

AN EXPERIMENTAL WORK IN PROGRESS

Dramatic Scenarios: An Interactive Paper Exploring Transformative Approaches To Theatre And Research.

Jane Burt & Athina Coptoros

This is a draft paper. Do not quote without permission from the authors.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a reflection on our experience of working with future scenario planning¹ using theatre for transformation² in the rural village, Qongqotha in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. It is not explicitly about the use of theatre for transformation but more a reflection on how we 'play out our roles' as scientists, social practitioners and artists. How, depending on how we understand our approach to our work, we 'set the stage' for action long before we make contact with the people we intend to work with.

To explore this we have created three scenarios, not future scenarios, of the initial meeting between two fictitious characters, the head of research and a drama co-ordinator. They are presented as if 'we were a fly on a wall' listening to their dialogue. We have chosen this approach to highlight two understandings that have arisen from our involvement in developing dramatic future scenarios, these are:

- that one's approach to research, rural development or theatre is evident long before one has any contact with villagers or other potential partners and infiltrates all aspects of one's work;
- that the relationships between the characters in any 'development drama' can tell us a lot about one's research approach. Anyone can use and write words such as 'participation', 'democracy' or 'transformation' but it is only in the action of doing the work and relating to others that these noble (and popular) principles are played out. In our experience, this is a lot more difficult to do than one may think because of other more powerful scripts that dictate that has power or access to power.

¹ Scenarios are plausible visions of alternative pathways to the future, and the consequences for various aspects of life on earth. Scenario planning is thought to be a useful, structured way to stimulate thinking and debate about future events or trends, and to explicitly state our uncertainty about these. (Peterson et al, 2003)

² Theatre for Transformation, draws in the techniques of Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 1979), Theatre for Development (Mda, Z, 1993) and Drama in Education (O' Toole, J, 1992). The process of drama allows us to view life 'as if it were real'. It is a creative experience that can challenge people to think beyond their current contexts by working within an imaginary space that is similar to their own situation

In the scenarios we have presented we try and look below the surface at issues based on relationships and power that could inform all our work, whether we work with theatre for transformation or Participatory Rural Appraisal³, or one of the many other methodologies, methods or techniques that are used in what has globally become known as 'rural development work'.

Each scenario is presented as the first scene to a play about using theatre in research. In each piece it is the relationship between: the head of research and the drama co-ordinator, the village where they work and their understanding of the purpose of using drama that all contribute to the reason for why they are doing it what they are doing and how they are doing it. It could be said to show three world views (ontology's), three approaches to research (methodologies) and three understandings of the use of theatre.

The three scenarios are simplified and to a certain degree stereotyped, which is what happens when creating any scenario. Neither scenario is right or wrong. The attempt is to highlight an approach. Each approach has its weaknesses and strengths. The question is which approach should we be using if the aim of our work is first and foremost, transformative.

Context of study

This case study took place in the Eastern Cape study site of the Gariep Basin as part of the Millenium Assessment project. The Millenium Assessment is an international effort to assess the relationship between ecosystems and human well being⁴. The pilot study looks at the use of theatre for transformation as a method for 'reporting back' research results in the form of 'future scenarios' to villagers in Qongqotha.

Masters students from Rhodes University had been working in the village for over a year, doing local assessments of past resource use as indicators of drivers of change⁵. The results from these studies were worked into three plays that were also based on three regional (Southern African) scenarios, which in turn are based in Global scenarios.

The data collected by the students in collaboration with the village participants, assisted us in making the regional scenarios relevant to the village of Qongqotha.

³ PRA is an ensemble of approaches and methods suited to the understanding and expression of local diversity, and to enable local people to assess, analyze, cope with, adapt to and exploit accelerating change PRA is an ensemble of approaches and methods suited to the understanding and expression of local diversity, and to enable local people to assess, analyze, cope with, adapt to and exploit accelerating change (Motteux, N. 2003)

⁴ Shackleton, C. 2003. Draft document.

⁵ Pers comm. G. Cundill & K. Scheepers. January 2004

A team consisting of a drama group, student researchers and two project coordinators developed the plays. The plays were workshopped with the village participants. It was made clear to the village participants that the plays were based on information gathered in collaboration with them and applied to the future within the context of regionally developed scenarios. This was emphasized in the introduction to the plays and in the plays themselves. After watching each scenario, the village participants were asked to make any changes to the plays so that they became more relevant to them. They were also asked how they would respond to the play if they were to be a potential future. The villages on newsprint recorded responses. The plays and village participants responses were presented at an Open Day attended by other villagers and local school children.

A note on text writing.

Writing a paper or a report is seen as a separate activity to a research process. Once the research or development work is over, the researcher or practitioner sits down to write a paper or report on what has happened so that others may have access to their experience and any knowledge gained from that. John van Maanen⁶ challenges this idea by characterizing the different dimensions of qualitative inquiry as 'fieldwork, headwork and textwork'. He wrote that the process of writing text is as much a research process as is collecting the data or doing the thinking and reading that is necessary to position oneself in a particular context. It is through the process of writing that ideas and understandings are further explored. As one of the authors of this paper discovered when writing up her master's thesis, writing is not a static process but a dynamic research methodology.

"When I started writing and reading after the so-called 'fieldwork' I realised I was still researching. The process hadn't stopped and it still hasn't stopped"⁷

Noel Gough, sees the process of creating a narrative as his instruments for data collection. Writing becomes an essential reflective and assimilating experience of re-looking (or re-searching)⁸

"I really do not know what the final thesis of my essay will be when I start to write it. Ideas about narrative and textuality are the instruments and apparatus with which I produce 'data' in my conceptual laboratory"⁹

This paper is approached as 'textwork' or a furthering of the research process into the influence of research approach within the context of using theatre for transformation in developing future scenarios. We wrote the scenarios in an

⁶ Van Maanen, J. 1995.

⁷ Burt, J. 1999, pg 109

⁸ (Lotz-Sisitka, H & Burt, J, 2003

⁹ Gough, N, 1998

attempt to understand our roles in the extended drama of this project and also to understand the how different approaches to research can affect the way in which different participatory methods are 'played out' in the field.

This paper is also an attempt to provide interactive space, by allowing the audience of this paper¹⁰ the opportunity to respond to the scenarios we have created. Just as we created the space for the villagers to respond to the drama scenarios so the audience of this paper will be given the opportunity to engage with the scenarios presented here.

THREE SCENARIOS.....

This is the point when you, the audience, stop being spectators of this paper and are given the opportunity to participate. We are asking you to take on the role of theatre critics. Below you will find the first scene of a play written as three different scenarios. After each potential scene we ask you to,

- a) comment as a theatre critic on the first scene;
- b) suggest how the rest of the play will look if this is the first scene..

Below you will find a list of questions to consider that will help you in your role as theatre critic.

Does this scenario sound familiar to you?
What is the role of theatre in this scenario?
What is the perceived role of the villagers?
What is the role of the actors?
Who is holding the power?
Who is creating whose future here?

DRAMATIC SCENARIOS: THE PLAY....

List of Characters

Head of Research
Molly (Drama Co-ordinator)
Heathcliff (Student Researcher)
Dumisani (member of drama team)
Andiswa (member of drama team)
Thandeka (member of drama team)
Lungile (village representative)
Mrs Mvemva (local government representative)

Scenario One: The large desk!

¹⁰ This paper will be presented at the 'Bridging Scales and Epistemologies: Linking Local knowledge with global science in multi-scale assessments.' Alexandria, Egypt.

Scene 1

Setting the scene: For the past year a group of white students have been working in a predominantly black rural area somewhere in South Africa under the guidance of the head of research at a prestigious university. The research is about to come to an end and the students want to communicate the results to the villagers while at the same time using the results to introduce the idea of future scenario planning.

The head of the research office is sitting behind his desk looking through some papers waiting for the co-ordinator of the drama group to come to his office.

There is a knock on the door.

Enter drama co-ordinator wearing bell-bottom pants and a bright T-shirt.

HR: *Looks up as co-ordinator enters room:* I'm busy right now, I'm only consulting with students later. Can you make an appointment with my secretary?

Molly: *looking a little confused.* Umm, I'm not a student... umm I'm Molly, the researcher you spoke to this morning on the phone about the future scenario project?.

HR: *Looking skeptical.* Oh are you, Molly.. sorry sorry. Come in. Do you want a cup of coffee?

Molly: No I'm fine, I only drink herbal tea.

Head of research: *Not quite knowing what to say to this.* Mmm ummm that's nice. Well then, umm let's discuss the project. *Suddenly he says out of the blue.* Do you like my desk, they tell me it is the biggest in Africa!

Molly: *Trying to hide a smile.* Ya, sure it's big if you like that kind of thing.

HR looks as if he is going to respond but doesn't. He looks annoyed as he moves some papers off a chair.

HR: Sit here.

Molly sits down hesitantly on the edge of the chair.

HR: Do you know anything about the millennium assessment?

Molly: Yes I do.

HR: Well part of the project is looking at future scenarios with communities that have been involved in the research. These scenarios have been developed based on information gathered from research that some students of mine did. We don't have much

money left but we would like to try some sort of creative way of working with these scenarios in at least one site. We have decided to link it to an open day that we are planning so that students can report back to the village their research results. This is a participatory project, you know.

Molly: Ya, that's what I was told. So what is it that you want us to do?

HD: Well I thought you could put on a play during the morning of the open day.

Molly: Oh.....on what?

HD: On the scenarios we have developed, of course.

Molly: *looking confused.* Whose we?

HD: The students and I of course. We have already written the scripts, here they are. *Hands over a folder that Molly takes.* The actors just need to act them out.

Molly: Oh.... *Looking a little taken aback.* You do know I do participatory drama don't you?

HR: Yes that's why I called you? Now how long...

Molly interrupts

Molly: Umm Do we have time to meet with the student researchers and go into the village before hand?

HD: *Impatiently* No that's not necessary, they have done all the work already we just need the play now.

Molly: So we are just presenting the play as is to the community.

HD: Yes it will be nice and entertaining for them on the open day.

A little uncomfortable silence.

HD: Well then, that's it. Umm we are already behind schedule so we've only got two weeks before the open day.

Cell phone begins to ring. HD searches around then answers it.

HD: Hello, hello, am I busy? No just finished.

Smiles at Molly and waves, gives thumbs up and talks into phone. Molly gets up and leaves the room.

The Theatre Critic

What is your response to this scenario?

Judging by the first scene, what will happen in the rest of the play?

SCENARIO TWO: The Small But Adequate Desk.

Set the scene: For the past year a group of white students have been working in a predominantly black rural area somewhere in South Africa under the guidance of the head of research at a prestigious university. The research is about to come to an end and the students want to communicate the results to the villagers while at the same time using the results to introduce the idea of future scenario planning.

The head of the research office is sitting behind his desk looking through some papers waiting for the co-ordinator of the drama group to come to his office.

There is a knock on the door.

Enter Molly, the drama co-ordinator wearing bell-bottom pants and a bright T-shirt.

HR: *Looks up as Molly enters room., looks her up and down.* Hello. Are you Molly?

Molly: Yup, that's me.

Head of research: Come in. Do you want a cup of tea or coffee?

Molly: Yes some tea please, but I only drink Soya milk, you don't maybe have some?

HR: mmm ummm no, not at the moment. *Looks a little distracted* Well then umm let's discuss the project. *Says out of the blue.* Sorry my desk is rather small, I'm hoping they will give me a bigger one.

Molly: It looks fine to me.

HR: Yes, well.... Would you like to sit here?

HR gets up and moves a pile of papers from a chair and Molly sits down on the chair.

HR: Do you know anything about the millennium assessment?

Molly: Yes I do.

HR: Well part of the project is looking at future scenarios with villagers who have been involved in the research. These scenarios have been developed based on information gathered from research done in the village. We don't have much money left but we would like to try some sort of creative way of working with future scenarios in at least one of our sites. We could link it to the open day the students are organising, as a way of feeding back their research to the villages. How does that sound?

Molly: Well you can actually do a lot more with drama than merely give information in an entertaining way. We can develop the dramas in collaboration with the villages. It'll also be very difficult to develop the dramas without knowing the context....

HD: That sounds interesting but will a morning at the open day be enough for that kind of work?,

Molly: No, it will be impossible to do in a morning. We will need time before hand to familiarise ourselves with the village and the research. To give the villagers some input into the plays and to access their responses to future scenarios. We must at least link up with the participants from the village and workshop the plays with them.

HD: Okay I think we can do some of that. I like the sound of it. It means that the presentation on the open day will not only be the interpretation of the researchers but also become the interpretation of the villagers. We need to remember that we don't have much time for this or money. You can do it your way but it still needs to fit into our time frame. We are finishing this project off. Our work in the village is almost over.

Molly: Okay I will have to talk about it with the rest of the drama team and see how we can work with the budget you've got and the time available. I'm sure we will be able to involve the village participants in some way.

HD: So I can hand it over to you then or do you need anything else from us?

Molly: Actually we will need to work very closely with the student researchers because they understand the context so well.

HD: Right, I will forward you their names. By the way, I would like to see the script that you develop before you put on the play.

Molly: There won't be any script. The plays are going to be developed by the whole team in a collaborative way. I'm hoping the researchers will be involved in this process, including you.

HD: Oh....well I don't know if I will have the time, but the students may be keen. Well give me a call if you need anything else, otherwise I'll see you on the open day.

Cell phone begins to ring. HD searches around then answers it.

HD: Hello, hello, am I busy? Just hang on a moment. Are we finished?

Molly: Yes, for now.

Molly gets up and leaves the room.

The Theatre Critic

What is your response to this scenario?

Judging by the first scene, how do you think the scenario will play out?

Scenario Three: What Desk?

Set the scene: For the past year a group of white students have been working in a predominantly black rural area somewhere in South Africa under the guidance of the head of research at a prestigious university. The research is about to come to an end and the students want to communicate the results to the villagers while at the same time using the results to introduce the idea of future scenario planning.

The head of the research office and Heathcliff, the student researcher are waiting for the drama team to arrive.

There is a knock on the door.

Enter Molly, a drama co-ordinator, Dumisani, Andiswa, Thandeka, three actors, one facilitator/translator, a representative from the community, Lungile and a representative from local government, Mrs Mvemve.

Head of research: *Looks up as team enters room.*: Oh hi everyone, Gee I think we need some more chairs.. ummm

turns to one of the students

Do you mind getting some chairs Beverly?

Dumisani: I'll help.

Molly: What happened to your desk?

HR: Oh I got rid of it. A desk has come to be a symbol of elitist power in the academic world. I thought this low round table is more conducive of participatory encounters.

They leave the room and bring back more chairs.

HR: *While they are waiting for the chairs and everyone to find their seat.* Does anyone want something to drink, I have coffee, tea, ceylon and herbal, but sorry I've just run out of soya milk.

Andiswa: Green tea for me if you have it.

Mrs Mvemve: Coffee, four sugars please

Both Dumisani and Thandeka: Just ceylon please.

The rest: *Said at different times.* No thanks.

HR: Great why don't you help yourselves over here.
Some get up to make drinks while HR continues talking..

HR: Do you know anything about the millennium assessment?

Molly: We have some information but we need to share it more with the team.

Lungile: We don't have to do that here though, Molly told me she is planning a workshop where we can work through our understanding with the help of the researchers.

HR: Okay, good. Well let me tell you what we are hoping for and then we can negotiate from there. A part of the project is looking at future scenarios with villagers that are currently involved in the research. There have been global future scenarios developed and we want to use these as a basis of developing locally relevant future scenarios with

the villagers. This will be quite a challenge as part of the process will be introducing them to the concept of future scenario planning.

Molly: mmm It won't only be challenging for them. We first need to get a good understanding of what scenario planning is, especially if we are to facilitate the development of relevant dramas.

Heathcliff: Shoo, if we are going to do this properly how long do you think it will take?

Molly: Well the drama process can continually feed into your research. It can respond to the villagers needs as they arise. It should be part of the process as long as you are researching in the village. What do you think Lungile?

Lungile: I don't understand much about this now but it would be good if we are involved in making the plays as well.

Molly: Yes, being involved in putting the plays together is where the most learning takes place.

Heathcliff: A bit like watching results come to life as you are researching. But that's a long time to be working with such a big team. Could get expensive.

HD: We'll just have to see how much we can do. The whole process might have to be shorter.

Molly: But in the long run it will mean less work... if the villagers are more in control of their own learning process I mean..

HD: Okay let's see. So what next?
Cell phone starts ringing.

HD: Oh goodness that's me. Sorry. *Switches cell phone off.*

Heathcliff: We should introduce the idea to the research team in the village. I'll organise it. When is a good time Lungisa?

Lungisa: Next week Wednesday good for everyone?

Molly: I can do Wednesday.

Dumisani: I can't I've got something on.

Tandeka: me too.

Heathcliff: What about Friday?

Mrs Mvemve: No I have to be in the capital.

Molly: Thursday?

Heathcliff: Bad for me, I've got a tutorial. Umm. Tuesday then?

Andiswa: No, sorry, that's my mothers birthday.

Lungisa: The villagers can't make it then we are being visited by the local clinic..

Heathcliff: Oh okay, umm we are kind of running out of days..

Monday?

Molly: Out for me I have a meeting all day.

HD: Listen, Heathcliff, can't you get everyone's time table and work out a time. It could take forever to organise now and I have another meeting to go to in 5 minutes.

Dumisani: Yes, I've also got to go.

Heathcliff: Okay everyone can you email me your timetable?

Andiswa: I don't have email..

Heathcliff: Okay well can you drop your timetable off with me.

Andiswa: Ya, sure. Will you remind me? *Gets up to go*

So does everyone else...

Molly: Ya , remind us all if you can Heathcliff?

Heathcliff looking worried and anxious is lost for words. People shout goodbye to each other and leave the room.

The Theatre Critic

What is your response to this scenario?

Judging by the first scene, how do you think the scenario will play out?

A FEW REFLECTIONS OF OUR OWN....

Most researchers, practitioners and villages have experienced one or more aspects of all three scenarios presented above. These scenarios do not aim to criticise or point fingers at any group or individual, but to offer a critical reflection on the use of theatre for transformation. The way we have worked with these scenarios is the same way in which we actually worked with future scenarios in the village of *Qonggotha in the Eastern Cape, South Africa*. We asked you to reflect on these scenarios so that we can all learn more about our own practices and find ways to transform or rethink our motivation and reasons for any rural development work. Based on the above three scenarios we have presented and the use of our own real life experience of the use of theatre for transformation in future scenario we have the following reflections to offer for further discussion:

Method vs. approach

There is no doubt that the process of using theatre for transformation was useful and to some degree successful in the work that we did in the village of Qonggotha in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. Theatre or drama has many attributes that allow participants to fully engage in a process of reflection and possibly even decision-making. But there is a danger of social, environmental or development practitioners falling into the trap of having found 'magic tool'. Theatre is not a magic tool, in fact the method of theatre can be used just as much to entrench inequality and the status quo as it can be used to as a tool of transformation. Theatre, in the form of film, has been a very powerful tool in Hollywood, for example, for indoctrinating and enforcing a particular view of America and American people, not only to the outside world but to Americans themselves. Any tool or method can be used in a variety of ways depending on the researcher or practitioner's approach. The approach that a researcher or practitioner works within depends on the often unconscious understanding of what we know about the world (ontology) and how we know what we know (epistemology).

Power and relationships

All research in rural development, whether you label it scientific or not, is about relationships, and relationships include elements of power. In the first scenario, the person in power is obviously the HD. In the others there are different levels of power sharing between the characters. This power sharing leads to other dynamics. As the co-ordinators of the theatre for transformation project in *Qonggotha* we were acutely aware of the significance of our work in relation to

the power relationships between: the student researchers and the villagers; the drama team and the researchers; the project leader and the student researchers; the drama team and the villagers; and the co-ordinators and the drama team. If we had not held a clear sense of what these relationships were from the start, the project may have lost focus of who was to benefit from this intervention, namely the villagers.

Although we were working in a rural Xhosa speaking area with an all-Xhosa drama group, the co-ordinators of the project, the student researchers and the head of the research were all English-speakers. In the historically and racially loaded context of South Africa, we need to acknowledge and share in our differences in order to find our similarities. It is important to understand and challenge our roles continually in every aspect of our work if we are to expect villagers to transform their roles in their everyday life.

- The drama team

There is a trend among the local research and university institutions to enlist the services of Xhosa speaking people (not students) in research or drama work and to regard them as interpreters for English-speaking students, either by directly interpreting for them or creating dramas that convey what researchers want the villagers to know. Their skills of negotiation and communication that are required to truly set up a relationship for the students with local communities are often not directly acknowledged. This is the approach of Scenario one: a large desk. It was clear to us as co-ordinators that we had a responsibility to collaborate with the drama team with integrity and respect for their abilities as first language Xhosa speakers with important skills of communication and facilitation.

Because the scenarios had not originally been created by the villagers it was critical that our characters represented real life characters from the village. To gain a good enough understanding of the village and its people, the drama team, who were all Xhosa speaking, was critical. Even though they were not currently living in a rural setting, they were rooted in the same language and culture. The drama group were by no means only actors, having also to integrate their skills as facilitators. We all had to gain a common understanding of each other and our futures in order to effectively work with future scenarios in *Qonqgotha*. This often means that time needs to be spent making sure that everyone in the team understands what is happening and is clear of the aims of the project.

“The introduction of individuals was done professionally, it also allowed me to connect with everyone at the same level. Everything was taken one step at a time and there was no pressure on anyone, mass participation was the important rule. The briefing about expectations of this venture were loud and clear. From day one everybody knew what was ahead of us. The group clicked together, respected each others opinions and

beliefs that make us human.” (Tisco, member of drama group)¹¹ quote taken from evaluation report by M.de Jong).

- Student researchers

It was critical to involve the student researchers from the start (even though we were only introduced into the process near the end of their research, as is presented in the Scenario two) as they were so familiar with the area we would be working in. Our experience of working with the students was one where they willingly participated and guided the development of the dramas. Considering that the future scenario planning came in at the end of their research in the area, it would have been disruptive for the villagers to be presented with a whole new group of researchers/consultants without the link being maintained with the students with whom they had established a relationship. It was also important for the students to acknowledge that they had started a relationship, not just engaged objectively in a research situation, and their role in this relationship contained a certain amount of responsibility. If the student researchers had not volunteered to be involved it would have been a lot more difficult to run this project. We needed to understand their relationship with the villagers and their continued accountability for what they had started.

“Continuous feedback between the drama team and ‘scientists’ was a key aspect of the process and a key factor influencing the ability of the scenarios to be meaningful to local participants” (George, student researcher)¹²

- The research institution and the villagers

Another dynamic that we had to be aware of was the villagers' expectations of the academic institution that the student researchers represented. The fact that students came from that particular institution carried with it loaded expectations from the villagers of long-term support. This was a particularly difficult dynamic to deal with and one that we believe often comes up in research situations.

“Even though we have had an open day people of our team felt that we left the village now with an uncomfortable feeling. This is almost always the case at the end of a research, because as a researcher you raise very high expectations. You are not a neutral person but a stakeholder in the process.” (Marjorielein, evaluator)¹³

Layers of transformation

¹¹ De Jong, M. 2004

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ *Ibid*

In theatre for transformation, the transformation is manifold. The theatre does not merely happen on the day of the workshop but is being played out from the start of the process, from the moment the head of research or in our case the project leader and the drama co-ordinator meet. If theatre is to be truly transformational in the village itself, elements of transformation have to pervade the modus operandi of the entire initiative. We could not presume that we ourselves would not be changed by our experience, that we stood outside of and separate from the villagers. Future scenarios affect us all and in acknowledging this, we get to know each other and influence each other's futures.

The purpose of research – some alternative approaches

A dominant understanding of research is that it is a separate activity that happens separately to implementation or learning, for example research happens, then we do a drama on future scenarios, then the villagers take action, Essentially the villagers and the research are two separate entities. This is the view of the first and to some degree the second scenario represented above.

There is another approach that is context based and where all three happen at once when research itself becomes a social practice.

“...research is sometimes thought of as to merely implement a sub-set of a finite number of methodological steps through which a neutral-minded researcher ‘discovers’ a truth about the topic being researched – a truth which she remains distanced. To understand research as (social) practice is to see it as a more creative and socially shaped process in which researchers make active decisions and socially shaped interpretations...”¹⁴

In the first scenario, the drama co-ordinator was asked to come in at the end of the process without the researchers' direct input and involvement. It was presumed that their research results would be enough and that the drama team would just apply these. We would prefer aspects of the third scenario where the context is shared continually rather than having to almost begin from scratch. In this way the expectations of villagers and potential misunderstandings could be included in theatre for transformation workshops and worked with in the form of future scenarios. In this way the research, using theatre for transformation as a potential methodology becomes a process of shared meaning making and social action.

Other roles for theatre for transformation

Drama can be used in research and rural development for more than reporting back research results. It can also deal with apparent and hidden issues such as:

¹⁴ Janse van Rensburg, 1999.

research relationships, relationships to power, issues of misunderstanding, resolving conflict, practicing for action¹⁵ etc. It depends on one's approach to research and one's understanding of drama. If one views research as accumulating knowledge then using a play is pointless, but if research is a process of emancipation¹⁶ then drama becomes a useful method to work through the issues of all those involved towards a level of equality.

If one views drama as entertainment or as a conveyer of information(as in the first scenario), or if this is the aim of one's intervention then one does not need to go to great lengths to involve everyone, to access villagers opinions. Then the best way forward is just to work from a script. But if one's view of drama is as a process of transformation and one's research aim is emancipation, then it is in the process of creating the drama that transformation and learning takes place.

“...the first requirement of drama is that it happens in a space. Initially, the space is neutral. It invites the playmakers to act in and upon it, transforming it into the environment in which the human drama will take place. The participants bring to the space their own preconceptions, ideas and backgrounds with the intent of creating a representation of the world and its possibilities as they perceive it... The space that the dramatic stage provides us with is a wonderful practice ground for real life”¹⁷

With this in mind, the drama process we were involved in could be extended to deal with conflicts and issues that are blocking progress, such as the current conflict between Rhodes and another village in the area, and the unresponsiveness of government officials. This is where villagers themselves can develop dramas to express and resolve their own discomforts.

In our context, the aim was to use theatre for transformation to report back results in the form of the complex idea of future scenarios. There can be no doubt that with this aim in mind, theatre is a good technique to use but without the underlying approach of the drama team this may not have been the case.

“I understood the play and I liked it. On stage it reflected exactly the villagers, so I know that you have kept in mind what you have seen in the village. It is also a part of freedom. It is very important to us to be involved in decision making. We feel we actually do something for the village. This is very important.” (Villager after the drama)¹⁸

¹⁵ Burt, J & van Niekerk, D. 1999.

¹⁶ This is the aim of Critical Theory. Critical theorists challenge the traditionally given reasons for research and what the outcomes of research should be. It critiques the role of the researcher in society as perpetuating the status quo by seeing research only as a form of gaining knowledge and understanding. So called valid topics of research and results of research are seen as being controlled by and benefiting those in power rather than addressing issues that would directly benefit the poor (Freire, P, 1972)..

¹⁷ Burt, J & van Niekerk, D. 1999

¹⁸ de Jong, M. 2004

A CONCLUDING NOTE....

The way we have written this paper is the way we presented the dramas in the villages. We took previous knowledge (based on some of our own experiences) and created three potential scenarios just as in the project we used data collected by student researchers in collaboration with villagers. The villagers were asked to respond to these scenarios to see whether they related to their experience (as well as how they would respond to each potential future). We have asked you to do the same for our three scenarios by asking you to respond to them and also to use your experience by creating the rest of the play. As a researcher and practitioner you probably have found yourself in all three of the above scenarios in one or many of the roles described. We have asked you how you would have responded to each one? No one is necessarily better than the other is, although we all have our particular approach. What we will leave you with is one more question, which highlights our personal approach to drama, development and research. In the paper we have only given you the freedom to respond? How would things have been different, had we asked you to co-create the three scenarios with us right from the start?

REFERENCES

- Boal, A. 1979. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. London: Pluto Press.
- Burt, J. 1999. Dramatic Learning. Masters thesis. Rhodes University, Grahamstown.
- Burt, J. & van Niekerk, D. 1999. Changing Spaces: The possibilities of drama in/for environmental education. *EEASA conference proceedings. 7 – 10 September 1999*. Rhodes University, Grahamstown.
- De Jong, M. Evaluation of Theatre for Transformation for future scenario planning. Rhodes University, Grahamstown.
- Friere, P. 1972. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin Press.
- Gough, N. 1998. Decolonising Sustainability: Subverting and Appropriating Mythologies of Social Change. In *Southern African Journal of Environmental Education 19*. Pg 3-13.
- Janse van Rensburg, E. 1999. They say size doesn't matter... judging knowledge claims in different research frameworks. *EEASA conference proceedings. 7 – 10 September 1999*. Rhodes University, Grahamstown.
- Lotz- Sisitka, H & Burt, J. 2003. Being Brave: Writing appropriate texts in environmental education research. *Canadian Journal of environmental education*.
- Mda, Z. 1993. *When people play people*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- Motteux, N. 2003. *Guidelines for Participation in Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) in South Africa: Participatory Guidelines*. WRC publication 1233/2/03. Pretoria.

O'Toole, J. 1992. *The process of Drama: negotiating art and meaning*. New York: Routledge.

Peterson, G.D, G.S. Cumming & S. R Carpenter. 2003. Scenario planning: A tool for conservation in an uncertain world. *Conservation Biology*. 17(2): 358-366.

Shackelton, C. 2003. Gariep Basion, 2033. The Gariep Basin Millenium Ecosystem Assessment Scenarios Chapter. Draft document.

Van Maanen, J. 1995. An end to innocence. The ethnography of ethnography. In J. Van Maanen (Ed), *Representation in Ethnography*. Sage: Thousand Oaks CA.

PERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Cundill, G. Masters student in the Department of Environmental Science, Rhodes University, Grahamstown. January 2004.

Scheepers, K. Masters student in the Department of Environmental Science, Rhodes University, Grahamstown. January 2004.