



Θέατρο & Εκπαίδευση δεσμοί αλληλεγγύης

Γκόβας, Ν., Κατσαρίδου, Μ., Μαυρέας, Δ. (επιμ.). (2012).
Αθήνα: Πανελλήνιο Δίκτυο για το Θέατρο στην Εκπαίδευση
ISBN 978-960-9529-01-3

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Govas, N., Katsaridou, M., Mavreas, D. (eds.). (2012).
Athens: Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network
ISBN 978-960-9529-01-3

Drama Workshop: a Mediterranean model inspired by the drama workshops of the UQAM (Université du Québec à Montréal)

Antoni Navarro



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Read the article below

Το άρθρο αυτό μπορεί να χρησιμοποιηθεί δωρεάν για έρευνα, διδασκαλία
και προσωπική μελέτη. Επιτρέπεται η αναδημοσίευση μετά από άδεια του εκδότη.

Drama Workshop: a Mediterranean model inspired by the drama workshops of the UQAM (Université du Québec à Montréal)

Antoni Navarro

Abstract

In this workshop, we will present the fundamental components of drama, analyzing its objectives, contents and activities, as they are understood outside of our own personal practices, that is, in drama workshops for students in training. It will include: the organization of temporal-spatial elements, the instructor as an artist-educator, brainstorming, flexible interactions in the process of creativity, the technique of mixing all elements presented in the workshop, the teaching of the procedure, etc.

We will separate ourselves from the added evaluative criteria that include incorporating the idea of the socio-educative circles in the drama workshop in, as this insinuates the necessity of adding individual training, methods and their own evaluative scales, whose ultimate end is the construction of the “Self” as a personal project interrelated with the cognitive, creative, physical and affective facets.

As for the contents, we suggest that the essence of drama is the study of personal relations in their different forms of expression (dance, corporal expression, oral expression, improvisation, performance), and we will present a series of activities that function as metaphors for our instructor training throughout the workshop. These will include: ice breakers, warm ups, focus (dramatization), and feedback.

With respect to methodology, we will use the practical-theoretical method and we will elaborate on the theory apart from hands-on practices and apart from the common reflective elements. Finally, we will offer some suggestions and some concrete tools to be used to evaluate and interpret projects, apart from what may be found in manuals and dossiers; as well, we will refer to didactic applications that we have created, that can be found on the Internet.

Introduction: Educational metaphors

As an initiation to the workshop, and to show our outlook towards theatre –that it is an essential part of education – we will use theatrical metaphors by comparing education with the theatre. Faced with the new change of paradigm we will see that: the curriculum is a document, which should be interpreted and used as a guide to create procedures in exercises for work on the stage. The student is the protagonist in the learning environment, and just as in the new theatre, the most relevance of a performance lies with the audience and their reception of the performance. Collective learning in theatre is considered to be collective art to the extent that everything is included in order to achieve a common objective. As we have seen, in the new theatre, as in education, one reflects on the receptivity of artistic fact. The most relevant aspects of this change in focus are the following:

1. The change of focus in all forms of knowledge and in all artistic forms: The biography of the author (speaker), the contextual period (time), the play itself (its contents), the moment of reception (target audience).
2. The study of the act of communication as a theatrical fact.
3. The *convivio* or the theatrical ritual.

To facilitate communication, we propose having a magical word, such as “abracadabra” which will function in all occasions to motivate, to help to assimilate basic skills, to aid in brainstorming sessions, etc. We view life, just as we do education, to be an enigma that must be considered and resolved every second of the day, on any stage or in any situation.

We feel that it's necessary to have a group of people who want to learn to work as a team and are ready to direct their efforts completely into the objectives of a group. As Phil Jackson, the legendary trainer of the



Lakers, remembers, “good” teams become great teams when their members trust so much in their fellow teammates that the “we” prevails over the “I”. The instructors will look for the collaboration of the creators, actors and every type of artist who wish to establish a dialogue with the teacher who already sees the innovation as the mode of social change.

To achieve this, we will begin with concrete practices as dramatic techniques will bring to the workshop dynamisation, either be this an elective subject or an add-on activity for study skills’ courses or including courses of mediation and alternative conflict resolution.

ICEBREAKERS

Social skills

Objective: To consciously understand the importance of non-verbal communication in interpersonal relationships, and how these affect social interactions.

Activity: The group will begin seated in a circle and will actuate the following steps: a) Eye contact, non-verbal communication, and actions according to Procedure 1 which consists of exchanging places. b) The group will add to this first activity Procedure 2, which consists of changing places with other participants, putting one person in front of another; the two members who are interacting then go into the center of the circle – back to back. c) The group will pause briefly to reflect on what has occurred and to analyze the types of negative communication which leads to aggressive behavior – that which puts one’s will above another’s, or the passive behavior of one of the people engaged in the communicative exchange is subordinate. d) The group will then repeat the previous activity, adding Procedure 3, which consists of adding together all of the previous Procedure. To do this, they will try to be assertive –without being either aggressive or passive and without trying to understand the theory intellectually, but will simply try to put the Procedures into practice, To close, the group will analyze the behavior of those who believe that they have gained a certain level of assertiveness, and discuss the process of achieving this new level of acting. The group will conclude the exercise by outlining some basic points of the profile of assertive people:

- Reaching objectives without hurting others.
- Respecting oneself while also respecting those around you.
- Acting and saying what you think in the moment (in an appropriate place), with frankness and sincerity.
- Looking for authenticity in one’s acts, showing confidence in one’s beliefs, and showing out own capacity to make decisions.

Comments: “*Our smile is the best advertisement of ourselves*” as an infallible letter of introduction. Aside from analyzing passive, aggressive and assertive behavior, the search for assertiveness will help us develop social skills. If we analyze assertive behavior, we will see that some of its common elements are: active listening, empathetic ability, a balanced exchange between the participants, and other conversational norms.

Wheel of Names

Objective: Mnemonic games to remember the names of all students.

Activity: The group will arrange itself in a circle. They will be instructed on how to apply the technique of mixing, which consists of physically ordering and communicating in any form that is non-verbal, arranging themselves in a semi-circle according to day of the week and month of birth –structured by those born in January in the beginning and those born in December at the end. Once the group has achieved this order, it will initiate the wheel of names. Each participant will state the name of that person in front of him/her, adding his/her name to the list, and speaking in rhythm. If one person forgets the name of a specific person, everybody, except for the person in question, can help jolt the speaker's memory.

Commentary: The key of the appeal of this exercise is saying the names rhythmically and with visual contact all of the participants of the workshop.

Technique of mixing and working in pairs

Objective: To put participants in new pairs, to have flexible interactions between them, and to begin a new series of exercises.

Activity: This activity has certain stipulations: it depends on the age of the participants, the duration of workshop, and the space available. Participants will be asked to put themselves equidistant from each other, comporting themselves as if they were each on a raft, which can sink at the slightest movement. Once the activity is explained, the participants are then instructed to move around the area in determined directions (not zigzagging, for instance) without touching anyone else. Groups of 3, 5, 8 or 20 are suggested. Once all the participants have completed the exercise, they are put them into pairs so that they can work with the concepts mentioned above, as a way of reviewing them:

- In pairs, they will relate to each other the best educational experiences that they have had as teachers or as students.
- In pairs, they will tell each other the types of activities they use in their classrooms: stories, jokes, linguistic exercises, songs, tongue twisters, riddles, folktales, social games (ex: Taboo, Scrabble, Sudoku, crossword puzzles, etc.), presentations, recitation of poems, the telling of anecdotes, commenting on technology, realia (documents from media, magazines, podcasts), recommended films...
- In pairs, the participants will be asked to observe their partner for 30 seconds, and later stand back to back with that person and describe him or her in as much detail as possible.
- They will be asked to relate three things about themselves, and the other person needs to guess which is not true. With another pair, they will relate three things about the partner and the other pair will guess which is not true.

Comments: Interestingly, the participants who have chosen their partner after the technique of mixing, shows more willingness to participate. It seems that using one's own volition in the choice of partner eliminates to a large degree embarrassment and lowers the modesty level. This enables the group as a whole to go deeper into themselves, to understand each other, and to be willing to accept instructions.

Technique of mixing and working in a team

Objective: The acquisition of special knowledge through the practice of peripheral vision, and being conscious of the pedagogy of the present.

Activity: The group will perform this activity using the same instructions used in the previous activity with regards to space and the manner of maintaining equidistance between participants, and making adjustments so that they don't "sink".

- *Figure out who is moving each group.* The group will choose one member of the group at random, whom the rest will then imitate. The chosen person will perform a sequence of physical movements. Another participant, who has left the room while the leader has been chosen, will reenter and observe the group's movements, and will guess who is initiating the movements of the whole group.

- *Follow someone at a distance.* This will further the technique of mixing and social skills. In order to practice social skills, the groups will use different techniques in which each person will show his/her capacity of interacting with the rest. The members of the groups will exchange looks while they are walking

around, and try to catch the eye of the others; once one person gets someone else's attention, they will interact with each other briefly, then sever the connection, and then relocate them. When a clap sounds, the participants will look for another person to connect with. At the same time, each member will try to guess who is following them without them realizing they are doing it.

- *The focus of our attention.* Someone in the group will pretend to faint in order to attract the attention of the rest. The members will be expected to focus on whatever happens in the group, be it centrally located or not, and whether it is of special interest or not, and regardless of whether each person chooses to look or not.

- *A physical mandala.* Afterwards, the participants will construct a *mandala* with their bodies with their eyes closed. In the mandala, they will interact with the others, and then slowly come apart.
Comments: This activity is an icebreaker with playful dynamics, and even though it may seem to be very controlled, it's an essential exercise because it encourages the group to participate in the other activities with more creativity.

TRAINING – Warm-ups

Imitate the style of walking in an exaggerated manner

Objective: To develop the capacity of observation of others, and how their bodies move.

Activity: The participants will be put in different groups, and afterwards, in their separate groups, each member will be assigned numbers (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.). They will be asked to get into a line sorting themselves from lowest to highest according to their numbers. They will then begin walking in the following manner: everyone who is number 1 will walk normally, those who are number 2 will imitate the 1s, and the 3s will imitate the 2s. This will continue as each graded number imitates the person in front, each one in an even more exaggerated manner than the one before. The exercise will then be enacted in reverse, the 1s being the last; they will imitate the 2s who will imitate the 3s, etc.

Comments: This activity is a way of introducing the concept of comedy and sense of humor. It also develops body expression.

Self caricaturizing

Objective: To develop a sense of humor and to guess the comedic messages of the participants.

Activity: Everyone will make a caricature of his/her own face. These faces will then be collected, mixed up, and handed out again randomly to the participants. Each participant will then try to guess which mask matches the corresponding person.

Comments: The caricature will give the group leaders valuable information regarding each student, about how they see themselves, and about their level of self-esteem.

Neither yes nor no; not also or either

Objective: To perform skits in which the participants act are led by the phrase "as if".

Activity: This is a technique of leading a conversation; one person asks questions to which the other can only answer "yes" or "no". It will serve to initiate dramatic interaction of the participants.

Comments: Once the members of each pair of participants have asked questions, the group will share the strategies of conversation that have been used, finishing the exercise by analyzing which were too direct, which didn't work well, which didn't captivate the interest of the participant being questions, etc.

Guess the character I have in my back

Objective: To conduct a necessary cultural input and to understand the inner working of theatrical art.

Activity: The group leaders will stick a post-it with the name of a character on the back of each of the participants in the workshop and everyone must guess what is written, asking questions which can only be answered with "yes" or "no".

Comments: The group leaders will take the opportunity to explain the concepts of universal characters such as *Don Juan*, the femme fatale (Bizet's *Carmen*) or the Miser (Moliere's), and also the typology of character (protagonists, antagonists and defectors).

Variations: Due to the fact that young people are more and more often culturally oriented through the

media, the session will begin with media characters (Neo Matrix as overseas benefactor -see Oedipus Rex, Indiana Jones as prototype of daredevil, The Godfather (Don Vito Corleone) as Roman patrician paterfamilias, or The Hunchback of Notre Dame, etc.).

DRAMATISATION - Expression-communication (focus)

The hot seat

Objective: In this activity, taken from the group dynamics of the field of psychology, the students will be shown how to approach any subject with authenticity in regards to quality researching. This means, not only will they develop social skills, but also develop cognitive ones, the emotional involvement with their chosen character maintained as of principal importance.

Activity: Before implementing this activity the participants will be asked to research a character that they are particularly interested in. It might even be suggested that each member take that character as his or her alter ego. They will then be asked to make a comprehensive introduction to the class about that character. Afterwards, the other members will be encouraged to ask about aspects of the psychology of the character.

Comment: This activity is a multi-faceted dramatization in the sense that the information is acquired from the collaborative work of all team members.

Variations: The same activity can be done about theatre issues or plots.

Dramatization for conflict resolution

Objective: To discover that, in the first place, conflict is the essence of theatre as well as one of the key elements -together with characters, theme, plot, time and space- of the drama. To learn how to use the dramatization of conflicts as a tool for peaceful resolution.

Activity: Participants are divided into two groups using the technique of mixing. They will be grouped in two circles. Group A will be the inner circle and Group B will be the outer circle. They will face each other. The teacher will propose different role playing situations in which both groups have to interact with each other using the technique of "as if". The exercise will begin simply, in pairs, consisting of one member of each pair, who has to get the other person to open his/her closed hands, always without hurting the other. This can be done with humor, surprise or even a polite "Please, could you open your hands?" This activity is a graphic display of the conflict of interests, which is always the basis of the confrontation between protagonists and antagonists. The exercise will become increasingly more complicated as the activity progresses. For example:

- a. Members A and B are a couple who have to solve the following conflict: Member A cannot leave the city because s/he has to deal with the care of a relative, and Member B has left because s/he has been offered the job of his/her life abroad, a job that will provide a level of personal and professional benefits that could not be found in his/her native country.
- b. Member A will be the protagonist, acting as an underground immigrant victim assaulted by an antagonist played by a racist Nazi. Member B will represent a defector who, after seeing a scene of horrible violence, did nothing. The victim confronts the citizen who is not mobilized against injustice.
- c. A and B are old friends dedicated to the arts, theatre and culture. While A has followed a path of inclusion in the system, B continues to go against the system. They both meet after a long time at the premiere of a local theatre. A is attending the premiere as part of the audience while B is boycotting the event along with the professional association of actors who have seen how all cultural budgets have being negatively affecting unofficial theatres.

Comments: After each improvisation, the pairs will be asked if any of them want to show their scene to the rest of the group. Along with more elaborate sketches, the group will also be attentive to the most original sketches presented.

FEEDBACK - Guidelines for open discussion

What kind of drama teacher am I? Find someone who...

Objective: To analyze the different types of dramatic facilitators depending upon different educational concepts.

Activity: Items will be read from the list aloud in order to find three, which could define us. Participants will then be given a moment to reflect on pre-opinion practices, i.e. someone in the classroom will be presented without having all the necessary information. One person will be chosen for each of the items. The selection will be contrasted directly by asking each person prior to award an item.

FIND A PERSON WHO ...	NAME
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Someone who, when putting on a play, motivates the students by showing how to interpret a character. 2. Someone who prefers to sit quietly and observe the reaction of the students and not intervene in excess in the development of the drama class. 3. Someone who takes on the role of the stage manager and infuses each student with enthusiasm for the project. 4. Someone who sees the drama class as a place which must be a place of freedom of expression, where what matters is not so much the goals of the class, but rather that there is a positive atmosphere. 5. Someone who has the ability to incorporate the new didactic aesthetic trends in the design of the theatre workshop. 6. Someone who carefully calculates the intrinsic meaning of each new proposal with the intention of making sure that each activity will have a 100% success rate. 7. Someone who continually needs to comment and makes observations about practices in order to give a theoretical-practical dimension to their classes. 8. Someone who believes in the idea that the drama teacher needs to know how to energize the members of the class. 9. Someone who thinks drama classes is where students are taught to play, or rather, to discover the pleasure of playing as a way to learn. 10. Someone who considers that drama teachers need to know how to make students speak about everything what they want to express. 11. Someone who proposes that the dramatization is to help the students learn to concentrate and listen. 	

And to complete the activity the members of the group will vote on a person for each item, who will should accept the popular vote and take the contents of the item and defend them before others.

Comment: The final conclusion would be that a good drama workshop facilitator should dominate, combine and implement each and every one of the items above, so that they are ultimately the definition of a good drama workshop leader.

Moral dilemmas

Objective: To transpose what is learned in the drama workshop to other areas of knowledge and to see that the theatre is nothing more than a microcosm of life itself.

Activity: Using the technique of mixing, the group will split into two subgroups (1s and 2s). Then in rows the 1s face the 2s. While the 1s must provide arguments to defend the idea that it is legitimate for a partner to have sex with a rich person for a million euros, the number 2s will argue that there is no possible justification for putting love at risk between two people.

Comments: This activity is inspired by the movie "*Indecent Proposal*" directed by Adrian Lyne. A simulation technique will be used, and improvisation, since the proposal is that the members must purport to believe in an idea that is not necessarily their, accepting the 'as if' to be credible.

Note: A moral dilemma is a short story, a story mode, in which a situation may arise in the field of reality but conflicting moral level, and requests from listeners or a reasoned solution to the conflict or an analysis of the solution chosen by the protagonists in the story. In general the situation is presented as a choice dilemma: the protagonist is subjected to a critical situation to which there are only two -and no more than two- options (A) or (B), both solutions equally feasible and defensible. The individual is thus faced with a real and inevitable conflict situation.

Brief final reflections

- Analysis of the teacher as mediator, i.e. as the leader of the theatrical play, who supplies the rules, without which the workshop would not be possible.
- The task of the workshop facilitator should be more towards the development of the searching process, at the expense of immediate results.
- The facilitator should encourage students to express themselves with body and voice, should investigate how predispose them to adopt an attitude of personal investigation and openness to others, and encourage them to get involved in the proposals of each workshop. The theatre teacher in the school setting should always play the “as if” and doesn’t need, in principle, specific skills related to the interpretation as an actor or actress. Often, this training is harmful because it encourages him or her to act as a role model and makes it harder to give up ideas or prejudices aesthetic valuing his/her own work and that of the students (Isabel Tejerina).
- The resources used by the workshop facilitator are as much about teaching as the drama itself. In fact, the theatre scholar Georges Laferrière speaks of the figure of the ‘artist-educator’ as a person skilled in Didactics theatre who knows how to use his/her knowledge, skills and the tools of art and pedagogy in both theoretical and practical workshops. This mixture of elements, that the artist-educator holds, includes not only the dimensions of art and pedagogy, but also, all aspects relating to the creation (artistic and literary) and communication.
- To make the students aware that the trends in the selection of strategies to understand the world from the emotional to the cognitive styles have their origin in abilities and learning styles, beliefs, and inherited attitudes. They also have to learn to design their own scale of values.
- To encourage the students to experiment with new strategies of teaching learning to the same extent that the creators are looking for new languages or new expression forms. This will allow them to increase their strategic repertoire so as to understand that the techniques are not the most important part, but instead the awakening of their desire to learn.

Antoni Navarro (Valencia 1960) has a degree in Hispanic Studies from the University of Valencia, diploma in audiovisual language by UNED and Masters in Teaching of Drama in the UQAM (University of Quebec at Montreal). Language arts teacher since 1984, currently working in the educational advisor of Sagunt CEFIRE (Valencia). While drama-theatre specialist coordinator of Graduate Theatre in Education of the UV, has published numerous tutorials, articles on theatre magazines, and manuals of literature *Itineraris* and *Workshop skit-Ed Theatre*. He has also translated several plays: *TU PEUX TOUJOURS DANCER* (teen drama) of L.D. Lavigne, and *Les Cunyades-LES BELLES-SOEURS* (landmark of Quebec literature) by Michel Tremblay. As a facilitator he teaches courses throughout the Spanish territory and in several European countries, on the teaching of literature, drama in young and Web 2.0 as a teaching tool.

