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Enhancing the persuasive influence of entertainment-education events: rhetorical and aesthetic strategies for constructing narratives

Anat Gesser-Edelsburg and Arvind Singhal

Abstract

The present article presents a rhetorical and aesthetic framework to create an entertainment-education (EE) narrative with high potential for persuasive influence. The researchers introduce the notion of an 'EE event' and its 'change potential', proposing three different models – the reinforcement model, the change model and the entrenchment model – to understand how certain narrative mechanisms influence the change potential of an EE event. The four narrative mechanisms under consideration include 1) *dialogue* between EE text and audience members; 2) audiences' emotional *involvement* with text; 3) audience members' *trust* in the veracity of the text; and 4) audience members' *catharsis* and transformation. The narrative mechanisms operating in each model are illustrated by an analysis of audience responses to an EE text. The researchers conclude by presenting a rhetorical matrix to empirically analyse the narrative mechanisms and change potential of EE events.

Keywords: entertainment-education event, narratives, persuasive influence, rhetorical strategies

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Introduction

The theoretical framework of entertainment education (EE) draws upon the parallel disciplinary worlds of communication, social psychology, cognitive psychology, health, drama, culture and sociology (Sood, Menard & Witte 2004). Most theoretically guided work in EE attempts to explain audience effects as a consequence of direct or indirect exposure to EE. These include the stages of change (DiClemente & Prochaska 1985; McGuire 1969; Rogers 2003), cognitive psychology theories (Fishbein & Ajzen 1975), audience-centred theories (McQuail, Blumler & Brown 1972), and contextual theories (Davenport-Sypher et al. 2002). Some theories are applied as means of assessing the pathways to change in the audience (Petty & Cacioppo 1986; Sherif, Sherif & Nebergall 1965).

A relatively smaller group of theories focuses on the narrative ability of EE to reduce audience resistance (Bandura 2004; Green 2006; Kreuter, Green & Cappella et al. 2007; Moyer-Gusé 2008; Slater & Rouner 2002). The premise of these theories is that people resist behaviour change in the same way they resist messages. For instance, they may deny the efficacy and effectiveness of the advocated behaviour, counter-argue the message claims, ignore the message, or even deny the validity of a message due to its source. The EE theories in this realm argue that the narrative can reduce resistance by transporting the spectator into the world of the characters, and through this intense involvement increase empathy and wishful identification, while lessening counter-arguing (Green & Brock 2000; Green et al. 2006 and 2008; Slater, Rouner & Long 2006). Audience resistance can also be reduced by bringing the messages through the ‘back door’, by implication rather than openly (Green 2006; Moyer-Gusé 2008; Slater 2002).

However, despite the attempt to reduce audience resistance through narrative mechanisms, EE scholarship and practice have neither fully nor systematically theorised, developed or implemented a rhetorical and aesthetic framework to enhance the persuasive potential of EE. In the ancient Greek tradition of rhetoric, skills of articulate expression, argumentation and persuasion were taught by building on constructs such as ethos, logos and pathos. In the same way, present-day EE scholars and practitioners need to strategically and mindfully adopt the principles of rhetorical engineering to engage with audience members.

The present article presents a rhetorical and aesthetic framework to create an EE narrative with high potential for persuasive influence. The present researchers begin by introducing the notion of an ‘EE event’ and its ‘change potential’, proposing three different models – the reinforcement model, the change model and the entrenchment model – to understand how certain narrative mechanisms influence the change potential of an EE event. The four narrative mechanisms include 1) *dialogue* between EE text and audience members; 2) audiences’ emotional *involvement*

with text; 3) audience members' *trust* in the veracity of the text; and 4) audience members' *catharsis* and transformation. The narrative mechanisms operating in each model are illustrated with an analysis of audience responses to an EE text. The article concludes with the presentation of a rhetorical matrix to empirically analyse the narrative mechanisms and change potential of EE events.

Enhancing the change potential of an EE event

An EE event is a purposive work of art in which an audience member engages with a text, whether on stage or screen, in public or in private (Orion 1998; Sauter 2000). The purpose of an EE event is to engage, move, pleasure, stimulate, provoke and consequently produce changes in the way audiences feel about a particular topic (Jackson 1997; Kincaid 2002; Singhal & Rogers 2004; Winston 1996).

To harness the 'change potential' that is vested in an EE event, message producers should pay attention not only to the rhetorical and aesthetic aspects of constructing narratives, but also to orchestrating the elements needed to engage audience members before the curtain goes up (Gesser-Edelsburg 2002). However, not much literature exists on how to initiate audience members' engagement with an EE event, and to prime its change potential before the audience experiences the narrative.

In the present article, the researchers argue that an EE event's change potential can be further enhanced if message producers purposely and strategically engage in a few action steps.

First, EE message producers should ascertain, in advance, where audience members stand with respect to their readiness for change, including a cultural understanding of how the audience reads and interprets the social issue(s) of interest in a specific space–time context.

Second, EE message producers must 'invite' audience members to the performance (*ibid.*) through secondary texts which shed light on the creators' intentions, thus creating the potential spectators' 'horizon of expectations' (Jauss 1982). In drama, the concept of a 'horizon of expectations' is akin to the process of 'programming' (Shoham 1989) the spectator's responses. Such programming occurs not only through the performance's aesthetic and rhetorical strategies, but also through the potential spectators' meeting with secondary texts preceding the EE event. Secondary texts may include press interviews with the director, writer and actors about the intentionality behind the work; the producer's opinions on the text's salience and relevance for audience members; previews, trailers, advertisements, posters and buzz on Internet forums and social networks; references to existing dramatic texts associated with the current production; opinions of critics who create an 'alternative show' for viewers before the curtain rises (Hanna 1983), thus eliciting curiosity or reservation; media campaigns surrounding the subject/issue of the drama to arouse

the audience's interest and shape their expectations; public discussions about the production process, connecting the artistic work with the social and political realities of the time and place.

Third (and the focus of the present study) EE message producers must strategically and purposely pay attention to the rhetorical and aesthetic strategies employed in the creation of the EE event. The rhetorical-aesthetic strategies that are employed will influence the change potential of an EE event, leading audience members to be either wilfully reinforced in their existing position (the reinforcement model); to change their existing position (the change model); and/or to become alienated and repelled by the implied position, and hence more entrenched in their positions (the entrenchment model).

Rhetorical-aesthetic models to understand an EE event's change potential

The three rhetorical-aesthetic models to understand the change potential of an EE event are: 1) the reinforcement model; 2) the change model; and 3) the entrenchment model. For each of the models, the researchers analyse how four narrative mechanisms play themselves out: *dialogue* between EE text and audience members; audiences' emotional *involvement* with text; audience members' *trust* in the veracity of the text; and audience members' *catharsis* and transformation (Table 1).

The reinforcement model

In the reinforcement model, audience members process an EE event in such a way that the messages are readily and totally *accepted* by them. Further, these messages *reinforce* audience members' existing beliefs, attitudes and behaviours about a specific issue or topic.

In the reinforcement model, the four narrative mechanisms work in the following manner:

Dialogue as consensual. Here, the produced messages dialogue with the audience members in a consensual manner. This is in contrast to the change model (discussed later) where the creators engage in Trojan dialogue (i.e. purposely introduce oppositional, subversive messages to illuminate the audience's world from a different angle), while in the reinforcement model producers use symbols, images and situations which are familiar to audience members and consistent with their existing predispositions. The EE event meets the audience members on familiar ground, which is consistent with their normative, cultural and moral world.

Table 1: Models to understand how narrative mechanisms influence the change potential of an EE event

Models of how audience members process an EE event	Description	Narrative mechanisms influence the change potential of an EE event
Reinforcement model	The produced messages are readily <i>accepted</i> by audience members and further <i>reinforce</i> their existing beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours	<p>Dialogue as consensual: The produced messages dialogue with the audience member in a consensual manner. The EE event uses symbols, images and situations which are familiar to the audience member and are consistent with his/her existing positions and perceptions.</p> <p>Involvement as narcissistic love: The audience member is emotionally involved in the EE event as a spectating voyeur who feels safe looking 'through a keyhole'. The spectator sees his/her own reflection in the unfolding event, falling in love all over again with their self-image and self-position.</p> <p>Fixating trust: The audience member trusts the veracity of the EE event as a given. There is no room for doubt or questions. The dramatic situation is what <i>it is</i>, and what it <i>should be</i>.</p> <p>False catharsis: The audience member experiences pleasure as a voyeur, but no meaningful or transformative learning takes place.</p>
Change model	The produced messages <i>change</i> audience members' existing beliefs, attitudes and behaviours in the desired direction	<p>Dialogue as Trojan: The EE event uses symbols, images, language and situations which are familiar to the audience member, but subtly exposes the audience to oppositional messages that question their existing positions. The audience member is invited (and seduced) to engage with a narrative that is familiar, yet different. The audience member feels that his/her engagement occurs out of free choice, and is not imposed or demanded.</p> <p>Involvement as empathic identification: The audience member is emotionally involved (e.g. absorbed, immersed, transported) in the EE event and has the ability to step into the shoes of dramatic characters to experience different positions. Unlike a spectating voyeur, the audience member is actively and fluidly engaged in seeing situations from the characters' points-of-view.</p> <p>Trust that freely believes: The audience member trusts the veracity and realism of the EE event, which allows him/her to freely enter a fictional world. The dramatic event, however, is designed simultaneously to reinforce this trust and raise doubts for the spectator, allowing him/her to access possibilities not familiar to them in real life.</p> <p>Meaningful catharsis and transformation: The audience member experiences pleasure and meaningful learning. Engagement and involvement with the dramatic event leads to an intellectual clarification of issues and events. The spectator undergoes a process of engaged learning in which new readings, positions and possibilities emerge. As these new positions are modelled and reinforced through various characters in other EE events, the spectator feels increasingly motivated and efficacious in assuming them.</p>
Entrenchment model	The produced messages are <i>rejected</i> by audience members and their existing positions are further <i>entrenched</i>	<p>Dialogue as oppositional: The produced messages dialogue with the audience member in a provocative, revolutionary and oppositional manner. The EE event uses symbols, images and situations that do not resonate with the audience member's existing positions, but operate outside his/her realm of experience. The spectator feels that his/her engagement is demanded, even coerced.</p> <p>Involvement as alienation: The audience member is emotionally distant, disconnected and alienated from the unfolding drama in the EE event. The drama is perceived as having an agenda, and is thus repelling.</p> <p>Fixating doubt: The audience member does not trust the veracity and realism of the unfolding EE event. Questions and doubts reign throughout about the fidelity of the narrative, resulting in resistance towards, and rejection of, the message.</p> <p>No catharsis or transformation: The audience member blocks any new reading of events because of alienation and reinforced doubts. The spectator resists the obvious and blatant prescription in the message and is repelled by it. Audience engagement is neither pleasurable nor enlightening.</p>

Involvement as narcissistic love. The audience member is emotionally engaged and involved in the unfolding EE event as a spectating voyeur who feels safe looking ‘through a keyhole’. Spectators see their own reflection in the unfolding event, falling in love (all over again) with their self-image and self-position. In the reinforcement model the dramatic event emotionally arouses the spectator, who remains protected in his/her seat, invulnerable in the position of a voyeur. Audience members might feel that they identify with the characters, but it is not identification in the sense of ‘being in someone else’s shoes’ but rather of narcissistic love, where one feels more anchored in one’s own shoes, more reinforced in one’s existing predispositions.

Fixating trust. The audience member trusts the veracity of the EE event; there is no room for doubt or questions. The dramatic situation is what *it is*, and what it *should be*. This trust fixates the unfolding EE event into an unchanging and unevolving event, preserving and reinforcing existing positions and opinions without challenging them.

False catharsis: The audience member experiences pleasure as a voyeur, but no meaningful or transformative learning takes place. Spectators experience ‘false catharsis’ (Gesser-Edelsburg, Guttman & Israelashvili 2006), implying that the two elements of catharsis, namely pleasure and learning, did not fully manifest in their viewing experience. The pleasure is devoid of an emotional involvement with what is happening in the EE event. Further, as the event presents only familiar and consensual perceptions, no authentic learning occurs. Thus, in the reinforcement model, audience members’ journey of learning through pleasure turns into a false journey in which the viewer experiences ‘fraud’ rather than a process of meaningful change.

- **Illustration: rooting for racist Bunker**

To illustrate how narrative mechanisms influence the change potential of an EE event in the reinforcement model, the researchers turn to analysing the audience response to the hit US sitcom of the 1970s, *All in the Family*. The plot centred on the protagonist, Archie Bunker, his wife, Edith, and their white middle-class American life. Norman Lear, the well-known Hollywood producer of the series, wanted to use humour to criticise Bunker’s racist, chauvinist and conservative attitudes by presenting an unflattering portrait of his lifestyle. But the talented actor who played Bunker had a segment of the audience rooting for him, especially when he spewed out racial epithets. Instead of rejecting Bunker and what he represented, his followers fell in love with his narcissistic reflection and bigoted attitudes (Vidmar & Rokeach 1974).

For Bunker's followers, *All in the Family* engendered a 'boomerang effect', i.e., a segment of the audience received the series in the opposite way from what its creators intended. EE scholars call this the 'Archie Bunker effect', which sees individuals in the audience identifying with a negative role model (Singhal & Rogers 1999). The creators of the programme bestowed key punchlines and jokes on Bunker's character, thereby reinforcing his narrative superiority over the other characters. Thus, the audience did not laugh *at* Bunker but *with* him. That is, Bunker's followers – mostly white middle-class men – experienced a 'false catharsis': they enjoyed their voyeuristic glimpse into Bunker's world, without experiencing any meaningful illumination of their own prejudices and lifestyles.

The change model

In the change model, produced messages *change* audience members' existing beliefs, attitudes and behaviours in the desired direction. Messages conveyed to audience members through the EE event are new, revealing or oppositional messages that, to some degree, are accepted by them. This acceptance expands audience members' latitude of knowledge, predispositions and beliefs (Gesser-Edelsburg 2002).

In the change model, the four narrative mechanisms work in the following manner:

Dialogue as 'Trojan'. In the change model, the produced messages use symbols, images, language and situations which are familiar to audience members, but subtly expose the audience to new or oppositional messages that question their existing positions. The audience member is invited (and seduced) to engage with a narrative that is familiar yet different. The audience member feels that his/her engagement occurs out of free choice, and is not imposed or demanded.

To understand how dialogue is managed in the change model, the writings of ancient rhetoricians are revealing. Sophists in ancient Greece as well as Aristotle, in his famous treatise *Rhetoric*, advocated the importance of emphasising commonalities with an audience they wished to persuade. Plato (1996) emphasised that the speaker must know the soul of his audience. The rhetorician's purpose is to speak to the audience's world in order to develop a dialogue with them.

For rhetoricians, drama or art is 'democratic' by definition, for the audience chooses to participate (or not) in its consumption out of free will, and the dialogue the audience has with the text is mediated by the group's 'old' store of knowledge, their positions and perceptions. When they choose to be in the audience to experience an EE event, they may be exposed to new or oppositional messages which can undermine, denounce or change their existing positionality.

Social psychologist Michael Billig (1987) argues that in order for this change to happen, message creators must introduce a new or opposing view into the audience's familiar and cherished categories. That is, the dialogue between the

audience member and text must be constructed such that dialectical tension is created between what the audience knows and believes, and what the text would like them to believe. This is often referred to as a 'Trojan dialogue', after the mythological Trojan horse that appears in the epic works of Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid*. The Trojan horse was Odysseus' strategic ploy for the Greeks to enter the city of Troy, after failing to penetrate its walls for ten years (Virgil 2006). However, in contrast to Odysseus' use of a Trojan horse as a manipulative device for war, the artist uses this rhetorical strategy to conduct a 'peaceful' and respectful dialogue with the audience.

In the change model, the message producer invites the audience to enter a narrative by creating a fictional world containing symbols, images, aspirations and desires which are familiar to the audience. Various aesthetic devices may be used to create intimacy with audience members, including humour (Slater & Rouner 2002) or, more generally, addressing the audience 'at eye level' (Gesser-Edelsburg 2011). The message producer leads the audience into the text by infusing oppositional messages into consensual ones. Oppositional content is woven dialectically into consensual content, so that audience members understand their now-expanded and changed point of view.

Involvement as empathic identification. One of the most potent persuasive features of drama is its potential to elicit emotional involvement and identification with characters (Cohen 2001; Schoenmakers 1992; Slater & Rouner 2002; Sood 2002). Involvement and identification with characters play important mediating roles in audience effects (Brown, Basil & Bocarnea 2003; Cohen 2001). Spectators' emotional involvement with the EE event has been referred to, and theorised, in multiple ways: as narrative engagement, absorption, immersion and transportation (Green & Brock 2000; Green, Kass & Carrey et al. 2008; Moyer-Gusé 2008; Slater & Rouner 2002). The greater the audience involvement in the story, the greater the influence the story's messages is expected to have (Green & Brock 2000; Slater & Rouner 2002).

In the change model, the audience member is emotionally involved (absorbed, immersed, transported) in the EE event thanks to the ability to step into the shoes of the dramatic characters, in order to experience different positions. Unlike a spectating voyeur (see the reinforcement model), the audience member is actively and fluidly engaged in seeing situations from the characters' points-of-view.

Identification with media characters can manifest in multiple ways: through perceived similarity, liking or wishful identification (Cohen 2001; Eyal & Rubin 2003; Giles 2002). In the process of identifying with characters in a drama, viewers may feel empathy for the character or may see characters as reflections of themselves (Affron 1991; Liebes 1996; Livingstone 1998). Further, according

to social learning and cognitive theory, in addition to identifying with characters, viewers pay close attention to how those characters' behaviours are rewarded or sanctioned, and assess the implications for themselves, as vicarious learners (Bandura 1986).

In the change model, the strategy is to generate the emotional involvement of the spectator with the dramatic world of the EE event. Such emotional involvement does not leave the spectator 'protected' in his/her world in the way the voyeuristic position does (see the reinforcement model), nor does it leave the spectator in a state of emotional resistance and alienation (see the entrenchment model).

In the change model, the spectator feels the drama is relevant/connected to his/her world, and can therefore move between feelings of rage and anger to begin to identify with and feel compassion for the characters in the drama. Dramatic characters who spur the spectator's involvement are designed to lead his/her transformation through empathic feelings of wishful identification.

Trust that freely believes. Audience members trust the veracity and realism of the EE event, which allows them to freely enter a fictional world. The dramatic event, however, is designed to simultaneously reinforce this trust and raise doubts, thus allowing spectators to access possibilities that do not exist in their current reality.

In the change model, the contract between the spectator and the EE event is based on trust and respect. The story, plot and characters are perceived to be authentic, realistic, believable, coherent and plausible, thus reinforcing the spectator's trust in the narrative (Brinson & Brown 1997; Busselle, Ryabovolova & Wilson 2004; Fisher 1987; Hall 2003; Kincaid 2002; Pennington & Hastie 1993).

Why is it important to establish the 'reality' of the story in the eyes of the spectator? The main reason is that in order for the spectator to agree to embark on a meaningful journey (albeit possibly difficult and even painful), s/he must believe the story.

Sigmund Freud asked why the drama *Oedipus Rex* attracted so many viewers in ancient times and continues to be relevant and powerful in the modern era. He noted that drama gives freedom to the unconscious, to the inner impulses hidden in the viewer's soul (the id); impulses that conflict with the desire to adhere to social norms and values (super ego), thus eliciting anxiety (Gilula 1985). The drama allows the spectator to access emotional strata s/he cannot or does not want to deal with in daily life. Drama provides an artistic cover under which a spectator can access his/her inner impulses and experience them, for instance in a fantasy or a dream (ibid.).

To advance Freud's theory, for audience members to become free in a dramatic event, they must believe in it. The EE event maintains a dialectical process of

establishing trust, creating doubt, suspending doubt and creating new trust, in order to create a dynamic of change.

Meaningful catharsis and transformation. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle coined the term ‘catharsis’, which may simply be translated as ‘an intellectual clarification of [the] events’ (Golden & Hardison 1968). For meaningful change to occur, an audience member must arrive at a new understanding, i.e., experience a moment of catharsis.

In the change model, the audience member experiences both pleasure and meaningful learning. S/he undergoes a process of engaged learning in which new readings, positions and possibilities emerge. As these new positions are modelled and reinforced through various characters in other EE events, the spectator feels increasingly sure of his/her potential to carry through on new positions and to implement new insights.

Albert Bandura’s (2002) social cognitive theory situates modelling as holding the seeds for transformative change. A positive role model for an educational issue, who is rewarded for good behaviour, reinforces the spectators’ motivation, whereas a negative model who is punished deters them. Rewards and punishments influence the spectators’ motivation and reinforce their sense of self-efficacy in carrying out newly-acquired and learned behaviours (Bandura 2004; Sood, Menard & Witte 2004).

Sometimes an intended transformation is non-realistic, given extreme environmental forces. In such cases, message producers may need distancing strategies (metaphors, fables, analogies) to indicate the transformation by implication, rather than reflecting this directly.

- **Illustration: modelling collective pot-banging in South Africa**

To illustrate how narrative mechanisms work in a change model, the researchers analysed *Soul City*’s fourth prime-time television drama series in South Africa in the late 1990s. The series focused on changing viewers’ attitudes, beliefs and behaviours with respect to domestic violence – a highly prevalent social malady, yet a taboo topic for most audience members, since domestic violence was (and to some extent still is) viewed as a private matter between husband and wife. *Soul City*’s intention was to present alternative scenarios to the dysfunctional status quo (Usdin, Singhal & Shongwe et al. 2004).

For that purpose, the series was developed through extensive formative research over 18 months with audience members, researchers from *Soul City*, community actors, former abusive husbands, and gender activists (ibid.). The research revealed that deeply entrenched intergenerational mores were at work. Boys were socialised by their fathers to believe they would be ‘the captains of the ship’, whereas girls

were socialised by their mothers to endure suffering. Research also confirmed that neighbours, even if they wished to help a victim, did not interfere in 'private' matters (Singhal & Rogers 2003). Furthermore, official institutions and organisations (e.g., the police, courts and health system) in South Africa looked the other way.

As the story unfolded on *Soul City IV*, the audience witnessed entrenched social norms at work. However, in one episode, a new possibility for confronting domestic violence was portrayed: as the abuser was about to beat his wife, the neighbours, collectively, came to stand outside his home and began banging pots and pans. The loud clang of dozens of pots and pans sent a clear message to the abuser that the community disapproved of his actions, and an assurance to the victim that her neighbours cared about her (Usdin, Singhal & Shongwe et al. 2004).

The 'Trojan dialogue' with the audience of *Soul City IV* is expressed in the aesthetic of the narrative (symbols and cultural imagery); the transformation of the characters (the neighbours' collective act of intervening); and the series' ideological resolution.

Soul City IV is ripe with cultural images, symbols and linguistic expressions of the different sub-communities in South Africa. The words and images are creatively woven into characters' dialogue, evoking in viewers a strong sense of identification. Viewers' identification with the characters – especially their empathy for the victim who is repeatedly victimised – lays the groundwork for the Trojan twist to come. The creators changed emphases in the text to provide new and opposite meanings for common expressions, for instance, a common Zulu idiom notes that a woman 'must sit on top of hot coals' (*Uhlale phezu kwamalahle evutba*) i.e. sit quietly and suffer her husband's abuse to maintain domestic peace. In the *Soul City* episode it was changed to 'You can't sit on a hot stove, and pretend you are not burning' (ibid.).

The audience's trust in *Soul City's* world was created from the outset through formative research, which grounded the authenticity of the plot and characters. Based on audience inputs, the abusive husband was portrayed not as a monstrous or deviant man but as a normative one, thus increasing the veracity and credibility of the text, while not condoning his violent actions. The image of the battered woman in the series was of a beloved, mostly happy and confident woman, so that the audience, captivated by her positive qualities, did not look at her as one who 'deserved' the wrath of her husband.

The creation of an authentic space in the series enabled the creators to start raising questions about the consensual perceptions of what constitutes private space and how it perpetuates domestic violence. Identifying with the battered woman's process of awareness, which was riddled with doubt and anguish, and her emotional distancing from her abusive husband's acts, led to a catharsis for many audience members, thereby casting accepted attitudes or behavioural conventions in a new light.

Furthermore, the various situations which depicted how different figures in the community deal with different kinds of violence, and the new means of non-violent intervention between couples, as proposed by the series, created a basis for both communal and social transformation. An assessment study found that *Soul City IV* gave rise to a significant public discussion about domestic violence: some 36 per cent of audience members had spoken to someone about domestic violence, while 14 per cent said they had done something to stop domestic violence in their own lives or in the life of someone close to them, within a few weeks of the series being broadcast (ibid.).

Community transformation was evident from actions which took place in various communities. In Mamelodi township, a group of protesting women marching to the courthouse where a man was on trial for beating his wife to death, shouted the name 'Thabang, Thabang' – the name of the television character who had beaten his wife (ibid.).

- **The entrenchment model**

In the entrenchment model, produced messages are in such strong opposition to audience members' current position that they not only totally *reject* them, but also further *entrench* their existing positions (Gesser-Edelsburg 2002). The narrative mechanisms work in the following manner:

Dialogue as oppositional. The dialogue between the narrative text and audience members is oppositional in nature. The EE event uses symbols, images and situations that do not resonate with audience members' existing positions, but operate outside their realm of experience. Audience members feel that their engagement is demanded, even coerced.

In the entrenchment model, oppositional messages operate differently on audience members than in the change model. In the change model, the message producers infuse oppositional messages into audience members' known and familiar positions, thereby involving and engaging them in the message-infused dialectical struggle. In the entrenchment model, messages to the audience members are unknown and unfamiliar, hence there is little or no audience engagement with the oppositional position. Threatened by the subversive messages, the audience members reject the intended message.

Involvement as alienation. The audience member is emotionally distant, disconnected and alienated from the unfolding drama in the EE event. The drama is perceived as having a coercive agenda and is thus repelling.

In the entrenchment model, the viewer remains alienated and distant from the drama, but not in the Brechtian sense. On the Brechtian stage, the viewer's

narcissistic identification (i.e., loving their current position) is shattered, albeit in an ironic and surprising manner. Bertolt Brecht (2003) describes this phenomenon in the context of Chinese acting, where an actor fully expresses his awareness of being watched, especially when the moment of alienation draws near. At one moment the actor's expression is one of well-managed restraint, and then, suddenly, it changes to one of utter triumph (ibid.). The conscious acting on the part of the actor, 'between' the expression of 'restraint' and 'triumph', is what leads Brecht's involved audience into a discovery of new or concealed meaning.

Unlike what happens on the Brechtian stage, in the entrenchment model the viewer does not feel s/he is undergoing an involved or meaningful emotional journey towards discovering new or concealed meaning. The viewer perceives the drama in the entrenchment model as having an agenda, as being predictable, or conversely as repelling. Such alienation results from the viewer's emotional disconnect from what is happening in the drama.

Fixating doubt. The audience member does not believe or trust the veracity and realism of the messages in the unfolding EE event. The fidelity of the narrative is questioned and doubted throughout, resulting in strong resistance to the message and its eventual total rejection.

No catharsis or transformation. In the entrenchment model the message producers try to illuminate issues for the viewer in a radically new and revolutionary way. However, the audience member blocks any new reading of events because of his/her alienation and reinforced doubts. The spectator resists the obvious and blatant prescription contained in the message, and is repelled by it. Audience engagement is neither cathartic nor pleasurable or enlightening. If anything, the intended message can have a 'boomerang effect', i.e., lead to the total rejection of oppositional messages and the further entrenchment of existing positions.

- **Illustrating the entrenchment model: rejection of the non-real stage in Israel**

To illustrate how narrative mechanisms influence the change potential of an EE event in an entrenchment model, an analysis was done of audience response to Israeli playwright Hanoach Levin's 1997 play, *Murder*. The play presents Levin's social commentary on the murderous nature of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

The plot centres around three murders. Act one opens with the unexplained murder of an Arab boy by three Israeli soldiers. In Act two, the murdered boy's father avenges his son's death by murdering a Jewish bride and groom after raping the bride on their wedding day, claiming that the groom was his son's murderer. In Act

three, three Jewish prostitutes identify an Arab labourer as having been responsible for a terrorist attack, and incite a crowd to lynch the man.

Levin's intention was to use the play as a platform to create a meaningful, albeit provocative, discourse about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. However, the audience rejected the play by 'voting with their feet' and walking out. Why did this highly political and provocative play fail to rouse viewers or stir public opinion in the manner intended?

One of the present authors (Gesser-Edelsburg 2002) led a study of audience responses to *Murder*. Her analysis of the context of the play and its narrative suggested *two* key reasons for audience alienation, leading to the realisation of the entrenchment model.

First, in 1997, when the play was staged, the Jewish-Israeli audience members were experiencing relative peace in their relationship with Palestinian Arabs. While there were occasional incidents of suicide bombings, it was still a time of relative peace. Gesser-Edelsburg's (2002) research indicated that the Jewish-Israeli audience translated the 'events' depicted in *Murder* as a violent and repulsive chronicle of their former aspirations for peace, which was far removed from their reality at that stage. They found it hard to believe or trust the veracity of what was depicted on stage.

Second, Gesser-Edelsburg's (ibid.) study found that the play's rhetorical-aesthetic strategy strongly alienated Jewish-Israeli audience members. There was little or no dialogue between the staged narrative of *Murder* (a chaotic and hopeless reality) and the audience's reality (a reality of peace). The director-playwright's violent aesthetic further alienated viewers, making them deaf and blind to what was happening on stage. Levin, whose intention had been to attack the audience's 'blindness' and 'deafness' about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, helped create an audience who could not see or hear what was happening on stage (ibid.). The audience did not identify with the actions of either the Israeli or Palestinian characters in the play, nor did they understand the play's message about the possibility of ending the centuries-old conflict. In essence, Gesser-Edelsburg's (ibid.) study of the effect which *Murder* had on the audience, confirmed the presence of those mechanisms that occur in the entrenchment model.

Discussion and conclusions

The present article has presented a rhetorical and aesthetic framework with which to construct persuasive EE narratives, in order to enhance the change potential of an EE event. Three different models – the reinforcement model, the change model and the entrenchment model – were utilised to analyse how EE message producers may harness certain narrative mechanisms to influence an EE event's change

potential. The researchers noted that audience members' existing positions could be consciously reinforced, their existing position deliberately changed, but that they could also be deeply alienated by an EE event, which might lead to their position becoming even more entrenched.

In addition, the researchers noted that it is important for EE message producers to ascertain, in advance, where audience members stand in terms of their readiness for change, and that they should 'invite' audience members to the performance (Gesser-Edelsburg 2002) through secondary texts which create potential 'horizons of expectations' in spectators, thus eliciting spectators' curiosity and arousing their interest.

Based on this analysis, the researchers conclude with a rhetorical matrix to empirically analyse the narrative mechanisms and change potential of EE events (Table 2). For each of the narrative mechanisms – *dialogue* between EE text and audience member, their *involvement* with, and trust in, the veracity of the text, and their *catharsis* and transformation – key rhetorical and aesthetic concerns are outlined, before a set of empirical questions is proposed to gauge the change potential of EE events. EE scholars and message producers may find value in posing these questions in their quest to understand how the rhetorical and aesthetic qualities of the EE narrative influence audiences.

EE message producers, like all rhetoricians, must be mindful of the ethical dimensions of their purposive work, and humbly acknowledge that no work of art is absolute. It is not possible for all of the subjects in a single work to fit the mould of either the reinforcement, change or entrenchment model. The question EE message producers must ask themselves, is whether or not the audience receives the complexity of their work in the way they intended. For writers to achieve the desired audience reception, the importance of formative research in EE projects must be recognised.

Formative research can help writers reduce the likelihood of the boomerang effect or of audience alienation. Constructing the EE text with the active participation of the audience can increase the possibility of evoking empathy and bringing about greater identification with a character who positively models a desired behaviour, while reducing the chances of the audience identifying with a negative character, and that character earning the audience's affection. Formative research can also give characters depth, width and complexity beyond their 'positive' or 'negative' portrayal of a specific educational value.

EE message producers continue to wrestle with the unenviable challenge of how to construct a narrative that is not banal and expected, but is at the same time novel and engaging. Speaking to the audience within the frame of their socio-cultural conventions is important, but it is not enough. For 'Trojan dialogue' to materialise, the writers must weave the audience's 'voice' into the narrative. The audience must be able to identify itself in the narrative, before entering into a contract of trust with

the creators. The narrative evolution should expose the audience to familiar images in new cloaks, to illuminate and frame the subject in new and surprising ways.

Table 2: A rhetorical matrix to empirically analyse the narrative mechanisms and change potential of EE events

Narrative mechanisms	Rhetorical concerns	Empirical questions to gauge change potential of EE events
Dialogue (between text and audience member)	How do the produced messages dialogue and engage with audience members' predisposed realities?	In processing the EE event, to what extent did the audience members feel that they were invited and/or coerced into a dialogue about change? the messages were consensual and/or oppositional to their predispositions? new possibilities for change were raised in the narrative?
Involvement (emotional engagement of audience member with text)	How are audience members emotionally involved, immersed or absorbed in the unfolding EE event?	In processing the EE event, to what extent did the audience members experience feelings of voyeurism, empathic identification, alienation, and/or anger? identification with certain characters and how did that influence their perceptions and positions on the issues the characters represented?
Trust (audience member's perceptions of the credibility of the text)	How does the audience member perceive the plausibility, realism and veracity of the unfolding EE event? Is the narrative trustworthy? Credible?	In processing the EE event, to what extent did audience members feel that the narrative was credible? Realistic? Plausible? at what stage did audience members begin to experience clarification of doubts, or new emergent possibilities? What conditions facilitated this change?
Catharsis and transformation (influence of text on audience member)	How does an audience member's engagement with the EE event lead to new learning, alternative positions and change possibilities? How does the modeling and reinforcement of change possibilities through characters increase audience motivation and self-efficacy for practice?	In processing the EE event, to what extent did audience members feel that they identified with the transformation of characters in the unfolding story? they went through a parallel process of change as the transformed characters? they were engaged and empowered by the characters and their story? the alternatives presented in the narratives are applicable to the reality of their lives?

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