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Forum Play on Cross-Cultural Communication Challenges: A Method for Inviting Discussion by Acting

ABSTRACT

In a Forum Play “the audience” become active, as actors, while they and we explore, show, analyse and transform the challenging situations we are playing out. At the workshop one or two refugees, living in Lejre on an integration programme and me, associate professor at Communication Studies, RUC, will invite the participants (max 20 persons) to be part of a search for possible ways to handle communication challenges experienced by us and the participants. The workshop is based on Augusto Boal’s “Theatre of the oppressed”, which is shortly described as a method to “discuss in praxis”, that is to try different ways of acting in order to find ways to shake or transform the presented communication challenges.

The point is not to talk about what we think we ourselves or other people should do — it is to discover what we can do by trying different ways of acting.

Preliminary program for the session

- Welcoming, introduction and an ice-breaking exercise
- In groups of 5 people, each participant tells about a situation where he/she did not feel understood or didn’t understand the others taking part in the situation. The reason why everybody tells a story is that we want to underline that difficult-to-handle-situations are a common condition for all human beings.

- The group selects the situation that they experience either as most commonly known or most difficult to overcome. The participant who told (and previously experienced) the selected story instruct the others in order to form a play for the rest of the groups.
- In plenary, the first group plays through once without interruption while the other participants observe. After reaching the conclusion prepared in the group, in which the “oppressed character(s)” fail to overturn their communication challenge(s), the actors begin the play again. At any point during this *second* performance, any participant may call out "stop!" and take the place of the actor portraying the “oppressed individual”. The participant continues playing until another participant in the circle has a suggestion after which this participant takes the "character of the oppressed". It is only the oppressed character's position that can be replaced. The participants who play the other parts keep their part, but act in relation to how they are met by the participants who occupy the “oppressed character”. When all ideas are tried out and the situation at play has changed, we sum up, what we learned. Then it is time for the next group to enter “the stage in the circle”.