

Outcome Report for Social Justice Theatre

By Emily Schmid

Throughout my journey at UVA I have found that my role as an artist has become much more that of facilitator, rather than creator. I enjoyed playwriting because I provided a blueprint for a much larger theatrical work. I enjoyed poetry because I created an opportunity to reflect on salient themes by presenting them through metaphors. I enjoyed stage managing because I facilitated spaces for artists to achieve their full potential. The work I got to explore through this grant enabled me to explore the lines between creation and facilitation and view teaching as an art form in and of itself. My creative work for this project was reading books, generating emails, making phone calls, distributing flyers, and finally, facilitating workshops. What I have found is that, despite not creating a tangible product, the process of learning and subsequently teaching the methodology of Theatre of the Oppressed was in fact an art form.

This became particularly clear to me during the training workshop that I attended with Theatre of the Oppressed NYC in Queens from July 7th through the 9th. The first two days consisted of learning theatre games and developing Forum scenes. The third day several workshop members had the opportunity to “teach back” games we had learned to the rest of the group as well as Joker (facilitate) the Forum Theatre scenes we had created. The rest of the group members had the opportunity to critique the facilitators for their accuracy, style, and ethics. Accuracy referred to whether or not the facilitator communicated to the group in a way that was effective and easy to understand. Style referred to the choices the facilitator made in presenting the information and how those choices either helped or hurt the group’s understanding. Was the presenter they loud? Were they quiet? Did they jump around a lot? Did they ask for volunteers to demonstrate? Ethics referred to how the facilitator addressed or ignored power differentials or oppressions that were present in the room. For example, when I was explaining a game that involved handshakes, I told the group that the concept was very simple. I was told afterwards that the use of the word “simple” could alienate people, especially people with conditions that could make shaking someone’s hand very complex. In this way, I learned that facilitation is an art form that requires listening and interpretation. Engaging with a community’s needs in a way that is respectful and kind, while still accomplishing the goals of the workshop, is a balance that I continue to try to strike as I facilitate more and more workshops.

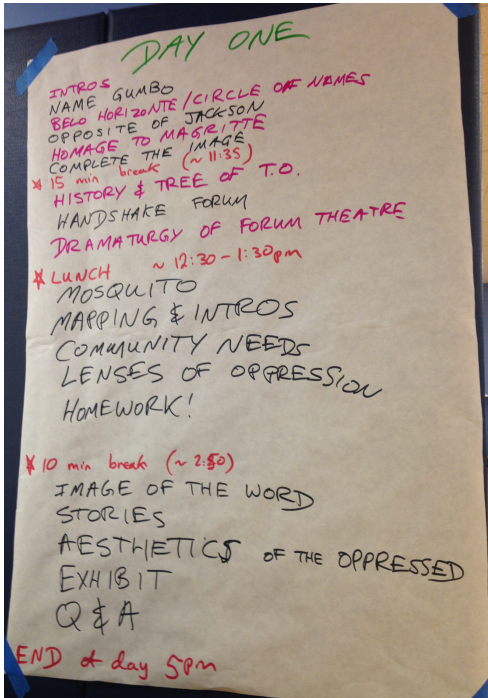
The first half of my grant consisted of the three days I spend in New York City over the summer working with Theatre of the Oppressed NYC. I came back with a much better understanding of the methodology of Theatre of the Oppressed as well as better definitions of what privilege, power, and oppression meant in my daily life. Additionally, I learned many games that I was able to replicate in the workshops that I eventually went on to teach. In the appendix are pictures that represent notes taken during discussions, as well as the daily schedules of the workshop. The third day’s schedule is not included because we rehearsed and presented our Forum scenes so there was no formalized schedule for the third day.

The second half of my grant involved continuing my research on Theatre of the Oppressed and planning a workshop that I decided to take to my high school alma mater, Potomac Falls High School. I struggled a lot in high school and feel connected to the social issues that continue within that community. As a result, I thought it would be beneficial to bring

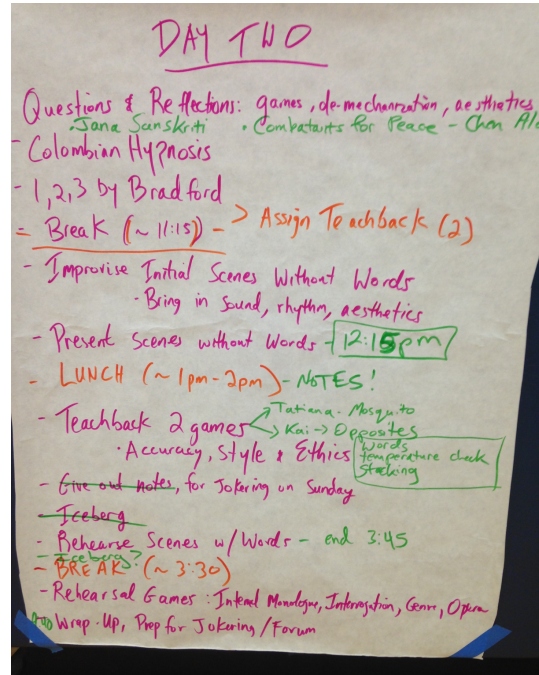
something like Theatre of the Oppressed to Potomac Falls. I developed a packet of information to be distributed to students which included an introduction to Theatre of the Oppressed as well as a parental permission form, photo release form, and a survey asking which social issues were most pertinent to the students. I also developed a packet of follow up resources for the students to take home after the workshop. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen SAT and community theatre conflicts, I only had about four people attend the workshop, but it still was a fruitful day and a half. Some of the materials I developed for the workshop are included in the appendix.

As I am writing this outcome report, I am preparing for an hour long workshop that I will be facilitating through Jessica Harris's, non-profit theater education group, Empowered Players on Sunday April 8th. Jessica Harris is a fellow Miller Arts Scholar. She and I have connected over the idea of refining the art form of facilitation so that art can function as a means for community engagement and dialogue. I also have a workshop planned for UVA students on Saturday April 14th. This is just to say that this work will continue long after the completion of this grant. I am extremely thankful for the Miller Arts Scholars program for giving me the opportunity to study more deeply a theatre practice that is not widely taught at UVA. I would also like to thank Theresa Davis for meeting with me regularly throughout the year and helping me strengthen my philosophy as a teaching artist. Finally, my appreciation goes to Mecca Burns and Brad Stoller for inviting me into their home and exposing me to Rainbow of Desire and Theatre of the Oppressed techniques I otherwise would not have experienced.

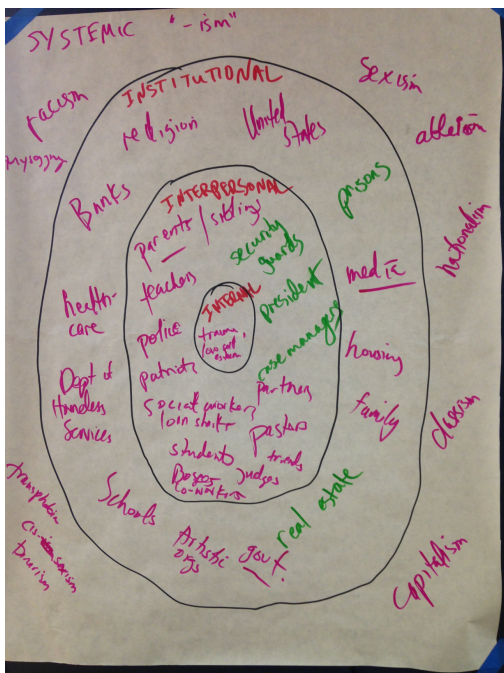
Appendix



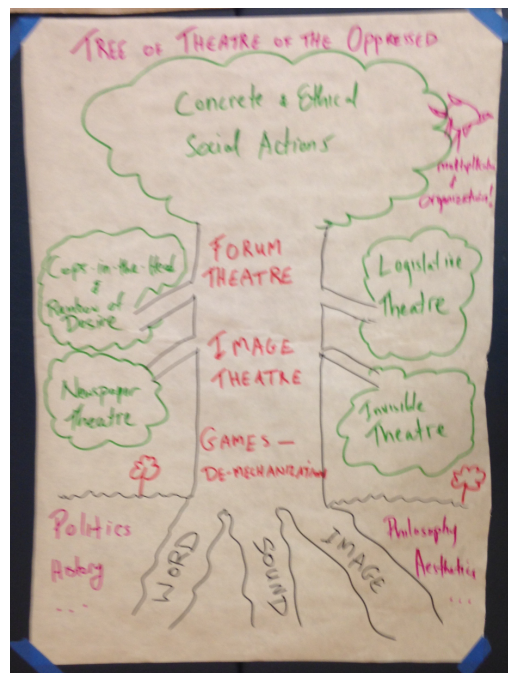
Day one of the workshop with TONYC consisted of introductory games and a discussion of how we map Theatre techniques onto our daily lives



Day two of the workshop involved the development of our Forum scenes, rehearsal games, and opportunities for “teach backs”



Our discussion of “lenses of oppression” led to this diagram which explores the different levels at which oppression can take place.



This diagram represents the “tree of Theatre of the Oppressed” a commonly used metaphor to explain the roots of Boal’s work, as well as the different branches that grew out of it.

Appendix (Cont.)

The following are excerpts from the introductory packet I prepared for the workshop at Potomac Falls High School:

Background on Theater of the Oppressed:

Theater of the Oppressed is a collective of theater techniques, created by Brazilian native Augusto Boal, designed as tools for education and social change. Boal saw that the way theater was being practiced was in itself functioning as a form of oppression by requiring that an audience sit and passively watch actors perform a play. Audience members are able to find catharsis through transferring their desires onto the actors onstage, therefore are not inspired to take any real action to combat injustice. In a Forum theater play the audience members are invited to take the place of the protagonist at the moment of conflict and thus are transformed from spectators to spect-“actors” when they try out a new way to address the problem presented in the play. The goal is to encourage dialogue and inspire action.

Goals of the Workshop:

- Introduce the philosophy of Theater of the Oppressed
- Explore issues of oppression and injustice faced by students in the Potomac Falls community
- Play theater games that explore image, sound, and word in relation to the issues identified
- Create mini forum scenes and practice facilitating them
- Discuss ways in which this work can be applied to everyday life as performers and students outside of this workshop

Workshop Agreements: *

- Lean into discomfort – challenge yourself to be vulnerable
- Assume best intentions
- Be intentional with your words and actions
- Honor confidentiality
- Practice empathy
- Listen harder when you disagree
- We are all experts on our own personal experiences
- Acknowledge intersectionality of identity and never expect one person to represent the collective experience of all others belonging to the same identity group

*We will discuss these agreements on day one of the workshop, so if you feel that something is missing or want to edit an agreement there will be a chance to come to a collective decision as a group

Appendix (Cont.)

The following are excerpts from the follow up packet I distributed after the workshop at Potomac Falls High School:

Key Terms

Theatre of the Oppressed – Theater of the Oppressed is a collective of theater techniques, created by Brazilian native Augusto Boal, designed as tools for education and social change. Boal saw that the way theater was being practiced was in itself functioning as a form of oppression by requiring that an audience sit and passively watch actors perform a play. Audience members are able to find catharsis through transferring their desires onto the actors onstage, therefore are not inspired to take any real action to combat injustice.

Forum Theatre – In a Forum theater play the audience members are invited to take the place of the protagonist at the moment of conflict try out a new way to address the problem presented in the play. The goal is to encourage dialogue and inspire action.

Spect-Actor – Boal’s term for audience members who are not just spectators but rather participate in the creation of a scene

Joker – Boal’s term for the facilitator of Forum theatre scenes and theatre of the oppressed games

Invisible Theatre – In the vein of “What Would You Do?” or “Candid Camera” invisible theatre is a piece of theatre that is acted out in public without the public being aware it is a piece of theatre. This way audiences are free to intervene in a situation as they would in real life, because they believe it is a real life situation.

Image Theatre – Theatre that is constructed solely using images.

Newspaper Theatre – Theatre that acts out the day’s events and news from the perspective of the public as opposed to from the perspective of the state or media companies.

Legislative Theatre – Theatre that acts out proposed legislation and involves lawmakers in the co-creation of theatrical products

Rainbow of Desire – A series of theatre techniques created by Boal when he was exiled in France. Boal mentions that the people in Brazil were oppressed by cops in the street but the people of France seemed to have internalized oppression and had a “cop in the head.” Rainbow of Desire addresses conflicting desires within one person as opposed to a conflict of desire between two people.

Appendix (Cont.)

The following are theatre exercises I have planned for the Theatre of the Oppressed Workshop I am conducting with Empowered Players:

Opposite of Jackson (de-mechanization)

Students move freely around the space. The leader gives commands such as “stop”, and “walk” and the students move on “walk” and stop on “stop.” Then the meanings switch and “stop” means “walk” and “walk” means “stop.” The same goes for the next set of commands (jump/clap) and (arms/knees) where knees initially means students put their hands on their knees and arms means they put their arms in the air.

Hand to Hand (trust exercise and movement de-mechanization)

Students walk freely around the space. The leader calls out certain body parts ie: hand to hand, foot to knee, elbow to shin, etc. and everyone must find a partner with whom to connect body parts.

Two by Three by Bradford (listen to what we hear)

Students get together in pairs and pick who is “A” and who is “B”. Together the pairs will count to three “A” starting with one, “B” following with two, “A” finishing with three, and “B” starting over with one. Do this for a while so the pairs get used to counting. Then “A” comes up with a sound and movement to replace the number one and the pair counts to count together using the new sound and movement to replace the number one. Repeat with the other numbers until the pairs are having a “conversation” with the sounds and movements.

Hand of Power or Columbian Hypnosis (responsive leadership, movement de-mechanization)

Again students are in pairs and chose who will be “A” and who will be “B.” “A” starts by placing their hand about a foot from “B”’s nose. “B” must follow “A”’s hand with their nose always maintaining the same distance. Then the pairs switch and “A” follows “B.”

Handshake Forum

The facilitator asks for a volunteer who is given the instruction that they must get the facilitator to shake their hand (the facilitator is not compliant). This provides the opportunity for other group members to pose suggestions and try out ideas to get the facilitator to shake their hand.