



MASIDLALÉ

2020 **EXPLORING CONNECTION**

12th Annual Drama for Life Conference and
Festival in partnership with ASSITEJ SA, report

Introduction:

The Drama for Life International Conference & Festival is an annual event that presents cutting edge research, performances, installations, dialogues, trainings and workshops that enhance the knowledge-base and experience of artists and artistic communities, including: students, academics, arts therapists, arts and cultural leaders and managers, arts educators, arts academics and arts researchers.

ASSITEJ SA and Drama for Life have collaborated in the past, most notably on the Cradle of Creativity in Cape Town in 2017. This year a collaborative project made sense as both organisations were planning to host a festival during similar dates in 2020 and to achieve mutual benefits for all those involved.

The event was modified in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing protocols and South African lockdown legislation to create a new and relevant platform for the professional development of emerging artists, young academics and DFL alumni, scholars, students, children and learners in 2020.

Drama for Life:

Drama for Life is internationally recognised as the University of the Witwatersrand's unique postgraduate academic, research and community engagement department that brings together the disciplines of Applied Drama and Theatre, Performance Ethnography, Performance as Research, Arts Education, Drama Therapy and Expressive Arts Therapies within the context of a **critical reflexive praxis**.

Our ethos is driven by three key questions: What does it mean to be human in the 21st century? How can we learn to be resilient, without compromising our humanity, as we engage with the enormous challenges of change in the 21st century? And, in so doing, how can we effectively use the arts, without compromising its aesthetic power, to bring about meaningful, sustainable social transformation and healing?

Our unique programme of education prepares arts-based researchers, arts activists, theatre-makers, performance artists, directors, applied drama and theatre facilitators, drama educators, arts educators, drama therapists and expressive-arts therapists to create interventions, performances, rituals and processes that skilfully and appropriately address social transformation and healing in a wide range of education, health and social contexts.

ASSITEJ SA:

ASSITEJ SA believes that every child and young person in our country deserves access to the arts, and especially to live theatre, from the earliest possible age. Theatre is a transformational force in the lives of young people, inspiring imaginations, shifting perceptions, teaching empathy and building our nation. ASSITEJ South Africa is a registered NPO and Section 18A, which operates as a networking platform for people working with or interested in theatre for children and young people.

It is the registered national centre of [ASSITEJ](#) (the International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People, which works in around 100 countries across the world) and is a member of [ACYTA](#) (African Children and Youth Theatre Arena), which brings together 17 African countries with ASSITEJ centres.

Our main aim is to facilitate the development of theatre for children and young people at the highest artistic level, and to ensure that children and young people everywhere in our country have access to theatre and the performing arts.

ASSITEJ South Africa works to promote international awareness of South African theatre for children and young people, through networking, organising exchanges, touring performances, and by facilitating contacts. Members are given access to a global network of information about festivals, performances, courses and seminars all over the world, with the potential to participate in these activities.

The Drama for Life Annual Conference and Festival during COVID-19:

The Conference and festival had to adapt very quickly to the COVID-19 pandemic. We made the decision to shift the conference and festival online to observe social distancing protocols. The event was then shaped in response to the global pandemic to create a new and relevant platform for the professional development of the Dram For Life and ASSITEJ SA communities.

The initial call read as follows:

‘Masidlale: Exploring connection...’ is an invitation to explore the current Arts landscape right now in the time of COVID 19. In response to the global pandemic DFL and ASSITEJ South Africa invite you to a new play space for finding ourselves in the here and now, an intergenerational collaborative exploration with students, learners, children, artists, facilitators, young academics and DFL alumni and staff, where everyone is invited to share and be included equitably.

The Conference Festival investigates the fundamental questions of:

‘Masidlale’...

- How do we play, explore and co create now?
- How can the Arts respond to disconnection?
 - How do we ‘come together’ to create during this time?
- How can theatre be reimagined as a place for healing and connection?
- Who are our collaborators and how do we journey together?

The team received about 70 responses to the call and a Conference and Festival committee was then established to create an intergenerational team to put together the programme. The need for the voices of the youth was felt quite keenly in order to create a programme that felt relevant and inspiring to young people. Members of the Drama for Life project team, ASSITEJ SA, DFL students, a lecturer from Rhodes University and three high schools learners, two from the National School of the Arts and one from St Enda’s in Gauteng, were selected for our committee.

The committee also helped with selecting the poster and social media banners for the event and supported in spreading the word on social media. The final programme can be viewed on the Drama for Life website.

Overview:

The 12th Annual Drama for life Conference and festival in partnership with ASSITEJ SA, MASIDLALE: EXPLORING CONNECTION took place from the 20th-24th August.

This year's conference was the first ever to be hosted as an online event and attracted a large local and international audience. MASIDLALE: EXPLORING CONNECTION aimed to cater for an inter-generational audience and had a number of events for children, teenagers, adults, scholars and students. The Conference aimed to explore the following vital questions:

How do we play, explore and co-create now?

How can the Arts respond to disconnection?

How do we 'come together' to create during this time?

How can theatre be reimagined as a place for healing and connection?

Who are our collaborators and how do we journey together?

The opening ceremony was led by our committee, comprising of Drama for Life students and staff, and young people from the National School of the Arts and St Enda's High school in an celebration of The 'In the Works' ASSITEJ SA platform, a playwright mentorship, invited groups of the target audience (6-10 years, 10-13 years and 13-16 years) to view the plays in private zoom calls. A number of the presentations included the voices and experiences of young people and making theatre at this time, including directors and producers from The Market Theatre Laboratory and the National School of the Arts. There were a number of collaborative, international partnerships and presentations including the Outreach Foundation and the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in London, The Sztuka Szuka Malucha festival in Poland and the University of Leeds with Tshisimani centre for Activist education based in Cape Town.

There was also a collaboration between the Drama for Life theatre company and Oluwaseun Odukoya, aka Aunty Shine Shine, a Nigerian story teller on Saturday the 22nd August.

ASSITEJ SA, 'In The Works,' Platform: PLAYREADINGS FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

The In The Works playreading programme was a key component of the Festival/Conference. Nine exciting new plays for young audiences were shared with the age-appropriate audience and with other interested parties. These plays are now in a process of final development for the stage. This programme was itself a collaboration between playwrights from South Africa and Kenya, and dramaturgs from the USA, UK, France and Australia, who engaged with many of the sessions.

In the Works was first envisioned as a physical festival, but due to COVID-19 the festival was adapted to an online format that utilised ZOOM as a platform for both performance and engagement. Through the In the Works Festival ASSITEJ South Africa was able to provide employment for numerous theatre professional for whom the COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly brutal –

these include 9 playwrights, 9 directors, and 47 actors. In the Works was envisioned to support young audiences to participate in the meaning making of theatre by not only acting as audience but to act as dramaturg. In so doing we are building a legacy of cultural participation for current and future generations. In total we had 150 children attend the festival, and 4 schools which were:

- Tate International School (Cape Town, Western Cape)
 - 25 children (Wanda's Wandaful Coils)
- Future Nation School (Johannesburg, Gauteng)
 - 35 children (First)
 - 11 children (#Stranger Things)
 - 3 children (Blue Days)
- Mimosa School (Johannesburg, Gauteng)
 - 15 children (Wanda's Wandaful Coils)
 - 15 children (Zwelitsha)
 - 15 children (Tokologo)
- American International School
 - 7 children (Zwelitsha)

The Drama for Life students were included in these sessions with the age appropriate audiences for the play readings and assisted to facilitate the conversations about the plays through a process of investigative questioning. DFL master's student, Simphiwe Mbonambi had this to say about the process and the facilitation style which was adopted for the conversations with learners in the sessions:

'The part that stood out for me was the translatability of Theatre from a live medium into an online one. I think it was done successfully. Judging from feedback from the audience, and their reactions, you could see that there was still a connection. (The framing of the investigative questions) helped me to form leading questions. It was a way of opening the discussion in a meaningful way. It was inspirational to amongst them (children), enjoying their energy and enthusiasm.

A conversation with the playwrights and their dramaturgs was held on Facebook Live, and can be viewed

here: <https://www.facebook.com/ASSITEJSouthAfrica/videos/1054693648293363/>

Another feature of the In the Works programme was a session on Dramaturgy with three international arts practitioners: Rives Collins (USA), Dominique Collet (Belgium) and Sarah Argent (UK). This session was an opportunity to explore ways in which children can play dramaturg to a writer or theatre-maker in the creation of work, while also talking about the role of a professional dramaturg. The video can be viewed

here: <https://www.facebook.com/144401062276633/videos/941081313058006/>

In addition, Lereko Mfono and Karin Serres collaborated on developing a workshop to stimulate curiosity and creativity in writing, which was focused on creating scripts for young audiences. A number of these scripts written by participants were then shared on the ASSITEJ international website as part of international Literacy week.

In the Works also fostered and developed important collaborative local partnerships in - with Drama for Life, the Market Theatre Laboratory, and the Virtual National Arts Festival, as well as with international partners – Write Local, Play Global, IFAS, and the broader ASSITEJ International network.

Programme: Please note that the full final programme Can be found on the Drama for Life website. The one below is a simple schedule to show basic shape of the programme over the four days.



MASIDLALÉ

2020 EXPLORING CONNECTION

Drama for Life in partnership with ASSITEJ SA presents: The 12th Drama for Life Conference and Festival: 'Masidlale: Exploring Connection'

Time:	Wednesday 19th August
16:00-18:00	DFL 12th annual Conference and Festival Opening Committee learners: Olivia Jack , Thabo Johnson and Siya Mthethwa present/ speak Petro Janse van Vuuren ASSITEJ SA-Yvette Hardie and team Lereko Mfono ' Little First, Big heart' screening (ASSITEJ :In the Works)

Time	Thursday 20 th August	Friday 21 st August	Saturday 22 nd August	Monday 24 th August
09:00	Morning check-in 'Our Happy Place'	Morning check-in 'Our Happy Place'	Morning check-in 'Our Happy Place'	Morning check-in 'Our Happy Place'
10:00	Play-write: An open Playwriting game Karin & Lereko (DFL) Presentation: Alex Sutherland and Tshisimani Centre for Activist Education; Bottom Up; University of Leeds	'In the Works' Series Reading 1- Chain play writing Ntswaki: An applied theatre investigation into youth unemployment experiences in South Africa	'In the Works' Series Reading 2- Chain Play writing Performance and discussion: Mother's Grimm, Jade Bouwers and team	Playback Theatre reflection- COVID -19 feedback Panel: how are our funders playing? RMB, Goethe, ACT etc
11:00-12:30	ASSITEJ SA 'In the Works' , play readings: Wanda's Wandaful Coils by Mathabo Tlali Workshop: Tamara Guhrs, Unmute: 1	ASSITEJ SA 'In the Works' play readings: Zwelitsha by Sanelisiwe Yekani Workshop: Tamara Guhrs, Unmute: 2	ASSITEJ SA 'In the Works' play readings: Water no get enemy by Maimouna Jallow Workshop: Tamara Guhrs, Unmute: 3	ASSITEJ SA 'In the Works' play readings: Tokologo by Zinhle Mbokane Presentation: Monique Hill Play space/Drama Therapy
12:30	Altered by YOU: a Forum Theatre reimagining by Mathabo Tlali, Lindsey Morris, Tsholofelo Molefe, Shoeshoe Malebo and Lungisa Duruwe and Lalu Mokuku	Presentation: 'The Shopping Dead' WhatsApp play, Faye Kabali Kagwa Panel: Our Happy Place, Welma de beer, Manola	Panel:Curating for Early Childhood development: Pawel Galkowski from Art Fraction Foundation (Poland), Play Africa children's museum, Futhi Mbongwe and Inala Theatre, Roshina Ratnam	Arts Education Conversations: (Just for Mvuso project community) reflection and way forward ASSITEJ SA 'In the Works' play readings: Lehe Le Kganyapa by Modisana

				Mabale
Time	Thursday 20th August	Friday 21st August	Saturday 22nd August	Monday 24th August
14:00- 15:30	ASSITEJ SA 'In the Works' play readings: First by Jade Beeby Panel: Making Theatre NOW young voices: Market Theatre Lab with NSA students	ASSITEJ SA 'In the Works' play readings: Stranger Things by Siphumeze Kundayi Presentation: Hillbrow Outreach Foundation's Cradle project	ASSITEJ SA 'In the Works' play readings: Blue Days by Uvile Ximba	Reflective conversation: Hamish Neill
15:00	DFL theatre company Storytelling Chapter 1	DFL theatre company Storytelling Chapter 2	DFL theatre company Storytelling for Africa collab: with Aunty Shine-Shine (Nigerian Storyteller)	
16:00	PLENARY SESSION: Dramaturgy Webinar International speakers DFL & ASSITEJ (Rives Collins, Karin Serres etc and In the Works young playwrights)	PLENARY SESSION: Performance during Lockdown, James Cunningham, Buhle Ngaba Sylvaine Strike (TBC) Jefferson Tshabalal (TBC)		Playwriting game conclusion -Karin Serres

Numbers/Attendance at various events/workshops/seminars and play readings:

In The Works:

13 August	Meet the Playwrights Live stream	1000 views	
20 August	Play-Write	46	
20 August	Wanda's Wandaful Coils	45	
20 August	First	54	
20 August	Dramaturgy Session	144 views	32 bookings
21 August	Chain Playreading	17	
21 August	Zwelitsha	36	
21 August	Stranger Things	30	
22 August	Chain Playreading	14	
22 August	Water No Get Enemy	37	
22 August	Blue Days	22	
24 August	Tokologo	30	
24 August	Lehe Le Kganyapa	32	
24 August	Reflection	12	

Drama for Life workshops/events numbers (please note that most of these numbers involve the DFL student body and community, and are therefore, not accumulative):

Presentation/Workshop	Date:	Participant Numbers:
OPENING CEREMONY	WEDNESDAY 19TH August	64
Our Happy Place, morning Check-in	Thursday 20th August- Monday 24th August	84 from the four consecutive days
Presentation: Tshisimani Centre for Activist Education;	Thursday 20th August	27
Workshop: Tamara Guhrs, Unmute:	Thursday 20th August-22ND aUGUST	75 from three consecutive workshops
Altered by YOU: a Forum Theatre reimagining by Mathabo Tlali, Lindsey Morris, Tsholofelo Molefe, Shoeshoe Malebo and Lungisa Duruwe and Lalu Mokuku	Thursday 20th August	25
Panel: Making Theatre NOW	Thursday 20th August	23

young voices: Market Theatre Lab with NSA students		
DFL theatre company Storytelling Chapter 1	Thursday 20th August	40
Ntswaki: An applied theatre investigation into youth unemployment experiences in South Africa	Friday 21st August	45
Presentation: 'The Shopping Dead' WhatsApp play, Faye Kabali Kagwa	Friday 21st August	35
Panel: Our Happy Place, Welma de beer, Manola	Friday 21st August	42
Presentation: Hillbrow Outreach Foundation's Cradle project	Friday 21st August	22
DFL theatre company Storytelling Chapter 2	Friday 21st August	42
PLENARY SESSION: Performance during Lockdown, James Cunningham, Buhle Ngaba Sylvaine Strike and Jade Bowers	Friday 21st August	30
Performance and discussion: Mother's Grimm, Jade Bouwers and team	Saturday 22nd August	38
Panel:Curating for Early Childhood development: Pawel Galkowski from Art Fraction Foundation (Poland), Play Africa children's museum, Futhi Mbongwe and Inala Theatre, Roshina Ratnam	Saturday 22nd August	32
DFL theatre company Storytelling for Africa collab: with Aunty Shine-Shine (Nigerian	Saturday 22nd August	51

Storyteller)		
Playback Theatre reflection- COVID -19 feedback	Monday 24th August	27
Panel: how are our funders playing? RMB, Goethe, ACT etc	Monday 24th August	43
Presentation: Monique Hill Play space/Drama Therapy	Monday 24th August	20
Reflective conversation: Hamish Neill	Monday 24th August	42

Monitoring and Evaluation:

The following data charts represent data captured from a survey which participants did at the final closing event on the last day of the Conference and festival

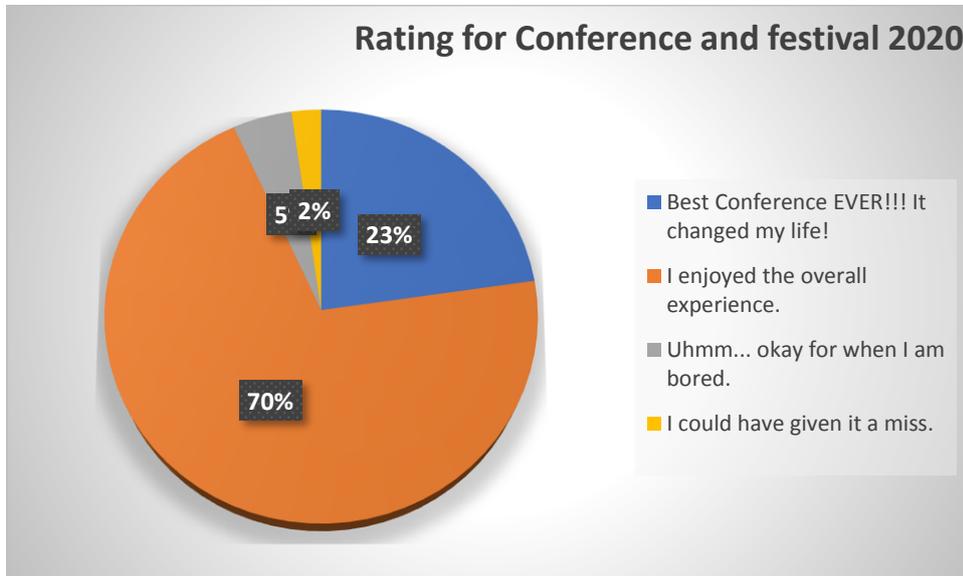


Figure 1 Rating

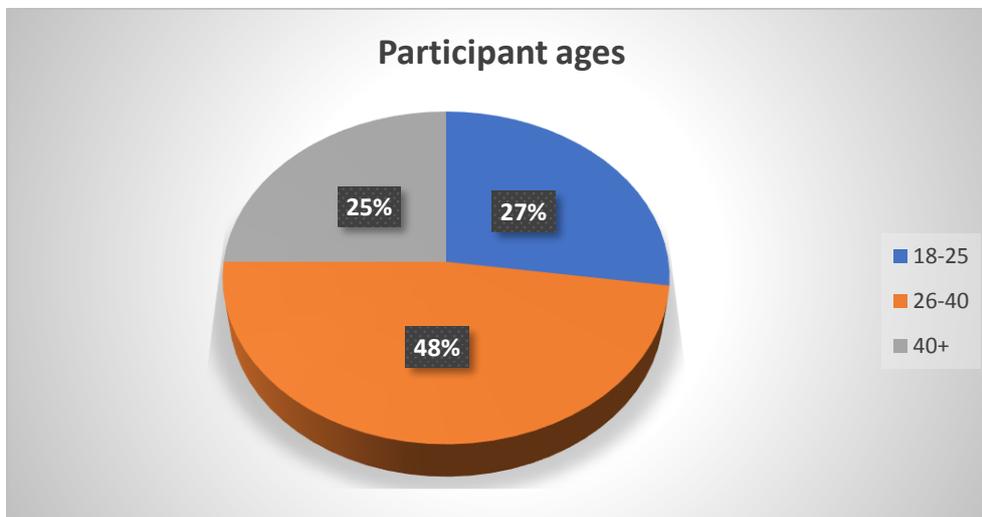


Figure 2 Participant ages

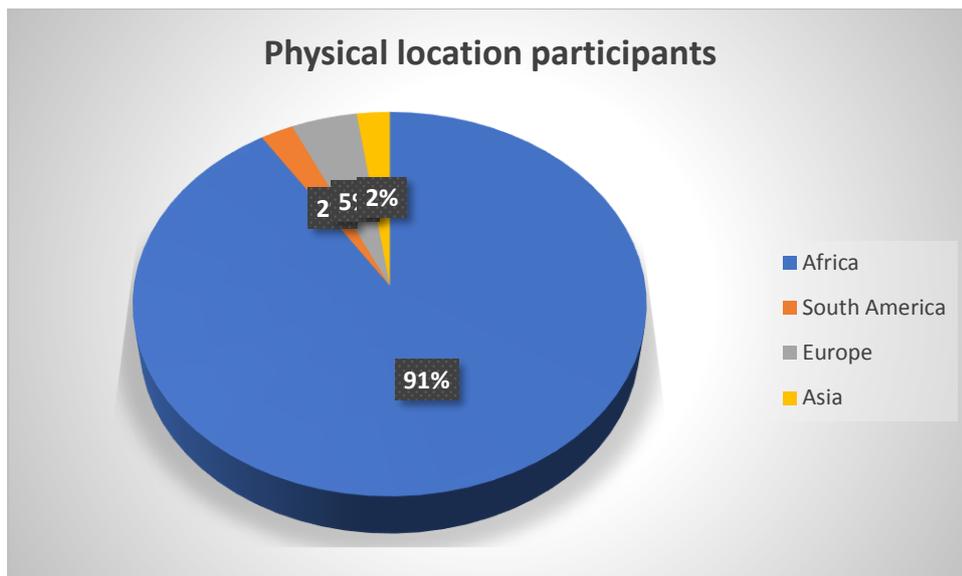


Figure 3 Physical location of participants

From this data it is clear that 70% of participants enjoyed the overall experience of the Conference and festival, while 23 % felt 'it was the 'best conference ever' and that it had 'changed their lives'. The majority of the participants were between 26-40 years of age and most were based in Africa. There was a very small contingent of participants from Europe, Asia and South America.

Feedback:

Some quotes from teaching staff and other participants after the Conference and Festival:

General:

- 'Amazing programme.'
- 'It ran smoothly.'
- 'This conference is fire.'
- 'It reads beautifully. So glad we did this.'
- 'I was very impressed. I felt the presenters were innovative in their delivering of their offering digitally. I was equally pleased when there were hiccups so that we are reminded of the immense work that went into these productions.'
- 'There was a deep sense of across border connectedness at the Conference and festival'
- 'The simplest digital responses resonated more: don't put technology before the heart.'
- 'Feeling of not having enough young audiences'.
- 'Duration was just right'
- 'Ayihlome was great. The interaction with spectators allowed us all to learn, reflect and "heal".'
- 'I keep meaning to congratulate the team. It was a really great conference.'

Specific feedback : 'Unmute yourself workshop

The sessions with Tamara was so gentle and helped me to overcome the anxiety of being productive or else...the sense of urgency at Outreach always was to prove that you were working so the focus was always on outcomes...despite us all being aware and trying to be creative in the process, the notion of slow work was not acceptable... A typical protestant religious pious thing. So the gentle rhythm of Tamara's work process allowed me to breathe, to realise that being in the moment is valuable, have a value that we need to find. I was constantly chasing the clock, chasing productivity and output. So her waiting for the children to respond, encouraging the process and concentrating on being in the space despite the distance via zoom was so encouraging. Her approach was an eye opener and I hope that I can use this learning with my future collaborations with young people using the WhatsApp or zoom space. That I allow people to sit with the silence so that the process can take place.

Mother's Grimm

I loved the Mother's Grimm despite being so out of my depth...it was a whirlwind of emotions, expectations and dreams not met or realised. It was a roller coaster ride that was rather spectacular. I find the various use of mediums film, tick-tock and voice over interesting and unique. I loved the approach to shift it completely into a digital dreaming versus reality space and the experience of Goldi real for so many children.

Cradle project: Outreach Foundation, Loxton and the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama

Our session was unique in that we managed to get voices from 2016- 2018 and 2020 together from Loxton to the UK, Soweto and Hillbrow. The conversation was difficult as we were conversing in different English as well as Afrikaans. But Nondumiso did it with great sensitivity. We maybe should have asked for a longer session as we could not address any questions. The project being 2 different projects with two very different approaches and pedagogy needed to be unpacked more, but that is how we learn and prepare better for next time.

Challenges:

The greatest challenge was shifting the Conference and Festival online and having to do all communications and meetings through online platforms. Quite early on in the process of meeting with the intergenerational Conference committee it became clear that there were varying levels of access and the skills for navigating online communications such as google docs etc. This proved a bit challenging in the selection of proposals as not everyone had gone through all the applications. The Conference co-ordinators then took feedback and curated a suggested programme which was then fed back to the committee. With a few inputs and tweaks it was finalized.

Another challenge was the sheer admin of getting all the details of each workshop and presentation uploaded, as many presenters took a long time to respond to the confirmation of having them on board at the Conference and Festival. In retrospect it may have been better to have a shorter call period, and a longer time for those accepted to submit their various details (i.e. blurbs, bios, photographs and descriptions etc)

The admin challenge extended into the actual Conference and festival as more support was needed with managing the various zoom rooms and the admin around getting the zoom links out. Although an automated system was created through Eventbrite, participants were often confused as to how they received the zoom link or when these would be sent out. It seemed the most efficient way was to share them on various WhatsApp groups, but this posed the safety risk as there was little control in how far the links were shared. Some participants were confused with how Eventbrite worked and expected the event itself to take place on the Eventbrite platform (which is really a promotion and booking site). Having said this, I do think the participation in the events was good, with the average attendance being around 30-40 in each session.

Another challenge out of our control was the national load shedding which began again during the week of the Conference and Festival. This posed a great struggle for those who wanted to join sessions but could not due to power and lack of internet in their areas.

The last challenge relates to the very first mentioned with some members of the public not understanding that the event was online. The Wits theatre staff received a few queries about how public could come to the theatre to attend the festival and it was challenging to try explain that the whole event was now online.

Opportunities and Collaborations coming out of the MASIDLALE: EXPLORING CONNECTION

Our Happy Place: A teacher who had attended one of the OHP check in sessions then contacted the Conference and Festival co-ordinator to request of the facilitators could come to her school and work directly with her learners.

Ntswaki Mpateng: The only DFL student who presented: An applied theatre investigation into youth unemployment experiences in South Africa, as part of Conference and Festival was invited to participate, with her research performance, in the STAND (Sustaining Theatre and Dance foundation) launch on 01st September.

Curating for young audiences: After this session took place, Roshina Ratnam from Inala Theatre has reached out to Play Africa to continue working with them for further Early Childhood development and research for their latest theatre show.

ASSITEJ SA In The Works: A number of the Market Theatre Laboratorys 1st year students attended the 'In The Works,' play readings and thoroughly enjoyed the process. This has led to a greater collaboration between ASSITEJ SA and The Market Theatre Laboratory in a series of workshops in skills for making theatre for young audiences. The workshops took place over the 15th-17th September and were very well received.

Monique Hill and Drama Therapy Online: There was great excitement about Monique's presentation and the hope is that she could be invited back for a Drama Therapy lecture and/or a Town hall presentation.

Publications coming from Conference: Some DFL staff have expressed interested in writing about the experiences/thoughts/concepts coming out of MASIDLALE. The project managers and festival curators will continue to support this with the intent of publicising some articles in the near future.

Conclusion:

Despite a number of the challenges the MASIDLALE: EXPLORING CONNECTION Conference and Festival was a great success and managed to create connections and collaborations across generations. These included the voices and experiences of young people, directors and producers from The Market Theatre Laboratory and the National School of the Arts, as well as learners from various primary and high schools in the ASSITEJ SA 'In the Works' platform. There were a number of international partnerships and presentations including the Outreach Foundation and the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in London, The Sztuka Szuka Malucha festival in Poland and the University of Leeds with Tshisimani centre for Activist education based in Cape Town. There was also a successful collaboration between the Drama for Life theatre company and Oluwaseun Odukoya, aka Aunty Shine Shine, a Nigerian story teller, which proved delightful for younger audiences. The In the Works playreading programme was itself a collaboration between playwrights from South Africa and Kenya, and dramaturgs from the USA, UK, France and Australia.

As noted there have been a series of opportunities and connections which have resulted in continued collaboration after the Conference and festival.

One beautiful partnership during the Conference and Festival was initiated by a nine-year old who attends a primary school in Johannesburg. Of his own enterprise he filled in our google form, which called for submissions for the Drama for Life Conference. After engaging with him it was discovered that he wanted his whole class to attend the play readings at MASIDLALE, and, after liaising with his teacher and principal, this was made possible!

This heart-warming story really epitomises the aim and objectives set out for the Drama For Life 12th annual Conference and Festival, as an 'intergenerational collaborative exploration' which would be inclusive of the voices of young people, students, learners and children.

Finally, the collaboration between ASSITEJ SA and Drama For Life has really been fruitful and created further ties between the work of ASSITEJ and the various Drama For Life courses and projects. As cited by Faye Kabali Kagwa, project manager for the 'In the Works' festival : 'The partnership with the Drama for Life Festival was fruitful in several ways - ASSITEJ South Africa assisted in programming at the festival which included the showcasing of new theatre for young audience, workshops, and webinars, and the Drama for Life Masters students assisted ASSITEJ South Africa staff in the facilitation of feedback sessions with young audiences.'

There is a synergy and commitment to ongoing collaboration and support between Drama For Life and ASSITEJ SA.



MASIDLALE

2020 EXPLORING CONNECTION



DRAMA FOR LIFE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ASSITEJ SA PRESENTS:

THE 12TH DRAMA FOR LIFE CONFERENCE AND FESTIVAL,

MASIDLALE: EXPLORING CONNECTION

20-24 AUGUST 2020

