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Behaviour and attitudes of teachers, trainers, and facilitators

by **ROBERT CHAMBERS**

The question of attitudes, behaviour, and values is fundamental to the successful growth of participatory approaches in all fields (Bardolf Paul, 2003).

Attitudes and behaviour are not one-time events. They are lived day by day as we ask ourselves, how did I behave today? (Rajendra Prasad, 2003).

The 'best' PRA experiences for me have invariably been when the practitioners are able to leave their various 'hats' at home and behave simply as concerned human beings (Tilly Sellers, 1995).

...without changing attitudes and behaviour in our institutions, and without putting our own interests last, participation will be a dream (Mwajuma Saiddy Masaiganah, 2003).

When observing a field school, it should be difficult to identify the fieldworker except that he/she should be the first one into the mud and the last one to talk (Dilts and Hate, 1996).

The top-down transfer of knowledge is embedded in most education systems and establishments. It is even fixed in the infrastructure of amphitheatres, lecture halls, seating arrange-

ments, and seminar rooms, and in the setting and facilities of flip charts, blackboards, whiteboards, screens, overhead projectors, slide projectors, videos, and now, Power Point. Perhaps more important, however, is the socialisation and expectations of teachers, trainers, and facilitators, who expect to transfer knowledge, and of students, trainees, and participants, who expect to receive it. Those who are turned out as finished proto-professionals by traditional top-down teaching systems are then conditioned to behave likewise in the bureaucracies that they join and in their relationships with clients. The top-down cultures, behaviours, and attitudes of normal teaching and normal bureaucracy are congruent and mutually reinforcing. All this is well enough known.

The scope for more participatory approaches, and for substituting learning for teaching, is both vast and exhilarating. The literature on participatory learning goes back decades and is continuously being augmented.¹ Unfortunately, much PRA training, especially but not only early on in government institutions, has been in the traditional didactic mode, neglecting behaviour and attitudes. I have seen a syllabus for a ten-day training in PRA at an extension education centre in which behaviour and attitudes were not even mentioned. I have also seen a sequence of six videos of a PRA training that appeared

¹ See e.g. Chambers (2002) for an annotated list (updated in a 2003 reprint) of 21 sources for ideas and activities for participatory workshops and how to obtain them, and Peter Taylor and Jude Fransman (2003, 2004) for numerous recent sources on learning and teaching participation in higher education institutes.

to consist of nothing but a lecturer lecturing about participation. As self-awareness increases, though, such practices should become less common.

One hopeful tendency is the evolution of individual practice. Many, perhaps most, of those who introduce others to PRA have experienced a transition of style and practice from teaching and training to facilitating, and from treating people as students and trainees to recognising them not just as participants who take part, but as colleagues, contributors, and co-learners. In part, this is through a progressive use of 'ask them' and recognition that 'they can do it'. It used to take me 20 minutes to 'teach' the method of matrix scoring; but I have now found that three or four minutes is better, with minimum basics giving space for learning through practice and creativity, 'using your own best judgement'. Box 1 illustrates how far this can go: participants are not taught theory, but theorise from their own practice.

Ideally, then, a trainer or facilitator models the behaviour and attitudes that are appropriate. Most obviously, this can be through providing participants with experiences that act as opportunities to express and analyse their own realities and experience and come to their own conclusions. Going further, a starting point can be making space for participants 'to negotiate what the training will be about, how it will proceed, and what it can accomplish' (Norrish, 1994). Curriculum development can then itself be participatory with 'students' defining what they want and can offer (Taylor, 2003). The Asian Health Institute, an NGO in Japan, starts its five-week courses with blank sheets of paper on which participants plan the programme. They say what they hope for and would like. Faculty members say what is on offer and what they can do. The blank sheets are then gradually filled up. Their principles are:

- each is responsible for own learning;

Box 1: A case study about 'teaching' PRA techniques

Until a year ago, while conducting a PRA training we used to give a long background of PRA to the participants before they go to practice in the field. We would also describe the key features of each PRA technique and tell them the steps for using them. There used to be temptations from both sides ... especially in TOT training of trainers to 'clarify' everything about the techniques first, only then go to practice in the field.

In a Reflect training (training of local facilitators) conducted in El Salvador in January 1998, just after the introduction of participants and facilitators we directly started mapping the area. The participants had never done mapping and had not read anything about it. They produced a beautiful community map within two hours and also shared experiences and observations about various aspects of the village life.

Later we asked the participants to reflect ... in small buzz groups, how exactly they could produce such a good map. They then wrote down one or two pages about the steps and process of their work, as well as copied the map from ground to paper. We as trainers benefited more from this experience. We could learn how we can learn by doing and why it is not necessary to give theory first. Participants can theorise from their own practice.

Source: Bimal Phnuyal (*pers comm.*, 1998)

- process becomes content;
- learning is thinking, feeling, acting; and
- equal responsibilities.

A participatory training methodology developed in India is also dynamic: 'whilst participants themselves work towards solutions, they are also continuously helping the facilitators [trainers] to evolve the training design' (Saxena and Pradhan, 2002). A course or workshop becomes a co-production with co-learning.

These are far cries, indeed, from traditional top-down, 'we know best' course planning, lecturing or, for that matter, intrusive evangelism.

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NOTES

This extract is taken from 'Behaviour, Attitude, and Beyond', Chapter Six of Robert Chamber's book *Ideas for Development*, and is reproduced with the kind permission of Robert Chambers and Earthscan Publications. See *In Touch* for ordering details.

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