Transformation through training: application of emancipatory methods in a housing education programme for rural women in South Africa

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Abstract   The role of education in the development of communities has been receiving increasing attention from the South African Government. The purpose of this study was to determine how community developers could contribute to transformative learning in community groups. Using an emancipatory teaching approach, a housing education programme was presented to a group of women who had recently been allocated subsidized housing in a rural Northern Cape town in South Africa. During the implementation of the housing intervention, the emancipatory method encouraged participants to question and alter their distorted assumptions. Guidelines are provided for community developers for applying the emancipatory teaching method to facilitate transformative learning.

Introduction

Community education is an essential component for individuals to gain skills and knowledge that they require to survive in a complex and a contemporary society (Lauritsen, 2005). However, education is of little value if the appropriate approaches to bring about empowerment are not being used. Joshi and Moore (2000) argue that empowerment fails when the educator's expectations do not correlate with the approaches employed in facilitating learning. This is often due to the technical approach where knowledge is imposed through a programme compatible

with the educator's view rather than learner needs or objectives (Freire, 1970).

This technical approach focuses more on acquiring skills and knowledge as a product of learning rather than on the development of learners as part of the process of learning (Freire, 1970; Mezirow, 1990). Training or development institutions that convey practical knowledge tend to use subject-orientated approaches that encourage the receiving, memorizing and repetition of information. This denies an individual the opportunity to create information, to solve problems and to reflect on practices. The emancipatory approach, described by Mezirow (1991) and Cranton (1996), is a powerful tool to shape institutional change that will benefit communities as individuals participate in their own re-education towards self-awareness, self-control and self-understanding (McGregor, 1997).

This article reports on an intervention for previously disadvantaged women staying in low-cost housing in a rural informal settlement. Many of these women experienced the negative effects of powerlessness due to the political history of the area as well as the position of women in a rural community. The acquisition of new low-cost housing has been viewed as an appropriate opportunity to teach skills and an opportunity for empowerment. Facilitators could strive to teach knowledge and skills while using approaches that encourage reflective practices and critical thinking (Hope and Timmel, 1984).

The findings presented in this article are focused on the qualitative data that was part of a larger study whose objectives were:

- to document the process of implementation of the housing programme using the emancipatory approach;
- to describe participant responses to the adopted approach; and
- to provide guidelines for community development practitioners when applying the method.

Literature review

When the emphasis is placed on the process of learning as part of community development, it is necessary to understand some related concepts such as empowerment, transformation and the theory of emancipatory teaching. Transformation represents a deeper level of learning that would be appropriate in working to empower individuals and help to address power imbalances. The emancipatory teaching approach provides practical guidelines to help facilitate the transformation process during community education and development practices.

Empowerment and learning

Empowerment has become a buzzword, and many intervention programmes claim to empower participants and communities. Empowerment as a process refers to the ability of individuals and community groups to set their own goals and to act collectively upon it as well as the ability to make their own choices (Kabeer, 1999, 2005).

Powerlessness in various individuals, groups and communities spawns the need for empowerment interventions as powerless individuals lose their ability to make choices and are more subjected to external prescriptions of others. In exploring the indicators of empowerment within an educational context, it is seen as a multidimensional concept that occurs in individuals on three levels, namely the *micro* (personal) level, *interface* (interpersonal) level and *macro* (socio-political) level (Albertyn, 2005). The fact that empowerment is a multidimensional concept has implications for those working in community development. Facilitation of the process of empowerment in any development effort should take cognisance of these levels. The microlevel refers to the indicators of empowerment related to individual feelings, attitudes and skills of personal control. This is seen to be the baseline for empowerment and an important starting point in any training intervention (Albertyn, Kapp and Groenewald, 2002). Once the individual feels personal empowerment, he/she moves to feelings of control on the interpersonal and the macrolevel of empowerment. These levels need to be kept in balance in any community development intervention. Empowerment is a process which does not occur in a once off intervention (Kabeer, 2005; Laverack, 2005). Individuals need to be aware of and conscientized regarding the ways in which empowerment or lack thereof impacts on the various aspects of their lives and given tools to reflect critically on their empowerment throughout their lives. Empowerment is said to begin from within (Kabeer, 2005).

In facilitating empowerment with a group of disempowered and marginalized people, focus should be placed on the individual as being central to the process and trying to diminish the difference in power between the facilitator and the participants. By creating opportunities that allow them to experience success with small immediate tasks, their self-esteem will be bolstered. Marginalized groups often have a strong natural support network and they should be encouraged to tap into this network for support. It is also important to ensure that they are given the skills to help them make the choices that are important to their life circumstances (Albertyn, Kapp and Groenewald, 2002). In empowering individuals, they are helped to gain skills to change and control their circumstances on the personal, interpersonal and macrolevel. These changes need to be

sustainable for it to be said to be a true empowerment. Transformation (sustained change) is thus an integral part of empowerment.

The concept transformation describes the process of empowerment and is best facilitated using the emancipatory teaching method.

Transformation

Community development approaches might be applied that cause marginalized community groups to accept their status quo and to see it as unchangeable, as it does not encourage them to see their circumstances in an alternative manner (Kabeer, 1999; Luke, 2005). In the case where education does not encourage questioning of inequitable social structures and assumptions that are distorted, the marginalized remain in the state of what Freire (1970) calls false consciousness, whereby they do not have a critical understanding of the reality of their circumstances. The challenge is thus to employ an educational approach whereby they can reflect and analyse their lives in participatory circumstances and create knowledge through the transformation of experiences, as is the case with transformative learning (Kolb, 1984; Percy, 2005).

Transformation can take place when an individual changes their frame of reference through the process of critical self-reflection. Learning in this case does not only take place on a cognitive level but also on a conative and affective level. This is called as the development of critical consciousness by Freire (1970) whereby participants not only learn as a result of information that is imposed on them but also enter in deep enquiry and questioning about their own knowledge and assumptions that might be distorted. Distorted assumptions are described by Mezirow (1991: 118) as assumptions 'that limits insight and openness to other ways of seeing themselves and other people'. This clearly could be the obstacle that could prevent individuals from changing and may especially be the case when working with disempowered groups.

There are different types of distorted assumptions that have been identified by Mezirow (1991), and an indication of these distorted assumptions could assist a community developer or educator to identify how to facilitate an intervention intended to bring about change. The distorted assumptions could be psychological, sociolinguistic or epistemological (Mezirow, 1991). *Psychological* distorted assumptions are related to the way individuals view themselves; these include fear, inhibitions, locus of control and psychological defending mechanisms. *Sociolinguistic* distorted assumptions are related to the interaction with people based on that individual's cultural background, expectations, norms and language. These can be related to ethnocentrism, egocentrism, social norms and rules. *Epistemological* distorted assumptions refer to the way individuals are aware of knowledge and

how they are using it. It is important when facilitating interventions for transformation to note that distorted assumptions need to be questioned and changed for transformation to take place.

For transformation to take place, it is imperative that critical reflection and discourse are part of the process in order to address the distorted assumptions that may be characteristic of a disempowered individual. Application of the emancipatory method of teaching could assist in facilitating this process of community development.

Emancipatory teaching method

Capacity building and empowerment are often seen as just another way to describe community training and skill development programmes. Yet, these two concepts involve a wider meaning. The achievement thereof is rather a long-term goal and refers to giving individuals and communities the support that will enable them to take control and ownership of their own development process (Chapman and Kirk, 2001). Young, Mountford and Skrla (2006) agree that it cannot be assumed that learning automatically takes place as teaching takes place. It is therefore necessary to encourage learning approaches that support emancipatory learning and encourage learners to be active and reflective.

The main purpose of emancipatory learning is to understand the root causes of oppressive and unsatisfactory circumstances so that real strategies can be employed to transform them (Thompson, 2000). This purpose is achieved as emancipatory learning allows the learner not to take assumptions and perspectives for granted but to question them and to make alterations (Anderson-Harper and Robinson, 1996; Cranton, 1996; Mezirow 1997). It can be described as the change of old ways of thinking and doing in new ways (Scott, 1997). This process is called transformation.

Critical thinking, self-reflection, dialogue and consciousness-raising, facilitated in participatory circumstances, facilitate the process of transformation and enable participants to move from awareness of issues that confront them on a daily basis. This will ultimately lead to transformation (Boychuk-Duchscer, 1999). Critical thinking involves thinking actively, carefully exploring situations with questions, thinking for oneself, viewing situations from multiple perspectives and discussing ideas in an organized manner (Topp, 1999). Self-reflection refers to introspection and self-examination as individuals are introduced to new choices. Introspection, in turn, takes place if one compares his/her own situation with other alternatives. That may lead to change of one's own values, perspectives and assumptions according to the new choices available. Percy (2005) contends that reflection is integral to experiential learning and is described as a

complementary process to action. She further notes that the higher the level of critical reflection, the more likely it is that transformation and empowerment can occur. Dialogue or rational discourse involves talking, sharing, perspective taking, questioning and responding, challenging, adapting and suggesting (Rehm, 1999). This enables people to examine controversial issues and draw connections between their lives, and those of their families and friends, and the issues being examined (Williams, 1999). Consciousness-raising is intended to facilitate oppressed people seeing themselves and familiar relationships from new, more critical perspectives. According to Freire (1970), development results from individual self-awareness and subsequent collective action.

To encourage critical thinking, self-reflection, dialogue, consciousness-raising and participation, it is important to apply participatory learning methods where the participants are actively involved (Percy, 2005). General techniques to encourage active participation are role-play, brain-storming, case studies, critical incident analysis (participant's description of an incident that is evident in their life) and metaphorical analysis (the use of metaphors to describe the experiences of participants) (Brookfield, 1987, 1990; Cranton, 1992; Petrie and Oshlag, 1993). According to Cranton (1992), these techniques need to be applied so that participants will be encouraged to collect data themselves and to analyse and question their distorted assumptions.

The characteristics of the emancipatory teaching method are also the characteristics that the action research propagates, since they both encourage participants to adjust the training programme according to their needs and be involved in their own development process.

Research methodology

For the empirical part of this study, the emancipatory approach was applied in an action research framework, presenting a housing education programme (Venter, 2006) to a group of eight women in Calvinia, a rural town in the Northern Cape Province in South Africa.

Situational context

Calvinia is a farming community with a total population of 8,459 (Census, 2001) and forms together with four other towns the Hantam district. The Hantam district, the poorest district in the Northern Cape, is viewed as a welfare area since the majority of the people receive government grants as their only income (Africa, 2006). The lack of housing is identified as one of the major problems in the Hantam district (Africa, 2006; Hantam

Municipality, 2007). There are currently 250 government-subsidized houses in Calvinia (Hantam Municipality, 2007).

Subjects
The target group was a group of 15 women between the age of 25 and 40 years who live in government-subsidized houses in Calvinia. Access to this group of women was obtained through contacts at the local municipality. The participants who did not attend all sessions were excluded from the data analysis. Hence, the final number of respondents in this study was eight ($n = 8$). The criteria for the selection of participants for the study were that they had to be female and they had to stay in government-subsidized houses. The criterion that they should be women was prompted by the fact that, according to Kellerman (personal communication, 2000), women in Calvinia are involved mostly in household management, while men are the breadwinners (Leukes, personal communication, 2000). Leidenfrost (1992) states that empowerment of women not only contributes to individual empowerment but also to the empowerment of the whole family.

Data analysis
Qualitative data were obtained during the application of the action research model during the facilitation of the housing intervention. The action research model of plan, act, observe and reflect proposed by Zuber-Skerritt (1992) was applied during each of the successive cycles of the eight weekly sessions during the course of the intervention. Qualitative data were collected to identify and track the transformation that had taken place during the course of the programme. This data were gained from journal writing, tape recordings and posters and were transcribed and thematically analysed. The three different types of distorted assumptions (psychological, sociolinguistic and epistemological) were used as the theme topics for interpretation.

Findings

Most of the participants were younger than 35 years of age and mainly in the age categories 25–30 years and 31–35 years (37.5% respectively); the smallest age category represented those who were in the age of 36–40 years (25%). One of the participants had no formal education and one had only completed junior primary schooling (age 6–8 years). Three participants had completed primary education (age 8–13 years) in comparison with only three participants who had completed high school (age 14–18 years).

Implementation of the programme

The first objective of this study was to document the process of implementation of the housing programme using the emancipatory approach. A housing education programme developed by Venter (2006) was employed and presented in seven sessions of 2 h each, once a week. The following topics were included in the 7-week training programme: housing and quality of life, job creation opportunities, housing policies, role players in the housing process, financial aspects, the role of local government, legal processes and community participation (see Table 1).

A practical handcraft activity (e.g. curtain making and ceramic painting) was included in each session. The reason for inclusion of this component of the programme was to meet the felt needs identified by the participants. This strategy is supported by Laverack (2005) and Albertyn (2005) as it provides the satisfaction of achieving short-term goals. It also serves as motivation to attend the following session when the tangible products could be shown to others and then taken home. The technical knowledge in the housing training material was used as a vehicle to help facilitate transformative learning by applying emancipatory techniques and action research. Emancipatory techniques included asking specific focused questions to identify distorted assumptions and the application of icebreakers to encourage the questioning of distorted assumptions. Franz (2003 in Percy, 2005) suggests that in facilitating transformative learning processes thought-provoking questions should be generated. Table 1 shows some of the questions that were asked to encourage the questioning of distorted assumptions and the icebreakers that were used during each session.

An action research approach was followed during the implementation of the emancipatory method since the characteristics of action research are congruent with the characteristics encouraged by the emancipatory approach (Cranton, 1994; Zuber-Skerrit, 1992). The action research model of Zuber-Skerritt (1992) that was applied consists of four stages, namely planning, action, observation and reflection.

The facilitators initially did the *planning* using the existing housing programme (Venter, 2006) and adapting it based on the needs of the participants. A framework was developed to guide the facilitation process. Theory related to distorted assumptions (Mezirow, 1990) and the application of appropriate emancipatory teaching methods (Boychuk-Duchscer, 1999; Cranton, 1996; Mezirow, 1991) were also incorporated in this framework. Transformation techniques like role-play, metaphorical analysis, analysis of critical incidents and brainstorming were applied in each session (See Table 1). The emancipatory approach was applied in participatory circumstances, and sharing views and perspectives were encouraged. Facilitation focused on encouraging all participants to share information.

Table 1. Outline of the housing education programme sessions, theoretical underpinnings, practical application and findings of emancipatory techniques employed

Theory: topic covered in each weekly session	Theoretical linkages: questions related to content (assumptions questioned)	Practical application: icebreaker applied	Finding: new distorted assumptions identified
Week 1: Housing and quality of life: Shelter and security The house as a home Create a healthy living environment	Do you feel you can be the person in your house that you would like to be? *(Psychological)* Who or what inhibits you to be that? *(Psychological)* What type of people do you associate with from the different types of houses? *(Sociolinguistic)* How do you feel about doing something (painting of ceramic) that you have never done before? *(Psychological)*	Get to know one another	*Psychological*: Participants did not believe in their own abilities Different inhibitors were identified that relate to their ability to achieve goals
Week 2: The government's housing policy Housing as a product and process Role players in the housing process	What needs are you able to meet? What plans do you have for your house? Will you be able to meet it? *(Psychological)* Would you have liked to be more involved in the building process of your house? Was there anything you could do to be more involved? *(Psychological)* Does the community accept you for who you are? *(Psychological)*	Identification of the specific psychological defending mechanisms they apply	*Sociolinguistic*: participants felt controlled by other people (social rules) who limit them to accomplish their own goals *Psychological*: they identified men, money and alcohol as factors that inhibit them to be themselves and to accomplish goals
Week 3: Practical implications when building houses Explanation of what the local council is Payment of services	What do you associate with the word squatter camp? *(Sociolinguistic)* How do you solve problems you are experiencing in your house? *(Psychological)* Do you think you, as a woman, can be a member of parliament or council? *(Sociolinguistic)* How do you feel about raising your concerns at meetings? *(Psychological)*	Critical incident analysis: Identify critical problems/needs they are experiencing and find ideas on how to solve it	*Epistemological*: Participants did not question assumptions that were made by a person in authority *Sociolinguistic*: Judging of other by using their own norms as reference

Continued

Table 1. *Continued*

Theory: topic covered in each weekly session	Theoretical linkages: questions related to content (assumptions questioned)	Practical application: icebreaker applied	Finding: new distorted assumptions identified
Week 4: The role of the local municipality in provision of services Service agreements Levels of service The different services	Will you visit any person in Calvinia? Does everyone take part in community activities or is there discrimination of certain people? *(Sociolinguistic)* How do you feel about being involved in the community? What will you do if the municipality does not remove the garbage regularly? *(Psychological)*	Case study related to their response to family members that abuse alcohol	*Psychological*: fear for new challenges *Sociolinguistic*: Feel limited by social structures
Week 5: Creating a budget Costs involved in possessing a house budget House loans and other forms of credit Financial support by employers.	How do feel about the way money is managed in your household? *(Sociolinguistic)* How do you feel about creating your own budget? Will you be able to do it? *(Psychological)* How does your community feel about borrowing money? How do you feel about it? *(Sociolinguistic)*	Identification of things that inhibit them	*Psychological*: fear for failure Feel inferior
Week 6: Different subsidy schemes Allocation of subsidies Contracts Responsibilities of the builder and home owner How to understand house plans	How do you feel about the house that you got free? What is your responsibility in the house? *(Psychological)* What will you do if someone cheats you in a contract? *(Epistemological)*	Metaphorical analysis – compare themselves in terms of self concept, inhibitions and fear with different items	No new distorted assumptions were identified but previous identified distorted assumptions were questioned
Week 7: Benefits and responsibilities of home ownership Community involvement	Who do you see as part of the community? How do the different people in the community feel about one another? *(Sociolinguistic)* What are you doing to be a good neighbour? *(Sociolinguistic)*	Role-play related to their response towards the way women are treated in the society	No new distorted assumptions were identified

Sharing of new concepts and skills could therefore be based on participants' experiences and perspectives.

The *action* or implementation stage consisted of two parts (conducted during each session): the execution of an icebreaker and the discussion of the housing programme content. The purpose of the icebreaker was to question distorted assumptions that were identified during the preceding session. The programme content was directed by specific pre-established outcomes, as was developed during the planning stage. Adjustments were made to the programme in the case where participants made suggestions during the reflection stage of the preceding sessions.

Observation and *reflection* were done in collaboration with the participants in order to identify any additional needs that they wanted to be addressed in the next session. A further aim of the observation and reflection stages of action research in this study was to identify the distorted assumptions evident in the individual participants that emerged during the session. Specific pre-selected questions were asked during the sessions to identify distorted assumptions (see Table 1). Adjustments were made to the programme during the subsequent planning stage through the incorporation of additional activities and specific questions to be asked to encourage questioning of identified distorted assumptions so that the participants' needs, recognized in the previous session, could be addressed.

Description of the participants' responses to the emancipatory approach
The second objective for this study was to describe the participants' response to the emancipatory approach process. Qualitative data were collected during the action research cycles that were followed during the course of the training. Participants were actively encouraged to identify and question any distorted assumptions that they may have had, and which arose during the training (see Table 1).

It was noted by observing journal entries that the most distorted assumptions were identified in the first three sessions. The non-distorted assumptions declined after session four and were more prevalent as the course progressed. This seems to indicate that participants responded in the beginning to questions without questioning their individual assumptions. The identification of distorted assumptions was, therefore, effective only to a certain point. It became imperative to ask deeper questions to encourage the questioning of already identified distorted assumptions. Mezirow (1991) states that individuals do not reflect on their assumptions in the early stages of reflection.

Questioning was encouraged throughout the sessions, which enabled the participants to change their perspectives in terms of the initial distorted assumption as reflected by the following statement (Session 4):

> 'I just want to know, we do not have a drain but we are still paying for sewage removal'. (r5) What are you going to do about it? (researcher) 'She has to go to the municipality'. (r6) 'They will just say they put in the toilet and it is our responsibility now'. (r2) 'There is a reason [that we pay] because the sewage has to be processed'. (r6)

These statements illustrate how participants went through the learning process themselves to find a solution as they reflected on the problem. Mezirow (1991) and Cranton (1996) believe that individual's perspectives and assumptions will change as they are exposed to alternative ways of thinking, which will also serve as guidelines for further decisions and actions. Percy (2005) also links critical reflection to transformation and empowerment.

The subsequent discussion will show how questioning of the three different types of distorted assumptions (psychological, sociolinguistic and epistemological) was encouraged. The changes that took place among individuals in the group are also reflected upon.

Psychological distorted assumptions
Psychological distorted assumptions identified in this study are the fear of failure and new challenges, the lack of believe in their own abilities and feeling inhibited and inferior.

It became evident in the first practical session (paint of ceramic) that participants did not believe in themselves as reflected by the following statements:

> 'I cannot paint'. (r8) 'I am not able to do this'. (r5)

The following statements also reflected participants' feeling of inferiority:

> 'There are people that cause me to feel I am not good enough'. (r6) *'Do you feel inferior when you are with them*?' (researcher) 'They make us to feel like that'. (r6) 'I am feeling only good enough to produce children and to clean the house'. (r5) *'How does it make you feel?'* (researcher) 'In times like this, I feel like leaving my husband'. (r5)

Participants were encouraged to question distorted assumptions related to self-concept, inhibition and fear through metaphor analysis in Session 6 where they could compare their self-concept with different objects:

> 'I feel like the toothbrush because I always need to do the unpleasant work'. (r6) *'What is the consequence of this?'* (researcher) 'That my husband never learns how to do it and that causes me to be more negative. It makes me powerless and I feel mistreated' (r6). *'How do you think it can change?'* (researcher) 'I need to talk about it to other people'. (r6)

The participants' change in terms of their self-concept, inhibitions and fear was evident from the following statements:

> 'It really feels as if I have changed since we are engaged in this programme, I am now looking differently at my situation'. (r5) 'I can see you changed'. (r6 to r5) 'It felt as if things will never change, but I learnt that every problem has a cause and a solution'. (r1)

These statements show how participants moved from a place of powerlessness to the desire to change themselves without blaming their situation on someone else. This changed perspective (assumptions) can also be explained by Mezirow's (1991) statement that learning occurs as a process, an opinion supported by Percy (2005: 129). The first process of learning is the reflection on the existing assumptions. The second process of learning includes the creating of new interpretations through intuition and discovery (Mezirow, 1991: 95). In the study, this process was encouraged by icebreakers to allow questioning of previously identified distorted assumptions. Also noted in the statements above is the relationship that has developed in the group among respondents. Cranton (2004) refers to an enabling environment for transformative learning as being one of trust, empathy, sharing openness and receptivity. This is evident in the process of dialogue employed in the application of the emancipatory approach with this group.

The following two statements indicate the change in response of the participants by taking control of their circumstances without depending on outside forces:

The first session:

> *'Will you continue when I am not here anymore?'* (researcher) 'No, where will we get the money to continue?' (group)

The last session:

> *'Will you continue when I am not here anymore?'* (researcher) 'Yes, we already meet the last week in May. We will first have a meeting to develop a programme. We will start to work together to help those who don't have an income'. (r6)

These statements suggest that the emancipatory teaching approach has contributed to encouraging the participants to become independent in taking collective action to identify and solve problems. Taylor (1998 in Percy, 2005) refers to building trusting relationships and that through this; learners develop the necessary openness and confidence to deal with learning at an affective level that is necessary for the process of transformation. The ability to take collective action, as an outcome of the emancipatory approach, is an

essential element in the process of community development as it provides a platform for transformative learning to occur.

Sociolinguistic distorted assumptions

Sociolinguistic-related distorted assumptions identified in this study are related to the limitations caused by social structures and social rules. It became evident in Sessions 2 and 3 that participants felt powerless as women citizens because of the particular social rules and structures as reflected in the following statements:

> *'Do you have any fear to vote?'* (researcher) 'Not to vote, but to share our views in public. Our husbands do not like it when we speak at public meetings'. (r6) *'Do you feel suppressed in meetings?'* (researcher) 'When our husbands are against it'. (r5) 'I feel inhibited when nothing that I do is acceptable'. (r6) Questioning of this distorted assumption is encouraged: *'When do you feel like that?'* (researcher) 'When people ignore me' (r3) 'and when people look down on me'. (r7) *'Can you change it?' (researcher)* 'Yes you need to go and speak to the other person'. (r6) *'How do you feel about the community where you are staying?'* (researcher) 'They are not working together'. (r2) 'There is a big difference between us and other members of the community'. (r1) *'Does the community give you the space to be yourself?'* (researcher) 'Our own community makes us feel scared'. (r4)

These statements suggest that the participants felt limited or oppressed by the social structures and rules that are applied by their husbands and the community. Kabeer (2005) found that subordinate groups are likely to accept and even collude with their lot in society.

In Session 4, the participants had changed their view about the community as reflected in the following statements, where participants were asked how they feel about being involved in the community.

> 'It is good for communication'. (r5) 'You can make a difference by sharing your views with other people'. (r7)

The changed view is ascribed to participants who were encouraged to question their assumptions. Reflective practices were also encouraged through the implementation of critical incident analysis and case study activities (see Table 1).

It was also evident in Session 2 that participants felt they were limited to interact and become involved (due to social rules) in a process (building of the low-cost houses) that affects them.

> *'Would you have liked to be more involved in the building of your house?'* (researcher) 'Yes'. (group) *'Is there anything you could do to be more involved?'* (researcher) 'We could not do anything, because we do not get together often enough. The people in control could to something about it'. (r5)

The participants appeared to have changed their perspective in the same session regarding how they can change their level of involvement (in the building process) in the future.

> 'I would like to be more involved in future'. (r5) *'Do you think there is anything you could do to be more involved?'* (researcher) 'We can work towards it'. (r2) 'We can change it'. (r5)

Participants became more aware of the benefit of collective action as reflected by the previous statement as they were encouraged to question their assumptions. This is an example of evidence of empowerment at the interface level. Kabeer (2005) and Laverack (2005) noted that the process of empowerment is on a continuum. Albertyn, Kapp and Groenewald (2002) and Kabeer (2005) state that empowerment usually starts within micro-level moving to the other levels of empowerment, and ultimately to the macro-level of empowerment where they are more involved in change in their communities.

According to Brookfield (1986), dialogue leads to a process of reflection on distorted assumptions and perspectives. Dialogue as encouraged during all training sessions enabled participants to become more aware of the importance of interaction.

Epistemological distorted assumptions
Epistemological distorted assumptions refer to the way people use knowledge (do they just accept it on face value or do they critically access it?). The participants did not reflect and critically access their information in the beginning, but merely accepted it. This is reflected in the following statements of Sessions 2 and 3:

> 'We believed the promises that were made during the election season by politicians, but it was not the truth'. (r2) 'I do not believe anyone, the government is just corrupt'. (r5)
>
> 'The government definitely cheats us with our municipality bills'. (r2) 'It seems if they want to get their money back that they spent on this free house by increasing our bills'. (r4)

These statements reflect the view of Cranton (1994) that individuals base their assessment of situations on their own experiences, before they are exposed to an environment of dialogue, reflection and critical thinking. It is therefore important to allow participants to discover alternative ways of thinking and acting (Cranton, 1996) as was done in this study. One of the domains of empowerment as proposed by Laverack (2005: 7) is that of enhancing 'the ability to 'ask why' (critical awareness)'.

The following statements (Session 3) illustrate how participants were encouraged to reflect on distorted assumptions related to the use

of knowledge (refers to the questioning of information instead of just accepting it):

> 'Promises that are made by Government cause me to feel powerless'. (r5)
> *'What can you do if promises are made but not kept?'* (researcher) 'We first need to find out if the promises are the truth'. (r5) 'We must demand that the promises are kept'. (r2)

This statement shows that participants were encouraged to think critically and to reflect on their assumptions by challenging the participants to question their assumptions. It also illustrates how their process progressed and is also represented in the following statement (Session 5):

> 'I am more aware of the need to talk and ask questions when I do not agree with something. I do not just accept it'. (r5)

Kabeer (2005: 16) states that for ' . . . transformation to take place, it implies movement along a number of fronts, from individual to collective agency, from private negotiations to public action and from the informal sphere to the formal arenas of struggle where power is legitimately exercised'. Transformation is thus a process that takes place over time and it requires strategic, focused planning using teaching methods that will encourage and foster critical reflection. According to Percy (2005), the higher the level of critical reflection, the more likely it is that transformation, autonomy, emancipation or empowerment will occur.

The success of the emancipatory approach is not only tied to the evident change that it brings about, but also the skills that are imparted through encouraging participants to question their assumptions and to reflect on their circumstances. It is this factor of emancipatory learning, which makes it a powerful tool for lifelong learning and sustainable change.

Guidelines for applying the emancipatory teaching method
Conscientization regarding the limitations of technical training alone may be required especially for a technically trained individual facilitating training in a specific topic in the field (Percy, 2005). Kabeer (2005) states that access to education can bring about the changes in cognitive ability. Critical reflection is the key to empowerment as individuals develop the capacity to question, reflect on and act on the conditions of their lives. Often community developers may be focused on the macro-level issues but the importance of the micro-level development needs to be noted. Micro-level empowerment has been found to be a base-line level of empowerment (Albertyn, Kapp and Groenewald, 2002). This then often leads to the individual feeling more empowered to address other empowerment levels that are more external to themselves (interpersonal and macro-level

issues). In order to address the third objective of this study, the following guidelines are provided to community developers, which outline their role in applying the emancipatory teaching method:

- adjust the programme continually according to the unfelt needs or distorted assumptions that emerge during training sessions;
- for transformation, deeper levels of learning are required; thus, this process may take time and planning;
- plan activities that will motivate participation based on their felt needs;
- move the participants towards discovering unfelt needs through activities (role-play, metaphorical analysis, analysis of critical incidents and brainstorming) that encourage consciousness raising, critical reflection, dialogue and critical thinking; and
- rather consider training as a process than a product by focussing on the facilitation approaches and the participants' response to it instead of on the results.

Conclusion

The method of combining teaching of technical knowledge with the emancipatory approach has been described, and the examples of responses indicate growth in critical reflection and transformation processes. When working towards facilitating transformation in groups, it is important to be aware of the process and continuum of empowerment and to work systematically at enhancing the individuals' skills by reflecting on their circumstances and acting accordingly. Teaching these skills and not only the technical content in an intervention (in this case, housing knowledge) will help to empower and enhance their capacity to sustain the process. The group setting using their natural network will increase support and accountability.

The emancipatory approach, according to literature, is the most suitable approach to accomplish the goal of empowerment. The emancipatory method challenges educators to go beyond the mere teaching of knowledge and skills by rather focussing on participation, dialogue, critical thinking and consciousness-raising, which will lead to transformation. The participants' experiences showed that they were encouraged to identify and question their distorted assumptions. Changes related to their distorted assumptions were evident as consciousness-raising took place.

Community developers are challenged to make adjustments to their intervention programme in such a way that participants will not be merely seen as objects of a learning experience but rather as partakers of

their own development process to bring about transformation. Therefore, the main concern is the facilitator's aim or vision when engaging in community education. It can either be to teach skills and to convey knowledge or it can be to go beyond the teaching of skills and knowledge to facilitating a process where participants' distorted assumptions are exposed and challenged. This will contribute to a sustainable process within communities.

Funding

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