

Forum theatre



Brief description of the activity

Forum theatre is a form of the Theatre of oppressed, where participants, non professional actors, play a short performance which represents a situation of oppression, of conflict or somehow negative that is common in the community and Has been experienced, directly or indirectly, by some of them.. Any kind of scene can be represented, as it does not Have to be coherent with a bigger and more complex story, nor needs a happy ending. It has just to reproduce a negative situation that the characters are not able to overcome. The story must be realistic. Any kind of story is suitable as long as it is somehow related to the lives of audience. After the first presentation, the play is re-started and the audience is asked to replace or add characters on stage in order to present their personal solution to the situation. So the group as a whole tries to find common solutions to situations of oppression present in the community and played out on the stage.

Forum theatre

Topic, objective and methodology:

The aim of Forum theatre is to understand and manage cultural diversities and the conflicts that may arise from them, by dramatizing concrete situations.

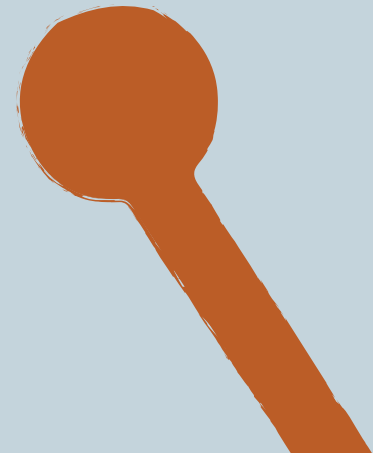
The theatre here is used as a tool to reproduce verisimilar oppressive and conflictive situations, but its solution is not devolved to the two potential conflictive parts, it is instead sought through a collective process, that puts at stake all and each participant, leading to a collective empowerment. It is a democratic process - as everyone can take part and have his own say - that offers an instrument of liberation, both individual and collective: anyone who has an idea replaces an actor and enacts his will.

Materials:

- Flip chart and markers
- Chairs

Location:

A space big enough to host a performance carried out by the participants. For the performance no stage nor theatre illumination is needed, but it is useful to have available some tables and chairs.



Steps:

Present a story of conflict and ask some participants to act it out. The rest of the group are spect-actors: they assist to the performance and will be called to intervene in the second phase, when the scene will be played out again and the audience will be able to step in the scene and replace or add to the existing characters. Your role is to act as the so called 'joker', and your task in the play is to mediate between the actors on the stage and the audience, asking to the latter to evaluate what happened after each intervention and if the proposed solution sounds plausible. The joker must be impartial and should never judge the intervention of spect-actors, but he has to encourage who does not agree with the suggested solution, to step in the stage and propose a new one.

Explain to the participants the rules

- The situation of oppression is played the first time

by selected "actors", that present it to the whole group

- The scene is then repeated; this time, anybody can step in by raising the hand and saying STOP once.
- The person who stopped the performance should then explain the reason and replace the actor who is not behaving properly according to him/her
- Other spect-actors have to wait for the end of the intervention before stopping the scene again (no "fights" for stopping the scene)
- The actor playing the role of the "oppressor" can never be changed

To make participants familiarize with Forum theatre, start suggesting the following scene: (details can be adapted depending on where you are making this activity)

An Italian, Catholic family lives in a nice town near Naples.

Today is Sunday. The mother, Concetta, is cooking pork chops; her husband Salvatore and her daughter Maria are waiting to eat this delicious dish!

Yesterday a new lodger and his family came to live in their building. So, Concetta invited them to eat together: she is a wonderful neighbor!

The name of the new neighbor is Ahmed: his wife is Myriam and his son is Abdülaziz. They are Muslim and can't eat pork.

Concetta is offended! How is it possible that they don't like my delicious pork chops?!

Ahmed's family is embarrassed and hurt...

Ask participants: How can this situation be solved? Who has any idea please come on the stage and re-

place the character he/she wants to represent.

The scene is then repeated and the facilitator reminds participants that they can say "STOP" at any moment of the performance, go on the stage and substitute one of the characters if they think he/she should behave differently.

Ask participants: Are you satisfied with the solution adopted? Who wants to suggest a different one? Please join the stage. The scene is re-played as many times as participants desire in order to find a solution that satisfies all.

Once the participants are familiar with the Forum theatre structure, divide them in groups of four and ask them to think about real situations of oppression they directly or indirectly experienced. Then ask the first group to play the scene. Once the scene is over, tell to the other participants:

"Now the story starts again. If you see somebody who

is unfairly suffering because of this situation, and is making mistakes that will lead him/her to suffer more and more, raise your hand and say STOP! The actors will then stop and we will listen to your idea.”

Let the scene start again and, when a spect-actor raises their hand, ask them to explain to all his idea and invite him to put this idea in practice on the scene. This spect-actor will then replace the actor he thinks is the most oppressed and will start improvising his idea of change, facing the oppressive characters who will try to replicate the oppressive mechanism as presented at the beginning. The audience can see the change produced by the intervention of the spect-actor. After this intervention, ask the group to discuss about the consequences of the proposed alternatives.

Continue the session with the other situations of oppression selected by the other groups and everytime ensure that every idea is equally put to test and discussed.

Remember to ask the audience after each intervention if they are fine with the solution found; the play ends only when everybody is comfortable with the solution reached, even if the problem is not completely solved.

As this activity involves a lot of emotions, and not being able to completely solve a conflictive situation can bring stress and frustration in participants, destroying the atmosphere within the group, it is advisable to have a short relaxation game between one scene and the next one. In this way the mood can be risen up and the participants are ready to open their minds for a new situation.

Check this list out to find the one that fits the best for your group <https://www.youthwork-practice.com/games/relaxation-games.html>

Conclusion of the activity

Once each situation of oppression has been played out, conclude the session by highlighting the fact that you maybe didn't find solutions to all the problem explored, but you tried out (with words, bodies, ideas) different alternatives, and checked the consequence of each of them.

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Have a short round of feedback by asking participants:

- How did you feel ?
- (to the participants who didn't intervene why did you decide to never step in? Were you comfortable with all the alternative solutions proposed? Did any of them upset you?
- Did you feel useful/useless?
- What were the roles in your group? Did you choose yours or was it imposed? Did you impose something to others?

- Do you think this technique can work in the reality ?
- Have you ever directly experienced any of these situations in your life?

The theatre has been used as a tool to explore social transformations and, hopefully, what was experienced during the session can be transferred out in the community and applied by each of the participant, both individually and collectively so, when they see the same oppressive mechanisms, they decide to say "Stop" I want to change it".

Innovative aspects for the promotion of interculture

The promotion of interculture varies a lot considering the area where it takes place and consequently the composition of the target group it is addressed to, its degree of cohesion or conflictuality, as well as the history that lays beyond its current composition. Promoting interculture therefore can have different "shades", in relation to

the aforementioned variables. In general terms, an intercultural centre should follow a phased approach to the theme that includes the following main areas, often interconnected and overlapped with each other. The first is education to interculture, namely the encounter and discover of different cultures, as bearer of values and features different from one's own culture. The second is the aggregation of people from different cultural backgrounds, so as to say, providing spaces and time where people from different cultures can spend time in an informal context in a way that the interaction is free and spontaneous. The third one, where Forum theatre specifically resides, is to make people feel and recognize each other as belonging to a unique community. A powerful means to achieve this third result is to discuss, dialogue and act to find possible solutions conflicts present within the community. In this perspective, Forum theatre both values and unsets cultural diversities: the appreciation comes from the fact that each member of the community is able to bring his instances, points of view and possible solutions to existing

conflicts - influenced by his living conditions and cultural background - to the collective dialogue. It unsets cultural diversities as a factor of exclusion from the community life because all and each participant takes part in a process of collective empowerment and emancipation, avoiding that cultural differences become a reason for exclusion from this process.



