

# Narrative Theatre for Social Action: A skill for psychosocial workers

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*This article describes the general use of Narrative Theatre and the skills needed by facilitators. The context of using Narrative Theatre in the long term to strengthen social action is described. Emphasis and detail is given to the short-term application of Narrative Theatre as an activity or event. The importance of structural support in terms of management, supervision in the field and on-going training is highlighted. Practical application is illustrated by an example from the field.*

**Keywords:** narrative theatre, collective behaviour change, community planning, social action, psychosocial strategies.

## Introduction

In an earlier edition of this journal an article was published on the theoretical framework and the roots of Narrative Theatre (Sliep & Meyer-Weitz; 2003). Narrative Theatre makes use of drama that is constructed out of the lived experience of the people involved in the work. This experience is used to stimulate creative problem solving and lessen the effects of problems on their lives. Using people's own life stories ensure that the work is done in culturally and contextually appropriate ways. It also puts people in the driver's seat, highlighting that they are the experts in their own lives. A drama is created based on their stories

and recognisable to the audience, which is then played out. The effects of the played out story on all those involved are examined by the participants. Through dialogue as well as experiential and experimental learning, a new drama is created of a preferred outcome that incorporates the strengths of the participants. It is the role of the facilitator to enable a safe space that creates an opportunity for reflection and deeper understanding of both the problem and possible solutions as a way to decrease the effects of the problem. The process deals equally with the problem story and with eliciting people's strengths. Ultimately the problem story is decentred and the preferred strength-based story enriched and centred (Sliep & Meyer-Weitz; 2003). Narrative Theatre emphasises the use of dynamic participation with thematic contents through a process of critical consciousness (Sliep, et.al., 2004; Sliep & Meyer-Weitz, 2004). For the full impact and potential of Narrative Theatre to develop, it needs to be placed into a long term perspective. Social transformation is embedded in the method that can only take root through revisiting problems with a long term vision and careful planning and implementation. This article will focus on the short-term methodology of Narrative

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Theatre as applied during a community event. The specific skills required by facilitators are highlighted and brought to life through the illustration of a case example. It is recommended that the theory-based article be read in conjunction with the current article if ideas are going to be used in the field. A strong theoretical understanding should drive the applied methodology.<sup>1</sup>

### Context of Narrative Theatre

Narrative Theatre is an additional skill provided to psychosocial workers which equips them to work more concretely in a group or community setting to deal specifically with problems that are more socially constructed. The training is provided at different intervals depending on the assessment of their skills on an on-going basis. Psychosocial workers have applied Narrative Theatre to the following themes in a community context: domestic violence; alcohol abuse; polygamy; discrimination; HIV; family disputes; drug abuse; early marriage; rape; forced marriage; mental

health problems; epilepsy; purposeful poisoning; child abuse; medical health issues; school drop-out.

Using Narrative Theatre takes place both as an event which is short term, as well as an ongoing process aimed at long term outcomes. The inserted diagram depicts the long-term effects of using Narrative Theatre as strengthening social fabric and working with social transformation. The short term is depicted in the diagram as audience and facilitator activities taking place during a Narrative Theatre event.

### Narrative Theatre as a long-term process

The best result for working with Narrative Theatre is to apply it on a regular basis as part of a long-term plan. One way is to work with an audience in the same geographical area using a variety of themes over time. The local leadership and community committees are involved and the activity is conducted as a community based collective process. The vision is to work



towards strengthening social fabric and social transformation. In this context social fabric includes two main concepts namely social capital and cultural capital.

The concept of social capital has been used to describe types and levels of connections or networks among individuals, within families, friendships, and communities including the exchange that arises from them and the value of these to achieve mutual goals (Muntaner, 2001; Putman 1995). Putman (1995) referred to norms and trust that contribute to the co-ordination and co-operation of people for mutual benefit (Sliep & Meyer-Weitz; 2003). Cultural capital refers to non-economic forces like family and social background as well as cultural influences and the way in which norms and values are carried over which could be both at a family and institutional level. It also includes cultural goods like oral histories and objects like forms of art. Cultural capital is nurtured through investment and commitment from the members of the collective (Bourdieu; 1998). It embodies what people know and can do and is elicited through the stories told in Narrative Theatre. To develop social capital the facilitator needs to concentrate on stimulating high levels of participation and increased levels of trust. Bringing forth local knowledge and encouraging the development of appropriate cultural resources will result in the development of cultural capital which can be transferred in symbolic capital (Santasombat; 2004).

On a practical level the facilitator views Narrative Theatre as a vehicle to increase awareness and gain momentum to achieve desired change over time. The following activities form part of such a process:

- *Community entry.* Negotiating entry into the community depends on the context of the work. In rural communities, man-

aged under traditional leadership, there are known protocols that have to be adhered to. The local leader is approached through the right channels to discuss problems experienced by that particular community.

- *Ownership of programme.* Observations from the leader and significant others included in the meeting as well as the community facilitator are exchanged. Problems are named and prioritised. Commitment is gained from the community leadership and the psychosocial worker to deal with the identified problems.
- *Identification of a long term vision.* Care is taken to include the strengths of people. Formulating a desired long-term vision for this community is part of the process. The leadership is encouraged to explore and affirm with the community what the long-term vision is and to gain a local commitment from all to work towards this vision
- *Long term planning.* Narrative Theatre as a strategy to increase awareness, stimulate creative collective problem solving and strengthen social fabric is discussed. The importance of regular follow-up to integrate knowledge and translate it into sustained behaviour change is shared. Space and support for these activities on at least a monthly basis have to be created from both a community and an organisational level.
- *Reflection after each activity.* After each activity a meeting is held with the local leadership who attended the activity to reflect and strengthen possible outcomes. Decisions are made on whether a specific theme will be repeated or what the next theme will focus on. Dates for follow-up activities are planned. The long-term vision is also revisited during these reflections.

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- *Yearly participatory evaluation.* Apart from the monthly reflections a more official evaluation needs to be incorporated into the work plan. The planning and implementation of this evaluation needs to be done with full participation of the community through the leadership.
- *Including outsider witnesses.* Creating opportunities for the leadership and other members of the community to share with outsiders their journey of dealing with problems enhances the possibility of creating an identity of strength and ability. It simultaneously decreases the sense of dependency and helplessness. Sharing stories of success, struggles and intentions can be done with surrounding communities, visitors to the organisation or with other stakeholders in the area.

### **Narrative Theatre as an event**

Part of the overall process involves many planned Narrative Theatre activities or events. The following description of methodology as used during each Narrative Theatre workshop should only be seen as a guideline. During the process, a drama is created which is based on real life experiences of the attending audience – this is referred to as a forum. The forum is used to examine experiences, decide on the effects that certain ways of doing things have on people and trying out different ways to get to more desired results. It is the intention of the work that people ultimately develop different ways of relating to each other, based on mutual respect and care and as well as dealing more creatively and relationally with problem solving. These are big aspirations that are not achievable in a single forum session. The strategy therefore necessitates that the participants are exposed multiple times to the same methodology although themes that are worked

with could differ. Participation of the audience is crucial to increase efficacy in establishing sustained behaviour change and creative problem solving.

Although the direction of work will be determined by those who participate in the process, the facilitator hopes to contribute to the outcome by:

- promoting creative problem solving
- building efficacy and capacity to create a realistic preferred reality
- ability to transfer skills to different contexts
- building self- and collective confidence and esteem
- fostering mutually supportive relationships

In summary the stages summed up in box 1 can form a guideline for Narrative Theatre. However, there is no strict order and stages could be attended to simultaneously. More important is that the facilitator is able to see the work as a process with different levels of complexity. It is the task of the facilitator to make associations both implicitly and explicitly between experience and knowledge, subjectivity and experience, and eliciting realistic future outcomes depending on the context. This requires that the facilitator engages in a process of reflexivity of self as well as stimulating a process of reflexivity in others.

### **Specific skills required by facilitators**

*Ability to work in a community context.* Often when psychosocial workers see clients individually, the problem is actually rooted in a social context. Certain values, norms and inter relational issues directly contribute to the experienced problem. Finding an outcome for the problem therefore also lies within the social realm, and not only within the individual. Creating an opportunity for a group of people, or in this case mem-

## Stages in the process of conducting Narrative Theatre

- Establish the community with whom the work is going to be done.
- Create an opportunity to present identified problem/s to an audience.
- Create and hold a safe space for participants in which people will feel free to contribute spontaneously.
- Facilitate a democratic decision on what the focus of the work will be for the day.
- Invite someone to tell a story that will depict a scenario that is recognised by others in the audience as something that could happen in their community.
- Invite a few people from the audience to act out the story.
- Create a dialogue with the audience to unmask the effects that a specific problem has on the different people involved and to create a better understanding about the circumstances surrounding the problem.
- Stimulate the audience to take a position on whether they like the outcome of the drama and ask what outcome they would have preferred.
- Ask participants what they would have done instead if they were in the shoes of the other person.
- To increase the level of efficacy participants are asked to try out their suggestions taking the role of the actors involved. By taking the role of someone in the story, the participant can both experience the position of the other and experiment with alternative interventions.
- Externalise specific problems, strengths or feelings to increase visibility and importance of issues that are more hidden or abstract.
- Any of the characters that have been externalised can be interviewed to deepen understanding.
- Care needs to be taken that the focus is shifted to people's strengths and to not get stuck at the problem level. Through facilitation of the process, personal and collective self-esteem is enhanced.
- Once a solution has been proposed that the group endorses as a preferred outcome, the whole drama has to be re-enacted – this time with the preferred end, ensuring realistic interventions at all times.
- Guidance needs to be provided on additional steps that need to be taken to transfer these skills into the real situation.
- Building understanding and efficacy around creative problem solving and sustained behaviour change is a process that needs to be revisited many times.

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bers of the same geographical area, to discuss a problem that is recognisable and possibly shared by many members of the community, will lead to more collectively generated solutions. A community to work with could also be a church audience, a women's group or a group of neighbours and friends who want to discuss a particular issue. If the community is within a specified geographical area it is possible to mobilise people through the local leadership. The 'gatekeepers' of the community are approached. The intentions of the work as well as possibilities of the themes that could be worked with then are identified and discussed. Once permission has been granted, either the local leaders call the meetings or facilitators could use other means such as an attraction like traditional dancing or drumming to gather people. If the community that the work is done in is within a different context like a school setting, one would approach management for permission and negotiate a mutually accepted time – an example in this case would be to deal with a problem like early school dropout. A committee can also be set up that is representative of the community to which accountability and feedback can be done on a regular basis.

*Ability to maximise participation of the audience.* An audience can serve a few purposes. People can look at a shared problem without feeling exposed. In an active audience you can facilitate dialogue and debate. A lively discussion takes place that aims at deepening understanding. A good discussion would create an opportunity for participants to listen and be listened to and to have a chance of speaking. It helps if people try and understand each other's perspectives. If for instance a debate develops between men and women that drives to polarised views it is no longer useful. In this

case it could be interesting to deliberately do role-reversal in terms of gender and to interview the characters on how they experienced that particular role. It is in instances like these that reflexivity is actively stimulated and made overt in the discussion. Intergenerational role reversals also work well for this purpose.

Creating an active audience becomes easier with experience. Music, dance or any kind of movement can lead to greater activity and participation. Doing exercises or participatory activities that involves everyone can be used – these are often referred to as energisers. Asking members of the audience to be involved in small easy activities rather than asking them to play long involved and complicated roles is important. The facilitator is usually also the director – but the person who is central to the story can also be the director. People can be asked to make a sculpture of a moment in a story that stands out for them. This is usually less threatening than working with words. It may be important to set some boundaries that could help people feel safe to express their views. The audience can be asked to understand that everyone will contribute from their own experience and that they should not be judged or criticised for these. It can also be acknowledged that every contribution will help to deepen understanding of the problem discussed and people who contribute are helping to create a stronger community. The facilitator should understand that it is also acceptable if people decline to participate.

*Ability to create a forum to facilitate collective problem solving.* A forum is basically a word that is used for the drama that depicts a particular theme and the space that is created to enact such a drama. The context will determine the protocol that will be followed at the onset of a forum. If the local leader

made the forum possible, traditional welcoming rituals will first be completed. The topic is then introduced and the reason for working with that particular theme is explained. It is also possible to go into the forum without a theme and to let the theme evolve from suggestions by the participants on issues that they are concerned about. The forum should not take longer than two hours unless there has been a clear request or indication that it is what the audience wants. Usually it happens at a time of day that people are not involved in other responsibilities and activities, which is often later in the day. Participants need to be able to participate in a forum without feeling that they are neglecting their other duties as that will diminish participation or cause participants to leave early.

The characters that play in the forum usually come from the audience. When facilitators are still inexperienced they sometimes prefer to start off with using volunteers who come from the same area and that are briefed before hand. To differentiate characters from other members of the audience and to help the characters get into their roles, some simple props like a headscarf, sarong or hat can be used to depict certain characters. One way of involving people from the audience is to ask whoever makes a suggestion about a follow-up action, to come forward and show the people how it could be done. Those participants are not necessarily leaders but people who are contributing in terms of their own unique experience. It is emphasised that participants do not have to be good actors to participate. An alternative is to initially use volunteers that are briefed beforehand on shared problem story whom then construct and practise the drama. The scenario is then played out to the audience and the participants from the audience get drawn in as a dialogue

about the drama develops.

Example: a teacher blackmails one of his female students into having sex with him. After she had sex with him she becomes HIV infected. The audience recognises that this kind of scenario happens often and would like to change the outcome. The facilitator asks the audience what they would have done if they were in this girl's shoes. A man from the audience suggests that the girls should threaten to expose him to the principal. The man who made the suggestion is asked to join the platform and take on the role of the girl. The actor now tells the 'teacher' to go jump in the lake and leave 'her' alone. The audience objects that this would not happen in real life – in the drama a moment like this is called 'magic'. The facilitator asks what could be done that is more likely to work in that specific context. A woman suggests that it is not possible to directly confront the teacher because of the power difference. It would be better to go directly to the principal after the first intimidation. The woman is now called into the platform and takes over from the man who played the role of the schoolgirl. That section of the play is repeated. The woman goes along with the teacher but says he must see her after school and then approaches the principal when she leaves. The facilitator asks the audience what they think about this approach. A debate develops around the appropriateness of making the teacher think he will get his way. Someone else suggests that the principal will not listen to the schoolgirl. The person who made the suggestion is then invited on the stage as the principal ...and so the play evolves bringing in more members from the audience and demonstrating the complexities of the situation. During every discussion a deeper understanding is developed.

*Ability to externalise problems and to use the tech-*

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*nique in Narrative Theatre.* Initially the concept 'externalising' was introduced into the field of family therapy in the 1980's by Michael White and David Epson (1990). In therapeutic practices one of the main uses of externalisation has been to enable people to realise that there is a difference between the problem and the person, emphasising that you may battle with a problem but that you are not the problem (Morgan, 2000; Zimmerman, Dickerson, 1996). In the work described we focussed on the use of externalisation in a community context.

An additional value of externalisation in this context is that it can be used to create more visibility around issues that need to be highlighted. This could be because a strength like *Courage* is masked by the problem, or the effects of a problem remains hidden like *Discrimination* or something too abstract for the audience like dealing with the concept such as *HIV*. One of the participants can be asked to play the character of the externalised feeling or issue. Having a character in the forum means that the play can be stopped and the character can be interviewed to increase understanding.

*Ability to work with the problem story.* One of the challenges of the facilitator is to create an understanding that problems are often socially constructed and created over time. The aim of working with the problem story is to create a deeper understanding of the problem itself, the circumstances under which the problem becomes worse and how the problem operates in people's lives. The facilitator aims at creating a distance between the problem and the person in order to feel more in control of taking charge of their lives. Once the problem is located outside of the person a space is created to have a discussion with the person about his or her own relationship with the problem. It also allows for the facilitation of

greater responsibility to deal with the problem. Social practices that promote, sustain or nurture the problem can be explored. A very useful practice is to explore the effects of the problem on their sense of self; how they view themselves in different roles because of the problem; their work and social life; on their physical life and especially on the lives of other people around them. It can be determined as a number of questions that result in what is called the mapping of the problem. A number of steps can be taken during the process of working with the problem story:

- Describe the general problem
- Identify the underlying main problem and give it a name
- Explore the effects of the problem, also called mapping the problem
- Make a visual snapshot or frozen statue of the problem to get people into an acting mode
- Discuss what is seen and not seen
- Externalise aspects of the problem where appropriate
- Describe how big the problem is by asking the involved participants to demonstrate it non-verbally
- Involve everyone's voice that is affected by the problem
- Search for the unseen and the unheard
- Deconstruct power relations
- Generate gendered discussions
- De-centre the problem by creating a space for attention on a more strength based quality or story.

Although it is strongly recommended that participants work with actual stories from the audience it may not always be possible. One such example would be in the case of sensitive stories like rape. In this case it would be more appropriate to take a story from a similar setting and ask the audience if they recognise that something like this

could happen. It will be the effects of rape and not the rape itself that would be worked with.

*Ability to bring forth people's strengths.* It can be assumed that people do not only have problem stories of their lives. Even when a problem has been very overwhelming, there would be moments that people have good experiences and make sure of their abilities and strengths. It is by becoming more in touch with these strengths and abilities that people become more energetic and hopeful about life. It is this hopefulness and energy that can also be used to counteract the effects of problems. The facilitator actively aims at eliciting a description of self that is based on strengths and does not include a problem description. During the process strong personal and collective qualities are identified and named. Stories can be told about when else these qualities came out and how others have described them in terms of these qualities before. The exploration, discovery and affirmation of local knowledge, strengths and abilities increase self-efficacy, which in turn leads to creative and collective problem solving. In the search for joint solutions, a collective identity is fostered through which social action becomes possible. There is a constant alternation between working to strengthen a collective identity and stimulating collective action.

There will be times when the focus will be on the Problem-story and other times in the process when the focus will be on the Strength-based story. The facilitator needs to make the connection between the two stories. Generated stories of strength are used to bring forth certain characteristics or qualities that could be used to counteract problems. Once these have been named, the problem story can be revisited and the audience can be asked how these traits

could be put to use to make the problem smaller.

*Ability to stimulate personal and collective esteem.*

It is important for the facilitator to create an environment where people feel connected and resilient. There are many proverbs that highlight that, collectively, people are stronger than on their own. In the English language a saying like 'united we stand, divided we fall' would be such an example. Asking participants to name some of the proverbs in their language could elicit the naming of shared values and norms of that particular community. The facilitator can wonder what the binding glue would be that would keep this community together. Another way in which the collective identity can be reinforced is to ask the group for examples in their history when they had experienced hardships but had stood together. The more strength-based stories are shared, the stronger the sense of collective esteem will become. It may also become necessary for members from within the community to challenge norms that are counterproductive to some members in that community due changing circumstances and context. At the end of the process a community manifesto of what the community stands for could be drawn up.

The work is not based on any essentialist notions or absolutes, which claim that there is only one right way of approaching the work. Neither does it advocate an *anything goes* attitude. It is important that every phase and step is planned according to specific intentions of the facilitator and is informed by a clear theoretical understanding. At no stage should the facilitator be seen as an expert on people lives but the facilitator does need to be grounded in the knowledge, skills and methodologies of Narrative Theatre.

Mostly the concern of the work is about

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working with emerging possibilities, including the various points of view of all involved and examining the effects of various ways in which complex situations can be approached. People will construct meaning through their experience that is elicited through Narrative Theatre. It is the role of the facilitator to ensure that a topic is not dealt with in a superficial manner. The kinds of questions that are asked from the audience could actively encourage reflection and deeper understanding. The audience is encouraged to steer away from accusations, judgements, shaming or blaming.

### **Training Facilitators of Narrative Theatre**

Preparing facilitators in the use of Narrative Theatre can best take place in phases. After each training-phase, the potential facilitators should be given the opportunity to try out their skills in the field and return with examples of difficulties or emerging questions.

*Phase 1:* During this phase, the trainees should be introduced to the use of interactive drama working with emerging stories. They should start building up knowledge about the concepts involved and develop skills to plan, facilitate and evaluate a drama independently from the trainer. At this stage, use may be made of volunteers who are prepared for the expected role as actors for the forum.

*Phase 2:* During this phase, trainees should learn about more specialised use of characters depicting externalised feelings, issues or desired strengths. They should learn to make use of members of the audience at the time of the conducted forum as main characters for the drama. They should be introduced to working with critical consciousness and reflexivity. They should be able to transfer skills of creative problem-solving

applied in one setting to other contexts and problems.

*Phase 3:* During this phase, trainees should build up skills aimed at fostering a collective identity (based on a shared value system of the community in which the work is conducted). During this phase, attention should also be given to skills that increase a sense of social responsibility and strengthen the social fabric of a community. The participants are encouraged to use the obtained skills in other communities, family discussions as well as individual counselling settings.

### **Supervision and support**

In addition to building the skills of the facilitators, structural support will be necessary to increase the possibility of achieving set outcomes. For Narrative Theatre to work in the field a strong commitment from management is needed to see the work through. Regular field activities that are part of the job description and weekly work plans are essential and should be reported on regularly. Supervisors that understand the process and are able to provide on-going training and support form an important bridge between training and the transferring of knowledge and skills into practice. Evaluation can also be built in during supervision with the active participation of both the facilitators and the participants. The supervisors may also be in a strong position to link the facilitators with other organisations and projects in the area to increase capacity building and support.

Dealing with overwhelming problems over a long time can have a debilitating effect on psychosocial workers. Narrative Theatre does provide a more energetic way of working with problems as it focuses on strengths and incorporates humour. It is also important to create opportunities for outsiders to

witness the work, which further enhances a sense of positive self-esteem and efficacy. In Narrative Therapy this is referred to as a re-telling, creating multiple opportunities for both the community and the facilitators to be more in touch with their strength-based stories. It will also create the possibility of diffusion of innovations on a grass roots level. This level of support has to be mobilised by the management.

### **A case study from Burundi**

For purpose of the article examples will be drawn from the framework of narrative theatre training workshops provided to psychosocial workers employed by TPO (Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation) in Burundi. The project for Psycho Social Interventions for Victims of Violence in Burundi was started at the end of 1999 after a 10-month pilot. The aim of the programme is to provide psychosocial help to a group of approximately 150,000 internally displaced people and refugees mainly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The psychosocial workers in Burundi are faced daily with major challenges ranging from support to survivors of violence and of human rights violations, to HIV-infected and AIDS patients as well as support to people who are affected by the devastating consequences of poverty and disintegrated social systems.

After an introduction training of Narrative Theatre had been completed and participants had been given a few months to practice their skills in the field, a field visit was conducted. The main focus of the activity was to deal with alcohol abuse in a particular community. The field example cited in this article is only for clarification of the methodology and as an illustration of evaluation. The exercise was translated to English and rewritten for easy reading.

Only excerpts of the activity have been included. Comments (in brackets) are added by the author after every section to enhance understanding of the practical application of Narrative Theatre.

- *Preparation.*

The facilitator had visited this particular community before and now returned for a second visit. He had negotiated a time and the theme with the local chief. The forum was done with a gathering of about 60 people.

- *Welcoming rituals.*

At the time of the event the chief welcomed the audience and the visitors and the facilitator returned the welcome. (Author's Comment: Introductions will vary according to context)

- *General Introduction.*

The facilitator explained what work TPO does and what the psychosocial workers employed by TPO can do for the community. Alcohol abuse is introduced as the theme of the day as it is a problem that has been reported on frequently within this particular community. (AC: Another way of introducing a theme could be to brainstorm with the audience rather than deciding beforehand what the theme will be.)

- *Invitation of members of the community to act out an every day scenario during which the problem presents itself.*

After volunteers came forward, the facilitator requested them to show to show him what happens if there is a drunkard in the community. The volunteers discussed with each other and acted out the following scene:

*The wife is with the children in the house; the man enters the house and shouts at them, he is drunk. He demands food. The wife says that he did not give her any money to buy food. There is no food. The man wants to beat her; the woman screams and runs away with the children. The man keeps on shouting and waving his arms. The neighbour*

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comes in and asks what the problem is; he tries to calm the husband. The neighbour wants to know what is happening. He talks calmly and softly with the husband but firmly. Holds his arm while he is talking to him and persuades him that he must go to sleep and that he will come back.

The next day: Neighbour comes back to husband and talks to him about the previous night. The husband denies that they met the day before. He asks the neighbour where his family is. The neighbour tells the man that he chased his family away. That he did this while he was drunk and that he wanted to beat his wife.

(AC: The facilitator could ask the audience who else is affected by the problem as an opportunity to invite more characters into the drama.)

The facilitator created a dialogue by asking questions from the audience to map the effects and unpack the problem story.

The following responses were given at different times over a two-hour period.

*P(psychosocial worker / facilitator): What have you seen from the play?*

*M(male participant): The man is a drunkard, he drinks the local beers. Maybe also many other kinds of drinks. You get confused when you drink too much.*

*M: You come back home, you beat your wife for no reason. You just want to fight. Maybe the children want to help but this is in vain. You are drunk. You show no respect. You also beat the children. You do not eat. You think you are strong and you do not like others to interrupt.*

*P: What are the consequences?*

*M: If you are a drunkard you must be taken somewhere. You become useless in your community.*

*F(female participant): Being drunk is showing no respect. You are not responsible.*

*F: If you are drunk you lose your appetite. You even forget your children. One woman even lay on top of her child when she was drunk with this local beer and she did not know it.*

*M: You can fall in a hole and could not get out even*

*for 2 days. It happened to me.*

*F: You do not behave; you pick up women and seek sex. You can also easily use drugs. You can misuse women. You can give the women something to drink, you will even forget about your wife and family.*

*M: Even women are selling beer to survive. A man uses all his economics on drinks and then he comes home and asks where food is. He is the first one to complain and to ask where the salt is for the food - the wife gets beaten like it is her fault.*

*M: You get thin after time - skinny and bony. Your legs will pull you down; your legs will become swollen. You look like you have been poisoned.*

*M: When you are an alcoholic your hand can even steal. You think about stealing or you beg for food at other homes.*

*M: Children can also watch this negative behaviour. One must protect your children from this behaviour. When a man is sober you can talk to him. Then he will feel ashamed. You must keep on trying. Do not just leave him. He might change. I was an alcoholic and I learnt a lesson.*

*M: You have to look after your family and do other things as well.*

*M: With too much drinking you can even die. If you have to drink and you are over drunk, it is a problem. You forget your responsibility, work, your family and yourself is a problem.*

*F: A woman even lost her children - she did not even know where they were.*

*M: If you take some it is OK, but if you take too much it is a problem.*

During the discussion the facilitator summarised the ideas from the community at different times. (AC: The manner in which questions are asked or comments are followed-up will enable further exploration of the root causes of the problem).

- *Mapping the effects of the problem*

*P: What other problems come from alcoholism?*

*M: Cases of more HIV in our community - if you are drunk you can pick anyone anywhere.*

*F: After you get HIV you can get other illnesses*

easily, you must be safer. When you are drunk you do not discriminate and you are not safe. You do not know whom you should go with.

*F: I heard that when you get HIV it can stay with you for 2 days and it goes away.*

*P: You are asking about HIV. Next time when I come I will talk about HIV. But if you get HIV it remains inside of you – it is not true that it will go out of your body in two days. But next time I will talk about it.*

(AC: Although this is an ideal opportunity for the facilitator to explore the myths of HIV/AIDS it could detract from the main discussion and the facilitator chooses to acknowledge the problem and to return to it as a theme on another day)

- *Exploring realistic problem descriptions and interventions through dialogue*

*P: When is drinking a problem? When does it become bad?*

*M: A certain amount is OK, if it is too much it is a problem. There are occasions or ceremonies when it is OK to drink – people share food and drink, the family is together, weddings are OK.*

*M: You need to look after your family, take time for other things also, and not only drink with your friends.*

*M: Once you overtake alcohol it is a problem.*

*P: We have come to create a deeper understanding of alcoholism as a problem in the home and in the community. Alcoholism is in this community and as workers from TPO many incidences are reported of problems that are there because of alcohol. We also know alcohol is part of our culture – it is only a problem when it is misused. Many of us drink but you need to know how much you can drink. Maybe if you know the consequences you will drink less.*

*M: What can be the remedy?*

*F: How can we help someone?*

*F: The brewing of local beer – we have to start there – after at those who sell the beer. Those who sell it also taste it all the time and then you can become an alcoholic.*

*M: You are the professional you need to help us.*

*M: How can you reduce your alcohol once you have tasted it (refers to addiction being in place)?*

*M: With our youth we need to educate them before they enter into that.*

*M: Alcoholism - is there medicine? Can you change even without medicine?*

*M: This sickness in you it goes slowly.*

(AC: The audience is showing clear knowledge about the use of alcohol and the related problems. The facilitator can highlight to the audience how much knowledge they do have amongst them. They also know under what circumstances the problem becomes worse and what pitfalls to look out for. Exploration could be done about examples where they managed to prevent someone from taking too much alcohol. These kinds of interventions are done to encourage a sense of perceived efficacy or belief that they are able deal with this specific problem. A belief in one's efficacy forms a major basis for action).

- *Members of the audience adding more actual stories*

*M: All those local beers have a lot of alcohol. You get drunk easily – if you are too drunk you are put into jail. When you make beer it is illegal. I was bound – I was seriously beaten, put into jail – someone managed to get me out. I felt that I would not do it again. It is something very serious – people have not come to understand it. It is a serious problem. Among us people we are brewing it. Community leaders do not stick to the law – they are bribed and they allow the people to brew it. Officials must start with the leaders in the community. The law is there but not followed. We must take responsibility for our own life. We can not destroy our own lives – we can not wait for the authorities. We have to do something.*

(AC: At this stage a high level of motivation is demonstrated which include the members of the audience who are part of the problem. Rather than label people as alcoholics and increase their isolation and other problems, they can be actively recruit-

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ed into the problem solving. The spirit and courage that people demonstrate is highlighted to contribute to the creation of a positive self-esteem within the individuals and the community. This further increases a sense of ability to take control over a problem or situation).

• *After two hours and exploring different scenarios the forum is drawn to a closure.*

*P: Conclusion now. Thank you for your ideas. Can you tell me what you have learned from this workshop?*

*M (young): I have learned about alcoholism – the consequences and about the dangers the local beer. It is now to each person how to use it and when your neighbour does not know to teach that person, to give ideas how to reduce it. Each person is to look*

*for yourself, your family and your neighbour.*

*More participants contributed what they have learnt from the session.*

*P: In summary we have looked at the consequences, on yourself, your family and the community. You have said one strategy to adopt is to reduce the amount of alcohol you use – you also want help others and give advice to others. You can also come to us for help if the problem is too big for you. We also said you want to teach your youth because they are our future – teach our children when they are still young.*

(AC: Part of the summary could include the contribution that everyone could make to diminish the problem. It is not only up to individuals to take more responsibility but everyone in the community has a role to

### **Interview with Mr Alcohol**

During the training of facilitators Alcohol was externalised as a character. The following questions were asked from the character that played Alcohol:

- *Are you confident that you are going to win in the long-run?*
- *How do you affect individuals, families and communities?*
- *Are you saying that when people are happy you are miserable and when you are happy they are miserable?*
- *What is your intention of bringing misery to people?*
- *Do you like power?*
- *How do I identify people who have been your long time friend?*
- *How do you identify your possible victims?*
- *How do you know which households are easy to enter?*
- *When do your victims become happy and when do they become angry?*
- *Is the happiness you give people long term or short term? HIV/AIDS may kill your friends when they involve themselves in risky sexual behaviour. Do you care about that?*
- *Do you have worries that one time you will suddenly disappear if we gang up against you?*

The answers of Mr/Mrs Alcohol can be very thought provoking. In this particular incident Mr Alcohol made himself very popular by saying he is invited to parties because he can make people happy. Whenever there is anything to celebrate he is there. He even creates jobs through home brewing practices. In this way he tried to convince the audience that he actually does them a lot of good. It brought up the issue of the difference between short term and long term effects of alcohol as well as the amount of alcohol that gets consumed. A lively dialogue developed that brought out the more complex issues of using alcohol.

play which can be highlighted. Policy makers, local leadership, professionals and others also need to tackle the problem – stressing the collective contribution will decrease feelings of isolation and being overwhelmed. It is not expected that behaviour will change instantaneously. It will help the community to generate a concrete plan of action that is based on small steps that are achievable and which they can review over time).

- *Wrapping up the forum.*

The chief, psychosocial workers and visitors thanked everyone including the audience. An invitation was given for the facilitator to visit the community again. After the forum many people came forward to talk to the counsellors about alcohol as a problem but also to ask about other problems they had.

(AC: There are a number of other interventions that the facilitator could have used to increase an understanding of the complexity of the problem. Any one of the characters involved in the play could have been interviewed. Certain effects or manifestations of the problem could also be externalised and interviewed. See box 2 for an example. From the case study it can be seen that the discussion can be taken into many directions. The foundation work that was laid during this session would have to be followed up with more sessions as well as a concrete plan of action.)

## Conclusion

Working with the actual stories of participants is different from coming with a recipe that can be followed with predictability. In the work it is called working with positive uncertainty. With the inexperienced facilitator there may initially be complete uncertainty. Although this can be curbed to some extent by providing a clear schematic out-

line or map of the expected journey, the facilitator needs to know that confidence will develop as a sense of efficacy develops. The same could be expected from the participants. First they may be uncertain of how to respond to the real life situations outside of the narrative theatre. Later, as a level of efficacy develops, they will act with more confidence. It has to be emphasised that the created drama in Narrative Theatre is really the impetus to change with an opportunity to experience and experiment with different positions and strategies. It is important however that there is further mobilisation and environmental support which can lead to desired behaviour change.

In order to evaluate the work it would be necessary to collect good baseline data and develop a good plan of action in terms of what you are trying to achieve. The more often a community is revisited while approaching different problems, the more likely it is that desired long term changes will take place. Measurement does not necessitate pre-decided objectives but can be done through analysing the participation and discourse of the audience which is more of a participative perspective (Storey, 1997) and appropriate to the post-modern theoretical paradigm on which the work is based. Unclear boundary conditions can make it difficult or impossible to predict in advance which members and how many members of an audience will change their behaviour. The outcome further depends on the level of skills of the facilitators of the Narrative Theatre. In the work presented, evaluation has focussed on assessing the participation and the discourse of the participants during the performances for immediate results. For more long-term impact results, measurement of social capital within the geographical communities

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where the Narrative Theatre has been operative over time is completed at different intervals (Meyer-Weitz & Sliep; 2004).

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- <sup>1</sup> TPO sponsored the development of a training manual of Narrative Theatre for the psychosocial workers of Burundi. It includes exercises and practical guidance for each of the described stages and evaluation guidelines. TPO or the author can be contacted for further information regarding the manual.

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