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Educational television programmes in South Africa

In the young democracy of South Africa television is of special importance as an educational, entertaining and information tool. HIV/AIDS, health and well-being are the great challenges which have to be faced by TV.

South Africans' using educational television to create awareness about HIV/AIDS education in Apartheid South Africa has been one of the most difficult of all the challenges that the new South Africa, which celebrated 10 years of democracy in 2004, has had to deal with. The "Bantu Education Act", Act No 47 of 1953, established a Black Education Department in the Department of Native Affairs, which would compile a curriculum that suited the "nature and requirements of the black people". The author of the legislation, Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd (then Minister of Native Affairs, later Prime Minister), stated that its aim was "to prevent Africans receiving an education that would lead them to aspire to positions they wouldn't be allowed to hold in society. Instead Africans were to receive an education designed to provide them with skills to serve their own people in the homelands or to work in labouring jobs under whites." (www.southafricaonline).

Education only became equal to all South African children after the 1994 democratic elections. Pre-1994 children were classified according to race and had to attend schools according to their racial groups and in their spe-

cific group areas. Integration was allowed on a quota system at mainly private schools and later at semi-private schools.

The Apartheid government, apprehensive that television might offer South Africans a window to the world, that could tempt new ideals and show the horrors of Apartheid, kept television at bay. Television, therefore, only arrived in South Africa in the mid-seventies. When television finally made its debut it became an extension of the Apartheid propaganda tool. The only images allowed on television were those sanctioned by the Apartheid government.

Considering the above backdrop the democratic South Africa has the challenge of making television an educational, entertaining and information tool. However, the recent scourge of the HIV/AIDS virus in South Africa has meant that the South African

government has the added challenge of creating awareness and educational programmes about HIV/AIDS.

The public broadcaster South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) is guided by the South African Constitution and the Broadcasting Act and has a mandate to encourage "the development of South African expression by broadcasting a wide range of programming that refers to South African opinions, ideas, values and artistic creativity" (Broadcasting Act No. 4 of 1999, Preamble). The SABC is made up of three channels: SABC 1, 2, 3 – each channel has a specific target audience. SABC 1 is designed for youth audiences. "SABC 1 celebrates what it means to be youthful and South African". SABC 1, however, states that "it is not about age, but about mindset-attitudes" (Channel Statement – SABC Content Hub Briefs, 2004). SABC 2 is positioned



Takalani Sesame cast

as a family channel within the Corporations PBS network, and SABC 3 is the Corporation's Public Commercial Channel and has the task "to build audience loyalty and improve on return on investment" (Channel Statement – SABC Content Hub Briefs, 2004).

SABC Education is a section of the public broadcaster, with a positioning statement "(to) deliver the public education mandate as described in the Broadcasting Act (1995), provides educational content to the channels and stations of the SABC, and sustains these through the supportive elements of print, outreach and awareness campaigns" (SABC Content Hub Briefs, 2004). SABC Education provides educational programmes across the three channels. Funding for the SABC comes from government and advertising. However, in order to support South Africa's educational demands and to provide greater learning opportunities some national departments, like the Department of Education, Communications, Health and Labour, have also provided additional funding for the production of educational programmes.

Takalani Sesame

SABC Education in partnership with the National Department of Education produces *Takalani Sesame*. *Takalani* is South Africa's version of the USA acclaimed *Sesame Street*. *Takalani*, which means "be happy" in TshiVenda (one of South Africa's 11 official languages) is produced for the ECD (Early Childhood Development) phase, which is 0 to 5 years. Only one million of an estimated 8 million children in the 0 to 6 year age group are enrolled in some type of pre-school programme.

(<http://www.scieninafrica.co.za/2002/august/muppet.htm>).

Takalani Sesame, however, is aimed at the 3 to 7 years age group. *Takalani* is a multi-lingual radio and television programme supported by print mate-

rials and an extensive training initiative. Based on the American formula, *Takalani Sesame* provides children with literacy, numeracy and life-skills learning concepts. *Takalani* is the answer to some of South Africa's pre-school educational programming that includes the production of resource materials that can be used by teachers, parents and caregivers. "*Takalani Sesame*, a pilot project to provide greater access to resources for parents, caregivers and educators in providing children with early learning experiences ..."

(<http://www.scieninafrica.co.za/2002/august/muppet.htm>).

The characters are all African and the radical multi-lingual approach has been inspiring. The programme also succeeds in providing optimum language quotas. This is significant because it gives young learners the opportunity to listen to different languages and to enhance their own language competence. Many black South Africans speak more than three languages, the mother tongue was not given priority in the Apartheid era, and it is therefore extraordinary that a national television programme is multi-lingual.

Kamie, the HIV positive 5-year-old muppet

The introduction of Kamie, a spirited 5-year-old muppet that is HIV+, will help educate about HIV/AIDS. Kamie explains in simple terms what it means to be HIV+. The results have been astonishing – children are learning that HIV is not contagious, that you can hug someone who is HIV+, that HIV+ people need love and care – all these fundamental issues about taking care of people living with HIV. "The character is expected to help destigmatise AIDS and encourage positive behaviour towards infected people" (www.Scienceafrica.co.za). Kamie was introduced as part of the *Takalani Sesame* cast. This pioneering



inclusion of an HIV+ cast member has created astounding reaction from the ultra-right wing – complaining that it is unacceptable to teach pre-schoolers about HIV/AIDS – to Kamie winning international acclaim and many awards including the World Festival "Cine Golden Eagle" in the children's programme category.

The former Minister of Education Prof. Kader Asmal is convinced that these awards help to demonstrate "South Africa's leadership role in preventing HIV and AIDS, as well as in fostering positive attitudes among children towards those who are different". Prof. Kader Asmal also described South Africa as a country "united by a common belief in a society where all people are afforded dignity and respect". He felt that these values should be learnt at an early age, and in many ways *Takalani Sesame* embodies this philosophy.

Takalani Sesame programmes are broadcast on SABC 2, Monday to Friday at 10.00 a.m. and again at 3.00 p.m. as well as on Saturday and Sunday mornings at 10.00 a.m.

Soul Buddyz

Soul Buddyz is another award-winning educational series that imparts excellent educational values. The focus of *Soul Buddyz* is to promote health and well-being for the 8- to 12-year-old age group. *Soul Buddyz* is a "multi-media edutainment series". It is developed by Soul City – the Institute of Health and Development Communication (IHDC) in partnership with SABC Education.

"*Soul Buddyz* has been developed specifically with this age group in mind, because attitudes are often

formed during this critical time and yet, in the context of a rapidly transforming society with technological changes as well as social changes, the needs and aspirations of children between the ages of 8 to 12 years old are often neglected. Emotional and health problems often originate or become embedded in this age group, with social problems such as physical and sexual abuse severely retarding the potential of many children.”

(<http://www.soulcity.org.za>)

As a multi-media project *Soul Buddyz* has four main components: television, radio, a life-skills booklet for Grade 7 and a parenting booklet.

Soul Buddyz is broadcast on SABC 1. It is a 26-part drama series with each episode being 26 minutes in duration. The drama unfolds when a group of children, from the multi-cultural background of South Africa, meet everyday after school at a recreational park. The group includes the entire South African spectrum – all race groups as well as a disabled boy on a wheelchair come to each other’s assistance. The introduction of a disabled member of the group is extremely significant, because the South African government has given disabled people special priority, and as



Scene of *Soul Buddyz*



Soul Buddyz – at the President’s office

part of the South African Constitution there are special quotas for the employment and integration of disabled people.

The group has to deal with the dilemmas that most South African children are confronted with, for example peer pressure, school work, relationships, substance abuse, physical abuse and neglect, HIV/AIDS. The emphasis on dealing with HIV/AIDS is essential, because more than 10% of South Africans are HIV+. The series deals with a young white boy whose mother is HIV+. In many ways the series is confronting issues that are pertinent for the young audience, giving them guidance and options of dealing with the pandemic from a personal and pragmatic perspective. The group works together to help each other whilst also having plenty of fun. Each episode ends with “a two-minute sequence of real children’s comments about the issues that *Soul Buddyz* raises – this is called the ‘Buddyz Buzz’ and helps give some African children a voice to express their opinion on important issues affecting them”.

(<http://www.soulcity.org.za>)

Soul Buddyz has recently introduced the *Soul Buddyz* clubs at school. *Soul Buddyz* clubs will get involved in projects that deal with substance

abuse, xenophobia, HIV/AIDS and environmental issues. The clubs will also be engaged in arts, cultural and sporting activities.

The last ten years of transformation in South Africa have heralded a critical boost in understanding and dealing with educational priorities. *Soul Buddyz* and *Takalani Sesame* are excellent examples of quality educational programmes that offer valuable knowledge about subjects that cannot always be taught at schools. ■

THE AUTHOR

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