

“Risky Business” re-worked as a school’s programme - 2009

Plans to develop initial Risky Business intervention

The clarity and power with which *Risky Business* communicates - around an issue that South Africans continue to approach with silence and complacency - called for its continued life. It is for this reason that we proposed to rework it for a broader audience of high school learners and urban as well as rural communities. We believed that with the insight that we have developed through making and performing the initial version of the work, in addition to further research and continued reference to the diverse cultural and life experiences of our company members, we were in an excellent position to target core issues around living with HIV/AIDS and preventing its spread in the South African context.

Our ability to construct broadly accessible, engaging work enabled us to communicate these issues in a dramatically powerful way. *Risky Business* for schools is a tri-lingual work (English, Xhosa and Afrikaans) able to speak to a range of audiences via a mix of highly physical and musical styles. Performances are followed up by discussions, which can be conducted in either isiXhosa, English or Afrikaans.

Specifically, the reworked *Risky Business* (consisting also in a 50 minute show followed by a discussion with the audience) dealt with:

- ✦ risky behaviour with regards contraction of the virus, and specifically challenges around the negotiation of condom use;
- ✦ the role of gender relations and male behaviour in the spread of the virus;
- ✦ resistance to testing for HIV;
- ✦ stigma around HIV and AIDS in the South African context; and approaches to living positively with HIV/AIDS.

Risky Business for schools

The local tour was a great pilot with Ubom! managing to visit several schools of various degrees of privilege. We toured to:

- Archie Mbolekwa where we performed in an old classroom,
- Mary Waters where we performed on an outside quad,
- Ntaba Maria in a church hall
- Mrtwetyana
- Victoria Girls’ High where we performed in the school hall.

This was a great chance to feel out the responses from learners as following each performance there was a discussion. The discussions revealed that many learners from the township schools are deeply entrenched in issues of stigma and were reluctant at first to discuss any issues raised in the play. With the workshop facilitation training that Ubom! underwent though, company members were well prepared to engage with the learners and discussion began surrounding issues of misunderstandings about what HIV and what AIDS is. Many learners seemed highly unaware about the difference and the “medical” factors that surround the pandemic.

It helped them to identify with characters and to watch the various roles played out in the scenarios. The learners did mention the importance of having a

Pics below: performance at
Archie Mbolekwa and Mary Waters
Schools



friend and also stated that they would be happy to talk to teachers. The difficulty was that not many teachers are able to be informative and seem reluctant to engage with discussions about HIV/AIDS.

With the character of the girl that had a "sugar-daddy", the general response was that AIDS was not worth a cell-phone, and some were aware that "sugar-daddies" were not about the older man loving one, and that sex is their only interest. The character Unathi was appreciated as a girl that looked after herself. She admitted to having sex but knew that she needed to protect herself and was strict about using condoms.

As an added bonus to the Risky Business play, in partnership with Alex Sutherland, who co-directed the original Risky Business commissioned by HEAIDS, a series of workshops were connected to Risky Business. This served well in using the content and issues played out for the learners in the various scenarios to further extend in action the issues discussed.

The learners' main comments also surrounded the fact that learning and thrashing out these issues of HIV/AIDS, sexuality, underage sex, sex before marriage, condoms, and pregnancy were much easier to understand and achieve with the tool of drama. The general message conveyed was that simply talking about these various issues was not good enough for them, and that actively engaging with new methods of approaching such subject matter was interesting for the learners, and clearly achieved a new level of understanding for them.

Alex Sutherland's report on the Risky Business performance-workshop Pilot project with Grade 8/9 pupils.

Aims:

- To develop a workshop using the play's characters and themes, which will use theatre strategies to facilitate an interrogation of how men and women approach aspects of HIV and sexuality;
- To develop skills around the role of an actor-facilitator with Ubom performers.

Motivation for approach:

AIDS is a **social** epidemic – therefore individual interventions ineffective. Gender, poverty, violence and social norms are factors in why HIV is spreading at the rate it is (Walker et al).

"Through education, life-skills training, and guided activities within youth programmes, adolescents should be taught communication, social and conflict resolution skills. Social programmes should provide structured opportunities for debating and contesting stereotyped gender roles, and for modelling alternatives" (Gistner p.30).

Young women (ages 15 – 29) have the **highest risk** of new HIV infections. Also group highest risk of rape. **Women are physically, socially, culturally far more vulnerable to HIV infection than men. Yet it is men who are driving the spread of HIV.**

Performances and workshops at Victoria Girls High School, Archie Mbolekwa & Mary Waters High Schools



- Fundamental to understanding HIV is understanding men's sexual behaviour.
- 'Maleness' expressed through multiple sexual partners, monogamy expected of women. "In respect of being monogamous, women, it appears, expect little of their men, while much is expected of them" (Walker et al. p.41).

A key feature of masculinity in South Africa is unquestioned control and authority over women – women seen as property to be bought, owned, controlled, and defended.

Therefore: Holding question which framed our approach is

What does it mean to be 'a man' or 'a woman' in an era of HIV/AIDS?

The workshop is not about providing answers, but asking young people to think about what is expected from young men and women, how it impacts on our understanding of HIV, and how we can perform alternatives.

If expressions of maleness continue to be tied up in multiple sexual partners, where unprotected sex is used to validate sexual dominance and authority, and this maleness is performed and embodied in a popular leader of our country, how does or can the relationship between art, life, the social and artistic work to make a difference? One strategy I have used which allows this transportation between art and life, is to engage the audience in interviewing characters from different scenarios presented. It provides the opportunity, in a truly Brechtian sense, for the actor-facilitator to step in and out of role to physically manifest multiple view points and the possibilities of change. The following extract is from a workshop in which the participants are engaging with the character of Phumeza, who has contracted HIV from a boyfriend who assured her that she was his only girl, and Siya, a young man seen as a player, who is charming and performs his masculinity by sleeping with many girls and promising most of them that they are only for him. One young man in this session felt a strong identification to Siya. He was Siya. Earlier, the boys in the group had insisted that it was Phumeza's fault that she got HIV, as she should have protected condom use, despite her boyfriend promising his faithfulness and that she was his first sexual partner.

Facilitator asks: what would someone else would have done in Phumeza's situation? What if he says I don't want to use a condom, what would you do in the same situation?

Girl to Phumeza: you must get dressed and go home if he does not want to use a condom because you are taking a risk, so you must take your clothes and go, it does not mean you don't love him, you still love him and must explain to him.

Girl: To add to that, girls can use a female condom - they are very big! -, so if she knows that they are going to have sex, she should put a female condom in her bag or put it on before. That is the responsibility she should have taken.

Boy: No, that will take time, he can't wait for her to put it in. He wants to have sex now.

Girl: No, I can put it in before hand.

Boy (surprise): So you are going to come here knowing you are going to have sex with me already!

Girl: Of course, you are my boyfriend!

All of the boys are not happy with the suggestion that a woman might know that she will have sex

Boy: what if Phumeza trusts this guy and he actually got AIDS from his mother.

Boy asks Phumeza: How many guys did you go out with before this guy?

Phumeza: he is my first one.

Boy: did you find out about other girls?

Phumeza: he told me he is my first one also

Another actor: So he's like Siya!

Another actor: Are you sure you got the virus from that guy, or does she think the guy has other girls or maybe got it through birth?

Phumeza: I am confused I don't know whether he was faithful or not, maybe he is cheating.

Sisonke (the actor) talks about Siya: With all the girls he meets he says 'you are the only one' so it is possible that he was unfaithful. He says "you must trust me baby it is only you.."

Boy to Siya: what do you say when a girl asks about girlfriends? Do you say you have more or what?

Siya: it depends, if I am really desperate to sleep with her I will lie and say she is the only one in my life and that always works.

Boy: do you think lying is a good thing?

Siya: it always works for me, it is the only way I get to sleep with girls.

Boy: have you been tested?

Siya: I don't need to, I feel healthy.

Boy: can I please give you a word of advice after school, go to straight to the clinic and do a blood test because the way you behave it might happen that you are dying already.

I beg you please, it is advice from me to you, no offence, peace.



I observed this particular boy take an interesting journey through this workshop. He was vocal and cocky. And he really identified with Siya. After the workshop, he participated in a focus group interview about the experience, and admitted:

"This workshop is an encouragement for me, for example, I did those things like the boys in the drama. But now I know there are responsibilities for me, and stuff which I have to carry on doing: not just take this girl and go home and the following day I want another one. This has helped me to stop and think".

This boy has high status amongst his peers and was also much older than the rest of the class. For him to admit that he is Siya and that he somehow needs to shift his perspective and responsibilities towards girls and how he expresses his masculinity was quite a profound statement. He also heard his female class mates' perspectives about relationships, the advice they gave to other characters, and how the actor talked about what drives Siya.

END OF ALEX SUTHERLAND'S REPORT

Audience Responses

Response from teachers

On the quality of production

Very good, on point (Bernice Goliath)

Suitable and relevant (Bondina McConnachie)

What do you think your learners gained or remembered most from the production?

Different 'backgrounds' of cast and could relate to the stereotypes (Bernice Goliath)

That we are still ignorant about HIV/AIDS and perceptions can ruin lives (Bondina McConnachie)

Most enjoyed and least enjoyed about the production?

Enjoyed all (Bernice Goliath)

The slick production (Bondina McConnachie)

Response from learners: What did you think about this production of Risky Business?

I think it was brilliant. All the things that people are scared of saying because of fear were said so nicely and clearly

It is because of the way the special configurations, voice projection, characterisation and they had really strong links which worked well and the group co ordination was great.

Because most of the time we ignore the part that HIV/AIDS is part of our live and we must accept and they showed that to us

I think it was just so true because it is really how things are out there and with ignorance I loved the characters and the way they spoke and also the whole 'moral' behind it

The play spoke about real life stories and in a way it was showing us how we can go about dealing with these problems

I really enjoyed the performance and I like the way they merged serious issues with a bit of comedy

It was excellent! Everyone was enthusiastic and by dealing with this issue it helped us a lot. You expressed feelings and emotions raw like the world does



Favourite moment in the play?

Where they were supporting each other through knowing their status

When they portrayed the scene of the young girl who is forced to prove her love by having unprotected sex because that happens each and everyday of our lives therefore I felt it was facing reality and accepting the things we choose to avoid

When Pumeza was going with Siya to the clinic because she encouraged him and gave him support

The testing because that scene was a fact and it showed us how it was done

When the 3 characters point at people who had HIV because that's what people say and judge them

When the cast got into the characters thoughts because it gave us their raw opinion of what people think in the outside world

When Pumeza advised the man to go and get tested because if you don't know your status you might get infected

When Noxie and Siya were advising each other about taking ARVs and going for testing because they were being good friends to each other and were looking out for one another

Yilena uSipho oyika ukutesta ngokuba ibonisa ukuba amadoda ayoyika ukuzazi imeko okanye isteytasi sawo (The part when Sipho was scared to get tested, it shows that men are scared to know about their status)

The one when Pumeza told her friends that she is HIV+, it is because she was brave not many people can do that

When Siya was asking the other girl to take her treatment because Siya gave the right advice to the girl

Ndithande landawo uPumeza echaza ngemeko akuyo, ngokuba iyafundisa, kufuneka uyichaze imeko okuyo (I liked the part where Pumeza spoke about her status,)

Ndithande leyokuba bexoxisana egumbini lokufundela bexoxa nge-HIV (I liked the discussion in the classroom about HIV)

What do you think the play was about?

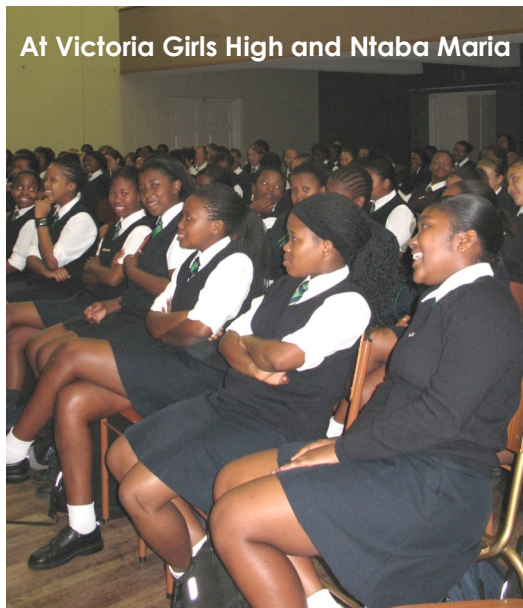
I think it was to show us the different ways in which people act to this virus and how we need to just not think of being ignorant and facing reality

Warning people about the virus and that they should go and be tested

Different ways HIV/ AIDS can make an impact on one's life
How we should cope with AIDS and that people should not judge others

How HIV affects everyone especially through unprotected sex
Using protection, how this affects us and what we should do

This performance shows us reality and it brings up all the topics that people aren't aware of or they just want to hide it. I like the way that everything was realistic and showed us all the issues that really do happen. They showed things from many different perspectives and I really enjoyed that. We've heard a lot about HIV/AIDS, but this was just the BOMB! Congrats!!



At Victoria Girls High and Ntaba Maria

Using treatment to live long life

Things people have to go through when they have HIV and the ignorance people have towards it

The fear of being tested because you'll be judged

It was about us not being judgemental, stereo-typical and having your facts right about things that you are unsure about

I have never liked talking about HIV/AIDS because it is all around and I know most of the facts but the play was great and now I can talk about it openly.

Thank you for coming, excellent performance, you entertained us while educating, great effort in preparation, well done!!

END OF REPORT

