



Forum theatre (FT) used as an empowerment tool in groups consisting of young people

The Theatre of the Oppressed describes theatrical forms that the Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal first elaborated in the 1970s, initially in Brazil and later in Europe. Boal's techniques use theatre as means of promoting change. In the Theatre of the Oppressed, the audience becomes active, such that as "spect-actors" they explore, show, analyze and transform the reality in which they are living. One of the major branches are Forum Theatre

Reflections

To facilitate a FT workshop is about creating a safe, open and creative space and sense of community. In FT the young participants use themselves as a tool, and they have to feel safe and comfortable exposing themselves whilst sharing challenges with other people. Amongst youths it's extra important because they're often very sensitive about other youth's opinions and judgements.

We always open a workshop with easygoing games, and define some rules for the work we are going to do together. We create a framework and shared knowledge of what we want. Find out what kind of themes the group are concerned about. Try not to have predefined answers for the questions being played out and discussed.

The group has to be connected and involved from the first step. We must put the individuals in focus and listen carefully to what people are saying and what is happening in the room. At the same time it is very important that the group is having fun and feel safe to be able to open up and create. Being a Joker (FT facilitator) is about shifting focus from the individual to the group and back again. Leading the process forward and at the same time take time for interventions and ideas.

It is important to create closeness in many ways. Closeness to and within the group you're working with. Closeness to the themes and experiences being discussed and played out, and closeness to the method - to know the games and being able to adjust them to different settings, themes and groups of people.

In facilitating a FT process it is necessary to have a clear structure, but be open for the group's interventions. Always switch between doing and talking. It is very important that every game and exercise are followed up by reflections where as many as possible in the group are taking part. Always ask the group after a game: Why do you think we did this exercise?

When learning to facilitate a FT process it is important that we have tried out the exercises and methods on ourselves first. How do we react? What do we feel and think? What do the games do with us? How is it to share personal experiences and thoughts? What does it do with me? First after this we might say something about what can happen to others going through the same process. We find that it's important to give time and space, and confidence and motivation for young people to express themselves.

Many of the themes put to the stage and in the group are difficult and vulnerable for the participants to bring in, and it's important to **follow up individuals and always closing themes** we have opened up in a safe and ensuring way. In between the workshops and meetings with the participants the facilitators have to structure all the information given by the group; stories, thoughts, images, improvisations and so on, and in the end put it all together in a manuscript. This can also be done with help from participants.



Literature:

Augusto Boal: Games for actors and non actors (1997)

Augusto Boal: The Rainbow of Desire (1995)

Emma Broddzinski: Theatre in health and Care (2010)

Peter Duffy and Elinor Vettraino (red.): Youth and Theatre of the Oppressed (2010)

An example of a line of Forum Theatre workshops with a group of young people

How we can use our own experiences to find possible strategies and solutions to challenges and difficult situations?

In this example we have estimated a group of 8 – 10 youths.

Workshop 1: Creating a safe space and Introduction to Oppression (3 hours)

- **Warm up (10 min)**

1) Create a line

Divide the group into two smaller groups, and explain each group will have to form a line as fast as possible, *without talking*, starting with:

- tallest to lowest person
- based on shoe-size
- darkest to fairest hair color... and so on.

This is about fun, working together without words, and ease up the group.

2) Give a gift

Tell the group to form a circle and use imaginary clay to form a gift and give it to the person next to you in the circle. The next person will receive the gift based on what she thinks she is getting, and then form the clay to a new thing and give it to the next one.

We are starting to share and imagine together. Theatre is about giving and receiving.

- **Welcome and Introduction (30 min)**

- Presentation of facilitators and group
- Presentation of method: FT
- Plan for the day and the following workshops



- **Name Games (15 min)**

1) Form a circle. First person starting by saying her name and a word starting on same letter as her name, a word that describes her personality. Next one repeat her name and word eg: «Funny Fiona», and then tells his name and a word.. and so on.

2) Form a circle standing up. The facilitator starts in the middle of the ring. She will walk towards one person in the circle as a zombie (movement and sound). The person she walks towards have to get eye-contact with one other person in the circle before the zombie reach him, and the person he gets eyecontact with have to shout out his name (the targets name) before the zombie reach him. If the zombie gets to the target before the other person have shouted out his name, he will be the next zombie. If not the first zombie will try again, walking towards a new target.

BREAK 15 MIN

- **Create a set of rules (15 min)**

To agree on a set of rules that apply to this group, everyone will be invited to make an entry. The agreement sets the standard for expected behavior under the workshop and it is the participants themselves who determine the rules. In this sense, the role of the instructor is to help participants comply with their own rules. This will give the participants ownership of the agreement and a sense of being taken seriously.

- What rules do you think is necessary for good teamwork and creating an environment in which everyone should feel safe to talk and participate?

Establishing a common framework for group work, Finding out what values are important to the group, Creating a framework everyone agrees and who the participants have established.

- **Circle of Rhythm (5 min)**

Form a circle. Facilitator starts by making a rhythm (clap, jumps..) and a sound all the other participants mirrors/repeats her rhythm and sound, then there is the next one in line..

Use your body and sound, not just words. It's ok to be «silly» in this room.

- **Blind car/Blind bus (10 min)**

Pair up the participants. They then by turn leads each other through the room, and traffic. The one being the car with her eyes closed, and the leader uses only sound and light pushes to instruct the car. Then you can start forming buses (many blind cars in a row) and so on. You can read about this in Games for actors and non actors.

Building trust, getting used to being in contact with each other. Listening.

BREAK 15 MIN

- **The sun shines on everyone who... (15 min)**

Form a circle, one person standing in the middle of the circle. There is a chair less than the number of participants, and the person in the middle should try to get a chair to sit on. The



person in the middle says something that must be true to him / her and starts the sentence with:

"The sun shines on me and everyone else who ..." for example, wearing blue trousers.

Everyone who share this (everyone wearing blue trousers) has to find a new chair. It is not allowed to jump to the chair next to you.

The play can begin nicely, for example with colour on what people wear, hair, eyes, etc. And the proceed by sharing concerns, hopes, family relations and so on.

- **Discussions about themes and Oppression (35 min)**

1) Form a circle. Ask the group: What is Oppression?
Every FT shows is based on an oppressive situation.

"Not being able to do/or be the one you want to be. When dialogue becomes monologue".

2) Think about a time you were prevented from doing anything you wanted to do / or were forced to do something you did not want.

3) Everyone will have to think about themes and questions that they are concerned about. What are important questions for you to discuss, and what are you concerned about in your life?

4) Be silent for two minutes and then everyone in the circle gives one sentence about their concerns or suggestions for themes/oppressions.

5) Write down every suggestion for themes on a whiteboard, and then you vote. Everyone has two votes, and you can choose to let everyone have their eyes closed while voting. Raising one hand for one vote, 2 hands for two votes. Summarize and count which theme who got most votes.

Examples for themes can be: Addiction, Social Rights, Loneliness, Bullying and so on.

- **Closing up (10 min)**

Tell the participants to think about a story till next time, reflecting on the theme that is chosen. This should be a true story, either self-experienced or the story of a close friend, family member and alike.

Form a circle, everyone shares one thought on what you will take home with you from the workshop today. One positive thing.



Workshop 2: Stories and Images (3 hours)

- **Warm up**

Hi Ha Ho (10 min)

Form a circle, we are now going to be Samurais, using our hands and arms as a sword. Explain: You send a HI by putting your hands together and raising them over your head and point at one other participant. The receiver of the HI lifts both his arms over his head and responding HA. The two persons standing on each side of the receiver forms their arms to swords and acting like they are cutting the receiver in two by his stomach saying HO. The receiver then send another HI to a new person and you keep on going for a while.

This is about concentration, focus and fun.

- **Name game (5 min)**

Form a circle. This is like the first name game on the last workshop, but instead of saying a word that describes you, you say your name and do a movement.

- **Welcome (5 min)**

Summarize and describe what will happen.

- **Image work**

Introduction (5 min)

Through working with images, we practice seeing and experiencing the world through the senses, not words. Sculpture work - without the head! Talk about life in pictures. Be aware of how we use the body. Since we are going to work with the body it is important to respect each other's boundaries, some do not like being touched, you can show with your own body what you want/dont want. We use the body to create vibrant photographic 3D photos.

Image work in couples (15 min)

Pair up. No planning, no talk, just improvisation. Begin to greet your partner. Freeze. Person A goes out of the freeze and creates a new picture that tells something about the relationship to person B. Create a situation and relationship and show it in the freeze. Then person B goes out of the freeze and creates a new picture that continues the story, etc.

Reflection: How was it telling a story without words? How was it to improvise the story? Did you manage to improvise without planning in advance.

Image circle (20 min)

Form a circle, everyone turns his back towards the circle. On signal, everyone should turn around at the same time and display a frozen image of the word / term the leader says.

You choose them in relation to or reflect on the theme you have chosen. E.g.:

Summer
Boredom
Trust
Distrust
Power
Loneliness



Reflections: What is similar/what is different? What does the body tell us about a situation/feeling? We send out signals about power and relations. Explain body language, roles, power relationships. Are you far away or near? What do you notice? What do you see here? Nobody has said anything about this person. What do you tell through body and attitude.

BREAK 15 MIN

- **Storytelling (30 min)**

1) Pair up. We are now going to share the stories we have thought about from our own lives. Each one choose exactly how much she or he want to share. No pushing, but your partner is able to ask questions to get a clearer view of the story. Go in pairs and share the story one at a time. The listener have to get the story so clear that he is able to retell the story afterwards.
2) Everyone tells the story of his or her partner as if it was his own story for the rest of the group. Take notes.

BREAK 15 MIN

- **Image work in groups. Real to ideal images of reality (50 min)**

1) Divide the group into three and three. Each group gets 15 minutes to create 3 Images of an oppressive situation in relation to the theme chosen. They have to be structured like this: First image: Presentation Second: Conflict, Third: defeat of the protagonist. Who are you?, what are the relations between the people in the image? Where are you? Who is the protagonist?

2) Every group show their serie of Images to the rest of the group

3) In facilitating each serie of Image, you ask what the audience see and reflect with them

4) Then you ask the performing group to form a picture where the oppression is broken.

5) Ask them to make transition from picture 1 to picture 2 in slow motion

6) When the facilitator claps his hands, everyone can make a rhythmic movement (fast or slow giving new info)

7) Add a statement or phrase

8) Submit a new action

9) Do the whole sequence in slow motion

We are now getting a lot of information to the show we are making. The facilitator uses this information to start form a structure and manuscript. So you have to take notes all the way

Closing up (5 min)

Form a circle.Thanks for sharing today. You give 1 minute so everyone can reflect on how they take care of themselves. Everyone shares one strategy in the circle.



Workshop 3: Improvisations and making scenes (3 hours)

- **Warm up (15 min)**

1) Ask everyone to walk around the room. When the facilitator claps her hands you meet up: knee to knee, elbow to elbow, stomach to stomach, forehead to the forehead. 3 thighs. 8 hands. 3 ears.

2) Ways to walk: High shoulders, shoulders hanging. walk with big feet, long arms, long nose, big head, heavy skirts. Talk to those you meet.

3) Let yourself be led by one part of your body.

3) Copy each other's way of walking. Enlarge it, reduce it. This way we can build a character.

- **Welcome (5 min)**

Summarize and describe what will happen today

- **Bombs and shields (20 min)**

This game is described in Games for actors and non actors.

Reflect on what we see as threats and what protects us from those threats in our lives.

BREAK 15 MIN

- **Mime in circle (10 min)**

One and one enters the middle of the circle. Mimes something. A volunteer comes into the circle and asks the mimer: "What are you doing?" The mimer responds something other than he / she are doing. The volunteer then mimes this. Next one comes in and asks and so on..

Practise improvising, fun.

- **Discussion: How do we make a FT show (30 min)**

1) Must always be in a 'world' the participants know. Must make a model based on own experiences. Not one persons story, but a collection of group experiences.

2) Who is the ideal audience?

3) We always start with a question: Ex: What is hidden bullying? How is hidden bullying going on? What is alcohol abuse? Why alcohol abuse?

4) Describe what is the **protagonist desire**? The role must have specific goals. Follows a main role (protagonist, his story, where he/she fails.

5) How can we get to know the protagonist? Achieve sympathy/compassion/empathy. We must encourage the audience desire to change the situation of the protagonist.



6) Where are the changeable situations? Each action must contain a doubt. Where could the protagonist have done something different?

6) The other actors in the show are antagonists. The protagonists fight against/with them.

7) In the final scene there is no room for change, but is there anything we could have done earlier?

8) The model should not contain morale, but doubt and concerns. Not 'this is the right answer, instead ask questions ...

- **Discuss contexts (10 min)**

Where do we want to meet the protagonist? Discuss.

- At home?
- in a meeting with social services?
- at school?
- in a social setting?
- In social media?

BREAK 15 MIN

- **Improvising stories (30 min)**

Divide the group into two groups. Each group work with the questions and guidelines above, starting to make a show each group. Improvising a least 2 scenes each.

- **Show the scenes to the other group (15 min)**

Reflect and discuss. Are the stories clear. What do we see. What are the motivations? Conflicts?

- **Closing up (10 min)**

Prepare the group on that you will write two small manuscripts based on the information, stories, images and improvisations the participants have given these 3 workshops, reflecting the theme you are portraying.

Form a circle, everyone holds hands, and by squeezing your neighbours hands one by one you are sending good energy to each other.



Workshop 4: Making theatre and rehearsing shows (3 hours)

- **Warm up**

HI HA HO (5 min)

- **Voice, Breathe and Body warm up (15 min)**

- **Welcome (5 min)**

Summarize and describe what will happen today

- **Read scripts together (15 min)**

Read through the scripts and assign parts.

BREAK 15 MIN

- **Work with the scenes as a normal Theatre production (1, 5 hour)**

Focus on:

- motivations
- structure
- clearness in the story
- changeable situations
- building strong characters

- **Put the scenes together- rehearse (20 min)**

- practise transitions from scene to scene

- **Closing up (5 min)**

How are you feeling?

Are you ready for showtime next workshop?

Form a circle, make a wave in the circle for good co-working and trust in each other.



Workshop 5: Forum Theatre Performance (3 hours)

- **Warm up**

HI HA HO (5 min)

- **Voice, Breathe and Body warm up (15 min)**

- **Welcome (5 min)**

Summarize and describe what will happen today

- **Discuss and rehearse possibilities for interactions in each group (20 min)**

BREAK 15 MIN

- **Dress rehearsal (30 min)**

Each group rehearse their show. Facilitator needs to be part.

- **Forum Theatre performance (1 hour)**

The two groups shows their models to the other, facilitator are jokering the model with the audiences (the other groups) interventions.

- **Reflections**

Under the Forum Theatre performance the audience is shown a short play in which a central character, the protagonist, encounters an oppression or situation he is unable to overcome; the subject is something of immediate importance to the actors and the audience, often based on shared life-experience.

We perform the show to an target-audience- this can be other youths facing the same difficulties, or living under same conditions, and/or adults closely related to the theme; parents, teachers, social health services and local communities.

The performance always ends badly for the protagonist- and now it is time to involve the audience.

A Forum T performance can thus be seen as a question to the audience: What can we do with this difficult situation?

It leads into a theatrical debate where audience members are invited to take the stage and try out different possibilities in the contextualised, concrete situation. Active audiences take the protagonist place and tries out their strategy. The Forum is focused on getting an better understanding of a problem or and issue, and about testing out possible solutions. Experiences and ideas are rehearsed and shared, generating both solidarity and a sense of empowerment.

- **Closing up (15 min)**

Evaluation.

Next step: External audience? Show the play in the local community? At the treatment center?