


Bridging Theory and Practice in Entertainment Education: An Assessment of the Conceptualization and Design of *Tsha Tsha* in South Africa

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Abstract

The entertainment–education (E-E) strategy in development communication has been widely described as the panacea to development challenges in Africa. However, despite its growing application on the continent, E-E is still argued to be inhibited from contributing meaningfully toward development efforts. E-E interventions are argued to be hamstrung by their failure to embrace theoretical advances in development communication and E-E scholarship and for remaining rooted in the modernization paradigm. Using the social change paradigm as its framework, this article assesses the notions of development, change, communication, audiences, and education that underpin the conceptualization and design of *Tsha Tsha*, an E-E television drama that uses a novel cultural approach to address issues surrounding HIV and AIDS in South Africa. The data informing the study were gathered through a Focused Synthesis Approach and analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The study's findings show that significant efforts have been made by *Tsha Tsha*'s producers to bridge E-E practice and contemporary development communication and E-E scholarship. The data analyzed in the study show that *Tsha Tsha*'s notions of development, change, education, communication, and audience have been significantly remodeled in line with the core tenets of the E-E for Social Change paradigm. The implications of the study are that more engagement and synergies need to be cultivated between E-E practitioners and development communication and E-E scholars if E-E's full potential, in contributing to development challenges on the continent, is to be realized.

Keywords

entertainment–education, development, communication, social Sciences, social change, HIV and AIDS, subaltern

Introduction

The entertainment–education (E-E) strategy has been invariably described as the viagra of health communication (Netherlands Entertainment-Education Foundation & Johns Hopkins University/Centre for Communication Programs, 2001, p. 2). E-E, conceptualized as the intentional, strategic, and theoretically based process of developing educational messages using media platforms to facilitate a desired behavioral or social change, has grown in terms of scope of application in Africa (Govender, 2013). Although E-E has been utilized to address a number of health-related issues such as blood pressure, smoking, vaccine promotion, and family planning globally (Singhal & Rogers, 2001; Tufte, 2005), the last 25 years have witnessed an exponential rise of E-E interventions on HIV and AIDS prevention, care, and support in South Africa (Govender, 2013). E-E interventions have assumed a key role in addressing a range of HIV and AIDS–related topics in a country where 16.8% of adults aged 15 to 49 are estimated to be HIV positive (Statistics South Africa, 2013, p. 3).

However, despite the growing presence of E-E interventions that address development challenges such as HIV and AIDS in South Africa, most E-E interventions are yet to be critically appraised and documented in academic literature. With most literature on E-E in the country existing only in the form of nongovernmental organizations' reports and workshop notes, very little is known about the interventions' epistemological foundations and aims, theoretical premises, and methodological approaches (see Tufte, 2005). Therefore, the contribution of E-E interventions in South Africa to the development of the E-E strategy in development communication worldwide remains scant (Govender, 2013). It therefore remains largely unknown whether the burgeoning E-E

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interventions in South Africa have reached their full potential in contributing towards resolving development efforts by tapping into theoretical advances in development communication and E-E. Waisbord (2008) contends that although critical approaches have enriched the field of development communication by raising questions and opening new analytical dimensions on how development, communication, culture, and change are conceptualized and articulated into development communication interventions, the situation on the ground reflects a continuation of modernization and diffusionist practices.

A number of scholars such as Tufte (2005), Dutta (2006), Waisbord (2008), and Nyamnjoh (2010) have argued that development communication efforts in developing countries are still inhibited from reaching their full potential to contribute toward development efforts due to their continued predication on modernization. They contend that contrary to claims made by contemporary development communication practitioners and scholars that the dominant paradigm in development communication has passed, a wide chasm still exists between programmatic experiences and contemporary development communication theory. This observation is particularly unsettling given that it contradicts the undergirding ethos of development communication of being a theory-based field whose efficacy reposes on an unerring commitment to bridging the gap between practice and theory (Waisbord, 2008). Obregon and Tufte (2013) posit that E-E interventions in particular can increase their efficacy by articulating new insights into their strategy by remooring notions of development, communication, audiences, culture, education, and change in line with post-colonial critiques of development and development communication.

In light of this context, the objective of this article is to use the key tenets of the social change paradigm to assess the conceptions of development, communication, audiences, culture, education, and change that underpin the conceptualization and design of *Tsha Tsha*'s E-E strategy. *Tsha Tsha* is a multipart South African television drama broadcast since 2003 that engages young people on issues surrounding HIV and AIDS. It is set in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa and uses Xhosa as its lingua franca but also provides complementary English subtitles. The main themes foregrounded in the E-E drama include HIV-related stigma, disclosure, condom use, secondary abstinence, voluntary counseling and testing, and sexual assault. *Tsha Tsha* was developed through a partnership between the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), the Center for AIDS Development Research and Evaluation (CADRE), Curious Pictures, and the Johns Hopkins University Health Communication Program (Hajiyiannis, 2007).

The E-E television drama *Tsha Tsha* was chosen for this study for a number of reasons. First, it is one of a few E-E interventions in South Africa that consciously makes use of the E-E strategy. Second, it is also one of the few interventions in the country that utilizes outside technical expertise to

strengthen its E-E strategy. Third, evaluation research shows that the television drama has been effective in increasing condom use and positive attitudes to people with HIV and AIDS among others (Hajiyiannis, 2007). Fourth, *Tsha Tsha*'s E-E strategy is based on a novel cultural approach that is claimed to be a marked departure from E-E interventions in the dominant paradigm. Fifth, studying *Tsha Tsha* was convenient for the researcher because CADRE, the producers of the television drama, provided the researcher with easy access to recorded Digital Versatile Disks (DVDs) of the television serial and other supporting documents relevant to the study. Furthermore, published and unpublished documents that provide insight into the conceptualization and design of *Tsha Tsha* were easily accessible from CADRE's website. These characteristics provided interesting entry points to understanding whether (and possibly how) *Tsha Tsha* has managed to bridge the gap between contemporary development communication (and E-E) scholarship and practice.

Criticism of Contemporary Development Communication and E-E Interventions

Over three decades after Everett Rogers's (1976) famous proclamation that the dominant paradigm in development communication has passed, the criticism directed at development communication interventions in the developing world has not subsided. Notwithstanding, being lauded as a success story in addressing a wide range of development challenges in developing countries, E-E interventions have not been immune to the same criticism that has been directed at the dominant paradigm of development communication. A number of influential scholars in the field such as Dutta (2008), Waisbord (2008), and Obregon and Tufte (2013) contend that contemporary development communication practice has not been responsive to paradigm shifts within development communication scholarship. Consequently, contemporary development communication practice is argued to be decoupled from theoretical shifts in development communication scholarship. In this light, despite arguments that a theory and practice dialectic exists in the field, Waisbord (2008), Dutta (2006), and Obregon and Tufte (2013) contest that development communication interventions are still epistemologically rooted in the modernization paradigm of development whose conceptualization of development, change, communication, audiences, culture, and education is problematic.

Critics of development communication and E-E practice argue that contemporary interventions are still conceptualized in modernization terms. Modernization conceptualizes development as a process through which developing countries adopt Western political, economic, cultural (and health) systems (Inkeles & Smith, 1974). This conceptualization of development is criticized for being Western-centered, disembedded, and wrongly assuming that development is a unilinear process

(Ferguson, 1990). The conceptualization of development that underpins modernization has been criticized for not taking into account the contextual variations, complex realities, identities, predicaments, and expectations in developing countries that hamper development. As such, its understanding of development problems has been found to be narrow. Consequently, contemporary development communication and E-E interventions whose conceptualization of development is premised on modernization wrongly attribute development problems to lack of knowledge and a “backward” traditional culture (see Linden, 1998, p. 72), rather than the deep structures that account for underdevelopment.

Unlike the modernization paradigm that attributes development problems in developing countries to internal factors such as lack of knowledge and backward traditional cultures, critical and post-colonial scholars contend that exogenous and endogenous structural and social factors are responsible for underdevelopment in developing countries. They posit that development is impeded by deep structures of power and inequality that exist between the core and the periphery, as well as within developing communities themselves (Servaes, 1999). At the global level, structural patterns of power and exploitation between developed and developing nations are considered to be the biggest impediment to development as well as perpetuators of disparities in the world (Nyamnjoh, 2013). These inequalities are seen as entrenched in laws and policies that hinder efforts to rid developing countries of their challenges. Critical and post-colonial scholars do not only consider global structural relations as the sole impediment to development efforts, they also contend that structural inequalities and power relations within developing countries hinder development. The local structural factors that are considered to be impediments to development include inequality, discrimination, poverty, marginalization, and social injustice within communities (see Al-Zoubi & Rahman, 2014). As a result, development in this paradigm is viewed as resulting from structural and social changes in social relations, economic activities, and power structure at the local and global level (Servaes, 1999).

Development communication and E-E interventions informed by modernization also face criticism for exclusively focusing on individuals as the locus of change in interventions (Singhal, 2004; Melkote, Muppidi, & Goswami, 2000). Within E-E, interventions back grounding modernization are usually premised on individual centered communication and social psychological theories aimed at changing the individual's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors through persuasion or dissemination of information (Lupton, 1994; Melkote & Steeves, 2001). Critical theorists and post-colonial thinkers argue that the notion of change that informs such development communication interventions is flawed. This notion of change narrowly locates the individual as the locus of change while ignoring the sociocultural and economic contexts within which development interventions are located (see Lupton, 1994). Instead, critical and post-colonial scholars

posit that development communication interventions should focus less on individuals and pay more attention to the complex underlying factors that influence individual behavior (Nyamnjoh, 2010, p. 9).

The assumption that development is impeded by lack of knowledge and that development is synonymous with Westernization has largely informed the conceptualization of communication and audiences which critics argue limits contemporary development communication interventions. The role of communication in modernization is reduced to a process of merely transferring information from the development experts to receivers with the intention of changing their attitudes and behavior (Rogers, 1983). This approach reposes on the notion that for countries to develop, they need information and persuasion through the media (Schramm, 1964). Consequently, the orientation of communication within modernization is essentially transmission, diffusionist, vertical, and aimed at manipulation and indoctrination (see Diaz-Bordave, 1977). The top-down approach to communication that is argued to be still dominant in contemporary development communication and E-E practice has also been criticized for assuming that the media texts have power over audiences. It views audiences as passive and vulnerable while overlooking their capacity to select, reshape, redirect, adapt, and at times completely reject media content (Nyamnjoh, 2010).

Development communication interventions premised on modernization also face criticism for the way they conceptualize and engage with subaltern cultures (Dutta, 2007). Subaltern cultures are treated as backward and an impediment to development. They are largely conceptualized as an object that can be captured in the lens imposed by outside development experts. Such an approach overlooks the complexity and fluidity of subaltern cultures by approaching them as a stable frame of constructs readily accessible to health communicators, even those from outside (Dutta, 2007, p. 316). Consequently, development communication and particularly E-E interventions are argued to be less effective because they do not incorporate (or at best superficially incorporate) subaltern cultures into the conceptualization and design process of interventions. Instead of locating interventions within the subaltern people's culture to understand the problem and conceptualize the communication approach, contemporary interventions informed by modernization are argued to reduce subaltern cultures into a tool used to figure out the best strategies for enacting change.

Conceptualizing the Social Change Paradigm in Development Communication

The criticism that contemporary development communication and E-E interventions are still located in the modernization paradigm has persisted despite the fact that theoretical debates in development and development communication have been enriched by critiques drawn from knowledge areas

such as post-colonial theory, critical social theory, and alternative citizen theories, among others, which have coalesced into the social change paradigm of development communication. The social change paradigm has fundamentally remooored the “dominant” conceptions of development, change, communication, audiences, culture, and education that underpinned development communication and E-E in the modernization paradigm (Obregon, 2005; Tufte, 2005). This article draws from the central premises of the social change paradigm, here-in referred to as E-E for social change, in development communication in its assessment of *Tsha Tsha*’s E-E strategy in South Africa. The social change paradigm provides both a critique of modernization and an alternative, expanded, multidimensional, flexible, and human centered conceptualization of development premised on principles of community involvement, human rights, dialogue, and process orientation (see Figueroa, Kincaid, Rani, & Lewis, 2002; Servaes, 1999).

Contrary to the modernization paradigm, the social change paradigm contends that development problems emanate from social inequalities and unequal power relations in society rather than a dearth of information. Consequently, the paradigm has shifted the locus of change of development interventions. Instead of identifying individual behavior alone as the locus of change, the social change paradigm holistically includes underlying social and structural factors that shape individual behavior (Tufte, 2005). The paradigm articulates individual behavior and social norms to power relations and structural conditions in society. By identifying social and structural inequalities rather than individual behavior alone as key impediments to development, the social change paradigm also ceases to view diffusion of information as the solution to development problems. Rather, the paradigm argues that development problems are solved through an organic process that strengthens the subaltern people’s ability to identify the problems in their everyday life, as well as their capacity to act collectively and individually on their problems as empowered citizens (see Tufte, 2001).

It is also important to note that the social change paradigm is critical of the pedagogic approach that informs the modernization paradigm. The banking approach that underpins modernization has been widely criticized for promoting a dehumanizing, ineffective, and retrogressive rote pedagogy which views subaltern people as “empty vessels” (Singhal, 2004). This banking concept of education has also been criticized for treating subaltern audiences as objects while also ignoring the complex and process orientation of education. Singhal (2004) avers that such an approach to education fails to empower and conscientize marginalized people to confront and problematize their developmental problems. The pedagogic approach that informs the social change paradigm is drawn from Paulo Freire’s (1970) ideas of a liberatory pedagogy. Unlike the banking concept which views education as a process of depositing information on empty

receptacles, a liberatory pedagogy conceptualizes education as a liberating process where subaltern people as knowing subjects achieve a deep awareness of their social and cultural reality to change it (Freire, 1970). In the social change paradigm, education becomes a process which empowers subaltern people to examine their environment and question the structures that sustain underdevelopment. To achieve this end, critical reflection, dialogue, autonomy, problematization, conscientization, and problem solving replace rote learning. Consistent with its underpinning values of human rights and cultural citizenship, the liberatory pedagogy actively seeks to understand, appreciate and respect the knowledge of subaltern people (Singhal, 2004).

Similarly, the conceptualization of communication in the social change paradigm has been remooored in response to the criticism of the diffusionist approach that characterizes modernization. Consonant with Freire’s dialogic pedagogy, communication in the social change paradigm is conceptualized as a cyclical, relational, and empowering process aimed at fostering dialogue with and among members of the community to bring about social and individual change. Instead of being a preserve of external program experts, communication in the social change paradigm is viewed as an inalienable human right which citizens exercise individually and collectively to emancipate themselves (Figueroa et al., 2002). In this light, communication ceases to be a simplistic and narrow process of proffering information-driven solutions to subaltern people but an iterative dialogous process used to negotiate communication driven solutions which bring about individual and social change (Figueroa et al., 2002). The reconceptualization of communication in the social change paradigm has also led to a seismic shift in the way audiences are viewed. Whereas audiences are viewed as passive in the modernization paradigm (see Tufte, 2001), the social change paradigm conceptualizes them as active decoders who do not necessarily accept positions offered by media texts. In line with cultural studies and reception theory, the social change paradigm acknowledges subaltern audiences’ ability to negotiate oppositional readings from media texts using their cultural capital. Media texts are seen as constantly mediating culture, as well as being mediated by culture as lived experience (see Tomilson, 1991, p. 61).

The social change paradigm also differs markedly with modernization in the way it conceptualizes and engages with subaltern people’s culture. Instead of seeing subaltern people’s culture as backward and an impediment to development, their culture is viewed as central to the development communication process. Furthermore, subaltern peoples culture is no longer seen as a static object that can be easily captured by outside development experts, but a complex web of meanings in flux that interact with structural processes (Dutta, 2007). Unlike other development paradigms which jettison subaltern communities’ cultures or merely co-opt them into development communication interventions, the social change paradigm engages with and works within subaltern people’s

culture to identify development problems and solutions (Dutta, 2007). The development paradigm is premised on the understanding that human experience is only meaningful when it finds expression in the richness of the context and culture in which it is experienced (Dutta-Bergman, 2005).

Method

This study employed a Focused Synthesis Approach (FCA) and qualitative content analysis to understand the conceptualization and design of *Tsha Tsha*. The FCA is a data inclusive qualitative research technique that uses existing information obtained from a variety of sources to understand a particular phenomenon (Majchrzak, 1984). In this study, the FCA was used to collect, integrate, and synthesize a huge corpus of visual and written documents that enabled the researchers to understand the notions of development, change, communication, audiences, education, and culture that underpin *Tsha Tsha*'s E-E strategy. The visual and written documents used in the study were selected insofar as they contributed to the overall synthesis (see Majchrzak, 1984, p. 59).

After collecting visual and written data from a variety of sources using the FCA, the first stage of the analysis consisted of a preliminary qualitative content analysis of the television drama serial (visual data). This phase was meant to help the researchers to familiarize themselves with the television drama serial's plot, narrative structure, and E-E content as recommended by Neuman (1997). This stage was followed by a more rigorous theoretically guided qualitative content analysis of the television serial. The aim of this analysis was to help the researchers to understand the structuring role of the television drama using the E-E strategy as well as to bring up the manifest and latent theoretical underpinnings of *Tsha Tsha* (see Fairclough, 1995). The analysis of the television serial was guided by the E-E for social change paradigm and its attendant underpinning notions of development, change, communication, audiences, education, and culture.

The third stage of the analysis consisted of a qualitative content analysis of the wide corpus of written documents gathered using the FCA. These documents were viewed literally as data and as a way of integrating evidence (Steyn & Nunes, 2001, p. 39). The following key documents inter alia were analyzed and integrated for evidence: primary and secondary official and private documents and reports that were published by the CADRE; Curious pictures and SABC education collaboratively or individually; technical partners such as Johns Hopkins Health and Education, South Africa; individual researchers and independent researchers as well as other documents discovered serendipitously in the course of the study. A theoretically guided qualitative content analysis was used to analyze and unitize the diverse data collected using the FCA to understand the underlying themes and meanings emerging from the content. This process enabled the researchers to understand the conceptualization and design of *Tsha Tsha* as well as the notions of development,

change, communication, audiences, education, and culture that underpin *Tsha Tsha*'s E-E strategy.

Given the FSA's propensity to collect a huge corpus of data, the challenges in organizing, collating, and synthesizing the data into a meaningful and coherent whole were overcome by focusing the synthesis to the study objectives. This helped the researchers to avoid the temptation to incorporate just about any evidence. The FCA proved to be a very useful unobstructive research technique that enabled the study to investigate the conceptualization and design of *Tsha Tsha*, and the television drama's underpinning notions of development, change, communication, audiences, education, and culture without the subjects being aware that they were under observation, a potential key source of error and bias in qualitative research. The findings of this study were validated at the inaugural conference on E-E in South Africa held at Rhodes University in 2015 where leading E-E producers and technical experts in South Africa participated.

Results and Discussion

This section of the article engages with the notions of development, audiences, communication, education, and change that inform *Tsha Tsha*'s cultural approach. It assesses whether the conceptualization and design of *Tsha Tsha* reflects the existence of dialogue between programmatic experience and contemporary scholarship in development communication and E-E. The data gleaned using the FCA show that *Tsha Tsha*'s producers consciously sought to break away from the dominant paradigm in E-E by premising the television drama on Paulo Freire's ideas on a dialogical pedagogy and Boal's concepts on liberatory theater (see Ntlabati & Kelly, 2004). The adoption of Boal and Freire's ideas as key elements of *Tsha Tsha*'s E-E strategy is consistent with efforts being made by communication practitioners and scholars to overcome the limitations of modernization by engaging with post-colonial critiques of development (Melkote & Steeves, 2001). Tufte (2001) contends that the articulation of Freire and Boal's post-colonial perspectives into development communication and E-E practice has the capacity to influence the conceptualization and design of E-E interventions.

Tsha Tsha's Conceptualization of Development

Development communication interventions in the modernization paradigm of development conceptualize development as an externally driven process through which underdeveloped countries catch up with the industrialized globalized North through replication of Western political, economic, and cultural systems (Inkeles & Smith, 1974). This conceptualization of development ignores the specificities, context, knowledge, and culture of developing communities (Burger, 2015). In contrast to modernization, contemporary scholarship in development communication conceptualizes development as an endogenous, multidimensional, and participatory process

that enhances human potential and improves people's lives (Melkote & Steeves, 2001). Development from this perspective emphasizes basic human rights, local knowledge, and cultural identity and not merely economic progress. Development is seen as resulting from structural changes in social relations and power structure in society (Servaes, 1999).

An appraisal of *Tsha Tsha*'s E-E strategy shows that the intervention's conceptualization of development is largely informed by contemporary scholarship on development and development communication that emphasizes basic human rights, local knowledge, and culture. This is evident in the television serial whose story line challenges unequal power relations that perpetuate unhealthy behaviors that drive HIV and AIDS in subaltern Black South African communities. The key social and structural issues that impinge development that are identified in program documents and engaged within the television drama include unequal gender relations between men and women, marginalization of the sexual rights of gay and lesbian people, and poverty. These social and structural issues are identified and harnessed into the television drama using the cultural approach. This enables the television drama to harness the specificities, context, knowledge, and culture of subaltern communities into the television drama serial.

Although the television drama *Tsha Tsha* seeks to enhance and improve people's lives through social change, and engages with local knowledge and culture, the evidence collected using the FCA shows that the intervention does not emanate from inside the communities it engages with. Rather, in line with externally initiated development interventions in the modernization paradigm, the television drama is initiated by CADRE and receives technical support from the Johns Hopkins University Health Communication Program (see Hajiyanis, 2007) who are external to target communities. It is therefore arguable that although *Tsha Tsha*'s conceptualization of development appears to be consistent with most key aspects of the E-E for social change paradigm, the fact that the intervention is exogenously initiated and driven undermines its authenticity (see McKee, Becker-Benton, & Bockh, 2014). Exogenously driven interventions have been criticized for alienating target communities and are considered to have less chances of bringing about new understandings and practices (Burger, 2015).

Locating the Development Problem and Locus of Change in Tsha Tsha

The evidence gleaned from the qualitative content analysis of the television drama *Tsha Tsha* and the program documents shows that the locus of change in the development communication intervention is not just the individual but includes social and structural factors that influence individual behavior on issues around HIV and AIDS in subaltern

Black South African communities. The E-E content of the television drama shows close engagement with a wide range of social and structural issues that include gender inequality, gender stereotypes, power relations, poverty, social support for disclosure, stigma, as well as sexual rights. *Tsha Tsha* promotes social change through role models like Andile, Boniswa, and Sis Wawi. For example, Andile confronts patriarchal values assigned to men by his community by taking up traditional feminine roles such as washing, cleaning, and looking after children. Likewise, he also confronts gender inequality in his community by speaking out on HIV and AIDS issues in a society that does not allow women to voice their views on issues such as sexuality. The expansion of the locus of change in *Tsha Tsha* to include social and structural issues that drive unhealthy behavior in South Africa is consistent with the E-E for social change paradigm.

An analysis of *Tsha Tsha*'s E-E strategy further shows that besides focusing on social and structural factors as the locus of change, *Tsha Tsha* also identified individual attitudes and behavior as key loci of change. The television drama seeks to change individual behavior and attitudes on issues such as condom use, abstinence, and voluntary counseling and testing. Although the focus on individual behavior as a locus of change is a relic of modernization, contemporary literature on social change posits that combining social change and individual behavior change helps interventions to bridge the dichotomy between development and E-E paradigms. This view is further supported by Tufte (2005) who argues that although E-E interventions in the social change paradigm need to shift their locus of change from individual behavior to social and structural change, individual behavioral change remains a key component of E-E interventions. In *Tsha Tsha*'s case, individual behavior change is articulated to broader social and structural change agendas underpinning the television drama. In this light, what appears to separate *Tsha Tsha*'s articulation of individual behavior change from the dominant practice in E-E is the decision to enlist individuals as advocates of change at the wider community level. The dual focus on individual change and social and structural change used in *Tsha Tsha* is further rationalized by the UNAIDS's (1999) Communication Framework for HIV/AIDS (p. 30):

... the individual is a product of the context, and for HIV/AIDS communications strategy to have a meaningful effect, intervention programs should begin with one or a combination of these domains. Thus individuals should still be targeted, but only in the context of their interaction within a domain or a combination of domains.

Assessing Tsha Tsha's Pedagogic Approach

The evidence gleaned from the FCA shows that *Tsha Tsha*'s producers adopted an approach to education and learning

that is informed by Freire's ideas on a dialogic pedagogy. From the very onset, the producers sought to avoid a rote learning characteristic of didactic pedagogies. Hajjiyannis cited in Ogenga (2006) states that *Tsha Tsha*'s producers chose the concept of lessons as opposed to messages because lessons include and acknowledge processes and complexities. This view chimes with Tufte's (2005) argument that lessons are preferable to didactic messaging which views learning as linear and whose primary objective is to disseminate information which results in individual behavioral change. Post-colonial scholars like Paulo Freire have criticized didactic messaging because it promotes rote learning, does not acknowledge the agency of the subaltern, and downplays the complexity and process nature of education and learning (Akar, 2016; Singhal, 2004). Conversely, a lesson-based approach acknowledges the complex nature of education and subaltern people and views education as a dialogic, empowering, and mutually transformative process.

Informed by Paulo Freire's ideas on a liberatory pedagogy, *Tsha Tsha*'s producers adopted what they describe as a complex, process-oriented pedagogic approach aimed at problem solving (Parker, Ntlati, & Hajjiyannis, 2005). The lesson-based approach is not underpinned by a predetermined set of indiscrete educational messages or themes. Rather, it is premised on key lessons built around covert and educational themes. The covert themes and lessons that the study noted in the television drama include the plight of young people who are burdened with caring for sick and dying parents, the financial and social risks associated with caring for sick parents, the challenges associated with confronting the possibility of being HIV positive, disclosure and the personal social challenges associated with it, dealing with HIV stigma as a community, drinking and alcoholism and the risks associated with it, and the challenges associated with discussing openly about HIV and AIDS (Hajjiyannis & Jugbar, 2005).

The lesson-based approach employed in *Tsha Tsha*'s E-E strategy indicates a significant departure from the dominant practice in E-E where themes are largely overt. *Tsha Tsha*'s themes and lessons are subtly embedded into the television drama. The lessons emerge discretely as the plot unravels and the principal characters interact with each other. According to Kelly, Parker, Hajjiyannis, and Ntlati (2004, p. 8), the integration of covert themes into the television drama allows the producers to capacitate audiences to learn about themselves through others rather than through a didactic process. Further evidence of the lesson-based approach in *Tsha Tsha* is reflected through the covert theme that focuses on the complex choices that young people encounter when choosing and shaping their relationships in marginal contexts. Instead of presenting the theme overtly, the television drama depicts young people, such as DJ, negotiating the challenges surrounding their relationships in a rural setting. In doing so, the television drama presents its subaltern youth audiences with covert learning opportunities on challenges

similar to their own. Youth audiences are presented with an opportunity to learn and problematize their challenges as the fictional characters in the television drama grapple, learn, and reflect on their own limiting situations (Kelly et al., 2004, p. 8).

Another key element of *Tsha Tsha*'s pedagogic approach that emerged from the FCA is Freire's (1968) concept of conscientization. *Tsha Tsha*'s producers conceptualize conscientization as a process that raises people's ability to identify their problems in everyday life and to then act upon them individually and collectively to improve their lives. The findings of the study show that conscientization is articulated into *Tsha Tsha*'s E-E strategy to enable youth audiences to identify and engage with characters who navigate limit situations similar to their own so that they, as knowing subjects in the process, achieve a deep sense of awareness of the sociocultural and economic realities that shape their own lives. According to program documents, conscientization is meant to provide a transformative pedagogic experience that heightens youth audiences' capacity to change their reality. Evidence of conscientization in *Tsha Tsha* is manifest through the development of realistic, dynamic, and fallible characters (like Andile and Boniswa) who negotiate complex, limit, and transformative situations characterized by poverty and discrimination. This process provokes subaltern audiences to critically reflect on their own situation thereby raising conscientization and the possibility of action (see Freire, 1998). The television drama is built around realistic, dynamic, and fallible role models like DJ, Boniswa, Andile, Viwe, and Mimi who constantly model positive and negative behavior within an impoverished community. These main characters constantly agonize over their situations (e.g., being HIV positive, lesbian, or orphaned) in ways that provoke audiences to be drawn to think about their similar challenges and situations.

The articulation of conscientization into *Tsha Tsha*'s pedagogic approach is intended to empower subaltern youth audiences to become active participants in examining their own constraining environment. Conscientization is viewed as capable of empowering audiences to question the social structures that promote unhealthy behaviors in their own communities. In this light, the use of a lesson-based approach and conscientization as key elements of *Tsha Tsha*'s pedagogic approach is largely consistent with the tenets of the E-E for social change paradigm. The paradigm seeks to promote a dialogic pedagogy that emancipates subaltern people from marginality by affording them a platform to collectively and individually pose problems and creatively reflect on the existing structures of marginalization (Tufte, 2001).

Tsha Tsha's Engagement With the Subaltern's Culture

Tsha Tsha's engagement with subaltern people's culture and their lived experiences in the conceptualization and design

process is guided by the intervention's cultural approach. The broad aim of *Tsha Tsha*'s cultural approach is to develop a television drama whose narrative and characters are steeped in the sociocultural and political context of its audiences' quotidian lives (see Tufte, 2005). Results from the FCA shows that formative research is the primary tool used by *Tsha Tsha*'s producers to engage with the culture and context of its subaltern youth audiences. From the initial stages, formative research was identified as a critical tool for enabling the producers to design an E-E intervention that is rooted in the culture, characteristics, needs, and preferences of its target audience. The centrality of culture in the intervention is enunciated by Jugbarán cited in Ogenga (2006) and Ntlabati and Kelly (2004):

Formative evaluation is the basic key in the entire conceptualisation of *Tsha Tsha* . . . it is our starting point and it is even our end point. (It is used) . . . to identify issues and specific cultural practices impacting on HIV and AIDS in the community; developing and understanding the characters and the dynamics of the relationships between them; testing the plausibility of drama events against the reference point of life in a small town in the Eastern Cape.

The above quotation clearly shows that the producers consciously sought to immerse the conceptualization and design of *Tsha Tsha* in its youth audience's culture and context. In line with its cultural approach, *Tsha Tsha*'s producers engaged and interacted with subaltern youth audiences to understand their culture and to identify key development issues affecting them. The engagement with youth audiences' culture was achieved through a mutually transformative dialogue between outside technical experts and producers and subaltern communities (Ntlabati & Kelly, 2004). The purposive articulation of formative evaluation into the intervention's cultural approach is a reflection of the producers' commitment to understanding issues surrounding HIV and AIDS from within the specific culture and contexts in which they arise with the critical input of the subaltern actors (see Airhihenbuwa, 1999; Dutta, 2015).

Evidence of *Tsha Tsha*'s engagement with its audience's culture is reflected throughout the conceptualization and design process. Formative research was conducted in Pedi, a rural town in the Eastern Cape. This was done to explore the town and familiarize with the primary target audience's culture, issues, and places important in their lives (Kelly et al., 2004). This process was meant to enable the producers to understand the dynamics, culture, and lived experiences of subaltern youth audiences. This process was followed by in-depth interviews, observations, document analysis, and focus group discussions which gave the producers a holistic understanding of the context, culture, and practices of subaltern communities. The data about the audiences' culture and contextual issues were gathered from a broad range of stakeholders in the community that include civic organizations, community-based organizations, and governmental

institutions such as the police, health staff, and educators. Anthropological and ethnographic participatory methods, such as the provision of disposable cameras to young people to document important incidents and experiences in their lives, were also used by the producers to gain a nuanced understanding of the culture of the target audience (Kelly et al., 2004). Such practices were critical in providing voice and visibility to subaltern communities and their culture at the critical stage of searching for social change objectives in the development of the E-E intervention (see Tufte, 2005).

Tsha Tsha's engagement with the subaltern audience and their culture and context during formative evaluation also informed the script development phase. During this phase, the writers adapted the script to the culture, needs, and language of its target audience. The data gleaned from formative evaluation helped the producers and scriptwriters to create realistic characters whose depth, challenges, and contradictions resonated with audiences' quotidian experiences. To align the script to the experiences and culture of subaltern audiences, 50 focus group discussions and interviews were conducted with young people familiar with the context (Pedi in the Eastern Cape) that the producers sought to portray in the television drama (Ntlabati & Kelly, 2004). The data from the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were then used to develop the names of main characters, develop main characters and the dynamics of the relationships between them, verify details of cultural practices, explore the plausibility of dramatic events against the life in a small rural town, and assess the appeal of the script to the target audience (Ntlabati & Kelly, 2004).

The evidence of the articulation of the local culture and contextual issues and needs in the television drama can be seen throughout the television drama serial. One glaring example is the culture of ballroom dancing prevalent in the Eastern Cape that was central to the initial episodes. The television drama also makes use of Xhosa, the dominant language of the Eastern Cape province, where the television drama is set. Furthermore, the names of the main characters in the television drama, Andile, Viwe, and Boniswa, are common among Xhosa-speaking Black South African youths in the Eastern Cape. At a thematic level, the key issues that constitute the locus of change in *Tsha Tsha* (poverty, idleness in rural settings, sexual rights, gender inequality, and alcoholism) were identified through formative evaluation in subaltern communities in the Eastern Cape.

The script development process was followed by a script review process consisting of research sessions and workshops with a sample of the target audience. Its purpose was to evaluate whether the characters developed were authentic, typical, and resonated with the audiences' context and culture. This stage helped the producers to assess whether the television drama was credible among the target audience (Kelly et al., 2004, p. 12). The script review process reflects the producers' intention to develop a fictional

product whose characters and material world are steeped in the audiences' quotidian culture and context (Ntlabati & Kelly, 2004). The engagement with subaltern audiences' culture largely resembles the culture-centered and participatory development of telenovelas in Latin America, which make visible audiences' values, culture, and problems in the story line (Lins da Silva, 1985, p. 114).

Tsha Tsha's engagement with the subaltern audiences' culture largely transcends the culture co-option approach which informs E-E interventions in the modernization paradigm. The evidence from the study shows that the producers purposively adopted a cultural approach anchored in the specific local context and culture in which subaltern Black South African youths experience their everyday lives. This process significantly shifts discursive control of the television drama, representations, identification of issues, and solutions from the hands of the "experts" to subaltern community members. It is also evident through *Tsha Tsha's* engagement with subaltern youth audiences' culture that the producers do not view local cultures as an impediment to development, but a critical component to work with (Dutta, 2007). *Tsha Tsha's* engagement with subaltern's culture is largely consistent with the core values of the social change paradigm which views human experience as only meaningful when it finds expression in the richness of culture and context in which it is experienced (Dutta-Bergman, 2004). However, it is arguable that the television drama still works with the subaltern's culture, rather than within it in ways that go beyond creating a sense of cultural connection to fostering belonging and citizenry (see Tufte, 2005).

The Conceptualization of Audiences in Tsha Tsha

Tsha Tsha's program documents show that the television drama's conceptualization of audiences is informed by cultural studies and reception theory. Cultural studies and reception theory reject the dominant assumption in E-E that assumes that audiences are passive. Cultural studies and reception theory view audiences as active decoders of media messages who do not necessarily accept the positions offered by the text (see Livingstone, 2015). This conceptualization of audiences is built into the E-E intervention through continuous formative research which enabled the producers to glean insights into the multilayered meanings (intended and unintended) proposed by the text as well as the potential differential readings negotiated by situated youth audiences from the television drama (Parker et al., 2005). Evidence of this nuanced conception of audience is found in the pretesting phase where audiences' differential readings of the television drama are invited. The opposition reading of the depiction of people living with AIDS in the television drama prompted the producers to revise the depictions.

Tsha Tsha's conceptualization of audiences from a cultural studies and reception perspective is also evident in the methodological and epistemological foundation informing

its audience research during formative evaluation. The adoption of qualitative audience research methods constitutes a significant decoupling from the predominantly quantitative audience research methods that inform E-E audience evaluation in the dominant paradigm of E-E. The turn to ethnographic qualitative audience research during formative evaluation epitomizes the emergence of a new approach to understanding audiences as well as E-E texts. Qualitative audience research views E-E texts less as determinant and isolated phenomenon, and audiences and meaning making as sophisticated, complex, and culturally specific (see Livingstone, 2015; Morley, 1992).

By acknowledging the polysemic nature of the E-E text, *Tsha Tsha's* producers simultaneously recognize the relative power of audiences. *Tsha Tsha's* conceptualization of audiences is also reflected through the lesson-based pedagogic approach. The use of the lesson-based approach in the television drama shows that the producers do not necessarily view audiences or learners as empty receptacles but active audiences with agency. The analysis of *Tsha Tsha's* E-E strategy indicates that the appropriation of cultural studies and reception theory during the conceptualization and design process was a deliberate effort to align the intervention with the social change paradigm which views audiences as active and media texts as polysemic.

Assessing Tsha Tsha's Conceptualization of Communication

The data collected using the FCA show that the primary aim of *Tsha Tsha's* communication strategy is to engage subaltern youth audiences in a dialogue whose end product is to propose collective solutions to health problems afflicting developing communities. Pursuant to this, *Tsha Tsha's* communication strategy is premised on a multimedia approach that is aimed at providing alternative public spheres that reinforce social dialogue, advocacy, mobilization, and participation around the television series (Ntlabati & Kelly, 2004). According to Hajjiyannis and Jugbarán (2005), alternative dialogic platforms enable *Tsha Tsha's* audiences to share information, integrate life experiences, and learn from each other in ways that are untenable when using traditional mass media platforms alone.

Program documents show that dialogue around the mainstream television broadcasts is complemented by video and DVD copies, a 20-min promotion tape, and a participation orientated facilitator's guide. Copies of the videos of the television series and the facilitation guide, which is premised on a deep questioning approach, are shared with key stakeholders involved in HIV and AIDS prevention, support, and care in South Africa. Key stakeholders such as the Correctional Services department, community-based organizations, government departments, and other groups that support HIV and AIDS education and training in South Africa have utilized

the aforementioned resources (Hajiyiannis & Jugbar, 2005). According to Singhal and Rogers (2001), the use of a multimedia strategy and supplementary campaigns as part of an E-E campaign, as is the case with *Tsha Tsha*, is consistent with participatory development communication campaigns and results in more effects on audiences compared with diffusionist interventions.

Although a growing number of contemporary development communication interventions are adopting multimedia strategies as key elements of their communication approach, *Tsha Tsha*'s case is interesting in that the producers articulated the intervention's multimedia strategy to Paulo Freire's (1998) ideas on liberatory pedagogy and Boal's (1979) ideas on participatory theater (Hajiyiannis & Jugbar, 2005). To achieve this, the multimedia strategy consisted of sequential complementary dimensions: viewing of videos or DVDs, discussion groups, role-play, and forum theater. The viewing and discussion of issues in the television series is guided by a facilitator's guide which was developed by the producers to promote reflection, problematization, and debate on HIV and AIDS-related issues (see Hajiyiannis & Jugbar, 2005). Freire's dialogic pedagogy encourages audiences as learners to engage with the E-E content and think critically about the different pathways to solutions rather than simply transmitting information to audiences.

Tsha Tsha's multimedia strategy also harnessed Boal's (1979) ideas on liberatory theater. *Tsha Tsha* uses forum theater to transform audience members from spectators to spec-actors with roles and situations to act. Acting and role-play enable subaltern audiences to situate and apply characters' experiences and challenges to their own lived experiences. Forum theater is employed in the E-E strategy as an extension of role-play where audience members are allowed to intervene in the action if they do not agree with an issue or with a character. By so doing, forum theater is used within *Tsha Tsha*'s communication and pedagogic approach as a flexible theatrical tool to involve and engage subaltern youths in ways that enable them to take up different roles and to also pose solutions to problems afflicting them and their community (see Hajiyiannis & Jugbar, 2005).

On the whole, *Tsha Tsha*'s Freire and Boal informed multimedia and communication approach signifies a shift from diffusionist mass media-based E-E initiatives that inform the modernization paradigm. The articulation of a television-based intervention to participatory communication tools such as forum theater and role-play create a dialogic communication process capable of empowering subaltern youth audiences (Singhal, 2004). Although the primary communication medium is television, *Tsha Tsha*'s communication approach is articulated to the E-E for social change paradigm which views communication as a dialogic process. The E-E for social change paradigm seeks to assist the subaltern to reclaim voice with a view to promoting dialogue. Dialogue is seen as a key facilitator for critical examination of one's

position and alternatives, a process which ultimately leads to problem solving (Tufte, 2005).

Conclusion and Implications

This article sought to assess the conceptualization and design of the E-E television drama *Tsha Tsha* in South Africa to understand whether the intervention has jettisoned modernization and its diffusionist tenets and embraced contemporary shifts in E-E and development communication scholarship. Using the social change paradigm as its overarching framework, the article assessed the notions of development, change, communication, audiences, education, and culture that underpin *Tsha Tsha*'s E-E strategy during the conceptualization and design process.

The evidence gleaned from the study shows significant evidence of ongoing dialogue between *Tsha Tsha*'s program practice and theoretical advances in E-E and development communication scholarship. *Tsha Tsha*'s epistemological and methodological foundation as reflected in the conceptualization and design process significantly remoores the interventions undergirding notions of development, communication, audiences, change, culture, and education in line with critical post-colonial insights on development.

Evidence of significant efforts to bridge theory and practice is reflected as follows: First, the intervention's locus of change is expanded beyond the individual to include social and structural factors that perpetuate unhealthy behaviors that expose subaltern Black South African youths to HIV and AIDS. Second, *Tsha Tsha*'s approach to education is articulated to a Freirean dialogic pedagogy, which seeks to conscientize audiences through a process of problem identification, reflection, and solution posing. Third, *Tsha Tsha*'s E-E strategy reflects producers' conceptualization of audiences as active rather than passive. This conception of audiences is supported by elaborate efforts to provide voice to subaltern audiences whose views are usually erased from E-E epistemic structures. Fourth, *Tsha Tsha* premises its communication approach on dialogue and participation as opposed to diffusionist and transmission approaches that inform the modernization paradigm. Fifth, *Tsha Tsha*'s engagement with the subaltern's culture shows the producers' view of subaltern people's culture as central to the development process rather than an impediment.

This study has shown that theory and practice are complementary in development communication. Consequently, bridging theory and practice should be viewed as a constant preoccupation among E-E scholars and practitioners if interventions are to reach their full potential. This study's findings reinforce previous studies' findings that contend that development communication and E-E interventions can be strengthened through constant remoooring of practice in line with theoretical shifts in scholarship. Equally so, collaborations between practitioners and scholars in the field of

development communication and E-E need to be encouraged and supported given that development communication is both a field of knowledge and practice (Waisbord, 2008).

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