

**Peter Slattery (Therapist Trainer Educator)**  
**PO Box 153 Dulwich Hill (Sydney) N.S.W. Australia 2203**  
**email: [petersla@zip.com.au](mailto:petersla@zip.com.au)    [www.peterslattery.com](http://www.peterslattery.com)**

---

### **Hello from Australia**

I hope these notes prove handy. The workshops we did in Canada together recently were based on these ideas and some of the activities here we worked through together. If you want to talk about anything, please just get in touch.

## **Working with young people**

**Engagement – catching a person’s interest.  
It must happen or nothing else will!**

Engagement is about a person ‘connecting’ with what is happening and how it is happening. It is about the person feeling that what is being explored and how it is being explored has personal meaning for them. This must happen or nothing else will. If a person is engaged they will feel that they want to continue or at least are prepared to continue to see what happens next. There are many issues which are important, but importance does not guarantee interest. Working with young people means catching their attention about these matters; it is about firing their imaginations so together we can explore their lives, what matters to them, what scares or excites them. Engagement is certainly about getting a person’s attention, but it is also about doing this in a meaningful way. It means thinking about what we are hoping to do together and thinking about what might fit for this person, on this day, about this issue, with the time available, so that we can establish the atmosphere, the ‘feel’, the process that we need to start to look at what is important for that person or group.

**WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE...  
SOME THINGS WHICH MIGHT BE TRUE**

- If a young person has not flourished at school then what we offer needs to be different from this
- We need to focus on what matters to them not only what we feel is important
- We may need to help them identify what they are interested in/concerned about/excited by
- A process needs to balance comfort and challenge
- Playfulness is a useful ally
- So is humour
- Interactions need to be creative and based on more than an ability to read and write
- There needs to be ways of working with a person which are other than verbal
- Directness is usually good especially when balanced with sensitivity
- It helps to develop a process which makes it clear what is expected of all involved
- Confrontation is rarely successful
- Expect the best and help it emerge

**IS THERE ANYTHING SPECIAL OR DIFFERENT ABOUT  
YOUNG PEOPLE?**

- Young people often tend to be more active and energetic than adults
- They are still learning, still developing what they think and feel, how they learn, what they want and who they are
- They may be less accepting of some of the silly stuff that adults tend to put up with stuff which is boring, inflexible or meaningless. Their responses can be open and scathing

**DEVELOPING PROGRAMS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

- Find out what appeals. This usually means talking directly to young people
- Ask young people to be involved in content and design
- Then run this past other young people
- Assume young people are a mixed group and reflect this in what you offer

## Some activities that can be useful

### THEATRE ACTIVITIES

Theatre can be powerful because it can show things which are not quite “real”; possibilities, dreams, fears. It can add a sense of the surreal and take people into thoughts, feelings and actions which they would not otherwise consider. “Theatre” here does not mean “terrific performance”, but activities and techniques which are often associated with acting and performing, but which can be adapted for a variety of purposes.

#### **Make a cross and a circle**

With one hand make a cross...stop...with the other make a circle...stop...now do them together.

#### **Purpose**

- To introduce the idea of doing something difficult.
- To get used to the idea of doing things imperfectly and feeling okay about this. (These activities come from Augusto Boal who has written numerous books.)

#### **Image of the hour**

Show us what you are usually doing on week days at 7 in the morning...at 8 in the morning....at 10....at midday.....at 3 in the afternoon.....

#### **Purpose**

- To signal that speaking will not be the only means of communication in the process to follow.
- To develop an exchange between those present. (This activity also comes from Augusto Boal.)

#### **Image Theatre**

Image theatre at its simplest is people using their bodies to show thoughts and feelings. The images which are created may be frozen or involve movement. A number of people together can show quite complex ideas and relationships. It is possible to show not only thoughts and feelings but hopes and dreams, an aspect of a conflict, of a dilemma, of a distressing event, of a fear or a desire, and represent it in the image.

#### **Purpose**

To offer a non-verbal way of communication.

## USE OF IMAGE

Use of image, like use of theatre, does not depend on being good at it. It is unimportant whether people are able to draw or not. This is not a test of artistry, nor is it art therapy. Image is used here as a way of inviting participation in a process. The image can be provided by you (see the following pages on Rating Scales) or you can ask a person to create one.

### **Create an image**

Draw something to represent what the house/you/the family looks like when everything is fine....and when there is some tension/conflict/sadness.

#### **Purpose**

To create a visual representation of a person's feelings. This can be discussed, added to, referred back to.

### **An image of an event**

Draw the story of an event. What happened, who was involved, the time of day, the place.

#### **Purpose**

To create a visual representation of an event so that key moments or key decisions can be identified

### **Drawing 'blind'. (Based on the work of Augusto Boal I think)**

- Close eyes (or avert eyes). (Use same pens and paper)
- Draw your body (OR how you think you appear to others; OR who you are as a person OR you at your best OR...)
- Group leader collects all the drawings, lays them out and everyone tries to guess which one is whose

#### **Purpose**

Fun activity to help people connect with each other and form a democratic group atmosphere

### **A drawing of generosity**

The drawing can of course be of anything at all

- Think of a time when you acted generously...
- Draw something to represent this time...
- Exchange stories. Some people may choose to keep theirs private

#### **Purpose**

To offer a non-verbal form of communication, and to remind people of the contributions they have made to their worlds

### **What do you think?**

People are asked to offer feedback about a programme or group. They are asked to do this with a word or two, or an image. People are asked to say what they most want to tell us about the group.

#### **Purpose**

- To provide workers with feedback about their programme.
- To give participants an opportunity to input into the programme.

## STORY TELLING

Story telling is ancient. It is a way in which we pass on all manner of things to others. It is a way in which we make sense of our own lives. It can be a delightful work of art, a thing of sadness, or a fun thing. The ideas below have a particular purpose. Stories offer people a way of speaking and a way of speaking about issues which may be sensitive for them. Story telling can be you telling a story, the person you are working with telling a story, or it can be constructed together in any number of ways.

### **What's the story here**

- Someone-often the facilitator, draws a series of images. (You can use computer clip art and make the images into an overhead).
- Participants make up and present a story.
- Or you can specify some aspect of the story; offer a starting point. "This person has been having a hard time lately...what do you think is going on in the story?" Or: "This person has a tough decision to make. What might it be?"

### **Purpose**

- To introduce the idea of looking at the "stories of people's lives".
- To enhance communication and expression.

### **A story is told while another acts out the story**

As one person tells their one minute story about anything at all!...a second person "acts" it out, mimes it. If appropriate, numerous people can play parts, or other characters can simply be imagined.

### **Purpose**

- To share stories
- To enrich imagination and to enhance communication

### ***Important!***

It is important that the "acting" supports the story and does not take over from it. It is the other person's story and the acting aims to complement it and enhance it, not dominate it.

## RATING SCALES

Ratings are so useful because they touch on the "grey areas" of an issue. They move away from right/wrong, good/bad distinctions towards more complex and subtle considerations.

There are endless ways of presenting such scales. At times they can be used to deal with serious issues while introducing a useful sense of playfulness.

### **There are the obvious yet still very useful ones**

Any anchor words can be used.

Dreadful \_\_\_\_\_ Wonderful  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Worst experience \_\_\_\_\_ Best experience  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

No fun at all \_\_\_\_\_ Lots of fun  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

### **You can make comparisons**

Imagine a happiness scale:

Miserable \_\_\_\_\_ Ecstatic.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Ratings give people room to move. "Today I'm a 4. Yesterday I was a 1".

### **You can be playful**

How organised are you to put this choice/idea/strategy into action?

I'm as messy as a dog's breakfast \_\_\_\_\_ I'm hot to trot

### **You can be creative**

How well are you managing your drug use/anger/sadness?



How would you describe your struggle to:

- give up.....?
- argue less?
- actually have some fun in your life?
- be more in charge of yourself?



About the same



I think I'm slipping back  
winning



I think I'm

## FEATURES OF THE ABOVE ACTIVITIES

### **THEY ARE USEFUL TO THE PROCESS BECAUSE:**

- THEY OFFER A STARTING POINT,
- THEY CAN OFFER PEOPLE A SHARED LANGUAGE, EG. THE "EXPLOSION", THE "QUESTIONS".

### **THEY ARE ENGAGING (INTERESTING, ATTENTION GETTING) BECAUSE:**

- DIFFERENT STYLES ARE TOUCHED.
  - THERE IS ROOM FOR EXPRESSION WHICH IS NOT EXCLUSIVELY VERBAL.
  - YET THERE IS STILL ROOM FOR VERBAL EXPRESSION.
  - THERE MIGHT BE PHYSICAL ELEMENTS.
  - OR THERE IS A VISUAL ELEMENT.
- THEY MAY DIFFER FROM THE EXPECTED.
- THEY ARE RESPECTFUL.

### **THEY ARE RESPECTFUL BECAUSE:**

- THERE IS CHOICE.
- THERE IS PRIVACY.
- THEY ADDRESS THE PERSON'S ISSUES.
- THEY ASSUME A PERSON IS ABLE. (TO WORK THROUGH AN ISSUE).

WITHIN SUCH A PROCESS, IT IS USUALLY THE CASE THAT ANY FAIR AND SENSITIVE QUESTION WILL BE RESPONDED TO.