

ART FOR ART'S SAKE

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE USE AND VALUE OF FORUM THEATRE.

Report from Route 9 with the same name as part of The Future is not what it used to be 4-5 April 2014.

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WHAT IS FORUM THEATRE?

FORUM THEATRE IS A TYPE OF **INTERACTIVE THEATRE** TECHNIQUE BASED ON

- Forum breaks – moments at which the play is stopped and the possible options and opinions are discussed
- Facilitator (narrator) – actor – audience framework
- Simultaneous dramaturgy
- Audience participation
- Translation of actual problem or issue into the staged narrative structure
- Opposing opinion groups for audience members within narrative
- Plurality of voices

USES OF FORUM THEATRE

- Change (opinions/views/relations)
- Education
- Initiating of discussion
- Creating a forum for discussing issues
- Boosting creative process and decisions in organisations
- Learning about the organisation
- High impact training and events for public sector / business / community clients

“PARTICIPANTS LEARNING IN AREAS SUCH AS MANAGEMENT OR DIVERSITY TRAINING CAN BENEFIT FROM THE TECHNIQUE HELPING THEM IMAGINE DIFFERENT RESPONSES AND OUT-COMES TO COMMON PROBLEMS”

VALUES OF FORUM THEATRE

- Provides a safe environment for changing roles (trying different shoes)
- Creates a sense of empathy between people in different opinion groups
- Offers different kind of education
- Create learning opportunities
- Gives voice to those who don't have one or can't defend themselves
- Can influence decision makers
- Audience participation and plurality of voices
- Let's one's opinions to be staged out theatrically and observe "itself"
- Facilitation of complex issues of younger audience like drug awareness, bullying, career choices etc.
- Imaginative and engaging experience

HOW TO MAKE MY OWN FORUM THEATRE?

1. GET AN ISSUE THAT NEEDS TO BE **DISCUSSED** OR REVIEWED

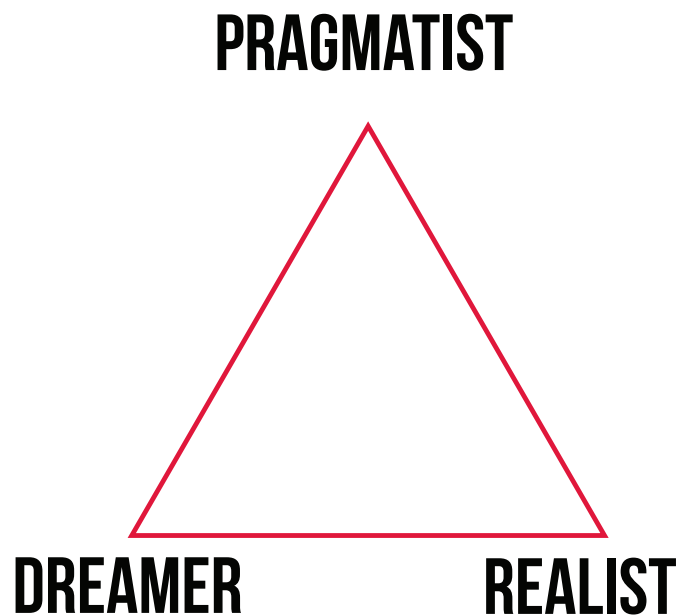
There is no story and no forum without an issue! It can be something that bothers your own community, your group, your own organisation or even yourself. Look for an issue you can use, exploit, and investigate. By forum theatre you can influence decision makers and find out what people really think. It is an effective way how to initiate discussion even between subjects that needs a little push. Furthermore you can give voice to those who has none or to those who need a safe environment, like violent crime victims etc. You may need to gain their trust in the first place. Schools invite true pros like Arc Theatre, so does local police departments or business organisations that want to use this method to discuss or reflect on changes and important issues.

2. HAVE AN ISSUE? TRANSLATE THE ISSUE INTO A NARRATIVE STRUCTURE. **STORY IS KING!**

If you've found an issue that needs to be solved you are ready for the next step: Translating the issue into a dramatic narration.

This process usually starts by investigating the topic on your own. The deeper the better. It can provide you with something you'll be able to start working with. First of all you should create a story that hooks the audience no matter what your overall objective is or how complex the issue. It is very important to think about entertainment and keeping your audience attention. Arc Theatre's competence and talent lays in the fact that they create an interesting story that people want to find out what will happen, even if they can predict it. Let your creativity be in

charge. Create a narrative structure and a plot for your story and adjust it towards your objectives.



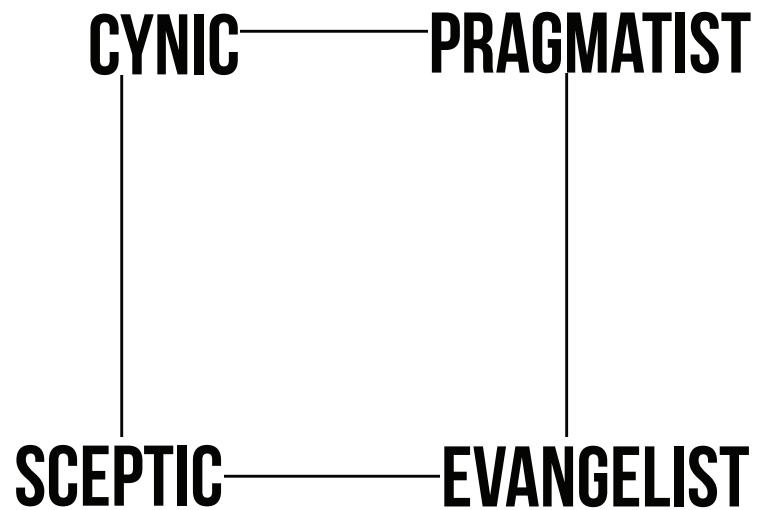
3. **HOW** TO MAKE IT ALL HAPPEN?

- a. **Think about the drama triangle (rectangle) created for Forum Theatre.** This can help you to create characters. When creating them try to think about your character's oppositions. This is what makes drama. Bare in mind there is a need for distance between characters and their opinion groups in the audience.
- b. **Remember that you can use the principle of analogy to the actual problem.** You may need to change a few names, genders, locations, organisational structure etc. Be cautious when dividing characters into opinion groups.
- c. **Hook up your audience.** Concentrate on creating situations that are both entertaining and useful for possible forum breaks.
- d. **It can be a metaphor.** Hansel and Gretel story may speak about child psychology, child naivety but it can also serve to discuss other

subjects/issues. Remember to adjust the metaphor for your audience.

e. **Goals and outcomes.** Think about the goals and preferred outcomes of your Forum Theatre. Depending on kind of issue you can use this technique to exploit or investigate the issue, even influence decision makers or offer consultation. You can also find out what people really think. Remember you are doing a change and you must be aware of the possible results.

f. **Write the story down and rehearse it.** If you're done with your story and characters you should make a dramatic narration. Start by creating a core outline of the plot, and as you develop your story keep expanding and adding details. Choose whatever form suits you and the complexity of your issue the best. Think about an opening scene and if possible rehearse it. It should end up in forum break with clear forum starting points for each character. If you learned about your issue thoroughly you should be ready to expect audience reactions and prepare possible situations as well. It is necessary to create options of possible development for audience throughout the whole play.



HINTS

The following questions would help you build up the core outline of your story

WHAT?

What type of organisation, in which the issue is taking place, is it in your story?
What it's called?

WHO?

Who is involved? Names? Ages?
Who is arguing?
Who are these people? (Realist, Pragmatist, Dreamer)

WHERE?

Where is the location?
Where is the scene set?
After going through this brief introduction you can start practicing Forum Theatre technique.

Explanation to the drama triangle and rectangle

Dreamer – idealist, romantic, utopian, fantasist.

Realist – down to earth, sceptic, this is how the world and money works

Evangelist – positive about everything.

Pragmatist – what are the steps I need to take? Looking for the best solution.

Sceptic – I need more evidence (can convert to evangelist)

Cynic – Negative, blocking everything (open cynic)

FACILITATOR – ACTORS – AUDIENCE FRAMEWORK

Forum theatre can be seen as a framework with various competences distributed between its parts. Atop all the magic of forum theatre stands the Facilitator, usually also the main author of the pre-written narrative structure. He is the one that controls the play and directs it to overall objective. He is the one most responsible for drawing the learning point throughout the process. Just like the conductor is aware of every little detail in musical score for various instruments and controls “the flow” the facilitator is the one that watches the group and needs to know everything about the issue. Its very important for him to be present also in the moment where actors are receiving inputs from the audience during forum break. He watches over time and gives airtime to speakers and also reviews new objectives for actors after each forum break.

Usually 3 to 4 actors are present on the stage together with facilitator. Each of the actors stands for one character which are created according to drama triangle (rectangle). Their role is to be a mirror to the particular opinion group of audience and impersonate given inputs even if they do not agree with them personally. Actors need to know the background and key messages. Most of the information they need is gathered throughout forum breaks. It is very important that actors can cooperate on stage and are aware of each other's roles. By the means of

improvisation they can support each other when possible forum break starts to emerge. Furthermore they are subordinate towards facilitator's commands.

Audience is divided into several opposing opinion groups. Every group is connected to one particular actor and they both share the objectives of character. The role of the audience is to create arguments and provide inputs for their connected actors. Throughout the play actors and their fixed character from drama triangle are switching between opposing opinion groups of the audience (on call issued by the facilitator). Therefore the opposing opinion groups of audience have to completely change their objectives along with character they defended. It basically implies that every member of the audience has to stand in other people's shoes, no matter what was his/hers initial opinion. Furthermore, each member of the audience has a right to call for forum break.

ARC: THEATRE FOR CHANGE

Arc was founded in 1984 as one of the first independent organisations of its kind. Located in East London's boroughs it specialises in creating and performing theatre that challenges assumptions and causes real change in the way that people relate to one another at work, at school and in the community. Arc provides expertise in range of learning strategies including theatre, storytelling, drama workshops and interactive Forum Theatre. Most recent projects involve public sector and communities in London suburbs that are challenged by the presence of gangs, domestic violence, teenage pregnancy and sexual violence.

FORUM THEATRE SINCE 1960'S

Forum Theatre technique was developed by Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal as one of the techniques that use theatre as means of promoting social and political change presented in Theatre of Oppressed. Cultural background in Europe required several modifications, ensuring this technique would also work with European audience. Arc's "version" varies in many aspects among which the lack of common oppressor and a different approach to facilitation are the most obvious.

SIMULTANEOUS DRAMATURGY PRINCIPLE AND FORUM BREAK

The actors develop the scene to the point of climax at which the main problem reaches a crisis and needs a solution. Finding an extreme makes argument explode. Then either one of audience, actors or facilitator stops the performance and ask the audience to offer solutions in forum break. This is the point at which new inputs from the audience enter the pre-written narrative structure. While audience "co-writes" the piece the actors perform it simultaneously, so audience thoughts are discussed theatrically on stage with the help of the actors.