

FORUM THEATRE AND THE TEACHING PROCESS

^aLADISLAV TISCHLER

Constantine The Philosopher University in Nitra, Faculty of Education, Department of Music, Dražovská 4, 949 01 Nitra, Slovakia
email: ^altischler@ukf.sk

Abstract: This paper presents a theatrical technique called *Forum Theatre and its Use in The Teaching Process*. Forum Theatre is a name for an interactive stage technique often used in the educational process. The world-renowned method, based on the dramatic techniques of August Boal, is characterised by the fact that the audience become actors and are thus confronted with the reality that takes place on the stage. This staging method is commonly used in modern teaching concepts all around the world and is one of the key methods of creative drama. It enables people to experience, analyse and subsequently understand dramatized situations in everyday life and thus improve not only the educational process, but especially mutual communication

Keywords: theatre, teaching, education, creativity, critical thinking

1 Forum theatre and the teaching process

It is essential to find connection between different disciplines, be able to creatively combine and bring new solutions and ideas in the shortest time possible so that the teacher can respond quickly to a constantly changing society and is able to bring and interpret new, up-to-date, and interesting information.¹ According to Nicholson, young people are now often in a complicated situation, being attacked by different emotional connections, beliefs and value systems. Access to social networks, multiple sources of information and mediated images make their adolescence more difficult and disturbed by constant uncertainty.² A teaching process must not go against this trend, but take this as a starting point instead. It should be assumed that contemporary society determines not only trends in theatre, but also in, for instance, the management of lessons. Increasing pace or in other words dynamics of society causes a constant flow of information. The teacher's task is to teach students to classify this information and to form their own attitude towards it. New trends and methods are constantly coming to guide the educational process so that it is as attractive as possible, but in practice their application usually does not work. Ken Robinson suggests that young people should be given the opportunity to develop their own creativity and learn to better adapt to the changing social and economic conditions they have to face.³ Since ancient times, production of theatre plays has served as a tool to make a text accessible. Consequently, it was easier to understand the text in a visual form which enhanced the intellectual level of the nation. Theatre offers the opportunity to put students in a model situation from real life, in which they will have to make decisions and bear full responsibility for them. This unrealistic situation allows the teacher to provide students with a detailed analysis of a conflict, relationships and possible responses to students' actions in the situation. Forum Theatre is a name for an interactive stage technique often used in the educational process. It is interpreted in the form of a compact performance, which presents the audience with attitudes to various problems, gives them the opportunity to realize their position and possibly change it.⁴ The world-renowned method, based on the dramatic techniques of August Boal, is characterised by the fact that the audience become actors and are thus confronted with the reality that takes place on the stage. This technique is extraordinary because the audience can directly

interact with the performance on the stage, change it as well as the fate of characters. *Forum Theater also extensively focuses on the individual and their personal mental set-up, blocks and issues, which helps them to overcome and strengthen their self-esteem and self-reflection in a non-violent way.*⁵ Not only does it develop the creative and critical thinking of the audience, but it teaches them to be empathic and assertive, and can lead to an objective solution of problematic tasks. An objective solution is an active search for so-called objective truth, which arises from the intersection of different perspectives on the issue. This staging method is commonly used in modern teaching concepts all around the world and is one of the key methods of creative drama. It enables people to experience, analyse and subsequently understand dramatized situations in everyday life and thus improve not only the educational process, but especially mutual communication.

In his publications,⁶ Boal divides the staging of the Forum Theatre into *three phases*. The first is based on a group work using exercises and games. It is very important for the participants in the creative process because they make their first contact with each other. Individual exercises are designed to eliminate initial fear of the performers. The games reinforce the dynamics of a group in which students learn to improvise and react readily to a new situation. Some of these exercises can then be integrated into the creative process. Bertold Brecht, and Konstantin Sergejevich Stanislavsky's acting exercises, and other dramatic activities are supplemented by the workshop participants themselves.

The book⁷ is divided into four chapters:

- Chapter – Feel What You Touch – to awaken movement, balance and touch.
- Chapter – Listen to What You Hear – to learn receiving tones and rhythms.
- Chapter – Awakening Different Senses – to practise senses without engaging eyesight.
- Chapter – Guess What You See – nonverbal communication.

Individual games are aimed at preparing students (future actors and actresses). This author deals with the topic of the use of music and drama performing activities in more detail: SONĐOROVÁ, D. 2019. *Music and drama based activities, their use in the technique Forum Theatre* (In *Teorie a praxe hudobní výchovy VI*. Praha: Nakladatelství Karolium. 2020, č. 6, p. 189-194). The use of the Forum Theatre technique is bound to the first phase.

2 Relaxation games

Zombie

The exercise is focused on relaxation, concentration, getting to know each other in the group and cooperation. Students stand in a circle and gradually say their names or nicknames. The game begins with the identification of the first "zombie" who looks at his victim and proceeds to him until the victim says the name of another student. Then he stops and the player whose name was spoken comes to life. He chooses the victim and goes to him again. The "Transfer of the zombie" continues until the victim makes a mistake. Then the player loses his life and can no longer continue in the game. The game continues until the last three players remain.

¹ One option is to link art education with information technology. Under the influence of COVID-19 measures, current education has been moved to the online environment for almost a year. This fact influenced not only the way education is implemented, but also the creation of new software for art education. See, for example, research and development of Albrecht software for teaching music theory for all levels of music and music-drama education: VOZÁR, M., ČIERNA, A., BREZINA, P. 2020. *Albrechtic - A Modern Didactic Tool for Teaching Music Theory*. In TURČANI, M. et al.: DIVAI 2020 : 13th International Scientific Conference on Distance Learning in Applied Informatics, Štúrovo September 21-23, 2020, 1. vyd. Praha: Wolters Kluwer, 2020, pp. 245-250. ISBN 978-80-7598-841-6. ISSN 2464-7470.

² NICHOLSONOVÁ, H. *Divadlo a vzdelávanie*. Bratislava: Divadelný ústav, 2010, p. 27.

³ NICHOLSONOVÁ, H. *Divadlo a vzdelávanie*. Bratislava: Divadelný ústav, 2010, p. 61.

⁴ MATYAŠOVÁ, L. 2005. *Divadlo fórum na školách žije*. In *Tvorivá dramatika*. 2005, č. 3, p. 15.

⁵ SONĐOROVÁ, D., GÁLISOVÁ, L. 2019. *Forum theatre as a means of risk youth resocialization*. In *Ad Alta: Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, 2019, vol. 9, issue 2, p. 44.

⁶ See BOAL, A. 1995. *The rainbow of desire: the Boal method of theatre and therapy*. New York: Routledge, 1995. 216 p. ISBN 0415103495, and too BOAL, A. 2002. *Games for actors and non-actors*. New York: Routledge, 2002. 336 pp. ISBN 0415237080

⁷ BOAL, A. 1995. *The rainbow of desire: the Boal method of theatre and therapy*. New York: Routledge, 1995. 216 p. ISBN 0415103495

Game with sticky notes

This game is designed to develop analytical thinking, students learn to ask the right questions, which supports the development of perception of the character's nature. Players in the group are sitting in a circle, each of them receives a blank piece of paper on which they write the name of a famous person or movie hero. Everyone sticks a sticky note on their partner's forehead without showing them the name. Everyone gradually asks questions to reveal the identity of the person written on their forehead. The questions must be formulated in such a way that the members of the group can only answer yes or no. If the answer is yes, the player may ask another question, if the answer is no, then the player on the right continues. The game ends when everyone discovers their 'true' identity.

In the sense of this word

One player from the group leaves the room, the rest of the players agree on some trait, emotion, or character feature, for example, nervous, distrustful, polite, angry, optimistic, rude, kind, selfless... The player comes back to the room and asks others to perform an action "in the sense of this word" (for example singing a song, writing a letter, calming a child in a baby carriage, performing a few simple exercises, speaking to a neighbour) to guess the trait, the emotion or character. The player whose acting is guessed correctly as the 'word' leaves the room and the game is repeated.

The second phase is focused on the development of staging thinking using theatrical images. A photograph or an image is basically a captured situation of everyday life. It can be easily transferred to the stage in 3D form and through the nature of characters and their relationships, students learn to develop stage thinking. Each situation has its logical structure, which is determined by its basic conflict. The construction of a theatrical image is determined by given circumstances (everything that affects the characters at a given moment), which secondarily influence the behaviour of individual characters. A teacher can revive the displayed image and move it freely forward or backward in time. Students learn to understand the relationships between characters, their nature and can name a primary conflict and circumstances that affect their actions. They are ready for the last phase when they understand the correlations of individual parts of a theatrical image.

Exploring space

One of the tasks is to teach students how to move in a space, what is appropriate for classical theatre space, what means of expression, movement and intensity of voice to choose in a given space. The teacher explains the difference between performing on the "big" stage and performing in a space that is in direct contact with audience. During acting lessons, students must not focus only on classical theatre space so the teacher intentionally changes the place of production of their etudes during the exercises, delimits and subsequently abolishes the boundaries within which the students move. They must be able to adapt their performance and be able to respond to any change in a space because they will often encounter an unconventional and irregular space in their future profession. The simple exercise is based on free movement of students in the space, recognizing it so as not to endanger or restrict the members of the group. Students must concentrate and feel their partners so they have the same tempo-rhythm. Then the teacher intervenes and he arbitrarily changes the pace of the group, conditions and rules of students' movement in the space. Students then vary their movement. The cooperation of the group and the perception of the space are important.

Improvisations

Students are divided into two or more teams that compete with each other. Each group has to come up with ten movie titles or books. One member from each group is selected by turn and assigned one of the fictitious names. Within the time limit, he must pantomimically or by movement present it in such way that members of his team guess the correct answer. If he succeeds, his group scored a point, if not than the opponent scored the point. The game continues until there are no movie titles left.

Improvisations are very important in the beginning of students' work because they teach them how to react quickly to the situation, to deal with tempo-rhythm, spatial feeling, they learn the basics of acting and develop their creative thinking. The teacher needs to create a relaxing atmosphere before the exercise which is very important at the beginning of improvisation. There is a principle – the looser the atmosphere, the better students are prepared for improvisation. The teacher explains the basic rules of improvisation after the initial attempts. Based on improvisational exercises, students begin to actively work with the tempo-rhythm and rules of stage composition. It moves on from individual to group improvisations in which students learn how to react to a chosen theme at a given moment with respect to the group, maintaining the theme, story and dramatic arc so that their actions lead to a point. The teacher can diversify the lecture with theoretical knowledge of improvisation in the Renaissance *Commedia dell'arte*.

Storytelling and its variations

The creative team is divided into pairs. They will be given the task of remembering a funny story. The members of the pair tell each other stories. The next part of the exercise continues on stage – the first member of the pair tells his authentic story and the second member waits outside. After the first narration, the second member of the pair tells the story as he remembered it, but he can also use his imagination as much as possible when narrating. The students' task is to recognise which of stories is original. They analyse stories and point out what interested them. Then the teacher analyses with them the structure of story, phenomena that create plot, tempo-rhythm, storyline, creating the plot and points.

The third phase is staging a Forum Theatre. The whole process starts by selecting a theme. Content elements are called theme (leading ideas, images, leitmotifs, what is being discussed). The motives for the action of characters are abstract and universal terms (for example, the motive of betrayal). Unlike motives, themes are specific and individual (for example, the theme of Faidra's betrayal of her husband).⁸ The right choice of the theme is an extremely important point, as it determines the whole direction of the staging in space. The choice of a theme affects social status, but mainly current issues that bother a selected group of students. A theme should therefore reflect a new or latent issue of the society which the specific group of students is a part of. This author, for example, deal's with the increasingly current topic of cyberbullying, mediated through the forum theater: HUBINSKÁ, Z. 2020. *Forum Theater and Movement* (In Ad Alta: Journal of Interdisciplinary Research, 2019, roč. 10, č. 2, pp. 146-150). Its intention was to present this sensitive topic to young people, to show them what their actions can cause and how to prevent inadequate behavior. Students usually choose themes they know well from their family or school, which allows them to have a closer relationship to the chosen situation. This applies not only to the engagement in creation, but also in relation to the characters which they will then portray more truthfully. An idea comes from the selection of a theme. An idea speaks of a message to be delivered to the audience through a performance. The second step is to prepare a script. In this phase, it is not only the students' creative thinking that develops, but they also learn to name the conflict precisely, its climax, the very path to the conflict, its consequences, and possible solutions. When preparing a script, it is necessary to name breaking moments of the story, which can reverse its direction, name the main characters and describe their basic characteristics. One of the rules of Forum Theatre is that the main character must turn out badly. It is important to point out the significance and the role of each character in building the theme of the whole production. Students and their teacher the first draft of the script. The teacher can choose an improvisation method to create a text template in this part. *There are different levels of improvisation: making up a text based on a familiar and quite an accurate outline (as in commedia dell'arte); or solely based on an agreed theme or construction; a completely original gesture and verbal*

⁸ PAVIS, P. *Dictionnaire du Théâtre*. Paris: Dunod, 1996. p. 411.

*idea created without a previous pattern in physical expression.*⁹ This method requires thorough previous preparation of the students. The next part is the staging in which individual situations are visualized in space. The teacher can approach the staging in several ways, but usually uses material from the preparatory part of the staging. They can use the 3D image method that they had tried in the second phase, the improvisation method, or a traditional arrangement of individual theatrical images for the visualisation. Simple staging principles are usually used. That means a basic costume, a simple scene and a musical component which has no story-forming character. Expressive elements must be simple. This will reinforce the informative value of the whole production and the audience will be focused on the conflict and theme. After this part the teacher manages the completed theatre production.

Before creating the script, students should learn how to effectively obtain relevant information about the topic. It is necessary to know all available information about every topic we want to try to produce. During the creation of the script, it is important to choose the basic plot facts, to work out the structure of the staging, in which conflicts and individual theatrical images are named. After that, students can be divided into creative teams. Each team will receive a scene in which they must describe in detail all the actions and, if necessary, come up with lines for individual characters. Then they present their studies to each other, and if the creative team has agreed to the proposal, the scene is added to the script. Otherwise, the proposal is returned to completion. In order for the project to be successful, it is important to identify and select the actors who, from a physiological and psychosomatic point of view, are most similar to our idea of the characters in the staging. Every actor has certain dispositions that predetermine him for certain types of characters. During the preparation for the staging of Forum Theatre we can describe every character who can intervene in the story and give it a work name. Then the creative team's task is to create biography and basic characteristic of individual performers. Each character will be assigned to an actor by comparisons. Actors name individual actions of their character, which result from dramatic text. Students analyse characters' reactions and motivations using prepared biographies and characteristics. Only after this inevitable theoretical preparation the actors start to learn lines of the play.

3 Performance in front of the audience

Forum Theatre is not a demanding production because of the use of simple expressive elements and thus it can be also realized in non-theatrical locations. The primary role of this theatre form is not its aesthetic aspect, but its informative value and subsequent interaction with the audience. The whole presentation consists of two parts. In the first part the audience is introduced to the performance and its theme, in the second part the audience play the main role. After the introductory part, the teacher takes over the action and together with the audience names the fundamental conflict. There is a controlled discussion, in which the conflict situation is analysed – the reasons for its occurrence, the characters' actions and their relations to the problem are named. At this stage, the individual protagonists who defend the characters' actions and thus help to better understand the situation are also involved in the discussion. After a basic analysis, the audience in cooperation with the teacher identify the causes of the conflict and propose solutions that would prevent it from occurring. The performance takes place again, and the audience is free to stop it when they feel that changing a character's behaviour in a particular situation would prevent conflict. A solution is proposed, and it is then applied in the performance. In this way, the audience has the right to enter and change the story. The action of the main character or the others may be changed. An important rule is that the nature of the characters must not change during the performance. The proposed change is included into the performance, which is then performed. The audience can see how this change affects a conflict situation. Audience can also enter the

staging process in a second way by replacing a performer, performing in the situation themselves and trying to change it in the ongoing process. Once performed, the audience is again asked to interact and rate this change. The audience can intervene in the performance and change the character's response until the conflict situation is prevented or its effects are mitigated. The whole staging ends with the final evaluation by the teacher and the audience. This theatre form carries a process that is constantly multiplying. The staging phase teaches the audience to think critically and creatively, but their knowledge is enhanced in practice only when it is introduced.

The format, which is made dynamic by a continuous flow of information, forces us to reassess the functioning of a teaching process, in which not obtaining information but sorting and combining it should be a priority. Application of theatrical procedures to the teaching process can show students how to analyse and create new solutions in problem solving tasks. Students are taught to communicate and cooperate with each other. Nicholson concludes her publication, *Theatre & Education 2009*: "... progressive elements in theatre-based education suggest that young people can actively create meanings and create theatre according to their lives, not just reproduce theatre as it exists."¹⁰ This article has no ambition to talk about finding a connection between theatre and the educational process as *Drama in Education* does, but it talks about theatre, which may be part of the educational process in *Education in Drama*. A key step towards making an educational process more attractive can be to realise the similarities of a lesson with the theatre performance and to apply the basic principles of staging. Teachers who are able to use the methods of the theatre performance will increase the attractiveness of their teaching unit and thus increase the efficiency of the teaching process itself. *One who encourages the development of children can stand proof of how people learn through playing and imitating. The child imitates reality and at the same time shows their view of the world. In children's games – as well as in theatrical play – there is a human urge not to accept reality as simply something given, but to "magically" transform it in a play through play.*¹¹

Literature:

1. BOAL, A. 1995. *The rainbow of desire: the Boal method of theatre and therapy*. New York: Routledge, 1995. 188 pp. ISBN 0415103495
2. HUBINSKÁ, Z. 2020. *Forum Theater and Movement*. In Ad Alta: Journal of Interdisciplinary Research, 2019, roč. 10, č. 2, pp. 146-150. ISSN 1804-7890
3. MATYAŠOVÁ, L. 2005. *Divadlo fórum na školách žije*. In *Tvořivá dramatika*, 2005, č. 3. 45 pp. ISSN 1211-8001
4. NICHOLSONOVÁ, H. 2010. *Divadlo a vzdelávanie*. Bratislava: Divadelný ústav, 2010. 79 pp. ISBN 978-80-89369-14-0
5. PAVIS, P. 1996. *Dictionnaire du Théâtre*. Paris: Dunod, 1996. 542 pp. ISBN 8088987245
6. SONDOROVÁ, D. 2019. *Hudobno-dramatické aktivity a ich využitie v technike Divadlo fórum*. In *Teorie a praxe hudobní výchovy VI*. Praha: Nakladatelství Karolium. 2020, č. 6, pp. 189-194. 368 p. ISBN 978-80-7603-163-0
7. SONDOROVÁ, D., GÁLISOVÁ, L. 2019. *Forum theatre as a means of risk youth resocialization*. In: Ad Alta: Journal of Interdisciplinary Research, 2019, roč. 9, č. 2, pp. 42-46. ISSN 1804-7890
8. VOZÁR, M., ČIERNA, A., BREZINA, P. 2020. *Albrechtic - A Modern Didactic Tool for Teaching Music Theory*. In TURČÁNI, M. et al.: *DIVAI 2020 : 13th International Scientific Conference on Distance Learning in Applied Informatics*, Štúrovo September 21-23, 2020. 1. vyd. Praha: Wolters Kluwer, 2020. pp. 245-250. ISBN 978-80-7598-841-6. ISSN 2464-7470.

Primary Paper Section: A

Secondary Paper Section: AL, AM

⁹ PAVIS, P. *Dictionnaire du Théâtre*. Paris: Dunod, 1996. p. 54.

¹⁰ NICHOLSONOVÁ, H. *Divadlo a vzdelávanie*. Bratislava: Divadelný ústav, 2010. p. 68.

¹¹ NICHOLSONOVÁ, H. *Divadlo a vzdelávanie*. Bratislava: Divadelný ústav, 2010. p. 61.