

The role of the educator in constant exploration



AUTHORS

LaXixa Teatre



WHERE DID THE PILOT SESSION TAKE PLACE

Barcelona



WHEN DID THE PILOT SESSION TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WAS IT

April-June 2022, 30 hours

WHO ARE WE ?

La Xixa Teatre is a non-profit organisation based in Barcelona, Spain, with the aim of researching, developing and multiplying educational and theatrical tools as a means for social transformation. The activities we carry out include workshops, training and performances targeting different groups of the population. We strongly believe in the embodiment of the experiences and in the amplification of the diverse voices.

In our work with educators, facilitators and trainers, we give special attention to verbal and non-verbal communication, to voice and movement, as they are the most powerful tools that we have to generate processes of individual and collective transformation and to reach the impact we aim for.



OUR METHOD

Through our experience, we have developed our own method, having always in mind the foundation bricks offered by Popular education and Participatory action research by Paulo Freire. We believe that all agents are capable of teaching and learning; they have knowledge, wisdom and creativity. They are always subject and not the object of the learning processes and have the same right to express their ideas, to discuss problems and solutions and to be listened to.

Given this important base, the methodologies that we combine are mainly the Theatre of the Oppressed, Clown and Process Work. However, in this article we will focus on Theatre of the Oppressed and Process Work, as they were the main methodologies used in the implementation of the second training that we organised in the framework of the VOICE project.

THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED

The Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), developed in the 1970s by Brazilian playwright Augusto Boal, has been one of the main tools for participatory communication and for Latin American popular education movements. TO is a political theatre, a collective essay of emancipation, that finds its basis on the epistemology of the Pedagogy of the Oppressed by Paulo Freire. This methodology consists of several tools: Image Theatre, Forum Theatre, Legislative Theatre, The Rainbow of Desire, Invisible Theatre and Journalistic Theatre.



1. The Clown is more than merely an art product; it is a methodology that helps awaken the ancient desire to turn things upside down and look at them from a different perspective. This method opens to creativity and improvisation, but it also requires a profound self-knowledge of the body and the emotions, a deep closeness to success and failure. The clown is always attentive and responsive to what happens around, as the improvisation starts from reacting to the audience..



We use theatrical games based on the TO to de-mechanize our body, perceptions, and emotions, making us aware of our cultural filters, making explicit and collectivizing our own conflicts and experiences. The collectivization of individual stories, and the subsequent extrapolation to a group history, allows us to look for collective and creative alternatives to situations that are often difficult to solve from an individual position. Within the TO methodology, Forum Theatre is our main tool. Actors and actresses (professional or not) develop a short play based on the collectivization of their own experiences. Each play is characterised by the presence of the oppressed, the oppressor, the allies (of the oppressor and/or the oppressed) and the Curinga or Joker. The Joker is the character who interacts with the audience, formed by the spect-actors and spect-actresses. In the moment of greatest conflict, the Joker stops the piece and asks the audience for suggestions to try to resolve the conflict on stage. The spect-actors and spect-actresses are invited to act the alternatives they offer by replacing the characters, with the aim to rehearse solutions that can be also given in real life.

PROCESS WORK

Process Work or Process Oriented Psychology (POP) offers a model that integrates and uses contributions from various disciplines to facilitate transformation and growth both individually and collectively. This methodology is applied in different areas: community and organizational development, training in diversity and leadership, individual and family psychotherapy, relationship consulting and group facilitation.

Process Work focuses on developing a state of consciousness; that is, helping people and groups realize how they perceive and live their experiences, learning to change their approach, and discovering information that they do not notice or marginalize, and that limits their ability to respond. Much of the information we need to transform, and grow is not perceived because it is a challenge to our ordinary consciousness. Without realizing it, we marginalize certain aspects - which we call subjective - of our daily experience: emotions, desires, dreams,

intuitions, fantasies, moods, etc., because they conflict with our basic belief system or with the dominant culture to which we belong. Therefore, we do not allow ourselves to hear or talk about experiences that are outside the scope of our ordinary consciousness and we prevent ourselves from being able to perceive signals and information of a non-ordinary reality. However, what we marginalize does not disappear, it only takes different paths to manifest (body symptoms, changing moods, addictive tendencies, conflicts, etc.) and if we give space to them to manifest and be analysed, they can help us being more aware of ourselves, others and the world. Process Work consists of cognitive learning (theories, methods and structures) but, at the same time, requires deep internal work and a "spiritual" attitude that allows us to transform difficulties into opportunities. Process Work teaches us to connect with our deepest being and learn to flow creatively in the midst of 'extreme circumstances'.



OUR EXPERIENCE WITHIN THE VOICE PROJECT

The second training which lasted 30 hours (process which ended with the participation in the annual Forum Theatre Marathon organised by La Xixa) took place from the 8th of April to the 11th of June and was characterised by a mix of face-to-face and (fewer) online sessions. As mentioned previously, the main methodologies applied during this second training were the Theatre of the Oppressed and Process Work and its main objectives were to investigate inner and outer diversity and systems of power (very useful for group facilitation), to foster movement and voice experimentation as tools for a more impactful verbal and non-verbal communication, to work on improvisation and the aesthetics of the oppressed. This was possible through the implementation of self-analysis and self-confidence exercises, theatrical games and through the process of creation of forum theatre pieces.



QUALITIES AND AWARENESS

As educators and group facilitators, we have a tendency to pay attention to the group that we are working with, sometimes feeling that we are an entity separated from it. However, although in a different role, we are part of the group, with our strengths and weaknesses, our talents and insecurities, our belief system and emotions. When approaching the participants is important, for this reason, to be self-aware of what we are bringing to the table.

During the training offered in the framework of the Voice project, we worked on self-awareness mainly through the implementation of Process Work exercises.

Participants were asked to stand and find a place in the room where they felt comfortable. Once there, they were asked to close their eyes, breathe in, breathe out, notice their body in the space, their feet on the floor, their head floating in the air. Then they were asked to open their eyes and find something that caught their attention...it could be an object, a sound, a light. They were invited to focus on it, and find out what was that attracted them, and how being aware of it changed something in their body. At this point, they were asked to imagine that they were that thing that caught their attention...to embody the qualities of that object, sound, light. Which are those qualities that were found so attractive? How would integrating them change how the participants feel and interact with the others and the environment? In order to embody and anchor that quality, the participants were asked to make a movement and to repeat it over and over again. The final invitation was to let the new quality/ies accompany them during the session.

IDENTITY, ROLES AND RANKS

As mentioned previously, educators are part of the group they work with. However, it is important to recognise that they have a different role and rank that comes with it. Being aware of our role and rank in the group is fundamental to relate with the other members and is fundamental for any educator.

In the training, we started from a step before, investigating first of all on one's identity. Participants were invited to define their identity: "educator, woman, white, 40-year-old...". Attention was brought on the fact that there are parts of our identity that might never change during our life, and others that do change, making identity something that is not fixed, and that in fact is in a continuous dialogue with the environment and society. Another interesting fact about identity is that its definition is much easier when we think of it as opposed to something else...it is easier to say what I am not than what I am. Good...but now inevitably another question arose: What does it mean to be different? We usually describe something or someone as different by assigning labels that are not considered positively from those who underline that certain difference. More concretely, in our society there are certain social identities that occupy the centre, while the "different" ones are labelled and marginalised. Our position in the centre or in the margin gives us a certain rank, as it does to the people we work with, influencing the way we relate to each other. As educators, it is necessary to acknowledge the power and privileges that we have, the diversities present in the group, and the impact that all of this has on it and on our mission in the group.

BUILDING TRUST, BUILDING RELATIONS

Once we are aware of who we are, we can start working with the group. The first step is to build a safe and courageous environment, in which participants feel free to express and exchange their ideas and trust that the group will keep confidentiality and a non-judgmental attitude, that dialogue will be open and honest.

One of the activities that we proposed with the aim of building trust among the participants was "The jungle of sounds". We divided the group into pairs. Each pair was formed by "A" and "B". During the first round, A (with closed eyes) was guided through sounds by B. B was asked to guide A, experimenting with different types of sound, different volumes and distances, while "protecting" A from getting hurt, ensuring a safe journey and being always aware of the space and the other bodies moving in the room. During the second round, the roles were swapped, and then the group came together to assess the activity and specifically how they felt in each role, the importance of verbal communication,

awareness of the space, trust, the need to take care and of being taken care of by the group.

OBSERVATION AND MEMORY

In the long list of the competences that educators are supposed to have, we can find observation and memory. Unfortunately, those are not gifts that everyone is born with; luckily both of them can be trained.

In our training, participants were asked to walk in the room, exploring the space, avoiding going in circles and fostering their presence. They were then asked to stop, close their eyes, and point with their finger at a series of objects, starting from the fire extinguisher (that is something anyone should pay attention when entering a room, right?). Then, they were invited to start walking again, then to stop, close their eyes and point at the person with a red jacket...and then the same for a few more times pointing at who wore a black shirt, glasses, blue electric socks, etc. During the debriefing, the group reflected on the importance of observation and recognition: How often we look at things and people, but we do not really see them, we do not pay attention? Culturally, we might fear staring at someone, or we may react to someone staring at us. As educators and facilitators, we are required to overcome those fears and to be able to see, observe, recognise, remember, take into account.

VERBAL VS. NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATIONS: FRIENDS OR ENEMIES?

Another objective of the Voice project is to provide tools to educators to foster their multimodal communication. Here comes an exercise that aims to help the embodiment of words in such a way that the verbal and non-verbal communication are in accordance and convey the same message.

The participants were invited to start walking in the space, while bringing attention to their breathing, body temperature, weight, tensions. While walking, they were asked to divide themselves in two groups, forming two lines (A and B) facing each other. Each person in line A had to have a pair in line B and talk about their best birthday party. All As were asked to do so at the same time, while the Bs had to carefully listen to the story. A minute passed by and the As were asked to stop; the Bs were asked then to interpret their pair's story making a sculpture with their body. In the second round, the Bs were asked to tell something funny that had happened to them lately. The As were then asked to interpret the story through a short musical performance. When asked about a feedback, participants said that on the one hand it was difficult to speak for a minute, as after a few seconds they felt they had nothing else to say so they had to really focus and try to give more details. On the other hand, for most people it was difficult to focus on their companion's story as everyone was talking at the same time; and last but not least, some had difficulties to interpret the story with their body and (in the second round) voice.



BIG BODY – SMALL BODY; BIG GROUP – SMALL

Another aspect that we worked on during our training was space. How do we use the space when we are facilitating/teaching? How do our participants/learners use it? What does it tell us? Below, you can find an exercise about space and movement, but also group cohesion and awareness.

The participants were invited to walk in the room trying to occupy the entire space, in silence and training the peripheral gaze (being aware of oneself, of others and of the environment). The facilitator asked to stop, look around and balance the occupation of the space. The participants were then asked to walk again, using each one as much space as possible, making the body as big as possible. After a few seconds of exploration in this new status, the participants were asked to walk using as little space as possible. After a few seconds of exploration, they were asked to again be as big as possible, and then as small as possible. They went back to walking normally, with the invitation of focusing on their body and the sensations that they had just experienced, before repeating the same exercise but now as if the group was part of one big body...and then of a very small body.

GROUPGROUNDING AND POWER

Another dimension of exploration and self-analysis within the Voice project is grounding.

The participants were asked to stand and focus on their body. They were invited to breath in and breath out, bringing consciousness to their breathing without trying to modify it. While doing so, they were asked to feel their body...their weight, their feet on the floor, their head in the air...and then to focus on their balance, imagining a line going through their body, connecting them to the earth and the sky. Finally, they were asked to move their body, feeling this axis...and then to start walking. While walking, when the facilitator indicated it, they were asked to spontaneously form groups of five, then of 4, of 3, of 2, and they were told that they would continue the exercise with the person that they had ended up in pair with. They stood one in front of the other, imagining a thin line right in the middle. They were asked to touch each other shoulder maintaining the distance drawn by the imaginary line. In turns, one person was asked to move the other person, push the other person until they moved. Then, again in turns, one person was asked to lay on the floor while the other tried to turn their body.

WHAT DID PARTICIPANTS THINK ABOUT IT?

The second Voice training offered by La Xixa was characterised by a mix of face-to-face and online sessions. The online ones were more theoretical, while the face-to-face were mostly practical. Part of the face-to-face sessions were dedicated to the creation of forum theatre pieces based on the participants' experiences which were presented during an annual event organised by La Xixa: The Intercultural Forum Theatre Marathon.

"Combining theory and practice makes everything richer and allows you to approach the subject in different ways."

"I am very satisfied with the session as doing theatre is something new for me. Through theatrical games, the facilitators help us understand better how we use our body. We become more aware of our movement patterns and rhythms. Similarly, we are learning to be more aware of our breathing and use our voice according to the need of the situation."

"I really enjoyed the activities and felt that we played a lot, which is one of my

overall expectations from the training! In addition, there was a lot of discussion and debate about our role as facilitators on sensitive issues ...".

"The session was up to my expectations... to understand the rhythm of body movements and to connect body, mind, and soul... they guide us while we create the scripts from real life stories..."

"The best thing was the activities meant to build trust in the group...seeing the diversity present in the group and the way we relate to each other, helps me to be more aware of the diversity that surrounds me in my daily life."

"When working with people, there are always moments when different opinions, leaderships, motivation and demotivation arise... Therefore, it is good to face, analyse and manage different kinds of situation."

WHAT DID TRAINERS THINK ABOUT IT?

At La Xixa, we were very satisfied by the learning process carried out with our participants. During this longer training, it was very interesting for us to use Theatre of the Oppressed and Process Work specifically for the purpose(s) of the VOICE project to improve multimodal communication, posture, and impact of educators. While working on multimodal communication, voice and body awareness and the role(s) of the educator, we gave special attention to intersectionality and systems of power that coexist in all learning environments and that determine the way the communication is carried out and the kind of impact that educators can have on the group(s).

The biggest gift for the trainers was the commitment and interest to experiment and learn shown by the participants since the first session until the end of the training.

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