

Working with PPI Contributors through drama

What this involves

This involves you in using the techniques of drama in helping your PPI Contributors to provide their input to your project.

What are the benefits of working with PPI Contributors through drama?

- It can be a fun way of getting people's attention and investment.
- It can be a good leveller, whether you are just working with PPI Contributors or whether you are working with PPI Contributors and staff together.
- It may challenge people to provide input that you would not elicit through more traditional methods encouraging creativity of thought
- It may appeal to reluctant speakers or more 'physical' learners

When this might be a useful/appropriate approach?:

- To make an event more fun, attractive to attend or easy to remember
- Enabling people to ask questions in a different way – may be particularly helpful if your PPI Contributors struggle to read documents
- Drama is about shared experience of discovery and creative exploration. It enables new ways of looking at the same information
- Emotion, gestures, and imitation are universal forms of communication understood in all cultures so will be useful in a mixed PPI setting

How can you work with PPI Contributors through drama?

Here are some drama techniques that you could develop for your setting without any previous dramatic experience.

Bringing Freeze Frames to Life — start with a still image created by a group and use thought tracking to find out what each of the characters are thinking and feeling. Get the group to bring the scene alive for a few moments with speech and movement. The group will enjoy being able to tell the story without worrying about how to start or finish the scene.

Decision Alley — One person walks down an alleyway made by the group and listens to thoughts or advice. A useful technique for exploring any kind of dilemma faced by a character, providing an opportunity to analyse a decisive moment in greater detail.

Cross-Cutting — borrowed from the world of film editing, where two scenes are intercut. In drama the term is used to describe two or more scenes which are performed on stage at the same time. The technique is used to highlight or contrast a particular theme or aspect of the story.

Flashbacks and Flash Forwards — Performers in a scene are asked to improvise scenes which take place seconds, minutes, days or years before or after. This enables the exploration of characters' backgrounds, motivations and the consequences of their actions. It shows what led up to a particular moment, how it might be resolved or how it may lead onto additional challenges.

Forum Theatre — A play or scene, usually indicating some kind of oppression is shown twice. During the replay, any member of the audience is allowed to shout 'Stop!', step forward and take the place of one of the oppressed characters, showing how they could change the situation to enable a different outcome. The other actors remain in character, improvising their responses. It enables participants to try out courses of action which could be applicable to their everyday lives

Hot Seating — A character is questioned by the group about his or her background, behaviour and motivation. The technique is additionally useful for developing questioning skills with the rest of the group.

Image Theatre — still images are used to explore abstract concepts such as relationships and emotions, as well as realistic situations. Participants rapidly sculpt their own or each others' bodies to express attitudes and emotions. These images are then placed together and 'dynamised' or brought to life. The method is often used to explore internal or external oppression, unconscious thoughts and feelings.

Mantle of the Expert — involves the creation of a fictional world where participants assume the roles of experts in a designated field.

Marking the Moment — a dramatic technique used to highlight a key moment in a scene or improvisation. This can be done in a number of different ways: for example through slow-motion, a freeze-frame, narration, thought-tracking or music. It has a similar effect to using a spotlight to focus attention on one area of the stage at a particular moment during a performance.

Narration — whereby one or more performers speak directly to the audience to tell a story, give information or comment on the action of the scene or the motivations of characters. Characters may narrate, or a performer who is not involved in the action can carry out the role of 'narrator'.
Open and Close - This is a simple and effective way for using still images to tell a story. It also mimics the technique

Role Play — ability to suspend disbelief by stepping into another character's shoes. The outline of a body is drawn on a large sheet of paper, which is later stuck onto the wall. This can be done by carefully drawing around one of the participants. Words or phrases describing the character are then written directly onto the drawing or stuck on with post-its. This drama technique can be carried out as a group activity or by individuals writing about their own character. You can include known facts such as physical appearance, age, gender, location and occupation, as well as subjective ideas such as likes/dislikes, friends/enemies, attitudes, motivations, secrets and dreams.

Storytelling — one of the simplest and perhaps most compelling forms of dramatic and imaginative activity.

Tableaux — participants make still images with their bodies to represent a scene. A tableau can be used to quickly establish a scene that involves a large number of characters. Participants stand in a circle, or around the performance area and a theme is given. One by one, they step into the space and establish still images in relation to one another until the tableau is complete. At this point, thought tracking can be used to find out more about each of the characters. Once participants are familiar with the technique, they can also work in small groups on different aspects of a theme. The group can discuss each group's tableau in turn, mentioning what they can see happening, what they would like to know more about and what they think could happen next.

What are the drawbacks of this approach?

- Will need a certain amount of space and people will have to be encouraged to give it a try
- May be off putting to the more academically minded PPI Contributors.
- People might trivialise this work and feel that it is not as real as other types of contribution

Resources:

- Co-designing research into experiences of female genital mutilation (FGM), 2016 *Sharon Dixon and Lisa Hinton, Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences, Oxford*
Working with peer support groups such as Oxford Against Cutting, held several focus groups. Used a translator. (Somalia, Sudan, Gambia, and Nigeria).
Worked with Sarah Penny, a researcher in creative writing in Brunel University to develop workshop techniques using drama therapy to allow the construction of community stories in their own words for their own use.
- The Theatre of Debate develops plays to challenge thinking of young people over 14. They work with schools to not only show the plays written specially but then engage the young people in debate with the actors staying in character. '[People are Messy](#)' is the PPI play that they produced which is now available as a film which you could consider using.
www.theatreofdebate.co.uk/People-are-Messy/People-are-Messy.html
- [Newfound Theatre](#) is a professional company that travels to you. The company is made up of a team of writers, actors, creative professionals and professional educationalists. They have worked in schools, youth centres, housing associations, the NHS and businesses. You could contact them to run bespoke workshops.
www.newfoundtheatre.com
- [Patient and Public Involvement in the Severe Pressure Ulcer Project.](#)
Ran an innovative workshop which utilised theatre techniques and videos to help make the interpretation process inclusive and engaging for everyone involved.
Had simulated patients and actors role playing patients
youtu.be/bgg6zkbLRg
- [Festival of the Spoken Nerd](#) is a trio of comedy live performers, who also make radio shows, TV appearances, DVDs, downloads, YouTube videos and books.
- [Talking Birds](#) produce theatre of place
- Bristol University produced [street theatre](#) to get across their research at a public engagement event
- European Theatre Lab does [theatre productions](#) on research
- University of Hertfordshire [commissioned theatre](#) companies to work with researchers.