



**Understanding Adolescence in African Contexts**

**WP 3 Workshop 1 (31 October - 2 November 2019)**

*Understanding Adolescence in African Contexts*

**Oxford 31<sup>st</sup> – November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2019**

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## Workshop Summary

The *Understanding Adolescence in African Contexts* Workshop took place in Oxford, between the 31<sup>st</sup> October and the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2019. The workshop, organized by Work-package 3 of the Hub – the ‘innovation’ strand – involved around thirty participants, who gathered in Oxford from Africa, Europe and the United States. Around half were members of the Hub, and half were academics and researchers from a wide variety of disciplinary backgrounds, not associated with the Hub itself. The workshop was the first of a series of events projected within this workstream. The next will be in March of 2020, a workshop in Cape Town which will explore the relationship between narrative and adolescence followed in Johannesburg in May 2020 by a workshop which will focus on neurology and the lifecourse, and later next year a final, larger workshop will draw together these strands to consider how these discussions can feed into the thinking and practice of the Hub throughout its work.

The following set of reports reflect our conceptual, methodological and procedural responses as organisers of the workshop. These are written as five short papers: 1) The methodology of self-immersion; 2) Risk and Perceptions of Risk; 3) The guiding myth of the well-adjusted individual; 4) Researching adolescence under the microscope; and 5) Emerging Areas of Work.

The remit of this first workshop in Oxford was to focus on context—on adolescence in African contexts. It was held in the itself provocative context of Rhodes House, a building laced with the colonial histories of Oxford’s institutions. As organisers we chose this as a site in particular to stimulate reflections on the ways of working and modes of knowledge production which the Hub is part of. The workshop created a forum to discuss how individuals have impacts on their contexts and how those contexts in turn impinge on individuals’ lives. It convened conversations about how combined contextual and narrative understandings can work to accelerate and deepen interventions to support young people’s well-being in various ways. Asking questions about context required us to transcend disciplines, bringing in perspectives from psychiatry to literary studies, and from public health to geography. The workshop was therefore profoundly multi-disciplinarity, confronting the challenges of establishing effective dialogues across very different sets of priorities and ways of working. The workshop sought to stimulate open and creative discussions across three days, beginning from sets of shared concerns and moving towards modes of implementing new insights in practice.

The workshop, then, was oriented by two guiding questions:

- a) What is the role of context in shaping how African adolescents understand themselves and their place in the world?
- b) How can emphasizing and exploring interactions between African adolescents and their contexts help us understand adolescents and their actions?

With these orientating concerns in mind, and with participants having been asked to read a few short texts in advance, the workshop was opened by Lucie Cluver introducing the Hub's work, and Elleke Boehmer and Chris Desmond introducing the workshop itself. Participants were then asked to introduce themselves, and describe, in a sentence, what kind of adolescent they were themselves. This opening exercise elicited lively conversations and fascinating self-reflections. It became an important reference point throughout the three days of the workshop. After these introductory sessions, an interdisciplinary panel offered short reflections to establish a variety of angles on understanding adolescence in context. These included two readings, one offered by Patricia Daley, Professor of the Human Geography of Africa at Oxford, who read from *Nervous Conditions* (1989) by Tsitsi Dangarembga, and another from Oluwafemi Oyeboode, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Birmingham, who read from the Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka's autobiographical *Aké: The Years of Childhood* (1981). These stories – including a memorable account of a flaming cockerel – set the stage for an exploratory and creative atmosphere throughout the sessions. Elona Toska and Alude Mahali completed the panel, offering the participants, respectively, a fascinating insight into one of the Hub's projects, and an account of a methodology of social network interviewing with adolescents in Southern Africa. After dinner, participants reflected on the earlier sessions, and were asked to define positive, negative and neutral terms which could define adolescence. This provoked an extended discussion on, among other things, risk. Adolescents, many noted, were characterized by risky behaviour, but this could be both a positive and a negative feature in individual and social contexts, and was crucial to many aspects of adolescent development. The question of how to define interventions which account for risk taking was reflected on productively.

The second day of the workshop began with a morning dedicated to multidisciplinary research presentations. During an intellectually dense morning of discussion, the group heard from members of the Hub including Olayinka Omigbodun, Heidi Stöckl, Alan Stein and Gerry Mshana, as well as academics familiar to many Hub members such as Tony Barnett from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. We also heard presentations from outside the Hub. Emma Kilford, a neuroscientist at UCL, introduced key elements of adolescent brain development, Alexandra Georgeakopoulou outlined her recent work on social media narratives among young people, and Diana Walters presented inspiring work on peace museums in East Africa. These presentations were all followed by extensive discussions.

After lunch the participants were invited on a walking tour of Oxford, hosted by *Uncomfortable Oxford* and led by doctoral students at Oxford who conduct tours to explore the colonial inheritances of the University. Participants returned to Rhodes House to reflect on the morning's presentations, before a final panel of researchers gave their responses to the workshop's proceedings. This panel was once again broad and interdisciplinary. Kopano Ratele presented his work on masculinities in South Africa, and emphasized the importance of working and writing alongside adolescents themselves. Simukai Chigudu, an Associate Professor in Oxford, talked through his

work on cholera in Zimbabwe, focussing on his interviews with young people during his research, and their contrasting understandings of political crisis. Cindi Katz, Professor in Environmental Psychology, Earth and Environmental Sciences, American Studies, and Women's Studies at the City University of New York discussed the political economy of youth, and her work on the concept of social childhood. In very different ways these discussants emphasized the inherently political dynamics of working on questions of adolescence in African contexts. At the end of a long day participants gathered at a local restaurant.

On the final day, participants came through the heavy Oxford rain to attend an interactive workshop with a local writer and teacher, Kate Clanchy. Kate demonstrated the power of writing poetry not only through showcasing her own work with young people in Oxford – including very powerful videos of young Oxford poets – but through making all participants write poems themselves. This simple exercise acted as a reflection of the beginning of the workshop, as it encouraged all participants to reflect again on how our own personal narratives of adolescence relate to research and intervention in adolescent lives. The workshop closed with a session attempting to gather together the many threads of the three days' discussions, and draw them into reflections on the Hub's processes of designing and examining interventions.

This workshop will inform the subsequent events organized in this Work Package. The results are also being gathered together in a series of concept papers which will be circulated and discussed in the Hub over the coming months. A transcript of all proceedings was made, and will be shared with Hub members. Finally, we recorded a series of podcasts, which will be published online.

**Outputs:** The following set of reports emerged from the workshop discussions. The reports reflect our conceptual, methodological and procedural findings on the topics discussed. They are intended to work as standalone documents or as a set.

## **1. Telling stories about our own adolescence: Methodology of Self-Immersion**

### Introduction

Adolescents are often described in negative terms, talked about as moody, lazy, risk takers or socially awkward, among other things. But reflecting on one's own adolescence can bring another perspective. By reminding ourselves of the complexity of our own experience, we may be more open to appreciating the complexity of the experiences of today's adolescents. Could exercises to promote this more empathetic perspective assist those who are seeking to support adolescents to find alternative ways of approaching this population?

This short paper outlines an exercise undertaken during the workshop *Understanding Adolescence in African Context*, held in Oxford in late 2019. The exercise proved effective in bringing researchers from different communities and disciplines together and mapping common interests. It was initially undertaken as an ice-breaker but had

methodological ramifications and effects in the conversations that ensued during the workshop.

We will now describe the exercise in a series of short steps, and recount some of the contributions it elicited. Our hope is that this might prove useful in a variety of workshop or teaching contexts, in particular for researchers working with groups of individuals different from themselves, and where negative attitudes towards adolescents may be leading to inappropriate interventions.

Describe the exercise

1. At the opening of the workshop, after introducing the broad themes of the event, we asked participants to introduce themselves. Given the topic of the workshop – adolescence in contexts – we also asked participants to answer the question in two words or in a sentence: *‘What kind of adolescent were you?’*
2. Following the introductions the participants divided into breakout groups around tables of 6-8 people. We asked participants to list as many characteristics of adolescence as they could, and to group these words into *positive, negative* and *neutral* categories.
3. We asked each group to report back on their discussions, and on the groupings of the words, and then opened up for general discussion.

What were the effects of the exercise?

The first thing to say is that the initial exercise elicited very personal, often emotional responses. Participants immediately drew on their personal experiences, and the affective experience of being an adolescent was thereby brought into the room through the immediate presence of everyone’s own personal stories. The topic of ‘adolescence’ therefore quickly stopped being abstract or absent; rather it was personal and immediate.

The second key observation was the effect this then had on the exercise of defining positive / negative /neutral characteristics of adolescence. Almost universally, the groups struggled to define characteristics that were univocally negative. Similarly, they were almost universally unable or unwilling to denote purely ‘neutral’ qualities. Each apparently negative or neutral quality was pushed back against by someone else in the room, insisting on its complex or at least dual character.

We believe this reaction was connected to the initial exercise, as personal stories then over-coded conversations about adolescence in general. The effect was to transform an apparently external, passive subject of research – the adolescents not in the room – into an affective, personal subject of research – the adolescents we have all been.

What might we learn from this exercise?

Reflecting on the impact of the exercise on all participants, we realized the difference it makes when individuals visualize themselves – or people close to them – as central to the situation they are studying. All participants, before the workshop, brought different conceptions of adolescence, often developed through research. In particular,

there was an overriding conception of adolescents as prone to risky behavior and living on the edge. This exercise usefully centred the complexity of adolescents as human subjects in the research. It encouraged the group to reflect on our training as researchers to isolate ourselves from our research subject, and to ask how we might break down that distance to develop a more holistic understanding.

The exercise seemed to develop the possibility for two different kinds of relationship between the researcher and the adolescent-as-research-subject. Firstly, one of over-determination, in which the affective experience and memory of having been an adolescent determines understandings of how adolescents ‘all’ act or experience the world. And secondly, there was the risk of constructing an artificial separation between the adult-researcher and the adolescent subject as different or ‘other’.

This exercise therefore raised a number of questions about how research on adolescence and on interventions in their lives is conducted.

- Is there something about adolescence that conditions our response to be highly personal?
- Why are our own memories of adolescence so strong? What is the role of individual memory in studies of adolescence?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks of placing emotion (in particular researchers’ own life-stories) in the foreground of our approach to adolescence and intervention?
- How might thinking about autobiography and life experience shape research on adolescence?
- If we only look at a research situation from the outside, can we build a view of adolescents as complex social actors facing different challenges with various kinds of motivations? How can we mobilize personal experience and affect in our research practice?
- The difference between researchers and the adolescents they research can be vast, particularly in research on / about Africa that often uses models of adolescence (neurological etc) which have been developed elsewhere. In that context, what are the consequences of researchers’ personalized association with the subject position of the adolescent?

## **2. Risk and Perceptions of Risk**

### Introduction

During our discussions at the October 2019 workshop *Understanding Adolescence in African Contexts*, a number of widely divergent understandings of the relationship between risk and adolescence emerged. For some, risk was dangerous, costly, and to be avoided. For others, risk stimulated creativity, pushed boundaries and was one of the key positive features of adolescence. A more nuanced, open, understanding of risk,

or recklessness, kept resurfacing in our discussions as a provocative and productive area of further inquiry.

Social discourse about adolescence characterizes it as a period of risk-taking with destructive effects. In contrast, many of the researchers at the workshop emphasized that, while adolescence is a time of taking risks, these are often crucial to development in various forums, from neurological change to educational growth. Risk was also widely seen as a positive kind of experimentation, exploring boundaries and devising better ways of coping with challenges and getting on with one another. Risk generates good, constructive energy. However, adolescence can also be a time of embarrassment, anxiety, uncertainty and self-consciousness. Risk, though attractive, may also feel threatening.

### Three characterizations of risk

We want to draw out three examples of nuanced understandings of risk presented during the workshop.

1. Emma Kilford, a neurologist, gave a presentation which explored some of the neurological dimensions of risk-taking in adolescence, and its significance for brain development. She also encouraged us to reflect on some delicate instances of risk taking and our perception of risk. She used the example of a young woman's decision to engage, or not, in unprotected sex with a partner. She noted that in many models the 'risky' behaviour might be characterized as choosing to have unprotected sex in this context. However, if we focus on the interpersonal dynamics of such choices, it may in fact be *more* risky for young women – in particular social and personal contexts – to refuse to engage in such sexual behavior and perhaps call into question her relationship. This opens up questions about scale and perception of risk-taking.
2. Kopano Ratele, a sociologist, talked in detail through his work with young men in South Africa, and about challenges to traditional forms of masculinity. The example of risk which his work raised was that of the risk of social openness, for instance towards young LGBTQ+ people. This kind of risk-taking, and its relation to identity formation and social change, is perhaps less well integrated into models of what counts as risky adolescent behaviour.
3. The third issue which was discussed at various points, and which relates closely to questions of risk and the perception of risk, is migration. Many young people in African contexts migrate and travel in various kinds of ways, across various geographies. This is often characterized as profoundly risky behaviour, and crossing the Sahara or the Mediterranean is clearly extremely dangerous. The perception of such risk changes, however, if we consider the act of migration as a form of autonomy, political agency and idealism. The risk of staying, and being unable to secure a better life for yourself in the face of structural conditions of inequality, can certainly be construed as *more* of a risk by many young people, than the uncertainty of migration. Such risks, and their political dimensions, are also a key part of adolescent agency across different contexts.

## Reflections

These observations and discussions led us to realize the importance of ideas about risk to various different kinds of research on adolescence (from literature to neurology). The spectrum of understandings that the quality of ‘risk’ encompasses is richly diverse and worth tapping into for many fields. We suggest that not predefining risk as negative might stimulate creative interventions more attuned to the particular qualities of adolescence. Indeed, the idea of risk seems a particularly fruitful area for further interdisciplinary work. For example, nuanced conceptions of risk from neurology can cross-fertilize debates within social policy, as well as those in literary and cultural studies.

### **3. The guiding myth of the well-adjusted individual**

The *Understanding Adolescence in African Contexts* workshop threw up an awareness of some of the assumptions that we bring to our research on adolescence and intervention. We are not saying that all of these are necessarily inaccurate in all contexts, but they are not, perhaps, made adequately explicit. These assumptions include: the idea that adolescence is a coherent category of research and intervention; the idea that Africa is a homogeneous area for research, that it comprises a single coherent terrain; and that we share a picture of the desirable outcomes of our work. It is this last assumption that we want to consider here: the underlying image of a well-adjusted individual that is both the desired outcome of interventions into adolescent lives and a model against which various kinds of adolescent behaviours can be measured as “aberrant”. When we aim to support adolescents to fit into society, their role in determining how that society should be organized is sometimes not considered. At the workshop this image was discussed, in particular, in relation to research on mental health in adolescents, and the implicit focus on identifying what helps or hinders adolescents fit into society. Here we reflect on how this assumption may be influencing our own work.

What are the operative assumptions of our work?

The Hub aims to improve the lives of twenty million adolescents. In some (not all) ways, this improvement is characterized as enabling adolescents to match more closely a figure of a well-adjusted individual. We could begin to articulate what this figure is by considering the Hub’s logo. The representation of a pair of African adolescents raises a number of questions and seems to reflect a number of assumptions. We could take it that these two individuals stand for the positive outcome of the Hub’s work. It is worth thinking about the messages that the logo may convey.

In the image, the young people appear healthy, energetic, positive, happy and comfortable together. The logo suggests a rising sun, an image that has a long association with Africa, on the one hand, and new potential and futurity on the other. Looking more closely at the values that the image represents, we notice a number of things. Firstly, one is a young man and one is a young woman. They are wearing Western dress. The man’s t-shirt appears longer and baggier than the woman’s, which

appears to be a 'crop-top'. The woman's body is slightly twisted, compared to the man, who stands four-square, facing the viewer. These positions result in the woman's body contours being more on show than the man's. Putting these signals together with the discourse of *acceleration*, *achievement* and *success* (words which circle the image), we can start to see the outlines of the ideal image of the successful adolescent that our research is aiming at. In a nutshell, the logo shows an aspiration towards a figure who is socially well-adjusted, physically healthy, economically productive and well balanced.

We might begin to ask, though, what other qualities or characteristics this assumes. Firstly, there is a clear heteronormativity, not least in the image itself. More speculatively, there are suggestions of norms around nuclear families and Western gender models. Assumptions about the benefits of individual dynamism relate to ideas of ordered forms of economic productivity, in which adolescents leave education to join the work force and contribute to economic growth. It is also noteworthy that the logo deploys two lone-standing individuals without any apparent spatial or social context. In other words, the individual subject, as opposed to the social subject, is understood to be the primary target of intervention. This presupposes a number of things about adolescent lives, not least that they are self-directed and autonomous.

How does this image impact the kinds of research we do, and the kinds of recommendations we will make?

We will take two examples here of how these assumptions might lead to emphasize particular kinds of research and intervention over others. Firstly, the question of heteronormativity, secondly, the figure of economically productive worker.

Discussions of research on fathers in African households was used in the workshop to initiate discussions about the importance of work with young men. Whilst in no way contesting the importance of such work, and research and intervention engaging with multiple forms of masculinity, it is important to question our own norms. That is to say that if we build our recommendations on the image of a heterosexual nuclear family, we may misconstrue research which emphasizes the importance of different kinds of care and carer roles (for instance, the stresses on single parent households and their effects on adolescent lives or the role men and women play in extend family systems of care). The nuclear family is, of course, not the only possible pathway to healthy adulthood.

A range of issues were raised at the workshop relating to how the adolescent is expected to fit into the economic system. These included overarching concerns that the goal of adolescent interventions is being pushed to creating the necessary human resources to feed the needs of powerful economic interests, or rather not to challenge them. At the micro level, this translates to a target outcome of an educated economically productive individual who is able to find work. Moreover, to find work in the place where they already are, i.e. reduce the need to migrate.

A focus on the economically productive worker misses two (related) possibilities. Firstly, that among the adolescents growing up in African contexts are those who have the potential to do more than earn a living for themselves and those close to them. It does not ask how many Einsteins, Morrisons or Marie Curies have been lost to violence or inadequate access to health and education. Secondly, it misses (and may even seek to constrain/avoid) the possibility that adolescents have the energy, creativity and attitudes to risk to reform society. A good environment for adolescents may be one which supports them to change society, not simply fit into it. But those setting the goals for interventions targeting this population may be too far past risk-taking to encourage this.

#### **4. Researching adolescence under the microscope**

##### Introduction

Participants at the workshop *Understanding Adolescence in African Contexts* offered and described many different kinds of methodologies for studying adolescence. In this short paper we want to outline some of these methodologies, and then draw upon debates about methodologies during the workshop itself, to reflect on how research on adolescence is conducted. This encourages us to ask firstly: How do we study adolescence? But also: Is there some kind of general difference of methods in terms of research on adolescence from other research not on adolescence? Should there be?

##### A round table of methodologies

We will not attempt to exhaustively capture all the methods raised, touched on or discussed at the workshop. We want, rather, to convey some of the variety on offer.

We heard about research on adolescence in neurological science, including that based on brain scans and human experiments and trials, but also on work with animals (notably tipsy mice). We held discussions about various kinds of poetic methodologies, from ‘poetic inquiry’ – a method that turns qualitative research into poetry – to poetry writing itself and the reading and sharing of poetry. We also considered social network interviews, as well as forms of collective writing practices alongside young people.

Some scholars drew on traditional social scientific methods to consider aspects of adolescence – from interviewing to surveys and from political economy to policy analysis. Others came from a wide spectrum of humanities approaches – from close reading to community organizing and historical and archival research. We also collectively undertook to understand adolescence through sharing readings, including readings from writers such as Wole Soyinka. We heard from psychiatrists drawing on models of adolescent development, as well as gender-based analysis of various forms. Analytical tools included approaches to the life-course and notions of social childhood, political crisis, the geopolitics of global health, clinical practice and community-based memory.

This enormous spectrum of approaches, tools and epistemologies clearly militates against drawing simplistic conclusions about how adolescence ‘should’ be understood. Rather, its variety suggests the importance of establishing interdisciplinary

conversations in order to understand the significance of different kinds of intervention.

## Reflections

This paper sets out more questions than answers. We want to draw out three themes: firstly, adolescent involvement; secondly, the relationship between research design and understandings of adolescence; and, thirdly, the relationship between methodologies and impacts.

One dominant theme that underpinned many contributions and discussions in the workshop was the absolute centrality of involving adolescents in research and interventions which concern them. This leads us to ask what the role of adolescents is in designing the methods used to research them, and raises the issue of timing. A number of interventions at the workshop emphasized that adolescents need to be involved not only throughout research, but at the very beginning, in the establishment of research questions themselves.

The second thematic question is to ask if there is a feedback between the methodologies deployed to research adolescence and the ideas that we have of what adolescence is, and the characteristics adolescents possess. Should our particular conceptions of adolescent life influence how we design our research? Does research about African adolescents in particular require us to ask more testing questions of our own positions as researchers? In short, how does this subject influence our research practice?

Thirdly, we want to draw out the relationship between different methodological approaches and different understandings of the impacts and effects of research. This question was central to a number of conversations during the workshop. Some researchers were looking for clear and definite outcomes, while other researchers sought to promote methodologies which they understood to be effective in and of themselves. For instance, the approach of conducting poetry writing workshops (with adolescents or others) is both difficult to quantify in terms of impact, and can be understood as an end in itself. A poem written during a workshop can be successful in terms of self-expression and the self-understanding achieved in the practice itself. But the benefits of such an approach resist quantification. They are sometimes hard to characterize or argue for within globalized systems of funding for intervention. This raises important challenges for how interdisciplinary projects such as the Hub can bridge the gap between different ways of quantifying and evaluating interventions. Just talking about different approaches is a constructive first step.

## **5. Emerging Areas of Work**

### Narratives and Storytelling

After thinking about context and adolescent experience in the first workshop in Oxford, we are now increasingly focused on the stories we tell about adolescents, and the stories adolescents tell about themselves. We will use the reflections captured in these documents here, and the discussions in Oxford, to inform our next

conversations, to be held in Cape Town in March 2020. In particular, we have learned once again the absolute centrality of bringing adolescents into the research framework as early as possible. This understanding will inform the design of the Cape Town workshop. It will be as collaborative and creative as possible. We will work with adolescents from Cape Town and surrounding areas to explore how narrative and storytelling can inform interventions into adolescents' lives. Alongside them we will invite performers and story-tellers to continue to investigate the complex dynamics of research working with and on behalf of adolescents.

#### Neurological research and brain development

There is a substantial and growing body of research on brain development during adolescence, and how this shapes behavior. There is also a substantial body of research on the early life determinants of later life outcomes, including through early life impacts on neurological development, and subsequent consequences on adolescent and adult behavior. There is, however, limited research on how early life experiences interact with neuro-developmental development in adolescence to shape behavior. And there is even less on how the social context in which this interaction occurs influences the nature of that interaction. In May of 2020, we will hold a workshop with researchers focused on the developmental origins of health and disease (who focus on pregnancy and early life), researchers focused on adolescent neurological development and its implications for behavior and experts on the social context. Collectively we will consider the state of our understanding of the interactions of early life experiences, adolescent development and social context, and what these imply for intervention design and research priorities.

#### Black Consciousness Movement and storytelling

One of the most promising areas of discussion at the first workshop arose from the intersection between Black Consciousness approaches and narrative methodologies. We will seek to further these conversations with both members of the Hub and, we hope, external experts and young people from different African contexts.

In thinking about narrative and adolescence, we especially want to foreground readings from the work of Steve Biko, a medical doctor and Black Consciousness activist. Biko once wrote: 'The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. If one is free at heart, no man-made chains can bind one to servitude'. As this shows, Steve Biko's call for Black Consciousness is underpinned by, and underpins, an insistence that emancipation must be achieved *by* the oppressed, not on their behalf by others; through the stories they tell, not just that others tell about them.

Across Africa – and not only Africa – Biko's message is still politically relevant and charged. It can challenge the way academics in the global north and far beyond go about designing interventions. Critically, Biko's arguments suggest that our understanding of ourselves in society can be changed by how we act – a potentially critical point for our work. We can learn not just from what Biko said, but from his approach. He outlined a narrative with which many Black South Africans could

identify and he described how it was influencing their decisions in negative ways. He then outlined how the narrative could be changed and how such a change empowers.

Biko, and others in the Black Consciousness Movement, present a similar line of argument to that of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and in particular his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Freire's theory and practice offers practical and theoretical premises for pedagogy and grassroots interventions. These approaches begin from people's embodied everyday lives and what Biko called people's "physical awareness" of their situations. They insist on the centrality of cultural action to raise consciousness and produce critical understandings of the world such that people can demand better lives and political agency. How might we learn from these approaches and use narrative to connect with and empower adolescents in African contexts? How would such an approach, designed to empower and not direct, fit with interventions designed to improve specific outcomes?

A number of organisations in South Africa have tried to use BCM inspired approaches to intervene with adolescents – such as the Umtapo Centre. We hope that it may be possible to learn from their experiences, and the challenges they have faced – including the need, imposed by funders, to target improvements in certain predetermined outcomes, such as risky sexual behaviour.