

Body language, space and facilitation: Basic introduction to Forum theater

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Information

Objectives of the Session

Introduce forum theatre technique. Introduce the concept of personal space.

Risks

The risk of someone not wanting to get out of their comfort zone is possible.

Background information

Forum theater, Image theater.

Tips / things to take into consideration

During the second activity of this exercise, do not be afraid to allow them to continue until the group has complete focus, especially if there is laughter/giggles at the beginning encourage them to be silent and focus on the space and movement around them. For the last step, when practicing forum theater, you can ask the group to place the situation in a specific setting. It can be an education setting (school, educational ministry, school student union office etc.) and the protagonist must be from that setting.

Requirements

Time required

120 minutes

Space required

A large room free from tables and chairs. If there are tables and chairs put them to the side of the room and make it difficult for participants to sit on them. If the participants begin to move the chairs ask them not to.

Group Size

20-30 people

Materials required

None.

Activities step by step

Step 1: Introduce the session briefly

5 Minutes

Ask the participants to occupy the space you have set up however they feel like. Explain that we are trying to make a safe and comfortable environment for everyone.

Step 2: Walk and greet

10 Minutes

The participants should start walking around the space, filling any free space. They should walk with purpose to the free space and then to the next and so on. Gradually ask them to speed up so that they are nearly running. However, they should not lose focus or bump into each other. Once the group is successfully 'occupying the space', ask them to move onto the second part of the exercise. Here, as they move around the space, they should shake hands with everyone they see. The aim is to shake hands with everyone multiple times and most importantly not to let go of the hand of the one person until they have shaken another.

Step 3: Cogs in the machine

10 Minutes

The group creates a machine with each member as an essential cog. Create a circle and one member goes into the center of the circle and starts a simple repetitive movement and sound (for example, movement: bending down and placing hands on the floor, sound: keeeeeerang). One by one each member adds to the machine until all the group are a cog in the machine. Gradually explain that, the machine is working really hard and they must speed up and sound louder. Then vice versa - the machine is slowing down: one after another every member of the machine leaves. Repeat until you feel that the group feels comfortable making loud sounds and movements.

Step 4: To warm up and introduce image theatre play the "Image of a phrase game"

30 Minutes

Divide participants into groups of 3-5 people. Give each group a sheet with a phrase such as 'Be careful!' 'Thank you!' 'or 'Congratulations'. Every group has 1 minute to create a frozen image of their phrase. They must do this without speaking to each other. Look at the images one by one, and ask the rest of the group to describe what they see. Guide the group into specifically describing what they see i.e., 'it's an old man saying thank you' rather than 'it's someone saying thank you'.

Step 5: Practice the forum theater method through a game called "Throwing the stone"

40 Minutes

In groups of 4-6 the participants devise a story that must end with an image of someone with a stone in their hand about to throw it through a window. To devise a story, the groups discuss the answers to a series of questions:

- Why that window?
- Is the person alone? How are the others present involved?
- What was the last thing that happened to provoke this action?
- What happened before that?
- What were the key moments that contributed to this feeling of frustration?

Now give each group 15-20 minutes to prepare their scenes and then show the scenes to the others finishing with their frozen image, as suggested at the beginning of the exercise. Each group has to have minimum 4 scenes. Pick one scene to replay and ask other group members to suggest alternatives strategies and actions. While one group is playing a scene, participants can stop the scene by shouting 'FREEZE' and replacing any member of the current scene, starting the scene again and playing out their alternative. You may have to run this several times before the situation starts to get better don't worry! The audience creating a 'worse situation is a useful part of the learning process too!

Step 6: Have a discussion in plenary referring to following questions

25 Minutes

- Ask the groups to explain what happens in each scene?
- What is the cause of this frustration? How could it have been avoided by the character/other characters?

- Would the suggested alternatives work in real life?