**Dialogue Across Difference (D-a-D)**

**A Participation Framework**

**Danny Braverman FRSA (Lecturer in Theatre, Goldsmiths University of London).**

What is the framework?

The D-a-D Participation Framework is an evaluation tool to answer the question: does this participation process “work”? It is a cousin to other uses of the D-a-D framework as a dramaturgical tool and performance analysis. Its primary function is to gauge how effectively a process promotes understanding between groups of people with different life experiences. It is fundamentally about how the individual’s experience of a process (including any performance elements) intersects with a communal experience. Although much participatory arts practice manifests itself within specific interest groups based on age, ethnicity, gender, geography, institutional affiliation and so on, there is always diversity within such groups. In addition, much participatory arts practice has at its heart interaction between different interest groups (e.g. intergenerational work). Implicit in the values underpinning the framework is that participatory performance is a key strategy in bridging difference in a fractured society. The D-a-D participatory framework, while focusing on primary participant experience, also acknowledges the important role of performance events where audience experience is to be valued. As such, it is concerned with aesthetics as well as the personal, educational and social development of participants. Inherently then, it does not see ‘process and product’ as in conflict, but as complementary.

The framework is constantly evolving as part of ongoing research. Anyone is free to use the framework and ideally to acknowledge its source. Feedback on its usefulness is encouraged, so that the framework can be refined.

Who is this framework for?

The framework is designed to be used by artists, arts organisations, participants, stakeholders, students of performance.

What is Dialogue Across Difference?

Dialogue Across Difference (D-a-D) is a broad framework designed by theatre-maker and academic Danny Braverman, that can be used as a tool for a variety of performance activities. In addition to its use in participatory contexts, it can be used:

* To inform the dramaturgy of making performance;
* As performance analysis.

D-a-D is adapted from a tool used by marketing agency Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (MHM) to analyse the motivation of attenders at cultural events. [[1]](#endnote-1)



The chief differences between the D-a-D model (above) and the MHM model is:

* MHM’s “intellectual” strand has been reconfigured in D-a-D as “educational”, with an understanding the learning is an embodied rather than a purely cerebral activity.
* With D-a-D, the three of the four strands are pillars (Educational, Emotional and Social) and contribute to the Spiritual. The MHM model was envisaged as a four-tier hierarchy.

How does the D-a-D Participation Framework function?

The framework should be flexible so that it is the most useful tool possible for anyone interested in evaluating participatory performance projects. The prompts are designed to be used to generate evidence to analyse the effectiveness of a performance project. The analysis should make apparent the interdependency of the four areas. The questions (below) are primarily for qualitative analysis. They could be used (and adapted where appropriate) to garner quantitative data to measure audience response (see table 1 for a simple four question format). It could be beneficial for evaluators therefore to contrast the qualitative and quantitative data.

**DIALOGUE ACROSS DIFFERENCE – OBSERVERS’ GUIDE**

**Social**

What was the welcome like for participants and the wider community?

Prompts:

Look at the signs and codes in place in any venues where the project takes place. For example décor, images, sound/music, signage; the way people are dressed; the way people are addressed; catering; merchandising; staff communication style. This includes rehearsal/workshop spaces as well as the performance venue.

Is this venue welcoming for:

People of all ages?

People from all cultural backgrounds?

People from all class backgrounds?

People with all gender identities?

Disabled and non-disabled people?

What elements *encourage* a sense that everyone is welcome?

What elements *discourage* a sense that everyone is welcome?

What was the social experience like during workshops/rehearsals?

Prompts:

Were there any specific kinds of people that might have felt included or excluded? If so, what in the process leads you to your conclusion?

Were participants interacting with each other during workshops/rehearsals? If so, how? Did people interact with others who they didn’t know beforehand? If so, what in the way that sessions were run encouraged or discouraged this?

What was the experience like before any show started?

Prompts:

What was the buzz like as the audience came in?

What was in place to welcome the audience?

Did anything make them feel uncomfortable or unwelcome? If so, what?

Did the performance in a sense start before the show started? What techniques were used?

How did people find their places (seats)? What was that experience like?

What was the experience of the show like?

Could you discern what the general relationship was between audience and performers?

Do you think the audience bonded in any way with people they didn’t know? If so, how did this manifest itself?

What was the social experience like after the show?

Prompts:

What was the audience response at the end of the show? How shared was it?

Was there a heightened sense of community in the audience? How did this manifest itself?

Were the audience talking to each other as they left the venue? If so, what were they discussing? Their feelings? The issues and themes? The individual performances? Something else?

Was there any discernible interaction between people who didn’t know each other before? How did this manifest itself?

Did many of the audience stay in the venue after the show? What was this experience like?

Overall, did you get the sense that social bonds were strengthened?

Prompts:

Was there anything in the audience’s body language that you can comment on that indicated how strong the social bonds were?

Were there improvements that could be made to the show to strengthen social bonds? If so, what?

How did the experience of social bonding in the audience contribute or otherwise to the learning experience, emotional journeys or spiritual experience of the audience?

**Educational**

Were ideas and themes effectively dealt with in the process?

Prompts:

How did the facilitators introduce themes and ideas? Did they use techniques that could include everyone present?

How did the facilitators manage any differences or disagreements?

Did you feel that the participants had a sense of ownership over the themes and ideas? Did they consider that the story being told was important to them?

Did the process enable a strong sense of self-development?

Prompts:

Were there methods used in the process that encouraged participants to explore their own place in the world (for example, did they work in role to empathise with others)?

Did the participants develop their self-esteem and confidence? If so, how was this achieved and did it work for everyone?

Did the participants develop other skills for application beyond the project, such as workplace, social or communication skills? If so, did this work for everyone?

Were ideas and themes effectively dealt with in the show?

Prompts:

What performance elements were used to deal with concepts and themes? Through image/symbol? Character? Narrative? Were these the best techniques to use to advance understanding?

Could you discern an authorial perspective? If so, what was it and how did it land with the audience?

Were the audience invited to consider their own response to ideas and themes? How didactic was the piece?

How well did the show present its subject matter?

Prompts:

Was there a “world” or area of knowledge that would have been unfamiliar to members of the audience? If so, how was it presented? Would the audience have been stimulated by and curious about any new knowledge?

What effect might any new knowledge have on different members of the audience?

How did it link with the central themes and ideas?

Might the presentation of any new knowledge encourage audience members to find out more?

How accessible was the learning in the show?

Prompts:

How layered was the show? Could audiences members with different backgrounds and experience all engage with elements of the themes, ideas and knowledge?

Do you think audience members might feel confident in expressing their thoughts about the show?

How might the show have been experienced by different disabled people (e.g. with hearing or sight impairments, learning disabilities, communication impairments, experience of mental health difficulties?)

How well did the show stimulate personal growth for the audience?

Prompts:

Were there elements in the show that might encourage audience members to think about their own lives? How might, for example, an audience member consider their own lives in contrast to that of a protagonist, other character(s) or performers?

Was there anything to indicate that audience members might positively change their ways of living?

Were there particular groups of people that might have felt more or less connected to characters or performers? If so, who; and what might be the impact?

Overall, do you consider that there were rich learning opportunities for both participants and audience in the project?

Prompts:

Were there any ways that the project signalled that it contained learning opportunities? What might be the benefits or otherwise of participants’ or audience’s assumption that this was an explicit learning experience?

How did the learning opportunities in the project contribute or otherwise to effective social bonding, emotional journeys or a spiritual experience?

**Emotional**

What was the emotional journey like for participants?

Prompts:

What feelings were apparent as part of the process? Were there moments of joy, love, gratitude, anger, frustration, boredom?

How did the facilitator(s) manage the emotional temperature in the process? Was this effective?

How did the retention of participants to the project reflect how they felt?

Did the project overall provide a positive emotional experience for the participants? Was this true for everyone?

How powerful was the audience’s emotional response during the show?

Prompts:

What can you gauge from audience responses: laughter; applause; sharp intakes of breath; silences; weeping?

Were the feelings shared or different for different audience members? What does this tell you about the emotional impact of the show?

How well did the show create its emotional effects?

Prompts:

What aesthetic tools were used? How did the use of, for example, scenography, lighting, sound, music, image, technology, symbol, genre, poetry, writing and performance style affect the emotional response of the audience?

How effective were the aesthetic tools? What might have been the effect if different tools had been used?

How well did the work of the performers elicit an emotional response?

How appropriate was the emotional response?

Prompts:

Did the audience respond in ways that you surmise were intended by the show? If not, why not?

Did the audience welcome their emotional journey? Were there any feelings of, say, discomfort, anger, boredom or embarrassment elicited? Can you surmise whether these were intentional?

Were there any feelings that led to a sense of catharsis or release for the audience? If so, can you identify when/where they happened and how they were elicited?

Overall, do you consider that the show took the audience on an effective emotional journey?

Prompts:

Can you sum up the shape of the overall emotional journey for the audience?

Was the emotional journey largely welcomed by the audience? If so, can you identify how this was achieved?

Were there audience members who you felt had a more effective emotional experience than others? What life experiences might have led to more or less emotional engagement?

How did the audience’s emotional journey contribute or otherwise to social bonding, their learning experience or spiritual experience?

**Spiritual**

How memorable was the process for participants?

Prompts:

Do you think participants would consider the project important to their lives? Was this true for everyone? How did the social, educational and emotional aspects contribute to this?

Were there moments in the process where the group as a whole experienced a sense of being uplifted, transported beyond their everyday experience? If so, when did these occur and what role did the facilitator(s) have in this?

Did the group as a whole feel that the experience left them more positive/hopeful about the world? If so, did this include everyone?

How memorable was the event itself?

Prompts:

Were there moments in the show where you felt the audience were participating in something “special”? If so, where and how did this occur?

Did the show ever generate a higher level of engagement than the norm of cultural experience?

Do you think the audience might talk positively about the show to others in the future?

If so, how “sticky” do you think the show might be for the audience in the future? Will it fade from the memory or stay with people?

How hopeful was the show?

Prompts:

Even if the show dealt with “darker” content and emotions, how life-enhancing was it overall in terms of illuminating meaning on the human condition?

If there was a sense of hopefulness, how shared do you think it was throughout the audience?

Might it have connected with some more than others? If so, who and why?

How well did the show stimulate the imagination?

Might it have unlocked a disposition to experience the world in a warmer and more loving way?

How uplifting was the show?

Prompts:

How well did the show take the audience beyond their thoughts and senses and create a feeling of unity and connectedness?

How much did the audience have a collective experience where they could be said to have left the “real world” behind?

Did you get the sense that the audience felt inspired?

Overall, how well did the project lift the community beyond their day-to-day experience?

Were there any experiences that equate to, say, religious experiences, or transcendence?

Did the audience experience any strong sense of collective identity and belonging?

Was there any participant or audience reaction that indicated a spiritual dimension to the show, such as collective inhalation, profound silence, joyous and spontaneous clapping and cheering, weeping?

Can you discern how much the social, educational and emotional elements of the performance contributed to any spiritual value?

**Quantitative Analysis – simple participant and audience questionnaires**

This will need to be adapted for many participation contexts. Consider using interactive techniques where form-filling might not be an inclusive approach.

To be adapted to suit each context.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Participant Questionnaire** | | | |
| How well did the project help you to make friends and feel part of a group? | | | |
| Excellent | Good | Average | Poor |
| How well do you think the project helped you to think about yourself and the world? | | | |
| Excellent | Good | Average | Poor |
| What was your emotional experience of the project like overall? | | | |
| Excellent | Good | Average | Poor |
| How important was the project for you in your life? | | | |
| Excellent | Good | Average | Poor |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Audience questionnaire** | | | |
| How well did the experience help you to feel connected to the people around you in the audience? | | | |
| Excellent | Good | Average | Poor |
| How well do you think the show encouraged you to think about yourself and the world? | | | |
| Excellent | Good | Average | Poor |
| How effective was the show in taking you on an emotional journey? | | | |
| Excellent | Good | Average | Poor |
| How well do you think the show gave you a meaningful, memorable and uplifting experience | | | |
| Excellent | Good | Average | Poor |

1. Morris Hargreaves McIntyre. (2005). *Never Mind the Width, Feel the Quality* (pp. 9-13). Manchester, UK: The Museums And Heritage Show. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)