



New methods

IMPROFORUM

Description of the method

Empowering youth and giving them voice to express themselves through creative means is the main objective of the method of Improforum. It is a development and upgrade of the classic Theatre of the Oppressed technique of Forum Theatre devised by Augusto Boal according to Paulo Freire's principles of pedagogy of the oppressed. The method combines activism and political demands with theatre improvisation and acting. It allows youth not only to develop creativity and political awareness but also to gain confidence and learn how to express and assert their demands and gain visibility by presenting them in public theatre performances, thus reaching either a specific target group or a wider audience.

Target group

Youth groups, school class, interested youth, preferably with some theatre experience

Number of participants

5-15 participants, 1-2 facilitators

Environment

A quiet town square or a bigger room/small stage.

Time needed

Approx. time: 1,5 – 2 hours.

Materials

Neutral clothes, some basic props like 1 table and 4-5 chairs.

Objective/aim of the method

The objective of the methodology is to empower youth and give them the skills to express themselves and voice their needs and demands and those of their peers through a creative theatre approach.

Step by step instructions

Step 1.

Arrange with the group which topic they would like to work with.

This can be done either through conversation or pre-determined by the occasion on which the event is taking place (e.g. a festival or a conference etc.). The topics can range from problems with housing, education, environmental issues, employment opportunities, human rights etc.

Step 2.

With the group and choose one or two persons who will act as so-called jokers (moderators).

In this the group should consider communication skills and whether the persons are comfortable with this role.

Step by step instructions

Step 3.

The joker(s) shortly explain to the audience what Improforum is and how the whole thing will proceed.

Step 4.

Warming up the audience.

The joker(s) facilitate with the audience one or two simple TO exercises or games. It is good that already these exercises are related to the topic.

Step 5.

The joker/s present the topic to the audience.

This is done first in the form of a short address from the stage area. Then the audience is given 2-3 minutes to discuss the topic with their neighbours in couples or threes.

Step 6.

The joker/s ask the audience to share their concrete experience/problems with the topic.

Members of the audience share in some words a concrete first-hand experience in which they faced a problem connected with the presented topic.

Step 7.

Developing the story.

The jokers ask the member of the audience whose story was selected to tell the story once again in more detail. During this the rest of the group of performers asks the member of the audience additional questions as to the characters, situation, location, maybe even some real-life lines of dialogue if they can remember etc. This continues until the group forms a good enough picture of the story.

Step 8.

Performing the story.

The group of performers improvises the story as told by the member of the audience. They take on the roles of the characters in the story, one of them also has the role of the person whose story this was. They perform the story to the point of the so-called Chinese Crisis (Boal) – i.e. the moment, when the situation appears most dire.

Step 9.

Interventions.

The jokers ask members of the audience who proposed ideas to come on stage and take part of the theatre story and try out their proposals live on the stage. The audience members come one by one and take on the role of the protagonist. The rest of the group of performers improvises the story again, adapting it to the intervention proposal of the audience members.

Step 10.

Discussion of the results.

After each intervention, the jokers discuss the proposal with the audience. How did the intervention change the story? Did it achieve its goal of improving the situation of the protagonist? Was the intervention realistic (i.e. is it applicable to a real-life situation).

Step 11.

Wrapping up.

The jokers summarize the results of the interventions and thank the audience for participating.

Tips for the trainer

This method cannot be applied from the blue, of course. It is necessary to work with the group of youths before in order to give them some acting and performing skills and to build up team spirit. It is also very important that the method is very clear to the group and that they feel comfortable and confident for applying it. If the group is quite inexperienced or shy, the facilitator(s) can take on the role of the joker(s) to make it easier for the group.

