



Learning through workshops: A reflective evaluation in action research

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ABSTRACT

Education is an effective instrument that can transform mindsets, and workshops as an educational tool offer participatory spaces where such transformation can take root and flourish. Through a qualitative research approach, this paper aimed to investigate the impact of implementing educational for peace workshops in action research. Children residing in KwaZulu-Natal aged 12 to 15 years were engaged, and a variety of strategies, such as role plays and videos, were used to involve them in the research process. Through thematic analysis, the findings revealed that by establishing ground rules and using creative tools, the workshops offered a safe space that allowed participants to connect and share their lived experiences. Subsequent findings showed that indigenous knowledge systems had the potential to bring about community change. Further analysis revealed that successful workshops also require prior training, ground rules and flexibility. The investigation also uncovered, in the end, a change in the participants' attitude and some form of collaboration and understanding. These findings highlight the transformative potential of children as active participants in action research learning environments. By positioning workshops not merely as data collection tools but as platforms for child-led reflection and collaborative knowledge creation, the study advances a more inclusive and generative approach to action research. It offers new insights into how children's voices, when centered in peacebuilding processes, can reshape evaluation practices. As a result, it is recommended that more education on peace strategies be implemented for both children and adults in South Africa.

Keywords: Action Research, reflection, workshops, children, *ubuntu*.

INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "If we are to teach real peace in this world, and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with the children."¹ This assertion highlights the importance of engaging children in peacebuilding efforts from an early age. The workshop has become popular within educational and research contexts, emerging as a participatory method that aligns with collaborative learning.² Increasingly, workshops have become popular in action research, as they enable practitioners to engage in reflective evaluations where participants are able to co-construct knowledge and refine practices.³

¹ Lynnea Bylund, "Gandhi Spoke at Montessori London 1931," Gandhi for Children, November 10, 2011, <https://www.gandhiforchildren.org/gandhi-spoke-montessori-london>.

² Helen Cahill, "Research Acts: Using the Drama Workshop as a Site for Conducting Participatory Action Research," *NJ* 30, no. 2 (2006): 61–72.

³ Johanna Albertse, Johanna Catharina Lubbe, and Isabel Coetzee-Prinsloo, "Through the Reflective Eye of a Pragmatist: Authenticity in Workshops for Co-Constructivism," *Journal of ExoTechnology and Education* 1, no. 1 (2025).

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Workshops have evolved from being used in their traditional form as an instructional tool to becoming valuable research methodologies across diverse fields.

Researchers have often used workshops to collect data about participants, as they can create interactive environments.⁴ Workshops have primarily been used as a data collection method rather than a tool for action. Despite the transformative potential of workshops, they are predominantly used in research conducted with adults.⁵ The participation of children in research has been debated, and in modern day, expanded into the field of research where children are not merely included in some stages of the process, but they are allowed to lead the process.⁶ This presents a missed opportunity, particularly in light of Gandhi's call to teach and involve children. When children are invited to use workshops to evaluate their own methods and experiences, they actively contribute to collective knowledge and become agents of change.⁷

This paper explores the potential of workshops as a child-centered action research methodology within peace-building. Further, it offers a reflective account of experiences of conducting research using an action research model with a group of children. The study seeks to challenge the prevailing adult-centric use of workshops in peacebuilding research and highlight the transformative role children can play when empowered through experiential learning. It argues for a shift from just data collection to participatory engagement, where children are empowered to reflect, collaborate, and shape the practices that affect their lives and communities. The results presented stem from a four-year (2017–2020) action research project aimed at exploring the issue of recurring xenophobia in South Africa, which proposed an alternative to violence through involving children in peace-building measures. The research used a qualitative reflective inquiry. The empirical material analysed here was retrieved from the workshops that were conducted as a methodological framework and data collection tool. Workshops have been introduced into formal education and research as an effective method of interactive teaching, allowing students to learn and retain information.⁸ This study singled out workshops, although many methods can be used in action research, as they would help to explore the objective. Empirical research provides some support for the idea that workshops enhance intergroup contact, which in turn fosters trust and helps reduce negative intergroup attitudes.⁹ Positive intergroup contact offers a means to mitigate intergroup tensions and reduce out-group prejudice in both in-group and out-group members.¹⁰ Much has been written about Action Research (AR), and this paper will not attempt to duplicate this existing literature; instead, it will focus on understanding the effect of AR workshops as an educational tool for peace, providing critical insights into their capacity to foster knowledge, dialogue, and empowerment within local contexts.

The main objective of the paper is to discuss the educational workshop tool that was used and its application in the field, to illustrate its use in AR circumstances, its efficiency, and limitations, and to suggest ways to integrate it into more community educational practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nelson Mandela stated that “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”¹¹ Sowing the seeds for peace has the potential to nurture a new generation of world citizens with a vision for a peaceful world.¹² This shows the power of education in fostering a lifelong learning

⁴ Pia Stovang, Ann Højbjerg Clarke, and Bo Mortensen, “Workshops as a Research Method in Business Research,” in *Collaborative Research Design: Working with Business for Meaningful Results* (Springer, 2024), 121–43.

⁵ Sabreena Ahmed and Ratnawati Mohd Asraf, “The Workshop as a Qualitative Research Approach: Lessons Learnt from a ‘Critical Thinking through Writing’ Workshop,” *The Turkish Online Journal of Design, Art and Communication* 2018 (2018): 1504–10.

⁶ Lennie Barblett et al., “Prioritising Children’s Participation in Research: Including Children’s Voices in Updating a National Early Learning Framework,” *International Journal of Early Years Education* 32, no. 4 (2024): 852–70.

⁷ Madri S Jansen van Rensburg, “Engaging Children to Make Evaluation Products More Child-Focused,” *African Evaluation Journal* (AOSIS, 2024).

⁸ Bojana Perić Prkosovački, Milica Popović Stijačić, and Nina Brkić Jovanović, “Educational Workshops: Positive Impact on Teaching and Learning,” *Pedagoška Obzorja* 35, no. 1 (2020): 42–55.

⁹ John F Dovidio et al., “Reducing Intergroup Bias through Intergroup Contact: Twenty Years of Progress and Future Directions,” *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 20, no. 5 (2017): 606–20.

¹⁰ Ashley Lytle, “Intergroup Contact Theory: Recent Developments and Future Directions” (Springer, 2018).

¹¹ N. Mandela, “Lighting Your Way to a Better Future,” Speech delivered at the launch of Mindset Network, Johannesburg, South Africa, July 16, 2003, <https://www.socratic-method.com/quote-meanings/nelson-mandela-education-is-the-most-powerful-weapon-which-you-can-use-to-change-the-world>.

¹² Suzanne Miller, “Building a Peaceful and Just World-Beginning with the Children,” *Childhood Education* 82, no.1(2005):14–18.

experience.¹³ Through educating for peace, this goal can be achieved. Education for peace can be either formal or informal, promoting social responsibility among young people. The role of society in community education is crucial, as it involves an initiative-taking approach where people are not just waiting for a helping hand from somewhere, but instead taking a significant role in building and development.¹⁴ Community-based education thus provides added value in shaping the community's character. Educating for peace is defined as a “means by which people learn to make peace by practicing peacemaking. This is not about learning peacemaking techniques but about engaging in peaceful relations.”¹⁵ Dissecting this definition means that instead of teaching textbook theories on peace, it emphasizes practicing peace through everyday interactions. Secondly, this definition shifts focus by viewing peacemaking as a relational process that involves engaging with one another in various respectful, inclusive, compassionate, and nonviolent ways. Peace is something you create, not something you learn. It becomes living peace, which is reflected in doing, being, and knowing. Educating for peace is value-based, which requires experiential learning.¹⁶ An output of it is that the participants will acquire “values, attitudes, perceptions, skills and behavioural tendencies.”¹⁷ This is the reason workshops, as an education for peace tool, were used as they enabled holistic experiential learning. Further, educating for peace brings children to a process where they can, on their own, create open relations with others and choose how they will relate when faced with violence.¹⁸ From the above, educating for peace is therefore a powerful transformation tool.

Educational workshops offer a methodical solution that brings interactive and student-centred learning, which develops skills and/or strengthens sensitivity to specific problems.¹⁹ This definition complements the context of this study.²⁰ Workshops are a valuable means of teaching and learning, fostering engagement among participants and encouraging cooperative learning.²¹ They facilitate the writing of notes and work well as a qualitative method of data collection.²² The success of the workshops is based on participants acquiring new knowledge that leads to personal transformation.²³ An added advantage of a workshop is that it does not require any special skills, as it is an interactive method of learning. Workshops serve as dynamic platforms for participatory learning, enabling participants to engage in complex issues such as conflict resolution, health, and peacebuilding.²⁴ Investigating their impact reveals how learning objectives are achieved, how attitudes shift, and how behavior changes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study employed a qualitative approach, utilizing a reflective approach. Reflective practice methodologies play various roles in self-reflection, self-learning, and monitoring (both active and passive) of personal and professional development. Using an interpretative framework, the researcher constructed a framework based on Gibbs' model of Reflection.²⁵ Gibbs' reflective cycle is a description that allows one to reflect and describe their experiences of the research, providing a “methodical way for people to look at and evaluate their experiences, behaviors, and feelings in a structured way.”²⁶ It has six stages, which are “description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan.”²⁷ This means there is “the description of what happened; the practitioner’s feelings during the experience; the evaluation of what was

¹³ Asharose, Izuru Saizen, and Praveen Kumar Chakkalathundiyil Sasi, “Awareness Workshop as an Effective Tool and Approach for Education in Disaster Risk Reduction: A Case Study from Tamil Nadu, India,” *Sustainability* 7, no. 7 (2015): 8965–84.

¹⁴ C Fletcher, “Community Education and Community Development,” in *Lifelong Education for Adults* (Elsevier, 1989), 51–54.

¹⁵ Hal Pepinsky, “Educating for Peace,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 567, no. 1 (2000): 157–69.

¹⁶ Mariette Zoepfrit, “Peace Education through Emotional Development in ECE,” *He Kupu* 4, no. 4 (2016): 12–16.

¹⁷ Daniel Bar-Tal, “The Elusive Nature of Peace Education,” *Peace Education: The Concept, Principles, and Practices around the World*, 2002, 27–36.

¹⁸ Pepinsky, “Educating for peace.”

¹⁹ Prkosovački, Stijačić, and Jovanović, “Educational Workshops: Positive Impact on Teaching and Learning.”

²⁰ Rikke Ørngreen and Karin Levinsen, “Workshops as a Research Methodology,” *Electronic Journal of E-Learning* 15, no. 1 (2017): 70–81.

²¹ Prkosovački, Stijačić, and Jovanović, “Educational Workshops: Positive Impact on Teaching and Learning.”

²² Ahmed and Asraf, “The Workshop as a Qualitative Research Approach: Lessons Learnt from a ‘Critical Thinking through Writing’ Workshop.”

²³ Ørngreen and Levinsen, “Workshops as a Research Methodology.”

²⁴ Berghof Foundation, *Participatory Peacebuilding: Practitioner Reflections and Methodologies* (Berlin: Berghof Foundation, 2023).

²⁵ Graham Gibbs, “Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods,” *Further Education Unit*, 1988.

²⁶ Pankaj Ramanlal Beldar, “Case Study: Enhancing Learning in C Programming Through Gibbs Reflective Cycle,” *Journal of Engineering Education Transformations*, 2025, 61–68.

²⁷ Leanna Schoch, “Reflections on the Parkinson’s Project: Learning Experiences with the Gibbs’ Reflective Cycle” (ZHAW Zürcher Hochschule für Angewandte Wissenschaften, 2021).

good and bad about the experience; the analysis or sense making of the situation; the conclusions and potential alternatives in dealing with the situation, and the action.”²⁸ To do this, the following questions were asked: What happened? When and where did it take place? Who was involved?²⁹ The third stage of Gibbs’ reflective cycle helps identify the positive and negative experiences and challenges. This means reflecting on what went well, what did not go according to plan, and the reasons behind these outcomes.³⁰ This reflective framework emphasizes the importance of the event and feelings if adequate reflection is to occur.³¹

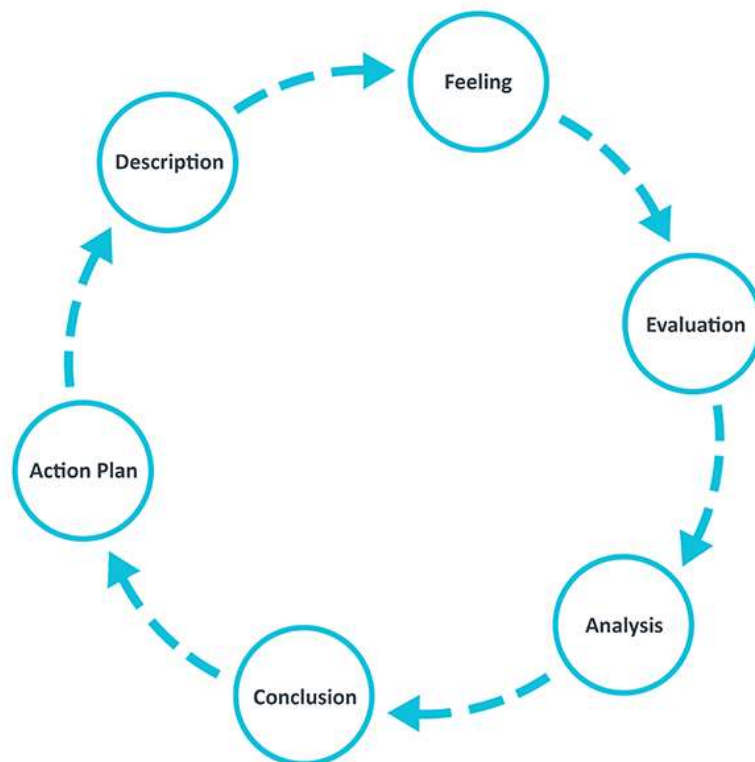


Figure 1: Gibbs reflective Cycle

METHODOLOGY

This study took place in Umbilo, Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. Fifteen participants were selected using a random sampling method. The following criteria were used to select participants: (a) Age must be between 12 and 15 years; (b) Residing in Umbilo; (c) Be a South African, Zimbabwean, Congolese, Nigerian, Tanzanian, or Malawian national. Data was recorded for each workshop that was held. Data was constructed through workshops which focused on topics such as conflict, myths, peacebuilding, xenophobia, non-violence, and integration. This study followed the thematic data analysis method to synchronize and make sense of the data sets. This study received approval from the DUT Research Ethics Committee on 26 July 2018. All engagements with children were age-appropriate, ethically sound, and upheld child rights and rights of research participants. The study was conscious of children’s vulnerability, as at most times they are viewed as underdeveloped and immature.³² Care was taken such that workshops would run, taking cognizance of international, regional, and national law guidelines to protect, respect, and promote the rights of children

²⁸ Hazel Thokozani Mahlanze, M N Sibiyi, and S Govender, “Guided Reflection: A Valuable Tool for Improving Undergraduate Student Nurses’ Levels of Reflection: Teaching and Learning in Health Care Professions,” *African Journal for Physical Health Education, Recreation and Dance* 21, no. sup-1 (2015): 396–408.

²⁹ Francine Antoinette Ocampo et al., “Nursing Student Reflections on a Research Internship: A Reflective Discussion Following the Gibbs’ Reflective Cycle,” *Nurse Education Today* 145 (2025): 106481.

³⁰ K S Praveena et al., “Using Gibb’s Reflective Model Approach for Enhancing Project-Based Learning among Students through Reflective Assessment,” *Journal of Engineering Education Transformations*, 2025, 148–55.

³¹ Mahlanze, Sibiyi, and Govender, “Guided Reflection: A Valuable Tool for Improving Undergraduate Student Nurses’ Levels of Reflection: Teaching and Learning in Health Care Professions.”

³² Patricia Nabuco Martuscelli and Rafael Duarte Villa, “Child Soldiers as Peace-Builders in Colombian Peace Talks between the Government and the FARC–EP,” *Conflict, Security & Development* 18, no. 5 (2018): 387–408.

when they participate in any matter that affects them.³³ Informed consent was obtained from parents and caregivers prior to research engagement and was further obtained from the children themselves before any interactions. All data used was anonymized and used solely to inform reflective pedagogical analysis; it was not quoted directly, and the identities of participants remain unknown.

Awareness Workshop Structure and Guidelines for Conducting the Workshop

The training model for the workshops was designed following the Hlayiseka training manual,³⁴ and I painted Peace Handbook on Peace Building with and for Children and Young People.³⁵ The primary reason for using training was that it was believed the workshop setting would provide participants with the opportunity to acquire knowledge and understanding of the meanings of conflict and violence, identify how myths contribute to violence, and encourage the understanding and acceptance of diversity and differences. A central aspect of data collection was documenting activities during each workshop session and observing participants' actions and reactions as the training progressed. The workshops employed various learning methods. Audiovisual tools were utilized as they provided visual assistance to the participants. The workshops were designed to be interactive sessions where participants would contribute and engage. Role-plays and simulations were powerful tools that enabled participants to experience firsthand the emotions that others went through. Through this, the workshop's learning process would foster cooperative learning among participants and encourage personal reflection. The topics for the training were divided into parts focusing on conflict, myths and stereotypes, xenophobia and migration, *Ubuntu*, peace, and cohesion.

Table 1: Multi-Workshop Outline: Conflict, Xenophobia, and Ubuntu in Practice

Workshop	Focus Area	Methods Used	Participant Feedback & Insights
Workshop 1	Understanding conflict and violence in local communities	- Visioning exercise - Cartoon video (chameleon conflict) - Group discussion	- Conflict seen as daily and normal - Diversity linked to conflict (culture, origin, personality) - Video sparked deep reflection and empathy
Workshop 2	Myths, ideologies, and cultural misconceptions fueling violence	- Role-play exercises - Group debriefing	- Myths about foreigners surfaced - Children revealed inherited biases - Role-play shifted attitudes and built empathy
Workshop 3	Exploring xenophobia and its personal/social impact	Puzzle word game ("Find the word: Xenophobia") - Group discussion - Testimonies	- Participants shared first encounters with xenophobia - "Amakwerekwere" discussed as a harmful label - Game created safe entry into difficult topic
Workshop 4	Integration, peacebuilding, and Ubuntu as a moral framework	Ubuntu-based discussion - Reflective sharing - Observational analysis	- Shift from theory to practice - Participants showed increased warmth and unity - Ubuntu seen as a call to action and dignity

³³ Tara M Collins, "A Child's Right to Participate: Implications for International Child Protection," *The International Journal of Human Rights* 21, no. 1 (2017): 14–46.

³⁴ Available at

https://xh.eceducation.gov.za/files/modules/000/000/096/1601910279_nrl0RkzrGJ_understanding_and_addressing_xenophobia_trainers_manual.pdf

³⁵ <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/i-painted-peace-handbook-peace-building-and-children-and-young-people>

WORKSHOP OUTLINE

Workshop 1

The workshops were divided into six parts. The first workshop commenced with greetings and introductions. Notably, the first workshop session was tense, as not all attendees knew what to expect. The researcher introduced herself to the participants and explained the content they would be trained on during the workshops. Some of the participants were very shy about introducing themselves. The first thing was to set expectations for our code of conduct. The participants agreed that they should all respect each other, they should not make noise, they should raise their hands if they had a point to share, everyone was equal, all cellphones would be put on silent, and they all agreed that English would be the primary language of communication, however, during break times, they could use their vernacular language with those who understood it.

Through using a visioning exercise, the first workshop was to have participants identify and explore what conflict and violence looked like in the communities from which they came, and to formulate discussions based on these findings. A cartoon video depicting a situation where the violence that ensued as a result of the conflict was shown to the participants. It was about a conflict between two chameleons that became glued to each other after they both wanted to catch the same insect for a meal. Neither chameleon wanted to let go of the insect for the other to have. The chameleons fought and pulled each other, but they did not let go. Opportunities to catch more insects were lost when they presented themselves because neither party wanted to let go of the fly. The conflict also affected innocent bystanders as they engaged in violent acts. After a long fight, the insect fell into the hands of a frog, who became the mediator. The frog shared the meal equally between them. This video was chosen because it highlighted a deeper understanding of the various causes of violence. Literature supports the use of videos in training sessions as a helpful tool in bringing realism to learning.³⁶ They captivate and stimulate the minds of participants through the use of images and are an important content-delivery tool.³⁷ This was the intention.

After watching the video, a discussion ensued, and the participants shared what they had learnt. Definitions of what conflict and violence meant were suggested by the group, and these were discussed. What fascinated the researcher about the discussions was that everyone in the group realised that conflict was something that one could face, irrespective of their age. The participants highlighted the fact that conflict was something that they might experience daily and was a normal part of life. However, from the video, they became aware that conflict exists in society because people are different and have varying perspectives, personalities, likes, and preferences. This extended to issues such as different places of birth, countries of origin, religions, and cultures. The workshop helped the students understand that conflicts are an everyday reality in the communities in which they live.³⁸ They thus needed to develop skills in conflict resolution to know how to behave when confronted with a conflictual situation. If not managed properly, conflict can escalate into violence. From there, the participants highlighted the adverse effects of violence, among which death, disability, and displacement were mentioned. At the end, the participants engaged in a discussion, offering peaceful and creative solutions to conflicts. In the discussion, the participants linked violence to the day-to-day violence that they would see at their schools when students fought after school.³⁹ This falls in line with current data that school violence is a lived reality in the South African context. The workshop helped lay a foundation that was expected to positively influence students' attitudes and promote social change among the participants.

Workshop 2

The objective of the session was for students to understand how differing cultures, nationalities, and ideologies have contributed to the violence evident in the country. This session aimed to interrogate myths associated with diverse cultures or nationalities that could result in elevated levels of violence. Research has

³⁶ Chih-Hung Chen, "AR Videos as Scaffolding to Foster Students' Learning Achievements and Motivation in EFL Learning," *British Journal of Educational Technology* 51, no. 3 (2020): 657–72.

³⁷ Cynthia J Brame, "Effective Educational Videos: Principles and Guidelines for Maximizing Student Learning from Video Content," *CBE—Life Sciences Education*, 2017.

³⁸ Monica Carrer, "An Everyday Approach to Conflict and Peace," in *How People Respond to Violence: Everyday Peace and the Maoist Conflict in India* (Springer, 2022), 71–102.

³⁹ Isheachida Manatsa and Tigere P Muringa, "I Don't Know How to Discipline These Kids': Navigating the Nature of School Violence and Teachers' Responses in South Africa," 2025.

been clear that a lot of social myths about foreigners and crime exist, and this extends to discrimination.⁴⁰ Some of these myths were that foreigners are responsible for crime, and they are in South Africa illegally. These are the reasons we see raised over and over in literature.⁴¹ Based on the myths, participants performed role-plays where they would depict the different myths they had heard about a represented nationality that was a member of the group. In the role-play, participants had to accurately portray how they thought the person they were representing felt, based on the myths they had heard. This was to put them in the shoes of those targeted by the myth. This was imperative in promoting awareness of cultural differences and encouraging respect for the diversity that exists between diverse cultures. It has been agreed that role-playing the opposition potentially can change attitude and can dispel any misconceptions that participants might have inherited and been influenced by those surrounding them.⁴² Roleplays are thus important because they generate “a range of perceptual, cognitive, and behavioral impacts, especially knowledge acquisition, content understanding, and affective and motivational outcomes.”⁴³

The role-plays revealed the different myths that the participants had heard about each other, and various aspects, both positive and negative, were revealed through the role-plays. Participants demonstrated that young children also held myths that they had inherited from their families, communities, and other groups. Cajete captures this perfectly when he says that myths “actively shape and integrate our life experience. They inform us, as well as form us, through our interaction with their symbols, images, and meanings.”⁴⁴ Even though the participants stayed in the same vicinity, an invisible wedge existed through the myths that inhibited the process of reaching out to each other. The sharing of perspectives and watching a myth about one’s culture being acted out enabled the participants to gain a better understanding of the conflict that exists, and this proved to be an important exercise. A discussion was held on how the participants felt while performing the roleplays and how those watching the roleplay felt while observing the performance, and the responses were documented for analysis purposes. Nigerian migrants, in particular, voiced feelings of being unfairly stigmatized as criminals and drug dealers’ despite many of them having diligent parents who had to support their families legally. Onapajo agrees with this and states that there is “*Naijaphobia*” in South Africa (professional, institutional, and societal *Naijaphobia*).⁴⁵ Most of the participants also shared that there was a dominant narrative that paints migrants in a negative light. They also discussed negative perceptions migrants had about South Africans, often fueled by stereotypes about their poor work ethic and social behaviors. Issues on differences, interactions, and connections were discussed in the groups. The discussions showed the various social dynamics that exist between children of local South Africans and migrant communities. Some of the participants held no prejudice toward migrants; however, they confessed that there was limited social engagement beyond the classroom. These accounts highlight both the barriers to belonging and the potential for meaningful relationships across communities. Participants indicated that society is too quick to judge individuals, and the judgment is often motivated by existing beliefs and other common societal trends that are often untrue. There was thus evidence of negative moral judgment existing in the group, and the consequence was evident in how they viewed each other.⁴⁶ Since people have no choice over their backgrounds or countries of origin, it would be very unfair to judge them based on their circumstances and not on who they are. The analysis of the children’s role-plays showed that myths about the participants’ nations had a bearing on the representation of a negative experience.

Workshop 3

During this session, the children were presented with a puzzle word game called ‘Find the word.’ The letters in this puzzle represented the word *xenophobia*, and they were required to work out what the word was.

⁴⁰ Laura Freeman, “Defying Empirical and Causal Evidence: Busting the Media’s Myth of Afrophobia in South Africa,” in *Mediating Xenophobia in Africa: Unpacking Discourses of Migration, Belonging and Othering* (Springer, 2020), 17–41.

⁴¹ André Mbata Mangu, “Xenophobia and Migration in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Myths and Realities,” *African Journal of Democracy and Governance* 6, no. 1 (2019): 44–72.

⁴² Rhia Catapano, Zakary L Tormala, and Derek D Rucker, “Perspective Taking and Self-Persuasion: Why ‘Putting Yourself in Their Shoes’ Reduces Openness to Attitude Change,” *Psychological Science* 30, no. 3 (2019): 424–35.

⁴³ Guy M Robinson, Michael Hardman, and Robert J Matley, “Using Games in Geographical and Planning-Related Teaching: Serious Games, Edutainment, Board Games and Role-Play,” *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 4, no. 1 (2021): 100208.

⁴⁴ Gregory A Cajete, “Children, Myth and Storytelling: An Indigenous Perspective,” *Global Studies of Childhood* 7, no. 2 (2017): 113–30.

⁴⁵ Hakeem Onapajo, “Xenophobia against Nigerian Immigrants in South Africa: The Naijaphobia Perspective,” in *Conflict and Concord: The Ambivalence of African Migrant/Host Relations in South Africa* (Springer, 2022), 61–84.

⁴⁶ Wen Ying Jin and Ming Peng, “The Effects of Social Perception on Moral Judgment,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (2021): 557216.

This was done in groups of three to distribute the number among them evenly. After the exercise, only two groups managed to find the word within the stipulated three-minute time limit. The first group to get the words correct became the winners of the game and received a mini prize of sweets. This game set the tone for the discussion to start on what xenophobia was understood to be in South Africa. The participants highlighted where they had first encountered the word. Then the training went on to discuss the effects of xenophobia, how it operated, and how the violence that results from it has affected the participants personally or indirectly. The training also looked at discrimination that came through the lens of xenophobia. A fascinating discussion ensued about the names attributed to non-South Africans. Many of the participants stated that at school, they were occasionally called *amakwerekwere* without having done anything at all,⁴⁷ a term that has been widely documented in South African literature as a derogatory label used to mark African migrants as outsiders.⁴⁸ In cases where they excelled in school, it was seen as showing off, and they would be called names as well. The discussion highlighted how the name-calling helped to stigmatize migrants, which led to a lack of confidence and negative self-consciousness. As Hack-Polay et al. argue, this shows that migrants often navigate hostile social environments.⁴⁹ In addition, the participants had to explore what it meant to be a migrant by examining other terms, such as asylum seekers, permit holders, and refugees. This cleared the confusion that exists where all migrants are viewed as illegal. It was interesting to note that with each session, there were always some notable and visible improvements in terms of enthusiasm when compared to the previous session.

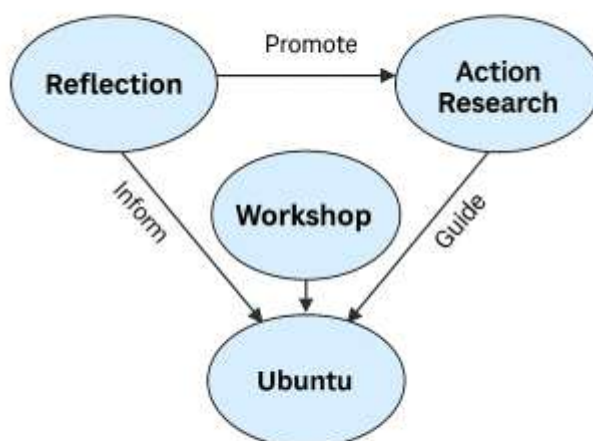


Figure 2: Conceptual Model

Workshop 4

This workshop aimed to look at integration and peacebuilding. The topic on *Ubuntu* was also covered, as this was part of the methodology that this study was to utilize. “*Ubuntu* is the common foundation of all African cultures and a consciousness of belonging together. The existence of xenophobia demonstrates an absence of tolerance for other Africans.”⁵⁰ Exercising the spirit of *ubuntu* through education for peace may therefore help eradicate the occurrence of xenophobia. This theory was employed in the hope that *Ubuntu* could serve as a framework for moral conduct, human dignity, and fostering friendships. For the training, *Ubuntu* was reinterpreted in light of the research objectives. From the discussions on *Ubuntu*, it became

⁴⁷ Travis Bostick, “‘Amakwerekwere’: An Assessment of Xenophobic Sentiment and Violence in South Africa,” 2012.

⁴⁸ Esther Mavengano, Tobias Marevesa, and Paul Nepapleh Nkamta, “Re-Reading Xenophobic Discourses from an Ubuntu Perspective: A Study of the Plight of ‘Makwerekwere’ in Mhlongo’s After Tears,” *Journal of Multicultural Discourses* 17, no. 3 (2022): 225–39.

⁴⁹ Dieu Hack-Polay et al., “‘Let Us Define Ourselves’: Forced Migrants’ Use of Multiple Identities as a Tactic for Social Navigation,” *BMC Psychology* 9, no. 1 (2021): 125.

⁵⁰ Elizabeth Chinomona and Eugene Tafadzwa Maziriri, “Women in Action: Challenges Facing Women Entrepreneurs in the Gauteng Province of South Africa,” *The International Business & Economics Research Journal (Online)* 14, no. 6 (2015): 835.

clear that the participants felt they needed to act and honor the legacy of *Ubuntu*. Perspectives shifted from general knowledge on the concept to seeing it in practice in peacebuilding. It was noticeable that the participants became closer to one another; for example, their seating arrangements, greetings, and even the way they conversed changed. The fourth workshop session concluded with participants agreeing on a peacebuilding intervention. More of this would be covered in the fifth and sixth sessions of the workshops. This paper will not cover these workshops in detail, as they will be explored in a subsequent publication.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Reflecting on the workshop journey, certain approaches were found to be impactful in fostering engagement and learning, while others highlighted important opportunities for further growth and refinement. Below are the reflections and findings of the researcher.

Value of Facilitator Training

In 2017, the academic department set up cohorts for the students, which were meant to train them on what peacebuilding and action research entailed. This was the first time encountering cohort supervision. This setup was very helpful as it allowed the researcher to be equipped and well-informed on how action research should be done and conducted. It has been said that cohort training models have advantages. It provides tools for “building personal effectiveness, self-management, personal advantages, professional and career development.”⁵¹ The researcher concurs with this notion, and it is therefore advised that, before embarking on an action research workshop, prior training is invaluable, as professional development and preparation are vital tools.⁵² The training helped the researcher to reflect on the workshop program they intended to undertake, so they could adapt it to suit the youth age group. Although a schedule would be prepared most of the time, the content was occasionally paused and modified to allow for reflection and the sharing of insights on issues such as diversity, social and cultural issues, and xenophobia. The training cohort established that action research is flexible, iterative, and context-sensitive. From the beginning, the workshops were structured in a way that allowed each participant to contribute, sharing their experiences and opinions.

Successful engagement through Ground Rules and Language

Workshops, particularly those involving young children, require defined ground rules that set behavioral and communicative expectations. This was evident in the emphasis on the common set of values that was decided on at the start of the workshops. The common set of values helped keep everyone respectful of one another, and they became the workshop's “expectations that defined explanations of behavioral and classroom performance and helped to create a consistent and safe learning environment.”⁵³ The children agreed on how they would address each other during the workshops. This showed that children, despite being young, are capable of agreeing on mutual respect and communication boundaries. When dealing with a diverse group of participants, respectful communication is important. A code of conduct plays a critical role in both corporate and business settings, and more importantly, within a research setting.⁵⁴ A code of conduct has the potential to enhance and protect the rights of participants, while also helping to build trust among them.

For successful engagement at the workshops, appropriate language was chosen when conducting the workshops, as the participants were a diverse group. In this case, English was adopted as the primary communication medium, with allowance for vernacular during breaks. For individuals who are non-native speakers, the ability to communicate effectively in the dominant language of their environment is often a crucial factor in their success. It was an advantage that all the participants were able to speak and understand English. Language barriers have been recognized as significant challenges when a multicultural group meets

⁵¹ Connor L Ferguson and Julie A Lockman, “Advancing Doctoral Student Professional Development through a Strengths-Based Cohort Program,” *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education* 16, no. 3 (2025): 263–84.

⁵² Cemile Dogan and Yasemin Kirkgoz, “Promoting Continuous Professional Development of English Teachers through Action Research,” *International Journal of Educational Reform* 31, no. 3 (2022): 246–77.

⁵³ Katharine M Croce and Jamie S Salter, “Beyond the Walls: Establishing Classroom Expectations in a Virtual Classroom,” in *Frontiers in Education*, vol. 7 (Frontiers Media SA, 2022), 816007.

⁵⁴ Vincent Giorgini et al., “Researcher Perceptions of Ethical Guidelines and Codes of Conduct,” *Accountability in Research* 22, no. 3 (2015): 123–38.

and affects outcomes.⁵⁵ Studies have also raised many concerns about the use of English as a medium of instruction in terms of academic performance,⁵⁶ where multi-lingual practices are seen as best when learners struggle to relate to English texts due to limited proficiency.⁵⁷ To further support this, a study by Posel et al, they provided data that showed that in South Africa, English was not the main language of communication outside the household.⁵⁸ Fortunately, in this study, using the English language was not an issue. This made the workshops flow, and no participant was left out in understanding what was being shared.

Workshops as a platform to share Experiences.

The main aim of the workshops was to provide a space for the sharing of knowledge between participants. From my observations, the workshops offered the participants a platform to share their lived experiences of stigmatization and social exclusion. The participants were able to speak about how they were labeled with derogatory names. In addition, participants reflected on how, in their communities, they were faced daily with conflict and violence. This acknowledgment showed that conflict is intergenerational and an inherent part of everyday reality, as evidenced in literature. The puzzle revealed how identity and language intersect in daily stigmatization. Participant responses also revealed how familial, communal, and media-driven narratives influence childhood perceptions of and attitudes toward others. The findings indicate the potential workshops have in establishing safe spaces that allow sharing and experiences.⁵⁹ This demonstrates that workshops can support and foster a deeper appreciation of participants' lived experiences.⁶⁰

Leveraging Creative Tools in Workshops

In the study, the workshops integrated the use of videos, puzzles, and roleplays as a metaphorical representation of conflict and violence. Children have a short attention span and tend to become easily bored.⁶¹ When one works with a child participant, they need to engage with them through various participatory tools. These can be games, role-plays, and videos. For me, the video allowed the children to reflect on and discuss violence beyond the everyday context of it, not only being physical but also structural. The interactive word puzzle became a tool through which an understanding of the emotional and lived dimensions of discrimination that they face was gained. Participants engaged in role-plays, which allowed them to explore myths associated with nationality and identity. From this, it can be deduced that creative learning tools can help demystify misconceptions and promote empathy across cultural divides. Beauregard et al share the same sentiments by stating that workshops allow children to tell stories about themselves, and they can freely express their identity and emotions.⁶²

Group Cohesion and Social Bonding

Ubuntu was used as a model for fostering moral accountability, dignity, and social cohesion in the study.⁶³ The intention was to redefine *Ubuntu* as a practical ethic for dismantling xenophobia and enhancing cohesion. At the end of the workshops, shifts in behavior among the participants were observed, including changes in their sitting patterns, demeanor during greetings, and interactions with others. These changes

⁵⁵ John Paul Chika, Okoli and Gabriel Elochukwu Nweke, "Effects of Language Barriers and Social Integration on Academic Achievement of International Students," *Open Access Library Journal* 12, no. 6 (2025): 1–15.

⁵⁶ Hakorimana Jean Pierre and Hesbon Opiyo Andala, "Effect of English as a Medium of Instruction on Academic Performance of Students in Geography Subject in Public Secondary Schools in Rwanda," *Journal of Education* 6, no. 4 (2023): 85–100.

⁵⁷ Ameera Carrim and Sibhekinkosi Anna Nkomo, "A Systematic Literature Review of the Feasibility of a Translanguaging Pedagogy in the Foundation Phase," *JOLTT Journal of Languages and Language Teaching* 11, no. 2 (2023): 195–210.

⁵⁸ Dorrit Posel, Mark Hunter, and Stephanie Rudwick, "Revisiting the Prevalence of English: Language Use Outside the Home in South Africa," *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 43, no. 8 (2022): 774–86.

⁵⁹ Graham R Daniel, "Safe Spaces for Enabling the Creative Process in Classrooms," *Australian Journal of Teacher Education (Online)* 45, no. 8 (2020): 41–57.

⁶⁰ Justin Newton Scanlan et al., "Learning from Lived Experience: Outcomes Associated with Students' Involvement in Co-designed and Co-delivered Recovery-oriented Practice Workshops," *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal* 69, no. 6 (2022): 714–22.

⁶¹ Othman Asiry et al., "Extending Attention Span for Children ADHD Using an Attentive Visual Interface," in *2018 22nd International Conference Information Visualisation (IV)* (IEEE, 2018), 188–93.

⁶² Caroline Beauregard et al., "Creating a Safe Space during Classroom-Based Sandplay Workshops for Immigrant and Refugee Preschool Children," *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health* 19, no. 1 (2024): 136–52.

⁶³ Cornelius Ewuoso and Susan Hall, "Core Aspects of Ubuntu: A Systematic Review," *South African Journal of Bioethics and Law* 12, no. 2 (2019): 93–103.

show the development of trust and relational interactions among participants. Despite underlying tensions, participants demonstrated a willingness to connect with peers from diverse backgrounds. It can thus be said that there is a transformative potential of relationship building and cohesion among children (local and migrant). This theme highlights how Indigenous knowledge systems can bring about community healing. Sustained engagement in peace education thus has the potential to build a new, cohesive community. However, for this study, there are no further prospects for training that would be continually done with the children. Therefore, without such a component readily available, it will be challenging to determine whether the exhibited attitude change will be eroded once the children reintegrate into their communities. To ensure sustainability, it takes more than a sudden change in community understanding and attitudes. Here, it was feasible to only measure the short-term outcome due to the nature of the study and the length of the intervention, which lasted over eight months. A medium- or long-term intervention would have been preferred, as a truly sustainable outcome must address both short-term and long-term problems.⁶⁴ This indicates that awareness generation does not happen in one day, but it is a continuous process if we are to get optimal results.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that education on peace strategies be implemented for both children and adults in South Africa on a larger scale in the various provinces. For children, this will help them to grow up with a mindset and attitude that condemns and resists xenophobic violence. This can be achieved by hosting educational training sessions on television channels, and the Ministry of Education can incorporate these sessions into the Life Orientation modules offered in the South African curriculum. To further promote empathy and address violence, a community-based project with stakeholders from different fields, such as NGOs, religious organisations and political parties, can join forces and use interactive techniques like story circles, peace circles, art, and drama. Further, including parents and guardians in peace education workshops may further increase the impact of workshops outside of the classroom.

CONCLUSION

Shifting how people think about certain social issues is a critical aspect of social change. Toxic mindsets lead to blaming marginalized people and impede efforts to address violence. The importance of workshops for training children cannot be stressed enough. The study has emphasized the role of educating for peace through the use of training workshops as relevant tools for child participation and engagement. Education is an effective weapon to transform people's mindset and can undoubtedly be used as a powerful instrument, and is essential for changing the conduct and attitudes of individuals and societies. The workshop sessions offered a safe space that would enable participants to connect. However, for workshops to be a success, there needs to be flexibility, language considerations, ground rules and use of creative tools. The results show that workshops are a powerful tool that can be used as an educational tool for peace.

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