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## Dramatic behaviour in participatory training

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### • Introduction

Most practitioners of participatory learning agree that a key aspect of good PRA practice is something labelled *behaviour, attitude* or *body language*. In my experience, trainees usually not only agree on the importance of behaviour in facilitating dialogues, but also agree on what is seen to be *good* behaviour. In this paper I describe some ways of learning about these things with the aid of ideas and exercises from the world of drama and theatre.

Being able to articulate good behaviour in feedback sessions is different from putting it in practice. For example, one trainee who was extremely articulate in discussing good behaviour facilitated a large community meeting of war victims. The local people were sitting on the ground whilst he walked around the circle and directed closed questions at individuals with an interrogative tone in his voice. He carried a knife, probably inadvertently, during most of the meeting and pointed it at people when he asked questions.

This is an extreme example but demonstrates that the facilitator was unaware of what he was doing, of his posture, of the style of his questions, of the knife in his hand and that it was likely to inhibit people from answering or speaking spontaneously. Conversely, he seemed unaware that he was missing an opportunity to stimulate discussions through positive behaviour.

Participation centres on achieving 'shifts in behaviour', from being in control to being facilitative. Much of this relates to power differences between *outsiders* and *insiders*. Differences in authority and control are almost

always 'visible' through dress, behaviour, speech and attitude. Outsiders have to become increasingly aware of their own behaviour and learn how to 'manage authority'.

Drama techniques and approaches are particularly useful in PRA training to raise awareness of: posture, people's positioning, how power relationships are expressed in behaviour and ways of speaking and asking questions. I describe some of these approaches below (several of which are included in the *Trainer's Guide to Participatory Learning and Action*, Pretty et al. 1995).

### Critical observation of behaviour

Good observation can be demonstrated with games such as 'Watch It'. In this game, participants form pairs and observe in details small changes in body posture.

In training sessions and work in communities, trainees are often divided into small groups for practising PRA methods, such as maps. An observer should be allocated to, and by, each group. It is good to give the observer a central role in feedback sessions. Ask them to describe aspects of the behaviour of the local *insiders* in order to start off a discussion about better, more facilitative behaviour of outsiders.

Studying photographs from interviews and community meetings is a good way of observing and analysing body language and behaviour too, as is the use of video.

### Demonstration and imitation

Demonstrating someone's behaviour through imitation can be a lot of fun but can easily be offensive or embarrassing. However, with the right balance, it is a very powerful way of

getting a message across. The lead trainer or observers can imitate a mannerism or a way of sitting, standing or talking. Care has to be taken to avoid creating a strong insider-outsider divide and only those people who are present should be imitated.

### Chairs, statues and role plays

The relationship between insiders and outsiders can be explored through 'the great game of power' (Boal 1992, p151). In this game, an imaginary space is created in the working room and the chairs and desks are positioned to illustrate human relationships. For example, chairs can be positioned to face a desk, with one chair behind it, as in a school class room. The idea is that trainees study the relationships expressed and start changing the setting: they can make it confrontational or relaxed. After a while, they can add themselves as statues to make it an even more exciting sequence of scenes of relationships of power. Those who stay outside the space discuss the changes.

Instead of discussing what good dialogues look like, it is interesting to request some trainees to be sculptors of other trainees (the statues) in order to show the others a 'good' or a 'bad' interviews or meetings. Being still and sculpted by others does not require any acting but it often happens that trainees turn the exercise into a role play.

In the case of a play of a community meeting, roles can include some community workers, a drunken elder or a distressed woman who comes late, a government official who wants to receive acknowledgement of his importance, etc. Sketches can be improvised immediately in this way. Alternatively a group can be asked to briefly prepare a performance of a good or bad, common or rare meeting or interview and then perform it. Feedback sessions are important in order to draw out the full potential of learning about behaviour, body language and good questions.

A role play of a wealth ranking exercise, using the trainers or trainees, can be used. I find this particularly good as an introduction to the behaviour aspects of PRA *and* the mechanics of PRA methods. It reduces the need for lecturing. The feedback to this session could

draw out a number of the key aspects of PRA, such as body language; the idea of 'good questions' and the functions of diagrams (to focus attention, recap and guide the discussion).

### Song, dance and story telling

It often happens that during or after interviews and community meetings, people want to sing, dance or tell stories as a means of relaxation and entertainment. Story telling and singing (by insiders *and* outsiders) are very good ways of establishing rapport, and also for highlighting issues about which a substantial discussion may be organised on a later date.

On a recent trip to Angola, we were facilitating community meetings with men and women in separate groups. People were getting tired but all agreed that we needed to continue the meeting. So, the men spent half an hour telling short, funny (sometimes dirty) stories and the women clapped and sang. After a community meeting in Malawi, the women bid the visitors farewell with song and dance. And, several years ago, after a lengthy interview of some men in Sudan, they turned the tables and starting asking the questions, mainly because of the interest they had in how men from other cultures herd their cattle, treat their wives and live their lives. A great opportunity for further debate and learning was being created because these were issues we had not addressed with them.

### • Conclusion

There are no doubt many more ways and ideas in the world of drama and arts from which PRA practitioners can benefit in attempts to learn with and from others. I am keen to read the other articles in this special of PLA Notes!

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### REFERENCES

- Boal, A., 'Games for actors and non-actors', Routledge 1992, translated from French by A. Jackson.