

## Water Glasses Exercise

This activity is used by Ouyporn Khuankeaw, a trainer in Thailand who most often works with village development workers, women leaders, monks and nuns, and NGO staff. She finds that popular education/experiential education is easier for participants to get the most out of if they understand that it is actually a different model from the prevailing teacher-centered model.

### Goals

- To assist participants to see the difference between teacher-centered and participant-centered learning
- To make connections between educational model and values such as community and democracy

### Materials

Enough empty glasses for all participants, a large pitcher of water, newsprint or whiteboard and magic markers

### How it's Done

Explain that this is an activity for exploring ways of doing education. Pass out the glasses. Say that this is good activity for being very aware of your internal experience.

Go around pouring some water into each glass. As you go, you can make comments like this: "It's so good to be a teacher sharing my knowledge with you...Oh, I see you also have an empty glass. I'm glad I have so much knowledge to share...So many empty glasses...! I have lots of water here."

Sit in the facilitator chair and look around in a neutral way. Suggest that the participants notice any feelings they have, but don't invite comments at this time. Announce that we'll now do something different: this is the time for participants to get up and move around sharing their water with each other. "Notice your feelings and reactions as you share your water with each other."

After a little bit of their sharing, get up and move among them, adding water as much as possible to their glasses while also receiving from those who want to share back. It's OK if some don't want any more facilitator water, or want to throw a bit of water at you -- some irritation with the facilitator is normal.

Stop the exercise when you see the energy start to go down hill, and ask them to return to their seats.

## **Debrief**

First, ask for feelings. When someone says a feeling you think others may share, ask those who share that feeling to raise their hands. An example of an elicitive question for feelings is: "When the facilitator was pouring into glasses, did anyone check to see if your amount of water was different from someone else's? What was the feeling?"

Ask what the water in the glass represents, symbolically. It's OK if it means different things for different people. Ask participants to focus on the water as knowledge.

How does the simulation reflect what is true in real life?

Suggest that the pouring of water by the facilitator was one model, and the sharing of water by participants was another model. Ask, "Which model seems more supportive of the value of community?"

Depending on the culture you're working in, you may raise the question of how it is that most people in the society value community, yet the schools undermine it through the educational model used. You can also raise questions about which model most supports democracy.