

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory in Examining Creative Arts as an Anti-Bullying Strategy in South African Public Schools

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This article explores the integration of creative arts as an anti-bullying strategy in South African public schools through the lens of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). The study aims to comprehend the complex interactions between creative arts interventions, cultural contexts, and the dynamics of bullying. By applying CHAT, the research delves into the cultural significance of artistic expressions, shedding light on how these interventions act as cultural tools that mediate and transform the complexities of bullying within the South African educational landscape. This article employed a qualitative research methodology under desktop design, incorporating existing literature retrieved from reputable academic platforms such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ResearchGate, and university repositories. The findings of this article reveal the nuanced ways in which creative arts interventions resonate within the cultural expectations of South African public schools, impacting social interactions, attitudes, and behaviours related to bullying. This article also highlights the historical and societal dimensions influencing the success of creative arts as an anti-bullying strategy, contributing to a holistic understanding of the dynamics at play. In conclusion, the article discusses the implications of the findings and underscores the significance of tailoring anti-bullying strategies to align with the cultural and historical nuances of South African public schools.

Introduction

It is prudent to foreground this study by giving a brief background about South African public schools, so that the utilising Creative Arts as anti-bullying tool within the South African public schools under scrutiny could be contextualised. Several scholars have mentioned that South African public schools operate within a diverse and dynamic educational landscape, reflecting the nation's historical and cultural complexities.¹ The post-apartheid era ushered in significant changes, with a commitment to providing inclusive and equitable education for all.² Despite these transformative efforts, South African public

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1. Nkhumeleni, C. *The transformation of the higher education institutions in the post-apartheid era: The South African research chairs initiative as an indicator* (Doctoral dissertation, University of South Africa, 2012).

2. Sayed, Y., Badroodien, A., Omar, Y., Balie, L., McDonald, Z., de Kock, T & Nakidien, T. *Engaging teachers in peacebuilding in post-conflict contexts: Evaluating education*

schools continue to grapple with persistent challenges that impact their functioning.³ Socio-economic disparities, existing resource inequalities, and historical legacies from the apartheid era create a multifaceted context that influences the dynamics within these educational institutions.⁴ The socio-economic disparities are particularly noteworthy, as they contribute to an uneven distribution of resources, opportunities, and support systems among schools, creating an environment where vulnerabilities, including bullying, may flourish.

It is essential to acknowledge that when it comes to the issue of bullying, several studies have engaged with bullying in South African public schools. Many scholars admit that bullying has emerged as a formidable obstacle within the landscape of South African public schools, demanding urgent attention and intervention to protect the well-being of students.⁵

For example, in South African schools, the issues of bullying have become increasingly prominent, drawing attention to the need for innovative strategies to foster a safe and nurturing learning atmosphere. Bullying in South African public schools is a pervasive issue that extends beyond mere schoolyard conflicts, encompassing various forms of aggression that negatively impact the lives of countless students.⁶ From verbal taunts and social exclusion to physical violence, bullying takes on diverse and insidious forms, leaving a lasting imprint on the victims' academic performance, mental health, and overall well-being.⁷

Perhaps, it is important to mention that although South Africa received freedom, not all schools in South Africa are multicultural; some are attended mostly by learners from a single cultural or racial background. This diversity in school demographics reflects the broader societal context, where historical and structural factors continue to influence the composition of schools.⁸ Additionally, while bullying can be linked to cultural or racial factors, it is not exclusively related to these aspects.⁹ Bullying is a complex phenomenon influenced by

interventions in South Africa. *South Africa Country Report: ESRC/DFID Research Report; University of Sussex: Brighton, UK, (2017).*

3. Mouton, N., Louw, G. P., & Strydom, G. Critical challenges of the South African school system. *International Business & Economics Research Journal (IBER)*, 12 no. 1, (2013): 31-44.

4. Clercq, F. D. The persistence of South African educational inequalities: The need for understanding and relying on analytical frameworks. *Education as Change*, 24 no. 1, (2020): 1-22.

5. Laas, A., & Boezaart, T. The legislative framework regarding bullying in South African schools. *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal*, 17 no. 6 (2014): 2666-2702

6. Jacobs, L., & de Wet, C. The complexity of teacher-targeted workplace bullying: An analysis for policy. *Journal for Juridical Science*, 43 no. 2 (2018): 53-78.

7. Sikhakhane, H. N., Muthukrishna, N., & Martin, M. The geographies of bullying in a secondary school context. *South African Journal of Education*, 38 no.1 (2018).

8. Daley, T. N. *Social representations on bullying in South African school children* (Unpublished, doctoral dissertation. University of KwaZulu Natal, 2018).

9. *Ibid*, 63.

various factors, including individual behaviour, social dynamics, and personal conflicts.¹⁰ Several news reports have highlighted instances where bullying occurs irrespective of cultural or racial differences, emphasising the need for a nuanced understanding of bullying dynamics in South African schools.

Many town schools in South Africa, originally designated for White, Coloured, and Indian learners during apartheid, have undergone significant transformations since the end of apartheid.¹¹ These schools, once exclusive to specific racial groups, have evolved into multicultural institutions that now reflect the diverse nature of South African society. This transformation has been driven by efforts to promote inclusivity and diversity in education, resulting in these town schools now having diverse learner populations from various cultural and racial backgrounds. This diversity has enriched the educational experience for students, exposing them to different perspectives and experiences.¹²

In contrast, schools historically designated for Black learners, whether in urban or rural settings, have encountered different challenges. Despite the end of apartheid, many of these schools still have predominantly Black learner populations. This can be attributed to various factors, including historical inequalities, socio-economic conditions, and the enduring legacy of apartheid spatial planning.¹³ The continued predominance of Black learners in these schools has implications for the level of heterogeneity within their student bodies. While efforts have been made to promote diversity and inclusivity in these schools, barriers still exist that need to be addressed to achieve true integration and diversity in South African education.

Additionally, one of the critical factors contributing to the prevalence of bullying in South African public schools: the socio-economic landscape.¹⁴ The country's historical context, marked by apartheid and its enduring effects, has created disparities in access to resources and opportunities. These disparities often manifest in unequal power dynamics within schools, providing fertile ground for bullying behaviours. Addressing bullying requires not only acknowledging these systemic issues but also implementing targeted interventions that promote inclusivity and address underlying socio-economic

10. Ngidi, L. Z. *Reducing school violence: A peace education project amongst stakeholders in Umlazi* (Doctoral dissertation. Durban University of Technology, 2018).

11. Ibid, 3.

12. Ibid, 10.

13. Ibid, 10.

14. Savahl, S., Montserrat, C., Casas, F., Adams, S., Tiliouine, H., Benninger, E., & Jackson, K. Children's experiences of bullying victimization and the influence on their subjective well-being: A multinational comparison. *Child development*, 90 no. 2 (2019): 414-431.

factors.¹⁵ The emotional toll of bullying on victims is profound, impacting their self-esteem, mental health, and overall sense of belonging. The fear of bullying can lead to decreased attendance, academic disengagement, and even dropout rates, perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage. Recognising the interconnectedness of bullying with broader societal challenges, such as poverty and inequality, is crucial in devising comprehensive strategies to eradicate this pervasive issue.¹⁶ These studies, conducted in different contexts, provide a framework for understanding bullying in South African public schools.

Highlighting the urgency of addressing the pervasive issue of bullying, it is crucial to acknowledge the various strategies that have been implemented thus far. One notable initiative was the introduction of the National School Safety Framework by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in 2015.¹⁷ This framework aimed to empower schools by providing guidelines for identifying and addressing security threats, aligning with international conventions and national legislation concerning child rights and safety. It drew upon substantial policy frameworks, incorporating key pieces of legislation designed to enhance the safety and well-being of students.

Despite efforts, the impact of the National School Safety Framework has been limited. To address persistent challenges, the Department of Basic Education has turned to Section 2(4) of the Protection from Harassment Act as a last resort. This section empowers children to apply for a protection order independently, without parental involvement, reflecting a proactive effort to combat harassment and bullying.¹⁸ While legal and policy-based interventions have been extensively studied, there is a notable gap in exploring the role of creative arts in combating bullying.¹⁹ The potential of creative arts subjects to promote emotional expression, empathy, and positive relationships remains underexplored in anti-bullying initiatives. Understanding this gap is crucial for developing a more nuanced and comprehensive approach to addressing the root causes of bullying in South African public schools.

This article is motivated by the recognition that traditional approaches have had limited success in curbing bullying. Creative arts subjects offer a unique avenue for students to express themselves, develop emotional intelligence, and

15. Chitsamatanga, B. B., & Rembe, N. S. School related gender-based violence as a violation of children's rights to education in South Africa: Manifestations, consequences and possible solutions. *Journal of Human Ecology*, 69 no. 3 (2020): 65-80.

16. Ibid, 10.

17. Department of Basic Education (DBE). The South African national curriculum framework for children from birth to four (NCF), (2015): 1–81, Department of Basic Education, Pretoria.

18. Leoschut, L., & Makota, G. The National School Safety Framework: a framework for preventing violence in South African schools. *African safety promotion*, 14 no. 2 (2016): 18-23.

19. Ibid, 7.

build positive relationships. By addressing the gap in the existing literature, this article aims to inspire educators, policymakers, and researchers to consider and implement creative arts as a potential solution to the persistent problem of bullying in South African public schools, ultimately contributing to the creation of safer and more inclusive learning environments for all students.²⁰

Therefore, addressing bullying in South African public schools requires a comprehensive understanding of its roots and ramifications.²¹ The integration of creative arts subjects stands as a promising strategy, offering avenues for emotional expression, skill development, and cultural inclusion.²² By embracing a multidimensional approach that considers socio-economic factors, cultural narratives, and collaborative efforts, South African schools can work towards eradicating bullying and fostering environments that nurture the growth and well-being of all students.²³ Therefore, for this article the following research questions that sought answers that would clarify the ongoing crisis in South African public schools were developed:

- a) How is the discourse on bullying framed in South African public schools?
- b) What prevailing narratives exist within educational policies, media portrayals, and community discussions?
- c) To what degree does the incorporation of creative arts subjects influence the discourse surrounding bullying, shaping attitudes, values, and perceptions in the South African public-school system?
- d) How do various stakeholders, including educators, students, parents, and policymakers, participate on the teaching of creative arts as an anti-bullying strategy?
- e) What cultural, societal, and power dynamic insights emerge from the examination of integrating creative arts to address bullying in South African public schools?

Problem Statement

The problem statement addressed in this article delves into the pervasive and entrenched issue of bullying within South African public schools. Existing research underscores the profound nature of this problem, shedding light on the shortcomings of current frameworks and interventions that aim to address and

20. Ibid, 2.

21. Ncontsa, V. N., & Shumba, A. The nature, causes and effects of school violence in South African high schools. *South African journal of education*, 33 no.3 (2013): 1-15.

22. Saneleuterio, E., López-García-Torres, R., & Fernández-Ulloa, T. Forestalling Bullying in Primary and Secondary Schools in Spain. *Athens Journal of Education*, 10 no. 1 (2023): 9-25.

23. Ibid, 2.

prevent bullying.²⁴ The prevalence of bullying incidents, substantiated by distressing statistics and tragic headlines, emphasises the pressing need for innovative and comprehensive solutions to foster safer and more supportive learning environments.²⁵

Policy frameworks, such as the National School Safety Framework introduced in 2015, are recognised within the research but are critically evaluated as insufficient in their impact. Despite concerted efforts, the issue persists, impacting a substantial percentage of students and manifesting in diverse forms such as social, verbal, physical, and cyberbullying.²⁶ The gravity of the situation is accentuated by the limited effectiveness of current interventions, prompting a reassessment of approaches to combat bullying within South African public schools. The research posits that the intricacies of bullying demand a deeper understanding that transcends traditional disciplinary measures and isolated interventions. The introduction of the concept of "bully-victims," individuals who oscillate between victimisation and perpetration, adds a nuanced layer to the problem. This underscores the interconnected nature of bullying behaviours and implies that a systemic approach, considering the entire school environment, is imperative for devising effective anti-bullying strategies.²⁷

Therefore, the problem statement pivots around the necessity for a multifaceted approach that not only acknowledges the limitations of existing interventions but also explores innovative avenues. The proposed integration of creative arts into the curriculum emerges as a potential transformative solution. This approach seeks to address the root causes of bullying by fostering emotional intelligence, empathy, and cultivating a positive school culture. The research aims to contribute insights that can guide policymakers, educators, and stakeholders in formulating more effective and holistic strategies to combat bullying in South African public schools.

Methodology

The decision to employ a qualitative research methodology in this study was driven by the need to explore the complex nuances surrounding the use of creative arts to address bullying in South African public schools.²⁸ Qualitative

24. Ibid, 18.

25. Ibid, 5.

26. Kutywayo, A., Mabetha, K., Naidoo, N. P., Mahuma, T., Njobe, P., Hlongwane, R., & Mullick, S. Learner experiences of safety at public high schools in three South African townships: Baseline findings from the National School Safety Framework learner surveys. *Gates Open Research*, 6, no 6 (2022).

27. Ibid, 7.

28. Isaacs, A. N. An overview of qualitative research methodology for public health researchers. *International Journal of medicine and public health*, 4 no. 4 (2014): 318-323.

research, renowned for its depth and flexibility, was deemed most suitable for delving into the intricacies of integrating creative arts within the context of bullying. Additionally, the study adopted a literature-based (desktop study) design, instead of interviews with human subjects.²⁹ This design choice was justified by the comprehensive exploration and synthesis of existing research, policies, and discourse, providing a foundational understanding of the current state of using creative arts as a means to combat bullying in South African public schools. Literary sources proved to be invaluable, sourced from reputable academic platforms such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ResearchGate, and university repositories.³⁰

For the search strategy, a systematic search was conducted using the "advanced search function" on the aforementioned databases. Various combinations of search terms such as "bullying in public schools of South Africa," "causes of bullying in schools," "influence of bullying," and "addressing bullying South African schools" were used. The search was conducted from July 2023 to January 2024, focusing on historical and current literature in the English language.³¹ Due to the limited literature specifically focusing on the use of arts to address bullying in South African schools, the search was expanded to include international studies. A total of 200 non-duplicate articles were found, with 149 articles excluded after reviewing the titles and abstracts as they were irrelevant to the study. Ultimately, 51 articles were included in this study. To enhance data quality and strengthen the study's credibility, triangulation was employed.³² This method involved cross-verifying findings through multiple approaches, ensuring a robust and reliable foundation for the study's conclusions. By triangulating data, the study aimed to mitigate biases and enhance the overall validity of the insights drawn from the examination of creative arts integration in combating bullying.

Thematic analysis was another key method used in this study, serving as a systematic and in-depth exploration of qualitative data.³³ This approach allowed for the distillation of key themes from the formulated questions, enabling a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted aspects of creative arts integration in addressing bullying in South African public schools. Through thematic analysis,

29. Banasick, S. KADE: A desktop application for Q methodology. *Journal of Open Source Software*, 4 no, 36, (2019): 1360.

30. Mohajan, H. K. Qualitative research methodology in social sciences and related subjects. *Journal of economic development, environment and people*, 7 no. 1 (2018): 23-48.

31. Ibid, 29.

32. Moon, M. D. Triangulation: A method to increase validity, reliability, and legitimation in clinical research. *Journal of emergency nursing*, 45 no. 1 (2019): 103-105.

33. Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International journal of qualitative methods*, 16 no. 1 (2017): 1609406917733847.

the study aimed to uncover patterns and insights that contribute to a richer understanding of the subject matter.

Theoretical Framework

In this article, Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) is employed as a theoretical framework, originating from the work of Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky.³⁴ This influential theory has shaped the perspectives of numerous scholars, including Engeström (1987); Leont'ev (1978) and Luria (1976). CHAT aims to comprehend the relationship between individuals and their cultural context, asserting that human activities are intricately shaped by the socio-cultural environments in which they occur, highlighting the interdependence between individuals, cultural artifacts, and the broader societal context.³⁵

Within the specific context of examining the integration of creative arts to address bullying in South African public schools, CHAT offers a valuable analytical lens. It facilitates an exploration of how creative arts practices intersect with the rich cultural fabric of South African society.³⁶ Therefore, recognising that activities, such as artistic expressions, are embedded within cultural contexts, CHAT encourages an examination of how these practices align with or challenge cultural expectations.³⁷ In the South African context, characterised by a diverse cultural heritage, comprehending how creative arts interventions resonate with the cultural expectations of students, educators, and communities becomes paramount.

CHAT accentuates the role of cultural artifacts and tools in mediating human activity. In the case of creative arts as an anti-bullying tool, this theory sheds light on how artistic expressions become cultural tools that mediate and transform the dynamics of bullying.³⁸ By delving into the cultural significance of creative arts practices, researchers can discern how these interventions contribute to reshaping social interactions, attitudes, and behaviours related to bullying within the school environment.

South African public schools, reflecting the nation's diverse cultural tapestry, are profoundly influenced by historical and societal contexts. CHAT proves particularly relevant in this setting as it recognises that human activities, including the integration of creative arts, cannot be understood in isolation from

34. Vygotsky, L. S. *Mind and society*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

35. *Ibid*, 34.

36. Engeström, Y. *Learning by expanding: An activity theoretical approach to developmental research*. Helsinki, Finland: Orienta Konsultit, (1987).

37. Leont'ev, A. N. *Activity, consciousness, and personality*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: PrenticeHall, 1978).

38. *Ibid*, 36.

the cultural milieu.³⁹ By applying CHAT, researchers can delve into the nuanced interactions between creative arts practices and the prevalent cultural expectations in South African society.⁴⁰ This approach aligns with the imperative for a holistic understanding of how anti-bullying initiatives resonate within the cultural context of South African public schools, providing valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders involved in fostering safer and more inclusive learning environments.

Contextualising the Findings of this Article

The findings of this article, rooted in the exploration of integrating creative arts to address bullying in South African public schools, necessitate a nuanced contextualisation. Understanding the implications and applications of these findings within the broader educational and societal framework is crucial for informing meaningful interventions and fostering positive change. The findings were divided into seven significant sections, namely: (a) framing of bullying discourse in South African public schools; (b) prevailing narratives in educational policies, media, and community discussions; (c) influence of creative arts on bullying discourse in public schools; (d) stakeholder participation in teaching creative arts as an anti-bullying strategy; and (e) cultural, societal, and power dynamic insights from creative arts integration. These developed themes provide a comprehensive framework for analysing and understanding the multifaceted aspects of integrating creative arts to address bullying in South African public schools. Each theme delves into specific dimensions, contributing to a holistic exploration of the research questions posed.

Framing of Bullying Discourse in South African Public Schools

The discourse on bullying within South African public schools is intricately influenced by power dynamics, cultural perspectives, and historical legacies, as examined through the lenses of influential scholars. The conceptualisation of subtle power operations within societal structures is particularly relevant, highlighting the significant influence wielded by educators, policymakers, and the media in shaping discussions around bullying.⁴¹ The pivotal role of educators

39. Beatty, I. D., & Feldman, A. Viewing teacher transformation through the lens of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT). *Education as Change*, 16no. 2, (2012): 283-300.

40. Nussbaumer, D. An overview of cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) use in classroom research 2000 to 2009. *Educational review*, 64 no. 1 (2012): 37-55.

41. Le Menestrel, S. Preventing bullying: Consequences, prevention, and intervention. *Journal of Youth Development*, 15 no. 3 (2020): 8-26.

as authoritative figures who shape the narrative by determining how incidents of bullying are addressed and reported.⁴² Understanding these power dynamics is crucial for uncovering marginalised voices and comprehending the structural impact on the formulation of anti-bullying policies.⁴³

The rich cultural diversity present in South African public schools adds a layer of complexity to the discourse on bullying.⁴⁴ Examining cultural perspectives, reveals the profound influence of cultural norms on societal values, affecting behaviours and attitudes towards bullying.⁴⁵ Research underscores the impact of cultural diversity on the interpretation and response to incidents of bullying by learners and educators.⁴⁶ Therefore, recognising these cultural nuances is vital for the development of anti-bullying initiatives that resonate with the diverse student population.

Historical influences, rooted in South Africa's apartheid history and subsequent reconciliation efforts, cast a profound shadow on the framing of bullying in contemporary school environments. The exploration of historical legacies highlights their impact on societal structures, particularly concerning power dynamics within the discourse on bullying.⁴⁷ Investigating whether historical injustices perpetuate power imbalances and shape perceptions of bullying incidents is crucial for crafting strategies that address deeply rooted issues. The examination of power dynamics, cultural perspectives, and historical influences within the discourse on bullying in South African public schools provides a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted factors shaping the narrative.⁴⁸ Acknowledging these dimensions is imperative for formulating effective anti-bullying strategies that consider contextual relevance, cultural sensitivity, and historical legacies, contributing to the creation of safer and more inclusive learning environments.⁴⁹ The theoretical frameworks and empirical

42. Winnaar, L., Arends, F., & Beku, U. Reducing bullying in schools by focusing on school climate and school socio-economic status. *South African Journal of Education*, 38 no. 1 (2018).

43. De Wet, A. Understanding harassment and bullying of learners in school: An education law perspective. *Child abuse research in South Africa*, 17 no. 1 (2016): 24-35.

44. Lidzhegu, M. E. *A whole-school approach to managing bullying behaviour among learners in South African primary schools* (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, University of South Africa, 2019).

45. Salin, D. Workplace bullying and culture: Diverse conceptualizations and interpretations. *Dignity and Inclusion at Work*, (2021): 513-538.

46. De Luca, L., Nocentini, A., & Menesini, E. The teacher's role in preventing bullying. *Frontiers in psychology*, no. 10 (2019): 1830.

47. Mayeza, E., & Bhana, D. Boys and bullying in primary school: Young masculinities and the negotiation of power. *South African Journal of Education*, 41 no. 1 (2021).

48. Ibid, 45.

49. Ibid, 44.

evidence contribute to a nuanced understanding of these dynamics within the South African educational context.

Prevailing Narratives in Educational Policies, Media, and Community Discussions

Examining the prevailing narratives on bullying within South African public schools necessitates an exploration of the embedded themes in educational policies, media portrayals, and community discussions. Educational policies, serving as a foundational framework, often reflect societal values and priorities. Previous work highlight the importance of policies in shaping the discourse on bullying, emphasising the need for a comprehensive and systematic approach.⁵⁰ Analysing existing policies allows insight into the institutional responses to bullying incidents, providing a lens through which the prevailing narrative can be deciphered.

Media portrayals play a significant role in shaping public perceptions and discourse on bullying. Media acts as a powerful mediator that constructs narratives, influences public opinion, and contributes to social norms.⁵¹ Analysing media narratives on bullying allows for an understanding of how incidents are framed, the language used, and the portrayal of various stakeholders involved. The impact of media narratives on public perceptions, indicating the need to critically assess media representations to discern their influence on the prevailing discourse.⁵² Community discussions, representing the collective voice of parents, students, educators, and other stakeholders, contribute to the multifaceted narrative surrounding bullying.⁵³ The engagement of communities in discussions about bullying fosters awareness, advocacy, and collaborative problem-solving. The importance of community involvement in anti-bullying efforts, highlighting the potential for collective action to shape the narrative positively.⁵⁴ Analysing community discussions unveils the shared concerns, values, and perspectives that contribute to the broader societal discourse on bullying.

50. Ibid, 18.

51. Ibid, 18.

52. Ferguson, C. J. Do angry birds make for angry children? A meta-analysis of video game influences on children's and adolescents' aggression, mental health, prosocial behavior and academic performance. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, no. 10 (2015): 646-666.

53. Mahabeer, P. Novice teachers' beliefs and fears on bullying in schools in South Africa. *Koers: Bulletin for Christian Scholarship= Koers: Bulletin vir Christelike Wetenskap* 85, no. 1 (2020): 1-15.

54. Tustin, D. H., Zulu, G. N., & Basson, A. Bullying among secondary school learners in South Africa with specific emphasis on cyber bullying. *Child Abuse Research in South Africa* 15, no. 2 (2014): 13-25.

The prevailing narratives on bullying within South African public schools are deeply embedded in educational policies, media portrayals, and community discussions. Theoretical foundations and empirical evidence, offering insights into the complexities of these narratives.⁵⁵ By critically examining policies, media representations, and community discussions, stakeholders can gain a comprehensive understanding of the prevailing discourse, informing targeted interventions and strategies to address bullying effectively.

Influence of Creative Arts on Bullying Discourse in Public Schools

The integration of creative arts into anti-bullying initiatives in South African public schools emerges as a promising avenue for transformative change within the discourse on bullying. Investigating the potential impact of creative arts, researchers emphasise the role of artistic engagement in fostering attitude shifts among students and educators. Several studies highlight the positive influence of creative arts, such as visual arts and music, in promoting empathy and emotional expression.⁵⁶ This suggests that creative arts interventions have the potential to cultivate a more inclusive school culture by enhancing individuals' ability to connect with the emotional experiences associated with bullying incidents.⁵⁷

Examining whether creative arts interventions alter perceptions of bullying within the discourse, as discussed by,⁵⁸ reveals the potential for a more nuanced and empathetic understanding of the complex dynamics surrounding bullying. Creative arts, providing a platform for individuals to express complex emotions, contributes to a collective narrative that challenges conventional perceptions of bullying. Furthermore, the assessment of whether creative arts subjects align with the values embedded in the anti-bullying discourse is crucial for sustained impact.⁵⁹ Creative arts, by fostering a culture of mutual respect and providing students with a means of creative expression, contribute to the embodiment of anti-bullying values. Therefore, understanding the multifaceted influence of creative arts on attitudes, perceptions, and values within the discourse on

55. Ibid, 47.

56. Farrington, C. A., Maurer, J., McBride, M. R. A., Nagaoka, J., Puller, J. S., Shewfelt, S. & Wright, L. Arts Education and Social-Emotional Learning Outcomes among K-12 Students: Developing a Theory of Action. *University of Chicago Consortium on School Research* (2019).

57. Lomas, T. Positive art: Artistic expression and appreciation as an exemplary vehicle for flourishing. *Review of General Psychology*, 20, no. 2 (2016): 171-182.

58. Belliveau, G. An arts-based approach to teach social justice: Drama as a way to address bullying in schools. *International Journal of Arts Education* 3, no. 2, (2005): 136-165.

59. Magagula, S., Mugovhani, N. G., & Yende, S. J. Challenges Encountered in the Enhancement and Optimal Teaching and Learning of the Creative Arts Subject in South Africa. *African Journal of Inter/Multidisciplinary Studies*, 4, no. 1 (2022): 373-383.

bullying is essential for fostering a safer, more empathetic, and inclusive school environment in South African public schools.⁶⁰

Stakeholder Participation in Teaching Creative Arts as an Anti-bullying Strategy

Stakeholder participation in teaching creative arts as an anti-bullying strategy in South African public schools reveals a complex interplay of roles and perspectives. Educators are key stakeholders, playing a crucial role in implementing creative arts interventions. Research suggests that educators' support and engagement are vital for the success of anti-bullying programs involving creative arts.⁶¹ Analysing the extent of educator involvement provides insights into the integration of creative arts into the curriculum and its impact on fostering a positive and inclusive learning environment.

Students, as both recipients and contributors to creative arts initiatives, hold a central position in the anti-bullying narrative. Their participation in artistic activities serves as a means of expression and contributes to shaping the overall school culture. The positive impact of art-making on emotional well-being, highlighting the potential of creative arts to empower students and mitigate the effects of bullying. Assessing the depth of student involvement in creative arts interventions provides a nuanced understanding of their role in shaping attitudes and behaviours related to bullying.⁶²

Parents, as influential stakeholders, contribute to the discourse on creative arts as an anti-bullying strategy through their support, engagement, and advocacy. Involving parents in school initiatives fosters a collaborative approach and enhances the effectiveness of anti-bullying interventions.⁶³ The importance of community involvement in comprehensive anti-bullying efforts, emphasising the role of parents in shaping the broader societal narrative. Analysing the degree of parental engagement provides insights into the holistic impact of creative arts strategies beyond the school environment.

Policymakers and school administrators, responsible for policy formulation and implementation, contribute to the structural support for creative arts interventions. Their decisions impact the allocation of resources, integration into

60. Rak, K. *A creative arts approach to learning with youth about bullying* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2012).

61. Meyer, M., & Wood, L. Becoming (p) art: Fostering socially engaged leadership for preservice art teachers through service-learning. *Journal of Education (University of KwaZulu-Natal)*, no. 76 (2019): 69-88.

62. *Ibid*, 61.

63. Gaffney, H., Ttofi, M. M., & Farrington, D. P. Effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying perpetration and victimization: An updated systematic review and meta-analysis. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 17, no. 2 (2021): e1143.

the curriculum, and overall institutional commitment to anti-bullying efforts. The significance of comprehensive and systemic approaches within educational policies.⁶⁴ Evaluating the extent of policymaker and administrator involvement reveals the institutional commitment to leveraging creative arts as a means to address bullying effectively. Stakeholder participation in teaching creative arts as an anti-bullying strategy encompasses educators, students, parents, policymakers, and administrators.⁶⁵ Theoretical foundations and empirical evidence, offering insights into the multifaceted roles and perspectives of these stakeholders. By critically assessing the depth of involvement from each stakeholder group, educators and policymakers can refine strategies, ensuring a comprehensive and collaborative approach to combat bullying in South African public schools.

Cultural, Societal, and Power Dynamic Insights from Creative Arts Integration

The integration of creative arts into anti-bullying strategies within South African public schools provides valuable insights into cultural, societal, and power dynamics. Culturally, creative arts, encompassing visual arts, drama, music, and dance, serve as expressive mediums deeply rooted in South Africa's diverse cultural heritage. In this article, the term "creative arts" refers to music. Cultural norms influence behaviours and attitudes, making the exploration of creative arts' impact on cultural dynamics crucial.⁶⁶ Analysing how various cultural groups respond to and engage with creative arts interventions unveils the potential for these strategies to resonate differently across diverse cultural.

Societally, the incorporation of creative arts into anti-bullying initiatives contributes to a collective narrative challenging conventional perceptions of bullying. Creative arts offer a platform for individuals to express complex emotions and experiences, fostering empathy and understanding.⁶⁷ Investigating societal responses to creative arts interventions reveals how these initiatives shape broader societal attitudes towards bullying. The significance of artistic engagement in enhancing self-awareness and promoting a deeper understanding of others within the societal context.⁶⁸ Power dynamics are inherently intertwined

64. Ibid, 18.

65. Ibid, 63.

66. Shao, Y., Zhang, C., Zhou, J., Gu, T., & Yuan, Y. How does culture shape creativity? A mini-review. *Frontiers in psychology*, no. 10 (2019): 1219.

67. Magagula, S., Mugovhani, N. G., & Yende, S. J. Challenges Encountered in the Enhancement and Optimal Teaching and Learning of the Creative Arts Subject in South Africa. *African Journal of Inter/Multidisciplinary Studies*, 4, no. 1 (2022): 373-383.

68. Dwiningrum, S. I. A., & Wahab, N. A. Creative teaching strategy to reduce bullying in schools. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 19, no. 4 (2020): 343-355.

with creative arts integration, influencing who holds the narrative authority in discussions around bullying. The conceptualisation of subtle power operations within societal structures is particularly relevant in examining how various stakeholders, such as educators, policymakers, and the media, exert influence in shaping the discourse on bullying through creative arts. Investigating power imbalances in the implementation and interpretation of creative arts strategies reveals the extent to which certain voices are amplified or marginalized in the anti-bullying narrative.⁶⁹

The integration of creative arts into anti-bullying initiatives provides nuanced insights into cultural, societal, and power dynamics within the South African context. The theoretical foundations and empirical evidence offering a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted impact of creative arts on these dynamics. By critically assessing the cultural resonance, societal responses, and power dynamics associated with creative arts integration, educators and policymakers can tailor anti-bullying strategies to address the complexities of South African public schools effectively.

Narratives of Victims of Bullying and Bullies in Public Schools

It is crucial to acknowledge that victims of bullying and bullies in public schools are integral components of a complex and often distressing dynamic. For victims, the ramifications can be severe, resulting in a spectrum of adverse effects including psychological distress, social isolation, and academic challenges. These individuals frequently grapple with navigating their school environment, contending with fear, anxiety, and a sense of powerlessness.⁷⁰ Conversely, bullies themselves often wrestle with their own unique challenges. While their conduct is reprehensible and necessitates intervention, it is crucial to acknowledge that bullies may be driven by an array of underlying issues such as low self-esteem, a desire for control, or exposure to violence at home.⁷¹ Understanding these factors is pivotal in devising effective interventions that target the root causes of bullying behaviour.

To address the needs of both victims and bullies, a comprehensive approach encompassing education, support, and intervention is imperative. Schools must cultivate a safe and inclusive environment where bullying is unequivocally condemned, and all students feel valued and respected.⁷² This can be accomplished through initiatives like anti-bullying campaigns, access to counselling services, and the implementation of restorative justice practices aimed at repairing harm

69. Ibid, 41.

70. Ibid, 18.

71. Ibid, 8.

72. Ibid, 10.

and fostering empathy.⁷³ By acknowledging the experiences of both victims and bullies and tackling the underlying issues that fuel bullying behaviour, public schools can strive towards establishing a culture of empathy, respect, and kindness where all students can flourish.

Additionally, it is important to highlight the gravity of the issue by referencing real-life tragedies resulting from bullying in South African schools. Headlines such as “Pupil stabbed to death at Gauteng school had suffered history of bullying”, “Grade 6 learner commits suicide after bullying”, and “Grade 11 learner takes her own life after taunts over her appearance” underscore the urgent need for effective measures to address bullying in schools. The prevalence of bullying in South African schools is alarming, with studies indicating that a significant percentage of learners experience bullying on a monthly basis.⁷⁴ Despite the introduction of the National School Safety Framework in 2015, which aimed to address security threats in schools, the effectiveness of these measures has been limited. As a response, the Department of Basic Education is promoting the use of Section 2(4) of the Protection from Harassment Act, empowering children to seek protection orders without parental assistance. This underscores the importance of implementing holistic anti-bullying programmes that address the underlying systemic issues contributing to bullying behaviour.

Bullying in Private and Public Schools of South Africa

In South Africa, bullying is a prevalent issue that affects students in both private and public schools. While the extent and nature of bullying may vary between these two types of institutions, the underlying dynamics remain similar.⁷⁵ In private schools, where students often come from more privileged backgrounds, bullying can manifest in subtle forms such as exclusion, ostracism, or verbal abuse.⁷⁶ These behaviours may stem from a sense of entitlement or superiority among certain students, leading them to belittle or intimidate their peers. On the other hand, bullying in public schools is often more overt and physical, reflecting the broader social and economic challenges faced by students in these settings.⁷⁷ Factors such as poverty, overcrowded classrooms, and limited resources can contribute to a more hostile environment where bullying thrives. Additionally, the historical legacy of apartheid and its impact on social dynamics can also play a role in shaping patterns of bullying behaviour.

73. Ibid, 7.

74. Juan, A., Zuze, L., Hannan, S., Govender, A., & Reddy, V. Bullies, victims and bully-victims in South African schools: Examining the risk factors. *South African Journal of Education*, 38, no. 1 (2018).

75. Ibid, 74.

76. Ibid, 18.

77. Ibid, 18.

Despite these differences, it is essential to recognize that bullying is a complex issue that transcends school type. Both private and public schools must take proactive measures to address bullying and promote a culture of respect and empathy (Leoschut & Makota 2016). This includes implementing comprehensive anti-bullying policies, providing training for teachers and staff, and fostering a supportive environment where students feel safe to report incidents of bullying. By addressing bullying in all its forms, South African schools can create a more inclusive and positive learning environment for all students.

Discussion

The findings of this article illuminate the pervasive issue of bullying in South African public schools, emphasising the urgent need for innovative strategies to address this complex challenge. Despite the introduction of the National School Safety Framework in 2015, existing frameworks have shown limited effectiveness, prompting the exploration of alternative approaches such as the integration of creative arts.⁷⁸ The study's emphasis on the Protection from Harassment Act's Section 2(4) as a last resort for empowering children to seek protection independently sheds light on the limitations of current measures and the necessity for more accessible avenues for students to combat bullying.

The investigation into the nature of bullying reveals the intricate dynamics involved, challenging traditional binary views by identifying cycles of victimisation, where individuals can transition between being victims and perpetrators, known as bully-victims.⁷⁹ This nuanced understanding underscores the need for holistic anti-bullying programmes that address the underlying systemic issues within the school environment, aligning with the theoretical framework emphasising the interconnectedness of relationships, safety, a sense of belonging, and prevailing attitudes and values in shaping the outcomes of anti-bullying efforts.

The critical discourse analysis of leveraging creative arts to combat bullying aligns with the developed theoretical framework, offering a promising avenue for reshaping the narrative around bullying. Therefore, recognising creative arts as more than a tool for self-expression, the study delves into its potential to influence power dynamics, cultural influences, and societal expectations.⁸⁰ This aligns with the call for comprehensive strategies that go beyond conventional approaches, emphasising the role of creative arts in fostering cultural sensitivity, empowerment, and reshaping societal attitudes.

78. Ibid, 18.

79. Ibid, 47.

80. Ibid, 18.

Additionally, CHAT facilitates an examination of societal responses to creative arts interventions. The theory underscores that activities are not isolated but are part of a broader societal context. In the case of this research, societal responses to creative arts as an anti-bullying strategy are critical for understanding how these interventions shape broader societal attitudes towards bullying. The theory encourages us to consider how creative arts practices contribute to reshaping societal norms and expectations related to bullying.

In essence, the application of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory enriches our understanding of the findings presented in this study. It provides a comprehensive framework for examining the intricate relationships between creative arts interventions, cultural contexts, historical legacies, and societal dynamics within South African public schools. The theory's emphasis on the interdependence between individuals, cultural artifacts, and the broader societal context aligns with the complexity of addressing bullying in a culturally diverse and historically significant educational landscape. As policymakers, educators, and stakeholders strive to foster safer and more inclusive learning environments, CHAT serves as a valuable tool for crafting anti-bullying strategies that are deeply rooted in the cultural and historical nuances of South African public schools.

Recommendations

In response to the complex issue of bullying in South African public schools, a multifaceted approach is recommended. Firstly, policymakers and education authorities should reassess and strengthen existing frameworks, such as the National School Safety Framework, incorporating insights from comprehensive studies on bullying dynamics. Prioritising the development of accessible channels for children to seek protection independently, in alignment with legal provisions, is crucial to address gaps in the current system.

Secondly, creative arts, including visual arts, drama, music, and dance, should be embedded in the curriculum to provide students with diverse avenues for self-expression, fostering a positive and inclusive learning environment. These artistic mediums offer unique platforms for students to explore their emotions, build empathy, and develop essential social skills. Thirdly, educational authorities should prioritise the development of comprehensive programmes that leverage creative arts as an anti-bullying strategy. These programmes can involve workshops, performances, and projects that not only empower students but also promote a culture of respect, understanding, and tolerance. By incorporating creative arts, schools can cultivate a safe space where students feel encouraged to express themselves authentically, diminishing the prevalence of bullying. Moreover, teacher training programmes should incorporate modules on utilising creative arts in addressing bullying, equipping educators with the skills and

knowledge needed to implement these strategies effectively. Encouraging collaboration between schools, local artists, and community organisations can further enrich these initiatives, creating a collective effort to combat bullying and foster a supportive educational environment. In essence, the implementation of creative arts within South African public schools emerges as a transformative recommendation, fostering an environment where students can not only flourish academically but also develop the resilience and empathy needed to counteract the impacts of bullying effectively.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research highlights the multifaceted nature of bullying in South African public schools and underscores the necessity of a comprehensive approach to address this pervasive issue. The findings of this study reveal the limitations of current anti-bullying frameworks and emphasize the need for innovative strategies that encompass policy adjustments and the integration of creative arts into the educational curriculum to effectively combat bullying. The integration of creative arts emerges as a promising avenue for promoting a positive and inclusive learning environment. By providing students with unique platforms for self-expression, creative arts interventions address the emotional and social dimensions that underlie bullying behaviour. These interventions include various forms of creative expression, such as visual arts, drama, music, and dance, which serve as powerful tools for empowering students and fostering a culture of respect and understanding.

Comprehensive programs that leverage creative arts, such as workshops, performances, and projects, have been shown to empower students and contribute to the cultivation of a school culture that values empathy and tolerance. These initiatives not only provide students with an outlet for self-expression but also create opportunities for meaningful engagement with diverse cultural perspectives. The successful implementation of creative arts interventions relies heavily on the training and support of educators. Teacher training programs that focus on integrating creative arts into anti-bullying efforts are essential for ensuring the sustained impact of these interventions. Additionally, collaboration between schools, local artists, and community organizations enriches these initiatives and fosters a collective effort to combat bullying.

In essence, this research advocates for a holistic approach to addressing bullying in South African public schools. By integrating creative arts into anti-bullying strategies, educators and policymakers can create safer, more nurturing, and empathetic learning environments. This approach not only addresses the immediate symptoms of bullying but also aims to address its root causes, ultimately contributing to the development of resilient, empathetic, and socially responsible individuals within the South African educational landscape.

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