

ART BASED PEACE BUILDING.

GPLT is using a very unique and sustainable means on peacebuilding, it promotes the use of arts-based, informal peacebuilding in grassroots communities. Art unites people, it gives them a space to express themselves and it's a means of communication.



Previous research

Although arts-based peace initiatives may not constitute the mainstream, there is literature that appreciates their efforts. Despite being marginalized, there is a growing body of literature illustrating the intersection between the arts and their role in conflict prevention as well as in post-conflict resolution. The article adds to this discourse by elaborating specific participatory theatre techniques for use in peacebuilding.

Many conflict mediation organisations do not have **arts-based mechanisms in place**. This is because **arts are perceived as 'soft', compared to the 'hard' issues of conflict and violence**. Therefore, peacebuilding practitioners have tended to come from the social and political sciences rather than from the arts and humanities fields (Shank and Schirch 2008).

Shank and Schirch (2008) are considered to be in the vanguard in shaping the conceptual framework behind strategic arts-based peacebuilding. Shank and Schirch (2008) note that there is still very little solid theory, empirical research, or evaluation of arts-based peacebuilding compared to the mainstream liberal peace models. However, whilst Shank and Schirch (2008) allude to the use of a variety of the arts, including: **hip-hop music, mural painting, spoken word,**

documentary filmmaking, agitprop, installation art, and chants. GPLT is distinct in that it elaborates specific participatory theatre techniques. It examines these techniques with the aim of equipping activists without specialized knowledge in the applied theatre paradigm.

Using indigenous knowledge in peacebuilding:

Major peacebuilding theories provide for the systemic dimension in the peacebuilding process, but rarely integrate cultural and practical indigenous methodologies (Amollo 2008). Hence local culture and indigenous knowledge are ignored within mainstream peacebuilding and this can be dis-empowering to communities. The use of participatory theatre in peacebuilding therefore aims at creating bottom-up approaches that take into account indigenous knowledge and practices.

Peacebuilding scholar Lederach (1997) asserts that any peacebuilding work must start with narrating events of the past and what happened during the conflict. Acknowledgement through hearing one another's **stories** validates their experiences of each and is a way of moving forward. Furthermore, the story forms a basis for organising human experiences and reveals not only that which is already known, but that which is there but not yet understood (Booth 1994).

Story telling:

GPLT finds an anchor in these assertions because the use of story in peacebuilding is an ice-breaker which precedes deeper penetration into the issues of surviving violence.

The use of theatre creates a safe platform where participants can use their self-narratives to validate each others' experiences and begin the process of healing. These acts of self-narration enable self-recognition and self-crafting (Butler 2005). This is because the whole notion of 'self' is dependent on 'others', and as such, self-narration offers participants reconstructions of themselves that can be revised through drama to offer relief, affirmation, recognition, healing and possible solutions. The act of witnessing by others in itself creates recognition through the Hegelian concept of reciprocal recognition (Butler 2005:21).

The immediacy of theatre enables participants to interrogate the peacebuilding process as it happens and arrive at new truths that can be immediately examined by all through the process of reflection and evaluation.