Interactive Theatre in the Classroom: Forum Theatre

The use of interactive theatre in health care education

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Building 45 / Human Performance Lab

Faculty of Health Sciences

James Wilson
Introduction

Dear Friend

A warm welcome awaits you in Southampton for our interactive theatre day together.

When you want to cut wood, you use a saw or an axe. When you want to drive a nail, you use a hammer. The saw, the axe, and the hammer are tools one uses to achieve a given aim. While there are many forms used as education tools to train healthcare staff including: print, film, video, radio, outdoor media, posters, leaflets, discussion, and even dance. Interactive theatre has proven to be particularly valuable given its special ability to engage and connect with its audiences.

Theatre is live and human. It uses similar tools used in the care of others including voice, speech, language, the body and emotion. It brings life and human reality to the audience while making people think and respond. We are all actors playing different roles in our lives, and the classroom is often our stage.

This workshop is designed to introduce you to Forum Theatre as a tool for bringing to life healthcare education. The day has been produced for people in teaching roles who wish to address modern day issues that is engaging, stimulating and challenging for their students.

Over the day we will explore the main components of Forum Theatre and there will be ample time for reflection.

I hope that you find the journey as inspiring and life affirming as I have.

Yours,

James Wilson
What is Forum Theatre?

A forum is a public place where people assemble to debate social and political issues. The name comes from ancient Rome where people would meet at the town square and discuss important matters. Likewise, the purpose of Forum Theatre is to create a space where people can express their thoughts, feelings, and concerns.

A Forum Theatre play presents real situations for the audience to consider. At first, the forum theatre group shows a problem that is experienced by an individual and that in some way relates to the spectators’ own lives. The problem is presented through a scenario or a play. The scenario/play introduces a central character around whom the action revolves (the protagonist or oppressed character) and who is confronted with a challenging situation represented by another character (the antagonist or oppressor).

The protagonist is the person who is most intimately affected by the central conflict. The antagonist is the character who blocks the protagonist from getting what she/he desires for example through an abuse of power (for example, a manager, subordinate, patient, relative and colleague).

The scenario/play ends often without a solution to the problem. The failure and defeat the protagonist experiences must not be presented as the consequence of fate but rather as the result of an error of judgement or behaviour or a bad situation for which solutions can nevertheless be found. If the situation presented in the scenario/play were resolved, then there would be no reason to become involved! The overall purpose of Forum Theatre is to present a problem and to open the door for the audience to find solutions.

Forum Theatre aims to transform passive spectators into active participants, known as spect-actors. Spect-actors share ideas about issues that concern the community and engage in dialogue about how to create social change. In a Forum Theatre performance, there is an intermediary between the actor and the spectator, called a Joker: someone who liaises between the dramatic world of the characters and the real word of the spectators. She or he encourages the spect-actors and generally helps the play advance through his or her questions and comments. The phase during which key scenes are repeated and audience members suggest their own new strategies is considered the actual Forum. Moreover, the Forum is the part of the performance ‘in which the audience, the spect-actors, start to intervene in the action, on the second showing’.

The forum unfolds with spect-actors replacing the oppressed character (not the oppressor) in order to show what alternative strategies and attitudes are available for him/her to try on.

Summary

Forum theatre is divided into three parts:

1. The play: The audience watch the play
2. The re-run of the play invites audiences to find solutions by becoming spect-actors
3. De-role actors and share
4. Discussion, reflection and conclusions

We will explore all of this and more during our day together
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