs’ drawn from government programmes and activities; that the existing skills regime within the SETA (and its associated problems) are imported as community education; and, the current limits in the practice and orientation of adult educators whose experience is largely shaped by formal subject-based teaching.

Government would do well to take concrete steps to support forms of community education that draw on the historical roots of people’s education. The practical implications of this proposal are:

- Developing a clear funding framework for non-formal community education.
- Formulating a plan for the development and implementation of critical transformative approaches to community education by
  - Supporting the mentoring of adult educators in CPAR and the development of transformative learning programmes at the nine pilot Community College sites.
  - Supporting the development of learning materials and related resources to give effect to these programmes.
  - Supporting the administration and management of such programmes in conjunction with communities.
- Supporting ongoing research to articulate a critical theory of community education.
- Supporting and facilitating public dialogue on the role of community education that fosters transformative actions towards a socially and ecologically just society.

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The Centre for Integrated Post-School Education and Training (CIPSET)

### Contact Information

Education, Work & Society  
Centre for Integrated Post-School Education and Training  
DVC: Research and Engagement  
Office 402, Building 519  
Missionvale Campus  
Nelson Mandela University

**Telephone:** +27 41 504 3924

**Email:** [adelah.jeftha@mandela.ac.za](mailto:adelah.jeftha@mandela.ac.za)

**Website:** [www.cipset.mandela.ac.za](http://www.cipset.mandela.ac.za)

