

Participatory Video for marginalized, disadvantaged or otherwise vulnerable groups

VISTA - participatory Video and social Skills for Training disadvantaged Adults
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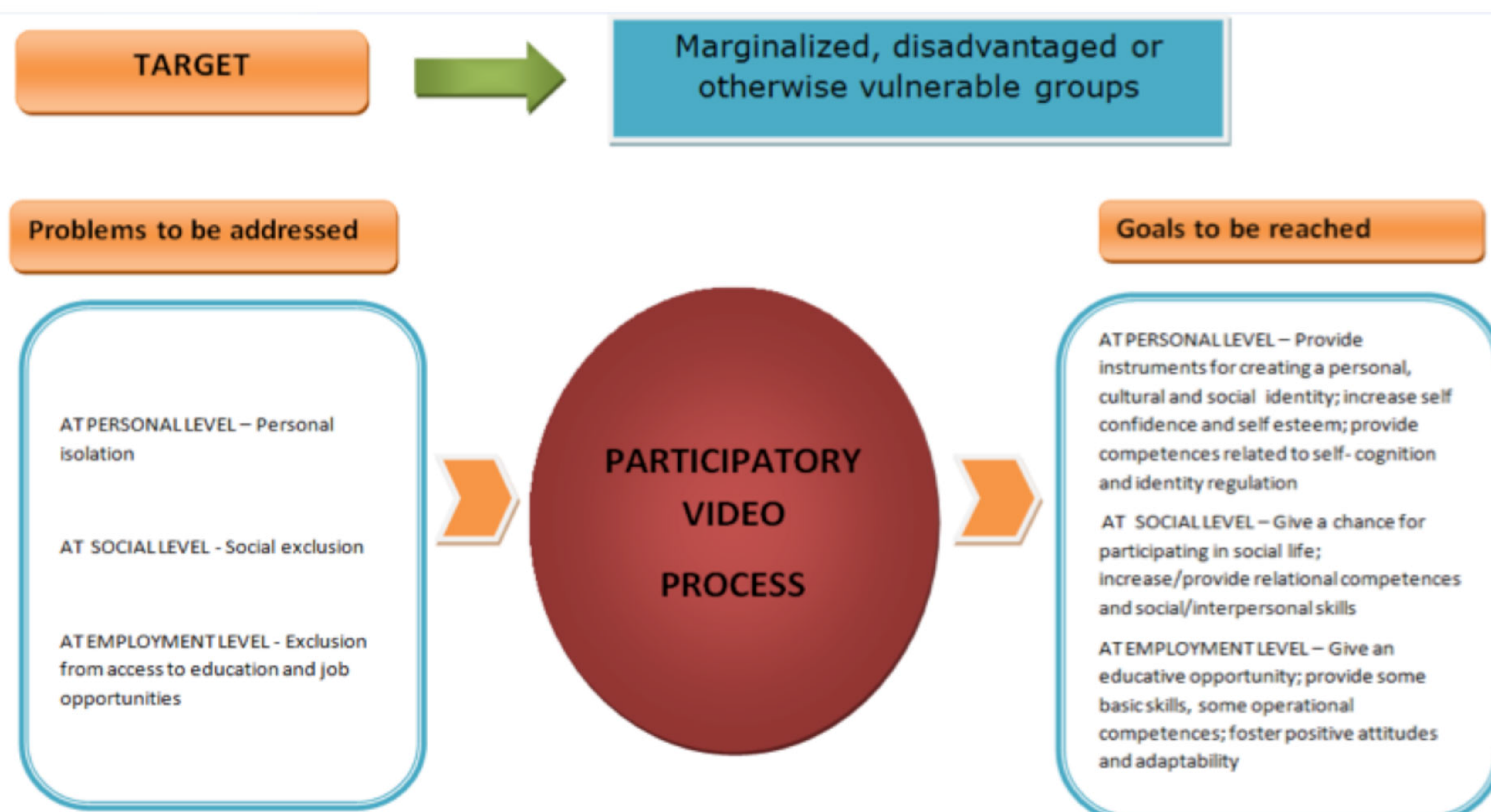
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Short guide for facilitator and trainers

The second phase of the Vista project has been focused on the realization of a short guide for teachers and facilitators about how to manage a Participatory Video activities for marginalized, disadvantaged or otherwise vulnerable groups of adults.

The emphasis of participatory video practice has been placed on process rather than product: PV is directed more towards reflection than towards the actual production since the whole process is centred on participation. It's a path along which emotional and cognitive aspects intersect: new emotions surfacing bring about the acquisition of new cognitive competences. PV carried out in this way becomes a powerful means of documenting people's experiences, needs and hopes from their own perspectives. It can initiate a process of analysis and change that celebrates knowledge and practice, whilst stimulating creativity both within and beyond the community. PV gives a voice and a face to those who are normally not heard or seen. The Vista PV model is represented as the follows :



This guide is split into 4 chapters that are the stages of the PV process

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Stage 1 - Group forming through narration

The starting point of the PV laboratory is the creation of a welcoming and stimulating group environment. Based on participation, collaboration and co-operation, the PV activities have to engage the participants physically, mentally and emotionally in a multisensory experience. The “getting to know each other” can be the first step for the group forming. Other activities (simulation; visualization; role play; free discussion; verbalization of thoughts, questions or experiences; physical movements), based on the different stories of the participants, can give emotional stimulation both individually and within the group. Members can bring their own commitment, their lived experiences and knowledge about what life is like from their perspective, sharing their perceptions and identify, prioritize and appraise their issues.





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Stage 2 - From the Storytelling to the drawing up of a Storyboard

Once reached a good cohesion within the group members, one of the main phases of the VISTA PV process has to start. Through the building and rebuilding of the participants narrations and talks, it must be found out what story/stories the group would like to tell and film. Creative activities have to be organized in order to stimulate ideas, to build the group confidence, to encourage and praise the stories of the members of the group. The facilitator has to stress the group underlining that everyone has a story to tell and a right to be listened to. Some tools and cross-sensory exercises that stimulate creativity can be used as, for instance, using role-play, games and group exercises as well as hands-on facilitation experiences, body movement, drawings.... in order to spur the imagination of people to create original stories that go beyond existing themes and narratives they experience everyday. Sharing these narratives is important not only for their sense of identity, understanding and recognition by others, but as a form of creative expression and advocacy of issues in their lives. Group members can be able to move beyond their everyday lived experiences to reveal poetic and imaginative renderings of their inner voices interpreting, reflecting, and artfully re-engaging in their world. This can be seen as the starting point for the creation of a group storytelling, in which group members, starting from their own narration, can put some elements together thus creating a shared story. The process starts with a germ of some shared ideas. The facilitator has the task to help the participants to bring together different ideas, viewpoints, methods, experiences in one story around a common theme. The conceptualization of the personal narratives for the creation of a script, a sort of storyboard for the PV project, is in general up to the facilitator, if participants are not confident, but ensuring that participants lead this activity and letting the group own the story (better not to instruct or suggest but encourage participants to think about what exactly they want to communicate). The better solution is to create a scenario by using all the ideas of the participants, so they feel that the final scenario is a part of their own story and has points of their own lives, thus letting the group own the final storyboard.

This path can be seen as a jazz song, with a deep structure (the overall storyboard) interspersed with free improvisation (the talks/narrations/ideas of the participants).

This process of working together to create a story is stimulating and can be very empowering. Indeed, planning tools such as storyboards are also helpful ways to ensure equal and meaningful engagement of all participants.

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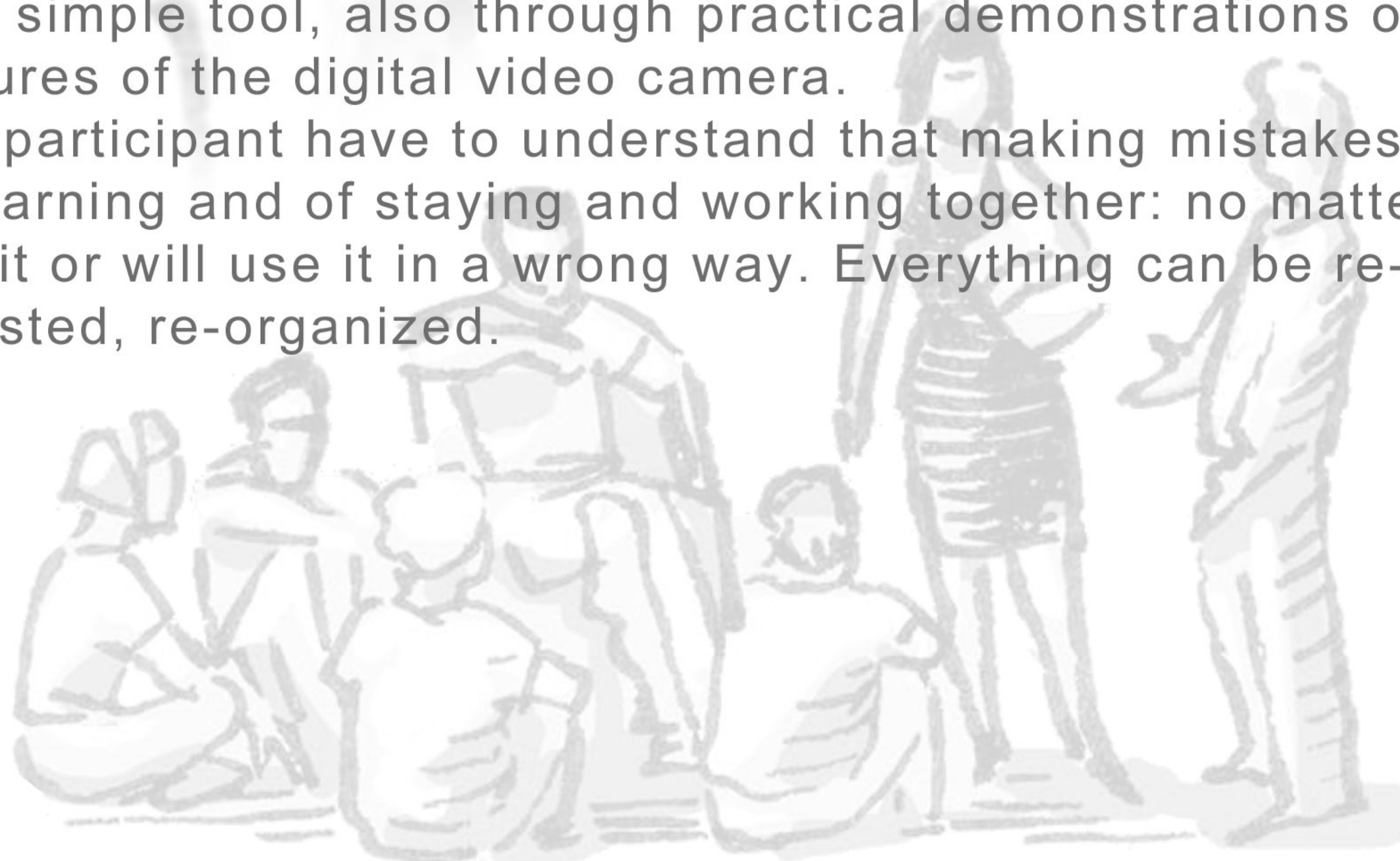
Stage 3 - Shooting the story/stories

Participants need to start to think about creating a story using the camera. This is the stage in the process in which the participants undertake the production of whatever video they have planned. It's the core phase of the method: through the lens they have the opportunity to choose what to focus on, to reveal their environment and to reach out to an outside audience through the development of a coherent moving image project. This way, PV method enables people to become creators and as such is a great catalyst for empowerment and change. The video becomes a tool to both reflect the participants' reality and highlight their potential to improve their personal and social skills. This stage has to be divided into four phases.

Phase 1 - How to use the camera

It's the first contact of the participants with the video camera and the aim is to give them the opportunity to handle equipment for video recording. It must be underlined that participant has to enjoy themselves, without being afraid of handling and using the camera. Thus it has to be explained as a simple tool, also through practical demonstrations of the basic features of the digital video camera.

The participants have to understand that making mistakes is a part of learning and of staying and working together: no matter if anyone uses it or will use it in a wrong way. Everything can be re-done, adjusted, re-organized.



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Stage 3 - Shooting the story/stories

Phase 2 - The roles within the group: casting the crew

This phase is related to the allocation of the crew roles (cameraman, camera assistant, person, sound/monitor assistant, interviewer, production coordinator, editing assistant. . .): who they are, what they do, what are their responsibilities.... Each one of the participants can announce in which part of the video making he/she would like to be involved in. What is important to underline is that all the participants will participate as an actor or actress for this video project. But if someone does not desire to act in front of the camera, he/she could be helpful by doing other film work behind the camera. Ideally all participants should have equal opportunities to undertake all roles during the production phase. Participants should be encouraged to rotate roles on a regular basis to prevent any individuals from appropriating particular roles. However, if it will be difficult for every participant to be involved in all positions during the video shooting, they can be organized in small groups. For instance:

- A small group of people will take the responsibility of the editing process expressing their opinion on the final visual style of the video.
- Another small group will be in charge of the camera as camera assistants during the video shooting.
- A small group can be the interviewers.
- Because attention must also be paid to identifying and selecting locations in which the story will be told. Therefore, another small group will have to do that.

Then the group can be interchanged. In this sense the PV brings everyone to the same level. Hierarchies that exist outside the workshop space tend to disintegrate. The participants are constantly changing roles, from camera operator to subject, from director to actor, and the dynamics of power are constantly shifting.



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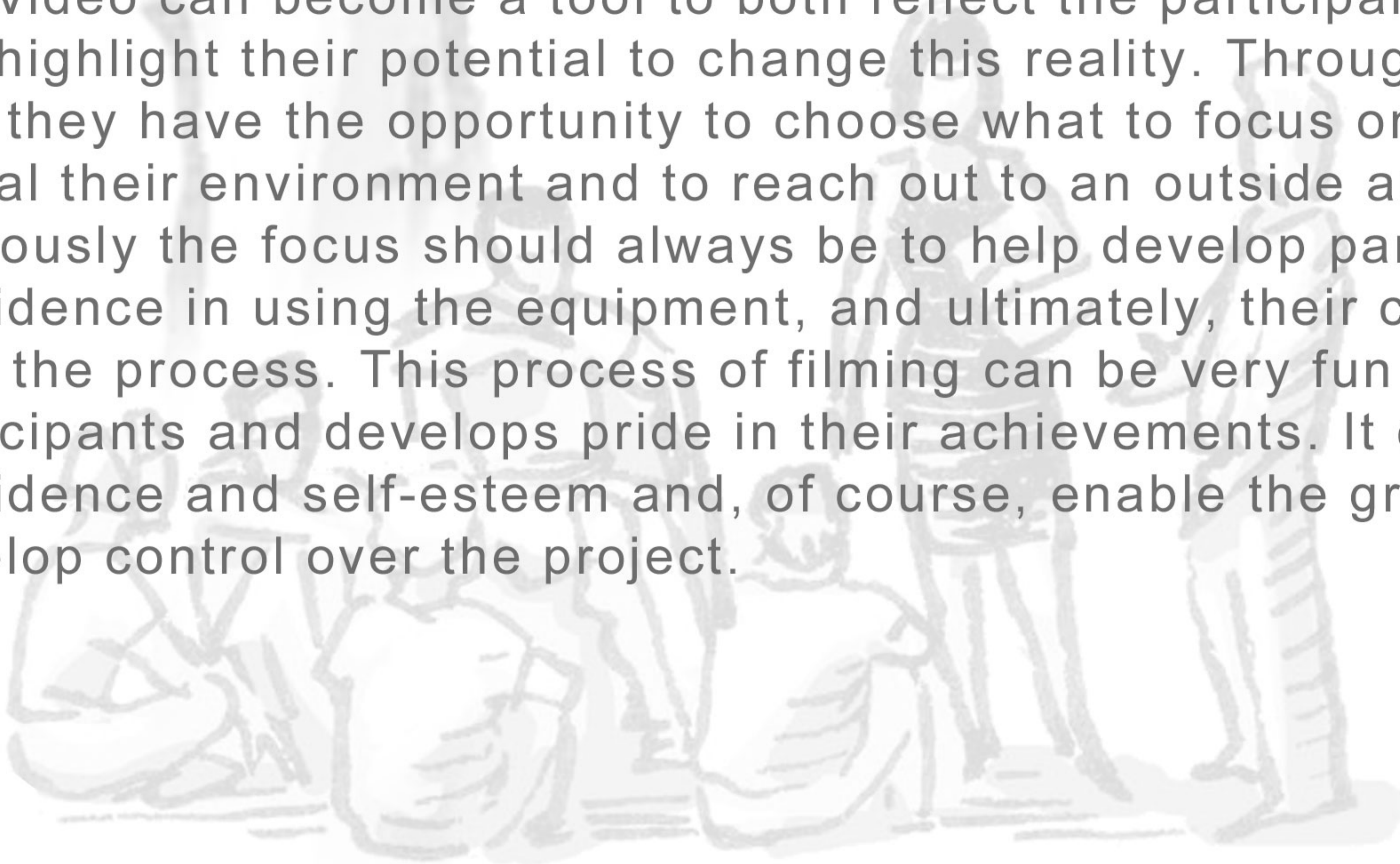
Stage 3 - Shooting the story/stories

Phase 3 –

Work on field: videos are directed and filmed by participants

From now on the script of the team becomes reality. The participants are the directors, the audience, the protagonists.... the PV's method takes its final form. This is the time to start the video product by filming the story and giving to it faces and voices. The participants has to film in relation with the storyboard that, in our case, is a sort of basic narrative structure organized in shooting schedule that divides the script into separate scenes. While filming, the storyboard is a point of reference, but the participants can be flexible. It's not a script that must be looked constantly when filming, it's just a basic line that helps the process. In this phase the facilitator must take care that all the participants have their own role and has to help the group ensuring progresses of the film and encouraging all the participants. This phase enables people to become creators and as such is a great catalyst for action, for change. The impossible becomes possible.

The video can become a tool to both reflect the participants' reality and highlight their potential to change this reality. Through the lens they have the opportunity to choose what to focus on, to reveal their environment and to reach out to an outside audience. Obviously the focus should always be to help develop participants' confidence in using the equipment, and ultimately, their control over the process. This process of filming can be very fun for the participants and develops pride in their achievements. It can build confidence and self-esteem and, of course, enable the group to develop control over the project.



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Stage 3 - Shooting the story/stories

Phase 4 – Screening back footage

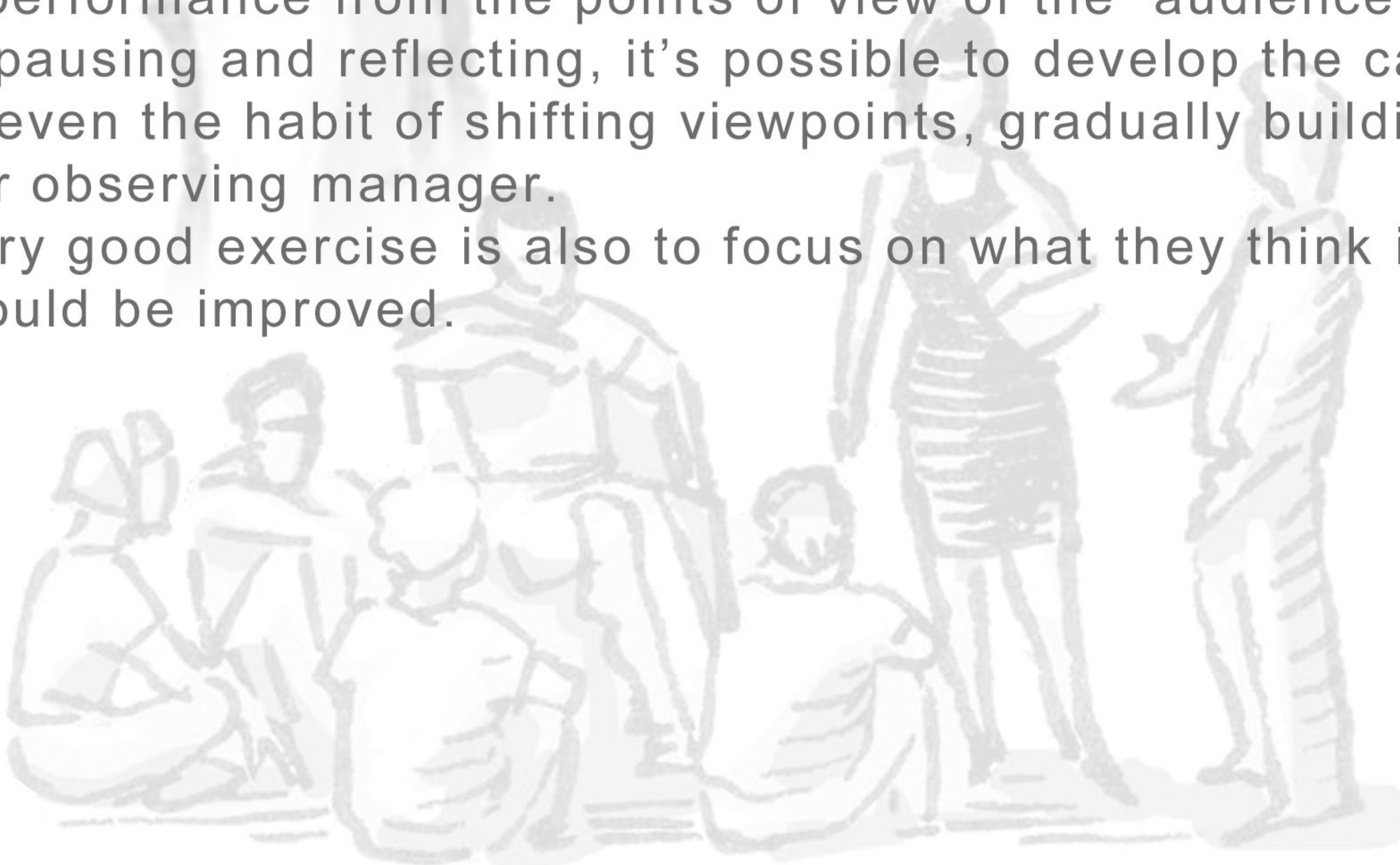
The ability of the video format to replay footage instantaneously using the playback function creates a lively feedback loop and serves to reflect back "our reality".

The pattern of film - screen - discuss is one that lies at the very heart of the participatory video process and is integral throughout the various stages involved.

Screening back footage and reflecting upon successes, challenges, mistakes made and lessons learned is an essential part of each stage. Participants will rapidly learn by noticing and responding to issues identified and will be able to make informed decisions about what to film next and how. It's important to set a pattern of screening back and to consider logging footage as part of the PV process.

The reflection upon footage represents an exercise of the phenomenon of role distance, a dis-identifying with the performance and a shift to a meta role stance in which the role player joins with the director and, from this position also considers the performance from the points of view of the audience. From this pausing and reflecting, it's possible to develop the capacity and even the habit of shifting viewpoints, gradually building an inner observing manager.

A very good exercise is also to focus on what they think is missing or could be improved.





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Stage 4 - The editing process

In this phase the facilitator plays a key role in supporting participants to shape videos, even if the group is the actor also of this phase. The images are selected for filming by participants themselves, who choose what and who to show. The technical editing process can be made by the facilitator himself (once the group has selected the images), by the facilitator with some members of the group (the ones who want to take part also in the technical realization of the video), by all the participants (if all of them want to be actors also of this process). It's not possible to get everyone involved in editing and many people won't be interested or have time anyway, but having a small group of advisors really helps to take some of the power away from the editor. It has to be remembered that nowadays editing is no longer the domain of professionals, most modern computers can immediately become editing studios and modern editing software are relatively easy to use, allowing to produce short films relatively quickly and simply. Even the smallest manipulation of filmed material, such as putting titles at the start and end and adding some music into the background in some of the shots can make for a very professional looking product. This is also, for the group, an important time to review agreements made at the start of the project and to talk about the experience. It may only be at this point that some participants realize the true power of what they have created and it is useful to discuss with them again about all the process and the experienced PV in action.

