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Act Out

Conceptual framework on Theatre of the Oppressed Workshops focusing on Forum Theatre and Methodology of Polarisation (MoP)

WP2 - developed by



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1. Introduction - the starting point

“Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it.” Augusto Boal

European societies have become more segregated in recent years. Trainers, youth workers or facilitators and other service providers for youth are working with quite heterogeneous groups, coming from very divergent socio-economic backgrounds and ethnicities, religion, sexual orientation, etc., need to develop new competencies to address these changes at the practical level in their work. Increasing polarisation in Europe is making it more difficult to maintain a constructive dialogue on different points of view. We perceive a potential risk the aforementioned workers, and the people they work with, only interact with people they already feel safe with, and that stereotypes, discrimination and hatred against people perceived as “the other” will increase as a result.

Adult education centres, as well as youth- and civil society organisations are affected by these challenges, and, with the still rising polarisation, often need to separate learners of the aforementioned different backgrounds from each other or are even forced to carry out segregated education due to the risk of conflict. In addition, many of these young learners have already had negative experiences with school and formal education systems and are therefore highly critical of this issue.

Anyone who has worked with heterogeneous groups and young people at risk, in environments where deep polarisation exists between different groups, knows how challenging it can be at times to stir youngsters’ motivation and to have them engaged in the work process. While educators cannot change youths’ lives for them, they can however support them in becoming their own agents of empowerment.

The methods of Theatre of the Oppressed, such as Forum Theatre, invite us to share our own realities and conflicts and to witness other people’s realities and conflicts. This enables us to empathize better and gain more understanding. It also helps us to reflect about our own positions and local as well as global power dynamics. Using the body as a tool, these methods enable us to practise in a playful way how we can create other, more equitable realities as a community.

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2. What do we want to achieve?

Act Out aims at bringing together socially divided groups, using the socio-dramaturgic field of the forum theatre methodology of polarisation tool (MoP). With these instruments, trainers, facilitators and youth workers engaging with youth aged 18-25 will be equipped with the knowledge, skills and competences to deliver workshops in order to foster the process of identifying, expressing and overcoming oppressive feelings and attitudes – negative mind-sets which may be caused by social divide, self-sensed discrimination and polarisation, Considering also the aspect that verbal communication does not feel ‘safe’ for people who do not have linguistic confidence. It refers to diverse community dynamics in various environments, such as urban, suburban and in a few rural areas. The settings for application of these methodologies include learning institutions, non-formal education and leisure.

Emphasizing on the Methodology of Polarisation (MoP), created within the Israeli-Palestinian context, we aim to transfer and apply this method to the context of polarized and divided communities within Europe to create dialogue, reconciliation and re-humanisation among divided polarised communities. So far, this method has scarcely been applied outside of the Israeli-Palestinian context, and this project aims to transfer parts of this approach to the European context, since polarisation and dehumanisation is also a challenge we face in communities throughout the EU.

The methodology of polarisation itself makes use of all Theatre of the Oppressed parts, applying them to mixed groups. Making these Theatre of the Oppressed methods more accessible, individuals and groups with differing viewpoints and experiences of oppression can connect and empathise with each other through games and exercises. The Act Out Project will also offer a toolbox including methods such as Image Theatre, Rainbow of Desire, and Forum Theatre with the focus on the Method of Polarization.

The workshops are created to give our participants the opportunity to experience theatrical games and active processes that lead to theatre plays and provide practitioners in adult education with information how forum theatre is being used in youth community work across different groups and which techniques to apply.

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Furthermore, the participants can be exposed to the direct experience of how a theatre play following these methodologies is prepared and how trainers and facilitators can manage the interaction with the audience in search for alternatives to counter-act the oppression presented on stage.

With these specifically designed & structured workshops, complemented by an interactive toolbox and showcase examples for practical use, trainers, facilitators and youth workers will contribute to the empowerment of young learners and participants in various programmes.

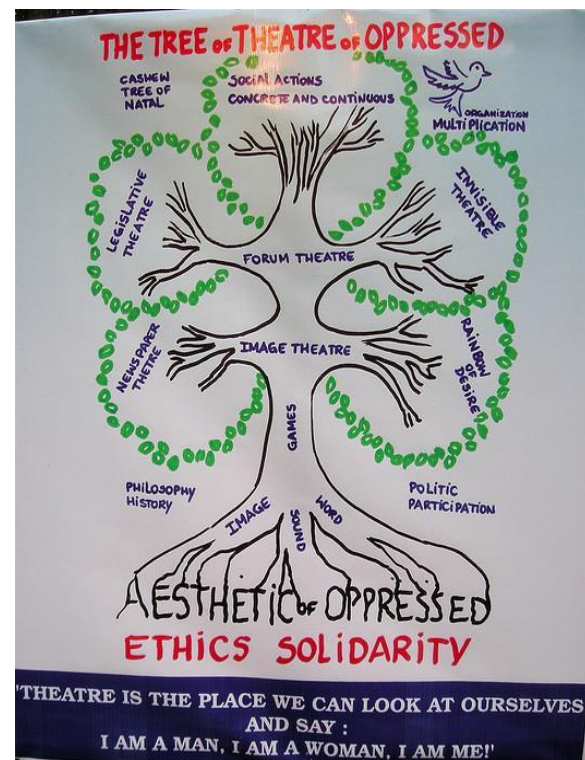
3. Forum Theatre and Methodology of Polarisation, techniques from the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO)

Theatre of the Oppressed

Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) is a participatory theatre method, developed by Augusto Boal, a Brazilian Theatre director, in the 1970s. It emerged from the desire to empower oneself from oppression and to create socio-political change. It was created in the context of dictatorship and how to overcome the oppression within that system.

Since then, different methods that help to overcome oppression through Theatre of the Oppressed have developed in different contexts and parts of the world. They help to explore oppression and conflicts within us and the societies we live in, aiming to transform them.

Source: <https://beinginorbit.wordpress.com/2013/10/16/implications-of-theatre-of-the-oppressed-for-musicalsonic-performance/>



Boal coined the term “spect-actor” to describe that we cannot only observe our own and others' conflicts from the outside as a spectator, but that we need to become active and change the situation ourselves. He worked closely together with Paulo Freire, who founded the Pedagogy of the Oppressed and their philosophies are inspired by one another.



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Theatre of the Oppressed itself has the aim to counter elitism, with the method focusing on the political and social transformation and less on the acting expertise. The philosophy around it is that everyone can act. It is about sharing real stories, so it is not necessary that the participants pretend to be someone they are not. These theatre methods mean to inspire each other, to show realities and to transform them actively with the help of the community. A way Augusto Boal, the founder of Theatre of the Oppressed has put it is:

“Anyone can do theatre, even actors. And theatre can be done everywhere. Even in a theatre.”
Augusto Boal

Especially in the context of western education, verbal methods have been much more dominant, whilst methods involving the body have received less attention. Act Out wants to address this. Theatre of the Oppressed is for everyone and can be applied in formal and non-formal education settings. The base of this method is to counter oppression; therefore, the participation has to be voluntary. Besides this, it can be used in all contexts if the aim is to support individuals to live a more empowered life inside out.

With forum theatre techniques, every issue suggested by the community of participants can be

- expressed and visualized by them,
- placed in a symbolic context by the participants themselves through play, and
- changed by the resonance-based actions of the audience.

Forum Theatre as empowerment-technique

Forum Theatre, a technique developed by Augusto Boal within the Theatre of the Oppressed, belongs to the socio-dramaturgic field and offers powerful techniques for addressing issues of polarisation, prejudices and conflicts among groups of young learners through interactive and participatory theatre practices.

Participants who repeatedly experience social disadvantage are encouraged to concretize their own interests and goals and to stand up for them. In the process of theatrical presentation, namely through interaction with the audience in search for alternatives to counter-act the oppressions or conflicts presented on stage, those affected by the topic are able to develop different perspectives and expand

their potential for action. In addition, people who previously had little insight into the problems the participants have to face gain a deeper understanding of their situation.

What is unique about Methodology of Polarisation (MoP) by Chen Alan & Combatants for Peace in Israel-Palestine?

Chen Alan and his colleagues from Combatants for Peace in the context of the Israel-Palestine-conflict developed the Methodology of Polarisation (MoP). They apply Theatre of the Oppressed methods working with mixed groups of Israelis and Palestinians, a binational community that resists the occupation. The method's aim is to create dialogue, reconciliation and re-humanisation between these groups.

You can read a short interview with Chen Alan here:



<https://www.beratungundtheater-leipzig.de/%C3%BCber-mich/die-geschichte/chen-alon/>

Or watch a documentation about his work applying TO with asylum seekers in Israel here:



[Between Fences \(English subtitles\) - YouTube](#)

The focus of the MoP lies on making the invisible oppression visible and showing that each side is suffering from the occupation, working together through the pain for a better future together. In doing so, they confront the stereotypes and enemy images that exist within the group in order to overcome them. This means the method considers the polarisation that exists in the room anyway, regardless if

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outspoken or not, to re-humanise one another. It is only suitable for groups that collaborate on a long-term basis, so that trust and a safe space can be established.

The polarised model makes use of other TO techniques such as the Rainbow of Desire, to explore the internal worlds of people within these narratives, as well as Newspaper Theatre to become aware of the external factors that make us think and believe certain things about each other. Please find below (page 10-11) more info about these two genres within TO practices. The polarised method shall not be used in short term projects but only in long term committed groups so that there is time to build trust with each other. Otherwise, the risk of reproducing stereotypes and retraumatizing one another might occur, which should be avoided.

Forum theatre appeals to all groups of people, regardless of their level of education. Even language barriers can melt away, as the medium of theatre offers communication possibilities on all levels. Here, images, emotions, postures, tones, facial expressions and possibly also music and dance speak for themselves.

Forum theatre enables the participants to quickly realize that they are the centre of attention, and that their opinions and skills are in demand – in many cases a new experience to youngsters coming from vulnerable groups, including NEETS (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

3.1. Image Theatre

Image Theatre comprises all the non-verbal techniques that allow us to express emotions and stories without needing to put words to them. It is possible to use it as a method by itself or as a preparatory tool to create a Forum Theatre scene. It usually means to use our own or other people's bodies to express an emotional state through a physical statue that does not move.

This approach allows us to start a conversation and reflection about themes and emotions that might not be easy to put words to. Besides this, it allows us to work together on topics without necessarily sharing a common verbal language. Doing this, there is an objective and subjective way of observing the given physical image. Even though we objectively see the same physical statue, subjectively it might evoke memories of very different situations and contexts within us.



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A person standing upright, lifting their arm into a fist, opening his or her mouth can have many different meanings for different people. The person might be considered as violent/criminal/terrorist by one person, whilst another person might consider it as oppressed/freedom fighter/activist. This can enable a group whose members have different life experiences to share their perspectives and broaden each other's horizons.

Image Theatre exercises can be applied in the work with a closed group but can also be included into Forum Theatre performances or social actions to make the complexity of oppression and its parts more visible. Images give a lot of room for interpretation, which helps people with very different realities to relate to one another, and to look at the same image from different angles.

3.2. Forum Theatre

Forum Theatre is basically the result of the dynamization of the images into a scene. When developed, it can be performed to explore a situation of oppression to transform it. Traditionally the developed scene portrays a conflict that ends in the escalation of oppression. At first, this scene is performed to an audience once. After this, the scene is performed a second time and this time the audience is invited to say stop and intervene. This can be done in different ways in different context.

The original way to exchange was to change the oppressed character and try out a different way to overcome the oppression, given the pressures, fears and difficulties of an individual. When using the polarized model, the idea is that the group of actors, as well as the audience should have different life experiences and backgrounds. This will enable very different results and enables a dialogue between groups that might otherwise not be aware of each other's perspectives.

In the context of Israel-Palestine, the plays are performed in front of both Israelis and Palestinians so that the play can enable Dialogue, Reconciliation and Re-humanisation, seeing different sides of the reality. Examples for other potential polarised groups could be: cis-men vs cis-women; cis women and cis-men vs. non-binary individuals; heterosexuals vs. LGTBQIA+ community; “old” vs. “young”, “newcomers” vs “locals”; racialized vs non-racialized; able-bodied persons vs. persons with disabilities; people experiencing mental health conditions vs. people not experiencing mental health conditions etc.



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This method can be used to explore solutions together to broaden participants' horizons when witnessing different ways of intervening. It can encourage critical thinking and collective problem-solving. At the same time, Forum Theatre practice as Boal created it, is not meant to find the solution within the theatre play, but to “rehearse for the revolution in reality” (Boal). So, the goal is not to be content after a Forum Theatre play, but rather to be disturbed about a given injustice, wanting to make a non-violent change in reality.

The purpose of Forum Theatre is to create a space where participants are able to become aware of power dynamics and practice how to overcome them, thus making it possible to meet on an eye-to-eye level.

3.3. Newspaper Theatre

Newspaper Theatre is a form of Forum Theatre where the scene itself is based upon Newspaper articles, and parts of these can be included into the play. Just as in regular Forum Theatre plays, a situation of oppression or conflict is performed, and the audience can intervene by suggesting different actions to change the outcome.

3.4. Invisible Theatre

Invisible Theatre is a TO technique, performing a scene in a public space without announcing that there will be a theatre play happening. This method was developed during the repressive dictatorship in Brazil and Argentina to be able to make the oppression visible in public spaces, without informing the public that what they see is a theatre play while it is ongoing. This method is used to raise awareness of an issue; the difference to other TO techniques is that there is no planned intervention.

This technique can be helpful to raise awareness among people who otherwise might not be interested to engage with a given subject, as it provokes spontaneous and real reactions by people passing by on the street. If you plan to create an Invisible Theatre play with your group, it is important to have individuals who are able to intervene and deescalate the situation if necessary. This technique can be used when you already created a Forum Theatre play together with a group and want to raise awareness about the topic in your local community. After performing, usually members of the group



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address the audience that witnessed the scene to initiate a dialogue about the given topic, talking about this specific inequality taking place, exploring what can be done as a community to counteract this.

3.5. Rainbow of Desire

Rainbow of Desire includes a set of TO techniques that help us explore internalized oppression and possibilities to overcome them. They are usually not performed in front of an outgroup but rather within a given group. When Augusto Boal, the founder of Theatre of the Oppressed, first came to Europe in the 1990's, he realized that the individuals he worked with had difficulties to identify their oppressors. The social structures and oppressions were different and partially less obvious than in Brazil at that time. Yet, people in Europe felt stuck and not free to do what they want to do in life either. The "outer cops" became the "cops in our heads" as he called them.

He realized that it was necessary to expand the focus of societal oppression, also including internal and psychological forms of oppression and conflict. This method is designed to understand and address the psychological dimensions of oppression, complementing the more socially and politically focused techniques of Theatre of the Oppressed. This method can be very helpful if the polarised model of the Theatre of the Oppressed should also be applied. In Israel-Palestine, these techniques can be the first step to become aware of inner voices that we have about ourselves, and about the others.

3.6. Legislative Theatre

Legislative Theatre is a Forum Theatre play too. It can also include other techniques, such as newspaper theatre, during the performance. It has the specific aim to change existing laws to create more social justice on the structural level of society. For this purpose, lawyers are invited as audience members so that new legislative proposals can be made as a result of the theatre play.

3.7. Forumspel (Karin Byréus)

Forumspel, which is a Theatre of the Oppressed method developed by Katrin Byréus from Sweden, is an adaptation of Forum Theatre for applying in schools and educational settings. It focusses on creating short scenes and works particularly with values and topics of injustice that appear in

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educational settings. It is based on role-plays within a given workshop context, not for an external group, with short scenes created and directly performed by the groups in front of each other.

3.8. Teatro De Las Oprimidas (Bárbara Santos)

Teatro De Las Oprimidas is a method that has an anti-racist-decolonial-community feminist perspective on Theatre of the Oppressed. It was developed between 2010 and 2023 by Bárbara Santos, as well as artist-activist groups from Latin America, Europe and Africa. It interconnects gender, race, and class to create an anti-patriarchal aesthetic-political performance. The main difference to other Forum Theatre methods is the community-based intervention instead of the individual.

When performing a play, the audience is divided into smaller groups which are asked to intervene in the play as a group, given the social role they actually have. It encourages thinking as community and using the power of many in a situation of oppression



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4. Design and structure of the workshops

Theatre of the Oppressed Methods are non-formal education techniques, including physical games and exercises which are fun and bring us into our bodies. The intention is to create a space where participants feel comfortable to share their stories and to engage in other peoples' stories, to overcome situations of oppression and conflict together.

These innovative methods provide practitioners in various settings of youth education with pedagogic elements, which are not connected to learners' (mostly negative) experiences in formal education. In this way, we want to enhance youth work by creative perspective taking to boost our young learners' intrinsic motivation, active engagement & learning success.

4.1 Learning objectives

- Help participants understand the mechanisms of challenging social issues, such as exclusion, discrimination or violence
- Encourage participants to actively search for creative and more effective ways to respond to such situations
- Empower and motivate participants to take action and stand against exclusion and discrimination in real life.
- Enable participants to understand different perspectives and reflect critically about their own positions.

4.2 Needs assessment

In order to tailor the contents of workshops to the groups, trainers and facilitators are working with, it is crucial to address the needs of participants in their real-life situations. The aim is to observe and identify the issues the group has to face and need to be covered by the workshop. Based on these findings, the trainer or facilitator can design the appropriate contents with the relevant exercises and approaches.

Informal needs assessment techniques are a good way to find out which challenges a specific group has to face or which need needs to be dealt with:

- **Group Discussions:** Open conversations to identify common issues and conflicts within the group.



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- Anonymous Surveys: Collecting anonymous feedback to ensure honest and uninhibited responses.
- Role-Playing: Observing interactions during role-play exercises to identify underlying issues.
- Focus Groups: Small group discussions focused on specific topics or conflicts.
- Story telling: Participants are invited to talk about a situation or experience which gave them a feeling of oppression, discrimination or exclusion.

4.3 Implementation of the workshops

General outline

Settings:

The workshops can be held subsequently as part of an ongoing process or as a single tool in individual or group training. Therefore, they may vary in length, e.g. as half-day -, one day - or two days event and focus on using Theatre of the Oppressed techniques such as, Image Theatre and Games, Forum Theatre, Methodology of Polarisation, as well as methods for dialogue creation, reflection- and biographic work. These methods are used to create scenarios with polarized viewpoints to explore power dynamics and oppression. The individual plays should not be too long, especially if there is a limit of the available time. They should present a clear situation that will be understandable for the audience without additional explanations.

Especially when starting to use Theatre of the Oppressed techniques please keep in mind that even seemingly short exercises and games can have a big impact on the group and their learning experience. The focus should lie more on the story and on showing the oppression, than on creating a theatre piece with lots of effects and material. Less can be more!

Required space and materials:

The method itself does not require specific preparation. Regarding the required space, it is important that the participants have sufficient freedom of movement to perform their plays. A real stage is not necessary, but a space that is somehow clearly marked to be the space for the performance part (in that case, all materials that do not belong to the actual play should be removed from the stage area).



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A flipchart and a couple of markers are recommended to write down the strategies and ideas developed by the participants, but it is not mandatory. Simplicity is the key and an important value of Theatre of the Oppressed.

Warm-up activities

At the beginning of each workshop, a warm-up activity will help participants to tune in with the topic, since many of us are not used to reflecting openly on our own life and the power relations that exist within it. Warm-up activities create a safe and inclusive space for participants and encourage open and honest communication, build trust, and a positive atmosphere. This allows participants to share their thoughts, concerns and expectations and sets the stage for a productive learning experience.

Pedagogical elements applied in the workshops

In the workshops, the participants have the opportunity to experience theatrical games and active processes that lead to forum theatre plays. The applied elements aim at equipping trainers and facilitators with knowledge, skills and competences to use forum theatre in their work with significantly heterogeneous groups of young people.

In this sense, the workshops focus on pedagogical elements for the empowerment of disadvantaged young people facing oppression and discrimination in their environments, including:

- Drama, forum theatre & scenario techniques, dialogue creation, role plays, reflection & biographic work
- Individual & group settings, how to moderate as a youth worker/facilitator,
- Discussion strategies,
- Motivation techniques,
- Modern career support,
- Self-development,
- Active participation in society,
- How to tackle/overcome obstacles & barriers (social, communicative, personal),
- Empowerment techniques.



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Closing sequences/debriefing

Every intervention (no matter how big or small it is) that made some sort of change in the perception of the participants is collected and written them down on the flipchart paper, then summarized together with the group at the very end of the workshop. This can be used as a basis for a group discussion about insights gained through the workshop and how to apply the identified strategies in real life situations. In addition, a final Q&A-session can be facilitated.

The closing sequence can also be conducted in a non-formal manner, through a verbal exchange round in the end. Participants should be given enough space to reflect together and ask questions about the method. Furthermore, you can also give participants time to journal for themselves before having a closing circle with a verbal or physical checkout. Participants can then share either verbally or through expression of their body their feelings towards the end of the session and what they will take with them.

5. Recommendations for trainers and facilitators

Working with young people from different vulnerable groups, with polarisation between group members, can be challenging. A protected setting and psychological safety are crucial for creating an environment that fosters growth, collaboration and mutual respect among all participants. This ensures a comprehensive and integrated learning experience that leads to tangible and lasting results. Forum Theatre is not a therapeutic tool. It is a pedagogical tool and often it can enable us to process and heal certain things, yet it is not the objective of it. It is important to make this clear to participants too, and to tell them that each person decides for themselves how deep/shallow they want to go.

Resistance to Participation:

Some participants may be reluctant to engage in theatrical activities due to shyness, fear of judgement, cultural differences or other reasons.

Helpful strategies: establishing a safe and supportive environment and learning atmosphere, applying inclusive warm-up activities, emphasizing the voluntary nature of participation in the Forum Theatre activities.

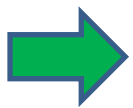
Managing Diverse Groups:

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Balancing the needs and perspectives of a heterogeneous group can be challenging, particularly when participants are expected to open themselves through pedagogical methods such as Forum Theatre plays. Forum theatre techniques are in many cases more appropriate for groups whose members already know each other. Familiarity among the participants often facilitates a safe and open environment for exploration and dialogue. In some cases, however, conflicts may have already manifested within the group. In newly built groups, participants may feel hesitant to engage deeply due to lack of trust and unfamiliarity with each other. By addressing these specific dynamics, trainers and facilitators can tailor their approach to maximize the effectiveness of Forum Theatre techniques, ensuring that both pre-existing and newly built groups can benefit fully from the workshops.

Helpful strategies: Warm-up activities to create a positive and trustful atmosphere are even more important here, setting up / emphasizing clear guidelines (group rules) for respectful interaction, being mindful of power dynamics and ensuring equal participation.



Creating group rules

A helpful tool to create an environment of mutual respect is to let the group create their own rules. This allows them to be part of the creative process and to own what and how things are happening in a different way. Imposing group rules onto the people can be ineffective and does not align with Theatre of the Oppressed values of working together on an eye-to-eye level. Yet, you as a facilitator can support the group in finding rules that help to maintain a respectful atmosphere. You can first let the group create a set of rules and then suggest additional rules if they have not covered them yet. It is important to do this with an attitude of care and respect. You need to show that this is to support them, not to power over them. These rules can help facilitators in their work with diverse groups, particularly to overcome the following challenges

Dealing with emotions

As part of these processes, the experience of conflicts or emotions in the workshops can be expected, possibly going deep with participants and causing consequences. Emotions are fine and welcome and should be allowed to a certain extent during group activities.

Helpful strategies: It can be helpful to be transparent with participants about this aspect from the beginning. This prepares participants emotionally and gives them the possibility to consciously decide

how much they want to go into such a process or not. It is important to remind them from the start and also frequently that this tool is for them and that they can stop and leave the activity at any given time to take care of themselves. As the trainer/ facilitator you need to be aware of your own competencies in holding such a space. Therefore, you need to be clear with your limitations as well, so that the participants do not misunderstand this as a therapy session. Yet you can be there for them seeking out for additional therapeutic/mental health support outside this setting. If there are unresolved issues or emotions among participants at the end of an activity, it is crucial to address them by offering one-on-one coaching or a personal discussion following the group activity.



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Sample of a workshop for Implementation with young people

This half-day workshop sample (5 hours) serves as an inspiration for facilitators to create a Theatre of the Oppressed workshop with young people. If you are not familiar with this method, it is recommended to start with simple games. In fact, the games and exercises are an important part of Theatre of the Oppressed practice and should be conducted to prepare the group for interventions within Forum Theatre plays. Thus, they are crucial to build trust among the group and bring participants fully into their body.

These activities enable participants to behave and move differently than they usually would. If the group members are not yet familiar with each other, it is a good idea to start with name games to build trust; otherwise, you can apply other connecting games. Below you can find selected games and exercises; more games and exercises can be found in Augusto Boal's book *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. Basically, it is recommended to begin with a short check-in round, where everyone can say their name and how they feel at this moment. This helps to create a safe space for participants and gives them the opportunity to take space right from the start. Furthermore, it is helpful to make the structure of the workshop transparent right from the beginning, to give participants an insight into what they could expect. At this point, you can explain that they are invited to participate and are free to step out from the process and take care of themselves at any moment.

Duration: 5 hours

Space: An area that allows the participants to move freely and undisturbed, both indoors or outdoors. However, conducting the workshop indoors might help participants to feel more confident. Depending on the group you can create a circle of chairs to sit down in the beginning, or participants can sit in a circle on the floor.

Materials: For this workshop, no specific material is required.

6.1. Welcome & Setting the Tone with Warm-Up Exercises

Name and Movement Game (10 - 15 minutes)

Purpose: Create a sense of togetherness, breaking the ice using our bodies.



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Instructions: Stand in a circle. Each participant says his or her name and makes a movement. In the end, the group repeats their names and the movements.

Walking Exercise (10 - 15 minutes)

Purpose: Connecting to our bodies. Connecting and listening to each other from our bodies.

Instructions: Ask participants to walk at their own pace, connecting with their breath and heartbeat. Conduct a body scan, checking in with different body parts. A suggestion for this could be starting with the head; then the neck; shoulders; arms; chest; belly; back; hips; legs; feet; ending with inviting all group members to feel their whole body at the same time. You can invite everyone to keep on walking, and if someone stops, everyone stops. If someone starts walking again, everyone starts walking again. Do this for a few minutes so that the movement becomes smooth, and it is difficult to see who initiates the stop or the movement. Subsequently, ask the participants at some point to stop in front of the person closest to them.

6.2. Colombian Hypnosis (30 minutes)

Purpose: Building trust and breaking out of accustomed patterns of movement.

Instructions: Ask the participants to form pairs and agree upon who is person A and who is person B. A leads with his or her hand, B follows the hand movements and keeps the same distance between the head and the hand. Their heads should be parallel to the hand all the time. Switch roles after a few minutes. After this, the pairs can try to lead and follow each other at the same time. A leads B and B leads A. A follows B and B follows A.

Reflection: Invite the pairs to share how they felt during this exercise: how was it to lead and follow? Were there any surprises? Do these roles remind them of real-life situations? Afterwards, all participants have the chance to share insights with the plenum.

6.3. When I Say Walk, You Walk; When I Say Stop, You Stop! (15 minutes)

Purpose: De-mechanizing of behaviours and learning of new patterns. Building new connections between body and mind, and of an increased awareness of how we often act automatically without being conscious about it.

Instructions: Ask the group to walk around in the room and tell them:



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When I say "walk", you walk; when I say "stop", you stop.

After some time reverse it: "walk" means stop, and "stop" means walk. You can also add the instructions "clap" and "jump" and, after a while, reverse these too. Play with these four options for a few minutes. Since these instructions are difficult to follow it usually creates a sense of laughter in the group, and it teaches that it is okay to make mistakes.

6.4. Preparatory Exercise: Image Theatre (45 minutes)

Purpose: Non-verbal expression of oppression topics and building understanding.

Instructions: Ask the participants to walk around in the room and name terms like “tired, happy, angry, sad, afraid, and frustrated”. Tell them to stop and display an image with his or her body when they hear one of these terms. Let them look at each other's positions and then continue walking. End with the term oppressed and tell them to move together in groups of similarly looking positions. Form groups of ca. 5 participants, based on similar images. These groups stay together to create a short Forum Theatre scene. As soon as they have joined their group, explain the next exercise:

6.5. Main Forum Theatre Exercise

Variation 1: Creating a Scene and Interacting with It (60 - 90 minutes)

Purpose: Explore real-life conflicts and intervention strategies.

Instructions:

- *Selection of the Story:* In the small groups that have formed in the last exercise, a brainstorming of situations where the participants either experienced or witnessed oppression is held. It needs to be a concrete situation and about people whom they actually know. This exercise is not to demonstrate abstract systems of oppressions like “capitalism, colonialism etc.”, but to look at interpersonal levels of conflict and oppression between real people. The groups should choose the story that most of them can relate to and develop a short-improvised scene, then present it to the plenum (3-5 minutes).
- *Development of the Scene:* The person whose story was chosen adds the characters that are part of the scene, explains the conflict and what each person needs to say.



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- *First Performance:* Each group performs their scenes for the plenum, without any interruption. The audience supports the actors within Theatre of the Oppressed by clapping on the lap, then the hands, ending with saying “action”, so that the actors know when to start.
- *Second Performance:* Before the second performance starts, divide the audience into smaller groups (ca. 5 people). These groups discuss possible moments for when to intervene and how. They will come into the scene as additional characters and can try interventions from their own social role. When the groups find something they want to try out, they can say in which moment they would like to try to change something. Then they act it out in the scene, and the actors stay within their characters and improvise with what the others are performing. It is important to emphasize that they cannot abruptly change their behaviour completely, the characters' fears, struggles, stressors still need to affect their improvisation. (This method was developed by Barbara Santos, who explored a feminist approach to interventions based on community and solidarity instead of individual interventions that are common within Theatre of the Oppressed)
- *Discuss:* Launch a discussion in plenum about interventions, their impact, and real-life applications.

6.6. De-Rolling, Reflection and Check Out (45 - 60 minutes)

Purpose: Stepping out of roles, exchanging of experiences and closing the process.

Instructions: Lead a physical activity to help the participants let go of their roles. This is important to avoid that individuals get stuck with the emotional states of a given character, and to come back to their own personality. You can play a rhythmic song and invite the participants to shake off everything they do not want to take with them. After that, guide another body scan so everyone can re-connect with his or her own body. You can also lead a gentle stretching or breathing exercise.

After this, participants have the opportunity to share in plenum how they feel at the moment and what they take with them from the workshop. We suggest applying the “popcorn style”, so that everyone can share when he or she is ready. To ensure that all participants take part in the closing activity, explain to them that, after the first person has shared, the person to the left should continue.

Since these techniques can be intense, we recommend finishing with an appreciation for the group and the effort they put into the exercises.

6.7. Important guidelines:

- Prepare the space beforehand and include enough breaks for the group.
- These games can be quite intense and, particularly since participants should not only work with their bodies, but also with their minds and emotions, breaks to drink water, have a snack and decompress are mandatory.
- At the same time, breaks should not be too long so that the group stays focused and in the process. A recommended length for breaks can be around 10 minutes. Listen to the group and their needs, to make it an enriching experience for them.
- Establish respect and confidentiality from the beginning, making sure that participants understand that they should take care of themselves and are free to choose to step out from an exercise and only observe at any time.
- Ensure everyone has a chance to contribute and share, encouraging participants to listen to their bodies and needs. Participation should always be voluntary.
- Be attentive to emotional needs and provide support. This also means to be transparent with the intention of this workshop. Be aware that these exercises can bring up emotional processes and that these are welcome. Be clear that even in such cases, Theatre of the Oppressed is not a therapeutic tool and, especially if you are not a therapist, you need to make sure to be transparent with your limitations. You can encourage participants to reach out for therapeutic support outside the session if needed. Make yourself available for feedback and supportive conversations after the workshop.

6. Conclusion

Forum Theatre offers an innovative, dynamic and impactful way to address conflicts and negative experiences with oppression, discrimination or exclusion in diverse groups. By using these techniques, youth workers and trainers can create engaging and transformative learning experiences. This conceptual framework provides a comprehensive guide for structuring workshops of various lengths, assessing group needs, applying relevant methodologies, and overcoming potential challenges. By fostering empathy, understanding, and actionable strategies, these workshops can significantly contribute to building more inclusive and harmonious communities.

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To end this guide, we want to share a quote that Boal said in his interview with «Democracy Now» in 2009:

“There is a poet, a Spanish poet, Antonio Machado, who says, “The path does not exist. The path, you make by treading on it. By walking, you make the path.” So, we don’t know where the path leads, but we know the direction of the path that we want to take. That’s what I want, and not to accomplish, but to follow, until I can’t.”

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