



# Process manual

Why use Forum Theatre in work with young people?



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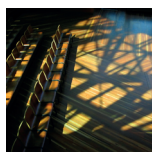
When working with young people it is essential to have several ways of creating dialogue. Most methods of communication are based on verbal dialogue, despite the fact that body language and other types of non-verbal communication are equally important. The forum theatre method incorporates body and verbal language, so instead of just talking about a possible solution to a conflict, the solution is tried out immediately after the event, offering young people a chance to find practical solutions that work for them. It provides an opportunity to experience the reaction to solutions and then store them in both body and mind. The focus is to challenge the way young people think and to consider alternative solutions to conflict.

The aim of the Forum Theatre - Actvise project is to adopt and adjust the forum theatre method as a tool that can be used by guidance counsellors, teachers, mentors and professionals working with young people. The method is an alternative and new way to communicate with young people, targeted at encouraging them to reflect on conflicts and problems, and through that shape new ways to 'Act.'

Furthermore the project incorporates new means of technology, such as video recordings, social networks and sites, and mobile devices. Use of and interest in these tools is already widespread among young people, and it is useful to exploit this interest when connecting with young people on their level. Introducing video recordings aims at expanding the range and levels of forum theatre. Video creates the possibility of maintaining scenarios, which can then be processed and analyzed later on or by using an alternative approach with adapted forum theatre principles.

The important characteristics of the methods that are mentioned in this manual are that they make participants active and involved through reflection and questions.

## Some forum theatre background



Forum theatre was developed by Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal in the 1960's-70's. He worked with community groups in South America who were facing oppression, and introduced participative theatre as a way to break the 'chain of oppression', giving people facing oppression a chance to work out solutions.

In the forum theatre method audience members can stop a performance, which is often a short scene in which a character is being oppressed in some way, and offer a solution to the scenario presented. The problem could be a real problem that someone in the community is facing.

The structure of the play provides a room to act out fears, concerns, dreams, hopes and so on and enables a type of transformation. With audience participation, individuals are provided with the power to change what they see on the stage and contribute to the scenarios presented. This allows the "... spectator to take on the role of Actor and invade the Character and the stage ... to occupy his own space and offer solutions." (Boal 2000) Basically, in trying to bring the "play" to a different end the cycle of oppression is broken.

## The phases of forum theatre

- **Preparation/pre-activity;**  
collecting dilemmas/situations for possible scenes, either from the audience group or from other sources (interviews, news, gossip, etc.)
- **Warm-up exercises;**  
The aim is to break down the barrier between the actors and the audience.
- **Value exercises;**  
getting people to make active choices about statements and opinions.
- **Preparing forum plays/ rehearsals in groups;**  
the participants use either prepared synopsis or a starting point in a value exercise to prepare a short play (3- 5 min).



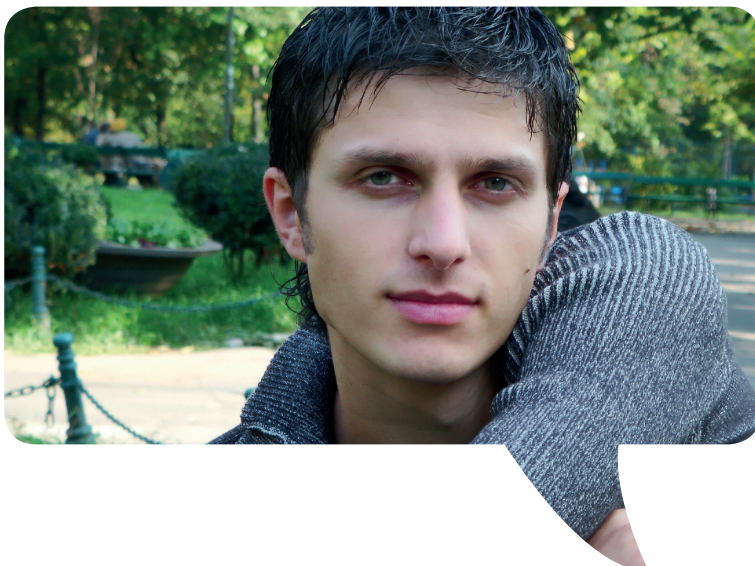
- **First performance of the play;**  
playing the scene through without stops or comments.
- **Discuss the play in pairs/group;**  
discuss what the scene was about.
- **Second performance of the play;**  
introducing the stop method, allowing the audience to stop at any time and ask questions of the characters.
- **Third performance of the play;**  
the joker/facilitator invites the audience to stop the scene and jump in and take over for one of the characters, if they have a suggestion for a solution to the problem. The play continues but now with a new solution. It is important that the rest of the actors stay in their previous character.
- **Repeat;**  
until there are no more suggestions.
- **Evaluation;**  
summing up what worked, if the solutions were realistic, etc. The joker asks the audience to discuss: Was that the real problem? Was that the real solution? Can I act like that in real life? What did I learn? (Boal 1979; Boal 2002; ACT!).

## The joker

The joker is the link between actors and spect-actors. He/she is a facilitator whose role is to keep the event flowing. He/she stands outside the general play and has no direct influence in the direction of the story, but is able to, with questions and facilitating actions, guide the group onwards.

### It is the Joker's objective to:

- get the spect-actors' ideas and suggestions enacted on the stage.
- make the spect-actors reflect upon the conflicts that they experienced in the play.
- help spect-actors understand and acknowledge their role in scenarios and how the solutions could help in their daily lives.



## Top tips for the joker

- **Do not manipulate or influence;**

the joker must avoid all actions, which could manipulate or influence the spect-actors. He/she must not influence the spect-actors or draw conclusions which are not obvious. The joker must always open the possible conclusions to debate and state them in an interrogative form in such a way that the spect-actors can answer YES or NO.

- **Do not make any decisions;**

The joker must at all time leave any decisions about doubts to the spect-actors. He/she must present The Rules of the Play and then leave the rest to the spec-actors.

- **Watch out for magical solutions;**

The joker must watch out for “magical” solutions, meaning solutions that would not be possible or which would not have the effect shown in reality. He can interrupt an actor’s performance if he considers it as magical – not by ruling that it is magic but instead by asking the spect-actors to decide if the solution is possible.

- **Be aware of own physical appearance, behaviour and non-verbal language;**

The Joker’s physical appearance is very important. The Joker must place himself so that he is not a part of the play or a spect-actor. The Joker must appear energetic, so fatigue or indecision does not impact upon the spect-actors.

- **Must be enquiring and facilitating debate;**

The joker must facilitate the spect-actors in getting their thoughts together and improve their actions.

## Keep in mind!

That it is important that there is a certain consensus between audience members about what they are viewing. They should be agreeing on what the conflict is, and the joker should ask questions and create a discussion about the scene in order to ensure this. Remember though, that the joker does not decide what the conflict is! But should instead ask questions like; “what did you see?”, “what is the theme/headline of this scene?”

If the audience hesitates to stop the scene, the joker can try to help them along by asking: “I just want to be sure that you think everything is alright in this scene?”. This can facilitate some answers. If the play comes to a halt or if it becomes unrealistic do not be afraid to stop the scene. If it becomes irrelevant for the participants, this will damage their whole experience of the event. Instead you can move on to another play.

If you ask the audience to discuss in groups or pairs, always remember to follow up – if they have taken the time to form an opinion they should be given a chance to voice it.

## Glossary



**Theatre of the oppressed:** Theatre form developed by Brazilian Augusto Boal, which seeks to transform audiences into active participants in the theatrical experience. Usually the Theatre of the Oppressed is divided in three: image theatre, invisible theatre and forum theatre. Image Theatre is a series of exercises and games where the participants make still images of their lives, feelings, experiences, oppressions. Invisible Theatre is a public theatre which involves the public as participants in the action without their knowing it. They are the spect-actors of a piece of theatre, but while it is happening, and usually even after the event, they do not know that this is theatre rather than real life. Forum theatre – see below.

**Forum theatre:** In forum theatre audience members can stop a performance, often a short scene in which a character is being oppressed in some way. Then spectator replaces actor to determine the solution to a given problem presented by the actor. In this way it is possible to bring audience members into the performance and for them to have an input into the dramatic action they are watching.

**Forum play:** A variation of the forum theatre, but instead of having trained actors to perform plays for a group, the group is involved in creating the plays, and also serve as actors, not just spect-actors. This ensures that the dilemmas in the scenes are relevant to the group.

**Actor:** In this project we use the term actor to describe the person who initially takes on a role. They are part of forming the motivations, background and actions of the characters in the play, and must in all repetitions of the scene stay in character to make solutions realistic and usable.

**Spect-actor:** the spect-actor is a member of the audience. Instead of being a passive spectator of the scene, as in more traditional theatre forms, the audience member is transformed into an active participant in the scene, who can ask questions, give inputs and suggest alternatives, in that way giving them the possibility to change the course of the scene.

**Joker:** The joker is the game leader or facilitator of the scene. He/she is the one responsible for creating a positive atmosphere and keeping a flow going through the event by asking questions that invites reflection and interaction. The joker must remain neutral for most parts, letting the participants judge whether solutions and actions are 'good' or 'bad'.

**Dilemma:** A situation containing some type of unresolved conflict. The dilemma must be realistic, relevant and have characters the audience/spect-actors can identify with.

**Value exercise:** Value exercises or value clarifications are a way to involve participants in discussing statements, positions and values. Participants will be asked to take a stand actively by positioning themselves and discussing their motivation.

**Warm-up exercise:** Small exercises involving some physical activity in order to break down barriers and prepare the participants to be active and involved.

**Pre-activity:** Activities and preparation that lies before the actual activities on the day (warm-up, value exercises, forum plays), and which aims at preparing the participants, gathering information and dilemmas or incorporating digital media.

**Post-activity:** Activities happening after the plays (and evaluation). Post-activities are a great way of getting young people to reflect on topics and dilemmas, and to allow alternative ways of processing the scenes, even for participants who are not confident with stepping up on stage. Post-activities can happen in classrooms, group work or at home or online depending on the methods used.

## Suggested readings:

Boal, Augusto (1979): **Theatre of the Oppressed**. Pluto:London.

Boal, Augusto (1992): **Games for Actors and Non-Actors**. Routledge:London.

Byréus, Katrin (1992): **DU har hovedrollen i dit liv**. DRAMA

