

Pantomime for Three Applications of Nonviolent Action

GOAL

- to give participants a theoretical handle at looking at the three applications of nonviolent action (social change, social defense and TPNI);
- to distinguish TPNI from other forms of nonviolent action.

TIME

80-120 minutes

HOW IT'S DONE

Explain that this exercise has to do with looking at different forms of nonviolent action. Divide the participants into three groups and ask them to meet in three different spots, preferably out of sight of each other.

Give them instructions, written or oral, and give them time to create a group pantomime. Pantomime means action but no talk or sound. (See instructions below.)

Have each group perform for the other two.

Debrief. (Questions below.)

INSTRUCTIONS

Group I

Create a pantomime in which some of you are engaging in injustice against the rest of you. Create a visual way of showing which are those who are doing the injustice. In the pantomime, show the oppressed ones rising up or in some way confronting the injustice, nonviolently. We ask for this realistic note: not all the oppressed ones are united, but this does not necessarily prevent success.

Group II

Create a pantomime in which about half of you are engaged in some collective activity that gives you satisfaction or productivity. Then the other half tries to take over the first group and force it to do some different activity. The first half resists nonviolently.

Group III

Create a pantomime in which one-fourth of you are fighting with another one-fourth of you. Start with arguing, and you can escalate to being physical but it's not OK to hurt anyone. The other half of you not involved in the fight intervene nonviolently to reduce the physicality of the fighting, although not to resolve the conflict.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

Lead a round of applause after each groups' performance. After the first two groups have performed, ask participants, "What are some of the similarities you noticed between the type of action being taken? What is different?"

When all three groups have performed and participants are ready (be relaxed about noise if they are having fun) examine the performances for possible lessons. Explain that we'll first do that group by group, then compare them to each other.

Group I: How did it feel to oppress the others? How did it feel to rise up against the oppression? If you were one of those who didn't rise up, how did that feel for you? Those who rose up: what were the times you felt the strongest? Those who played the oppressor role: what were the most effective things the oppressed did?

Group II: First half: how was it to be interrupted by the second half of the group? [Get feelings] Second half: how was it for you? [feelings] What were the most effective things the first half did?

Group III: Fighters: what were your feelings as you were fighting? Interveners: what were your feelings as you intervened? Fighters: what were the most effective things the interveners did?

Summarize or underline any points made, briefly. What did these three pantomimes have in common? [Then go for the gold of this particular exercise, which is:]

"WHAT DIFFERENCES DID YOU SEE AMONG THE THREE PANTOMIMES?"

Include, in follow-up questions, "What differences did you see in the task or goal of the group that was operating nonviolently?"

As the differences are voiced, clarify the conceptual scheme of the Three Applications of Nonviolent Action with the assistance of newsprint. Especially note that all three are appropriate in different circumstances, and that TPNI is the work that people will be learning how to do in this training.

FURTHER TPNI THEORY: POLITICAL SPACE

It is valuable to introduce the concept of political space at this point. Political space - for social changers and social defenders to have their struggle without killing or minimal violence - is important; and TPNI work can allow for that to happen. In a nutshell, political space is the space an actor can act and not have unacceptable consequences happen to them (at its most extreme being killed; being imprisoned indefinitely or tortured might be other unacceptable consequences depending on the situation). The goal of TPNI is the expansion of political space.

Three ways of introducing political space, depending on your group:

Squeezing political space

Using several people from the "social change" pantomime group, have them do their pantomime over again. This time, use a few other people to encircle the social change actors (that circle, though you don't need to tell them now, represents their political space). Have them make that circle smaller and smaller and smaller until they are closely knit around the social changers. Debrief. "How was it for people?" Use that as a metaphor for describing political space.

Greenhouse metaphor

One can liken social movements to plants: they can both grow over time and both are especially susceptible to outside forces destroying them when they are small and less able to support themselves from the wind, rain, or political executions. TPNI is a way of "protecting" burgeoning social movements, like a greenhouse. TPNI is not about stifling or doing the work of growing the social movement, but about protecting it from the outside forces that seek to destroy it. In that way, TPNI is like a greenhouse.

Raw theory

Using stories and illustrations, give a general explanation of political space. (Deterrence theory as a whole theory gets introduced later. But the concept of political space can be introduced here.)

Use each of these methods to briefly sketch out the four techniques of TPNI, too: accompaniment, interposition, presence, monitoring/observing.

WHERE TOOL COMES FROM:

Pantomime series designed by George Lakey; political space debriefs by Daniel Hunter