

—
**TOOL
KIT**
—

TO BELIEVE

OR NOT TO BELIEVE

**WHY NOT
LIVING
TOGETHER?**



— *Summary*

Table of Contents

Introduction

General objectives	00
Specific objectives of TBnTB	00

Chapter 1

What is interreligious and interconvictional dialogue?

1.1. Ways of exchanging: polemics, controversy, debate, dialogue	00
1.2. In search of a common ground and a common quest	00
1.3. Interreligious or interconvictional?	00
1.4. Types of interconvictional dialogue	00
1.5. Open problems	00
1.6. Why encourage interconvictional dialogue with young people?	00

Chapter 2

What is interreligious and interconvictional dialogue?

1.1. Ways of exchanging: polemics, controversy, debate, dialogue	00
1.2. In search of a common ground and a common quest	00

Chapter 3

What is interreligious and interconvictional dialogue?

1.1. Ways of exchanging: polemics, controversy, debate, dialogue	00
1.2. In search of a common ground and a common quest	00

Chapter 4

What is interreligious and interconvictional dialogue?

1.1. Ways of exchanging: polemics, controversy, debate, dialogue	00
1.2. In search of a common ground and a common quest	00
1.3. Interreligious or interconvictional?	00
1.4. Types of interconvictional dialogue	00
1.5. Open problems	00
1.6. Why encourage interconvictional dialogue with young people?	00

Chapter 5

What is interreligious and interconvictional dialogue?

1.1. Ways of exchanging: polemics, controversy, debate, dialogue	00
1.2. In search of a common ground and a common quest	00
1.3. Interreligious or interconvictional?	00
1.4. Types of interconvictional dialogue	00
1.5. Open problems	00
1.6. Why encourage interconvictional dialogue with young people?	00

Conclusions

What is interreligious and interconvictional dialogue?	00
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References

What is interreligious and interconvictional dialogue?	00
--	----

— Introduction



This toolkit is the product of the project "To Believe or Not To Believe, Why Not Living Together?". Carried out by three organisations in Belgium, Italy and Spain (Axcent, Giolli_Cooperative and Red Incola).

The collection of tools presented here holds significant importance to combine interconvictional dialogue with Theatre of the Oppressed. The methodology created encourages dialogue within the sphere of beliefs and convictions. It is mainly aimed at young facilitators working in the field of IR/IC dialogue in the formal and non-formal sphere. Also to groups that work with the Theatre of the Oppressed methodology and want to explore the IR/IC dialogue. This project has young people as its interest group, but it can also be used with adults.

The development of the project entailed meticulous research, expert seminars, a training in Theatre of Oppressed and IR/IC dialogue held in Brussels, the application of the methodology through workshops with young individuals in the 3 countries and reflective analysis of the outcomes. Thanks to the workshop experiences, we have discovered a method that facilitates encounters between young people of different convictions, fosters profound transformations in participants compared to other conventional verbal tools and generates dialogue that contributes to coexistence and social cohesion.

Regarding interconvictional dialogue, we have verified its value as a tool to empower young citizens, promote empathy and tolerance and prevent extremist ideologies and hate speech. Educational spaces, whether formal or informal, are fundamental for promoting this type of dialogue. To initiate such actions, this toolkit addresses what interconvictional dialogue is, distinguishing it from other forms of verbal exchange like controversy and debate. It also delves into the primary approaches to interconvictional dialogue and the challenges associated with the concept, as it often does not readily translate into other languages or conform to standardised societal norms.

Secondly, the toolkit aids us in comprehending and delving into Theatre of the Oppressed, a revolutionary method created by Augusto Boal, which utilises Theatre as a tool to understand and transform the world. Theatre of the Oppressed's primary goal is to restore the means of theatrical production to oppressed individuals and assist oppressed groups in analysing and transforming oppressive reality, both internally and externally, through theatrical language. It trusts that these groups can find their own solutions to problems and seeks to problematize reality by questioning what is considered natural. Theatre of the Oppressed encompasses several techniques, among which Forum-Theatre, used during the project experiences, stands out.



*The experience of
Forum-Theatre allowed
me to explore also the
emotional level...*

In the toolkit, we have selected a total of 10 exercises that had a valuable impact on the project and will serve to organise an interconvictional dialogue based on Theatre of the Oppressed. We are aware that interreligious dialogue is not easy and Theatre of the Oppressed cannot be considered a "miracle recipe". The experiences have provided us with valuable lessons learned that are essential for facilitating effective dialogue among individuals with different beliefs and convictions and these must be taken into account for the organisation and execution of new projects.

Despite the initial challenges, such as addressing a sensitive topic and working with intercultural groups, these lessons offer clear guidelines for achieving meaningful dialogue through the proposed activities.

Emphasis is placed on the importance of creating a Safe Space, analysing the power structure behind the interlocutors and recognizing that, at times, genuine dialogue is only possible after addressing power imbalances. Additionally, it suggests complementing the methodology with other dynamics to deepen the understanding of convictions and provides insights for developing the facilitator's role.

We hope to have been able to provide an engaging guide for addressing the challenge of fostering effective interconvictional dialogue and promoting mutual understanding and respect in a diverse and complex world.

I learnt to listen to the other and explaining who am I...



— *General objectives of TBnTB*

01

Support the inclusion of target groups with fewer opportunities. The plurality of religious beliefs and convictions has grown in Europe as migratory movements have increased. These arrivals, often the most vulnerable, face difficulties of inclusion. This plurality remains invisible, contrasting with the rise of xenophobic and racist discourses, in which there is a link between immigration and religious diversity.

Recognizing religious and convictional diversity would therefore be another of the objectives to encourage, teach, train and inform citizens about interreligious dialogue as a means to transform exclusion into inclusion, lack of understanding into respect and conflict into peace and justice.

02

To promote an active, committed and participative citizenship, which gives answers of dialogue, solidarity and welcome to the different situations of diversity.

03

To offer innovative educational tools to bring citizens, especially youth, closer to the management and knowledge of prejudices and hate speech, which are linked to intolerance.

04

To favour the construction of values, increase the critical attitude, encourage teamwork and conflict resolution through participation.

05

To improve coordination and networking in the interreligious field, often fragile in the local contexts in which we want to have an impact.



— *Specific objectives of TBnTB*

01

Promoting cooperation and exchange of knowledge, experience and methodology among partners to improve the skills to activate interconvictional dialogue with youth.

02

Exploring and developing non-verbal tools for interconvictional dialogue, accessible for everyone. Dialogue isn't only about talking with each other, it is also to have shared experiences and to transfer these experiences to the 'real world' for a better living together.

03

Empowering young people and especially young migrants to express themselves on convictions without fear.

04

Learning young people the skills of engaging with Otherness: active listening, mutual respect and understanding, critical attitude, teamwork, conflict resolution, agreeing to disagree, the search for shared values.



*The possibility to see the other as
a chance not an enemy...*

What is interreligious and interconvictional dialogue?

In this chapter we will explore what is dialogue, how it differs from other types of verbal exchanges and the importance of a common ground. Next, we will discuss the differences between interreligious and interconvictional dialogue and the types of dialogue that exist. We end this chapter with describing some open problems in the field.

1.2.

In search of a common ground and a common quest

Dialogue and debate are different from polemics or controversy due to the existence of a common ground. For example: people from the same religious background who have the same doctrine, the same authorities, the same texts. They can talk about the interpretation of those different elements. The goal is not to get right, but to build together in the context of a common quest.

If we want to do this in the context of interconvictional, i.e. with people who do not believe the same, we must first find a common ground and seek a common goal. If you start an interconvictional dialogue with the hope of taking the other person to your truth, there is no longer a common quest, because the other person wants to take you to his/her beliefs and you want to take him/her to yours.

Hicham Abdel Gawad constructed an ethics of dialogue that can be the common ground, based on four principles: authenticity, freedom, symmetry and sharing.

Authenticity:

not coming up with hidden agendas (e.g.: I want to convert him/her, but I'm not going to tell him/her).

Freedom:

dialogue is pointless if people cannot choose to get out too. If people are forced to stay until the end, there is a problem. You add a compulsion to something that should be as free as possible.

Sharing:

I share with you my tradition, I lend it to you so that you discover it, so that you possibly enrich yourself with it, that this nourishes you.

Symmetry:

people should see themselves as equals. If you get the impression that one is higher than the other, then it won't work. I have to feel that the person opposite me is my equal. No difference in power. There is no dialogue with my boss at work.

1.3.

Interreligious or interconvictional?

By the way, have you noticed that we use the term 'conviction'? Convictions are a certain view on life: what life means, its value and how it should be lived. It is the search for answers to questions of life, questions about the meaning of one's own existence. Conviction concerns the deeper level of someone's life story, beyond facts and feelings. It is closely related to someone's values, but it goes broader and deeper than only values. It is about the images, symbols, metaphors and stories which give meaning to life. It can be about God, religion and faith, but convictions are broader than religion or faith. The term "conviction" encompasses both religious perspectives (such as Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism...) as non-religious, philosophical perspectives such as Atheism, Secular or Freethinking Humanism, Agnosticism...



Why would it matter to involve not only religions in the dialogue, but to widen it to convictions? Because a lot of the Europeans belong to those non-religious perspectives. According to the Eurobarometer 439 on Discrimination in the European Union (2019) 10% of the EU population considers itself as atheist, 17% as non-believers or agnostic. In Belgium the community of free-thinking humanists is recognized by the government as one of the eight official convictions and religions in the country. To limit the dialogue to only religious people would mean to exclude a big part of the European population.

By consequence, working interconvictionally instead of interreligiously has an impact on the group composition of your project: everyone can participate in an interconvictional dialogue, because everyone has a certain view on life and can talk about that which makes life valuable.

1.4.

Types of interconvictional dialogue

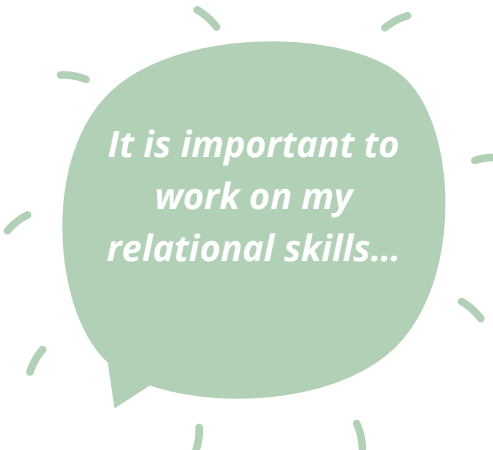
Interconvictional dialogue comes in many forms, but all of them aim at a better understanding of each other. We tried to distinguish three main approaches. Note that there is no hierarchy in these approaches, nor the right approach for all situations. The approach depends on the group, the moment, the conditions and the goals you want to reach. But the main idea is: everyone can participate in an interconvictional dialogue: not only convictional leaders and representatives, but all human beings, old and young.

01

The **first approach** aims at sharing knowledge. This approach focuses on deepening the knowledge and raising awareness on the topic of convictions and interconvictional dialogue.

Participants become aware that there are different traditions by knowing better the meaning behind the rituals, specific ceremonies or objects that are used. This could be by visiting convictional places like churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, freethinking places. Or participating in ceremonies or events of a certain tradition.

- The interconvictional educational space of Red Íncola is made up of an exhibition with images, maps and religious objects, through which young people learn about religious pluralism, recognize the enrichment of diversity in society and through dynamics promote dialogue. Participants talk about what unites them despite having different convictions and how to get involved to promote coexistence based on tolerance and respect.



*It is important to
work on my
relational skills...*

The **second approach** aims at sharing narratives. This approach focuses on creating mutual knowledge, empathy and respect by sharing stories. This could be during exercises, workshops or living a common experience like a challenging trip.



- In 2017, Axcen organised a visit to Auschwitz with a group of youngsters from Brussels with different convictions. The immensity of the place brought fragility and intensity to the dialogue.
- D'Broej works with socially vulnerable children and young people in Brussels. Extraordinary life circumstances ask for extraordinary projects. Therefore, they established a program of treks to the mountains with their youngsters. Together, D'Broej and Axcen are organising the first interconvictional trek in 2024.
- Diversi-Date is a project by Odisee Hogeschool Brussels in which they invite 100 youngsters from secondary schools to their campus to dialogue and exchange on topics such as identity, relationships, lifestyle and conviction. Diversi-Date consciously doesn't opt for traditional conversational methods, but facilitates dialogue through various creative methodologies: digital storytelling, play, improvisation, etc.

Critical note: the social justice theory adds to the narrative approach that social positions cannot be forgotten. The narrative approach assumes a certain equality that isn't always there. Social positions are always woven into the dialogue. For example: if you are the only Muslim in a group, you will probably be seen as a representative of all Islam. While if there are different secular people, they will be allowed to give their own view.

The **third approach** aims at sharing experiences. This approach focuses on acting and working together by creating common events and actions like peace prayers, environment protection day... In this type of dialogue, also called “the socio-convictional dialogue”, the participants speak both as members of their religious or convictional communities and as citizens of a (secular) society. This type of dialogue is less intellectual and more practical and aims at fostering social cohesion.



- **Forum Interreligioso “4 ottobre” di Parma:** a mix of christians, muslims and jewish people periodically organises peace prayers or flash mobs in the town.
- **The international Dialogue Center KAICIID** created a database of promising practices on the implementation of interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

In practice, these approaches are often combined and intertwined. The Emouna Program for example is a leadership programme for people who want to build bridges between their own convictional perspective, the other and society. Keywords are study, critical reflection, interconvictional dialogue and social engagement. The program includes study visits, encounters, lectures, exercises and the development of a social project by each participant. Emouna started in France and now has programs in Belgium and the Netherlands as well.

It was useful to help me open and going out of my comfort zone...

1.5.

Open problems

During the project, we noticed that the terms and concepts of “conviction” and “interconvictional dialogue” are very confusing and often untranslatable.

In **Dutch** the terms “levensbeschouwing” (conviction) and “interlevensbeschouwelijk” (interconvictional) are recognized and used in schools or public instances. So in Belgium, all pupils in Dutch-speaking schools have to work six hours on their interconvictional competences (“interlevensbeschouwelijke competenties”).

In **Spanish** the terms “conviccion” and “interconviccional” exist, but aren’t used in practice. In the “Guia de recursos para la convivencia intercultural e interreligiosa y prevención de la intolerancia por motivos religiosos” there are only 3 organisations listed as working interconvictionally, with only one of them explicitly mentioning the word “interconviccionales”.

And in **Italian** there isn’t even a word to describe interconvictional dialogue. The word “conviction” is not particularly meaningful in the debate about dialogue.

But still, even if we don’t have the words to describe what we are doing, the message of this toolkit should be clear. Interconvictional dialogue is not about the technique. A perfect dialogue is quite rare and maybe even unexisting. Interconvictional dialogue should be seen as a goal you want to reach: better knowledge of each other, eliminating prejudices, improving social cohesion and living together in a more comprehensive way.

1.6.

Why encourage interconvictional dialogue with young people?

Educational centres, associations, social, leisure and training centres are places where people from different social, cultural contexts participate, as well as from different religions and convictions. These are privileged spaces for learning and exploring methods for interconvictional dialogue.



Chapter **2**

**What to and
forum-theatre are**

2.1.

Its birth

Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) was founded by Augusto Boal, a Brazilian theatre director, play-writer and activist. Through his work with the Arena Theatre in São Paulo, he realised his attempts to inspire people that are living in poor areas to rise up and fight against inequality, poverty, oppression. He was arrested and tortured during the Brazilian dictatorship, then he started to travel all over the world spreading his method. Back in Brazil in 1986 he became for 4 years a politician, to support the fight for equal rights in the Municipal Council of Rio de Janeiro. He founded "The Theatre of the Oppressed", which is a theoretical framework and set of techniques.

More about Augusto Boal you can find here:

<http://augustoboal-oppression.weebly.com/biography.html>

2.2

Some guiding principles

TO is a method that uses theatre as a tool to understand and transform the world.

The pedagogical framework was influenced by Paulo Freire and his Pedagogy of the Oppressed, based on processes of "conscientization" (awareness raising + action).

The TO main goals are in short two:

1. To return to oppressed people the means of theatre production.
2. To help oppressed groups analyse and transform oppressive reality, both inside and outside, by means of theatre language.

TO trusts oppressed groups that they can find their own solutions to problems and provide tools that help them to "problematize" reality and question what is seen as natural. It is considered a political theatre, but not ideological as there is no ideology to convey.

*It increased my
knowledge about
religions...*



2.3.

Method/techniques

The method has to do with TO goals mentioned above and the coherence among them and its techniques. It also implies when and how to use a specific technique, taking in account the context, the group, the specific goal of that intervention, etc.

Moreover the method draws the facilitator's role as a maieutic one and tells how to keep it and how to address different challenging situations.

So when using the technique called Forum-Theatre please take in account also the method that is behind that, in order not to misuse it, as sometimes happens.

Key elements of the method are:

- keep in mind the TO goals in each situation where you are applying it; a technique in itself is not TO if used for other goals;
- trust the group you are working with and do not think them should be indoctrinated or saved by you;
- use a maieutic approach that is to give questions in order to improve the awareness, more than to give your opinion;
- techniques should be adapted to the specificity of the context/group you are working with;
- remember that TO does not claim to create a catharsis (just to make people happy in the theatre space) but, the opposite, to activate people as they can solve their own problems.

2.4.

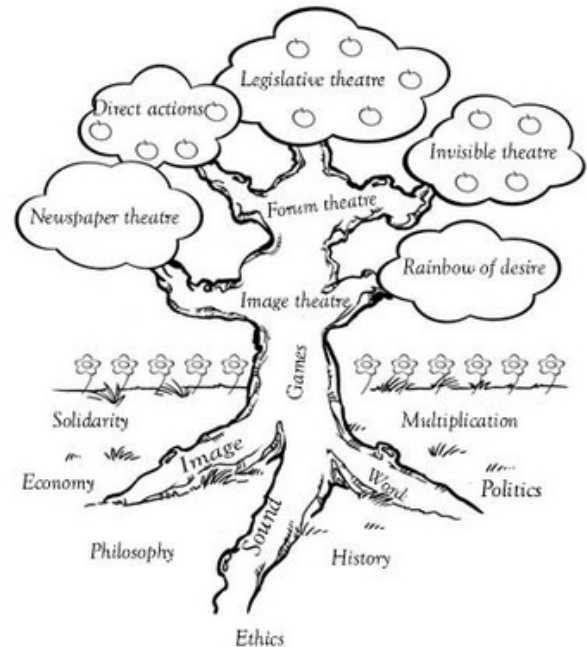
Forum-Theatre structure and goals

TO encompasses several techniques: Image-, Invisible-, Newspaper-, Forum-Theatre, Cops in the head, more two approaches called Legislative-Theatre and Aesthetics.

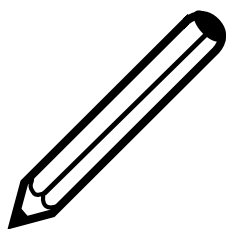
This tree of the Theatre of the Oppressed, drawn by Boal, represents its different aspects and techniques; it can be used in the workshops to talk a little about each element of it. You can find the description about these elements here: <http://augustoboal-oppression.weebly.com/theatre-of-the-oppressed.html>

Take note that in this tool-kit we analyse Forum-Theatre as it seems to us the most useful technique for our purpose. Basically Forum-Theatre in a story staged and shown to an audience, which contains an oppressive situation. The story does not have a happy ending and the public is invited to come onto the stage, replace the protagonist or his allies and show an alternative solution to break down the oppression.

Tree of the Theatre of the Oppressed



One person, called Joker, guides the play by helping the audience analyse the piece and invent alternatives; he/she encourages the spect-actor to come onto the stage and experiment his/her own idea; the Joker also functions as a "difficultator", by problematizing what is easy and simplistic. The Joker guides the debate to deepen the situation, but always lets the audience follow their vision, avoiding indoctrination and manipulation.



For deepening this topic see the last chapter about references.

Experiences

During the implementation of the project, the three entities involved in the project developed different workshops to put into practice the proposed methodology of interconvictional dialogue through Theatre of the Oppressed.

— *Initial objectives*

To offer a "safe space" that allows young people to share experiences and create new relationships.

To encourage dialogue between young people and to generate interreligious and interconvictional dialogue.

To awaken participants' curiosity about religious beliefs other than their own.

To make visible the oppression that some people suffer because of their religious beliefs (whatever they are, even for non-believers).

To reflect on the stereotypes that exist in relation to religion, especially those that can be harmful or oppressive and to try to dismantle them.

Investigate and identify the elements that block dialogue when talking about religion and work on strategies to reduce or disappear them.

Red Incola Experience



Group of participants

At Red Íncola we have a youth program with a group made up of 80 young people of different cultures and convictions, with whom we carry out open activities every Friday afternoon. For many of them, religion is an important topic, which is why we decided that it would be an interesting group to carry out the workshops.

For the experience, a total of 18 young people between 14 and 21 years old participated, boys and girls. Ninety per cent of them were of migrant origin, most of them recently arrived and 10% autochthonous. In terms of diversity, they came from Catholic Christianity, Evangelical Christianity, Islam, Christian family tradition without being practising Christians and one young person declared himself/herself to be agnostic.



Organization of workshop

In Spain we worked with the group for almost 5 months, from 27 January 2022 to 7 May 2023, with a total of 16 hours, divided into 8 sessions of 2 hours. Due to the dynamics of the group of young people with whom the activity was carried out, it was decided to hold a workshop every two weeks.

The last session was a morning-long get-together, in order to have several connections with all the topics that have been worked on during the different sessions.



Stages of the process

- 1. Entrance and welcome phase:** Presentation, team building, safe space, expectations and rules.
- 2. Drama Literacy 1:** The Body
- 3. Drama Literacy 2:** Rhythm and Voice
- 4. Intermediate phase of knowledge:** Interreligious space and symbolism of objects.
- 5. Drama Literacy 3:** Voice – narration (From this session came the stories that we will later take to the Forum-Theatre)
- 6. Preparation of the Forum-Theatre:** Identification of the characters and first improvisations.
- 7. Forum-Theatre:** Rehearsal and work on scenes and characters.
- 8. Forum-Theatre:** Representation – Reflection – Closure.

Difficulties encountered in the process and intervention strategies applied to address them



Project name

In our experience with young people, we were aware that terms like religion and Theatre could put them off. For this reason, both terms were removed from the posters and the workshop was presented as *2Bn2B Games and activities that favour dialogue*. Obviously, once we got in touch with the young people (session 1) we explained what we were going to do and the objectives in general terms that we wanted to achieve. It was here that words like convictions, religion and Theatre first appeared.



Safe space

Talking about our religious values and convictions is not easy, especially when we are in a group with very different people. That is why we have worked very carefully to create a safe space where each of the participants felt safe to share what they considered necessary without any kind of pressure. We have experimented with activities that are directly connected with emotions, with the life stories of the participants. Activities that taught them to listen, to explore their innermost identity, about what matters to them, their values and thus be able to express it. Throughout this process, debriefing after the activity has been essential to achieve a deeper understanding and fix the discoveries without imposing anything at any time and allowing the participants themselves to draw their own conclusions, thanks to the help of the maieutics of the trainer, the group and the different perspectives/opinions.



The group

Regarding the diversity of the group, initially we tried to ensure that within it there was as much wealth as possible in terms of religious convictions, for this reason we contacted different groups, including the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Valladolid. In the end we were not able to attract young people from outside the regular Red Incola group, but we realised in the process that we had a very rich and varied group.



Participation

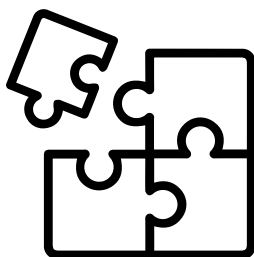
To guarantee the continuity of the participants throughout the process, its importance was greatly emphasised from the first session, but we consider that the temporal distance between sessions (sometimes more than two weeks) has played a trick. In the long period that the project has been developed, some of the participants have had to abandon the process for work, academic, health reasons, etc. In the month of April we had a break for the Easter holidays and in full execution the month of Ramadan coincided, making it difficult on Fridays for young Muslims to participate. Likewise (although to a lesser extent), they have been incorporating into the project some people who could not participate in the first sessions.

Methodology used

(in a general sense, taking into account the characteristics of our participants)

The importance of the space: the space chosen for the activity is the interreligious space of Red Íncola. It is not casual, it's a warm environment, with elements of religious diversity and with space to carry out the activity with movement. The last session was also located in a special place: we travelled to Bamba, a special place where its church reminded us that there was a time when Christians, Jews and Muslims lived side by side and where its ossuary reminded us that death is the same for everyone.

De-mechanization activities, the initial landing activities and to measure the emotional temperature and evaluation activities: some of these dynamics have been present during almost the entire project. Walks have also been very present throughout the entire process.



Phase 1

Methodology for the creation of a safe space

Presentation Games, Knowledge Dynamics and Confidence Dynamics, activities to analyse fears and expectations regarding the project. To establish the three golden rules of Theatre of Oppressed:

1. There should be no judgement (neither towards you nor towards others)
2. Whenever you can try to get out of your comfort zone, but if there is any activity that you really don't feel like, don't do it
3. Privacy (what happens inside the workshop, stays in the workshop)

Methodology drama literacy process and process of the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO)

In phase 2 we began our drama literacy process and we did it through the body, which is why the Image-Theatre was very present in this step. In phase 3 we continued with rhythm and voice activities like The Rhythm Machine. In phase 5 we returned to the usual process of TO and here we added the voice to everything we had done up to now; in this phase the first stories came out to work with the Forum-Theatre. In phase 6 we made the first improvisations and defined the characters a bit. In phase 7 we continued with the preparation of the Forum-Theatre, we made some adjustments and changes because we realised that many of the characters from the different stories were not going to be in the final session; this took time away from working on the characters, on the will and the counterwill of each one.

Methodology pedagogy of coexistence of the interreligious space

During the previous phases, we have gradually introduced specific concepts about beliefs and convictions, being the theme chosen for the last part in all the activities, thus generating reflection and dialogue after its execution. For example, to carry out improvisations, scenes of conflicts related to people of different convictions that they had to resolve were proposed. In this way, we dismantled stereotypes about the aforementioned religion and related it to the participants' own convictions.



In phase 4 was a knowledge and encounter in religious diversity using the pedagogy of coexistence.

- Through the interreligious space (images, dynamics with rites, world map) we got to know different religious traditions in the world and we recognized this diversity in our city, generating dialogue about what we know about them and sharing our own convictions.
- Objects as a means of exploring religious diversity. We combined the methodology of the Theatre of objects that allowed us to understand what values are attributed to personal objects, what common values there are in different religions and convictions and to get closer to the rites or ceremonies found in the daily life of people with different religions and convictions or people with different convictions.
- Generate dialogue in relation to interiority: the working procedure is based on personal experience and integrates the body, thoughts, feelings, beliefs and it's based on personal experience. We work on expressing feelings, what each participant believes in, what values are important for each one and what they mean, why it is important to respect what is different, how religion is lived in the community, etc...
- When exploring the different representations of diversity, the concept of multiple identity is worked on. It approaches plurality and interculturality as a positive practice and dynamics that break prejudices are used, thus seeking to prevent hate speech.
- Finally, we use the "golden rule" present in all religions, to activate tolerance, the concept of peace and coexistence.

Giolli Experience



Group of participants

Giolli collaborated with Forum interreligioso “4 ottobre” di Parma (Inter-religious table), as we did not already have a group of youngsters to work with. The members of this Table contacted their own religious organisations and collected some young people interested in interreligious dialogue. The final group was a little moving, but saw the presence more or less constant of people of Christian, Catholic, Muslim and Baha'i background, plus some not religious.

As a whole 15 people have participated in the experience with an average of 12 each time. They were more female than male.



Stages of the process

We followed these steps that came out from experience and partially are covering the typical TO proceeding:

- 1. Entrance and welcome phase:** presentation, team building, safe space, expectations and rules.
- 2. Drama Literacy 1:** the Body
- 3. Dialogue and empathy**
- 4. Drama Literacy 2:** voice-narration (From this session came the stories that we will later take to the Forum-Theatre)
- 5. Preparation of the Forum-Theatre:** identification of the characters and first improvisations.
- 6. Forum-Theatre:** rehearsal and work on scenes and characters.
- 7. Forum-Theatre:** representation-Reflection-Closure.



Organization of workshop

In Parma the path was split in 4 sessions that started just after 2 meetings where experts talked about the famous encounter with Sultan Mohamed and San Francesco d'Assisi.

We run 2-2,5 hours long sessions in March-April 2023, with a distance of 7-15 days one from another meeting, depending on group availability. The positive was that we asked them to try with an initial 1 hour session, after that they decided to have another session and there we proposed to have 2 more and they accepted.

We mean, when people do not know us or the topic or both, better to start lightly, with less commitment, testing that, then the activities themselves will motivate them to proceed longer. There was an idea to show something to a small public, but the time was too short to prepare the play, so we concluded within the group by doing 2 internal Forum-Theatre sessions. Later on 4 October 2023, we performed in front of about 80 students from various secondary schools in Parma.

Difficulties encountered in the process and intervention strategies applied to address them

01

The first difficulty we had is related to the variety of the group. We would have liked to have more non-religious people and Jewish people too, but the Forum interreligioso "4 ottobre" di Parma did not manage to get them. So we had only 3 religions and 1-2 non-religious. The ones who participated most were the Catholics. We tried to get other people by contacting other entities, but we finally gave up.

02

To have enough time to explore the topics was a big issue. We had only 4 sessions lasting 2-2,5 hours and considering the group was heterogeneous and people did not know each other, but in sub-groups or pairs, we just had the time to create a safe space and improvise some scenes. We also realised 2 scenes and applied the Forum-Theatre to them, but with such a short time that it was not possible to deepen the solutions. Also the creation of the plot was penalised by time as we could not work a lot around the convictions on the field.

03

Ensuring the continuity of the participants throughout the process has been a little challenging, but of course we had to take into account the busy time they have as students at university or workers. The negotiation of time step by step and the shortness of the process in this sense helped us to keep the continuity.

Methodology used

(in a general sense, taking into account the characteristics of our participants)

We have been using mainly TO based techniques such as:

- game and exercises from the 5 Boal's categories
- games with characters
- improvisation of conflictive situations
- rehearsal techniques
- Forum-Theatre

Moreover, in the earlier phases, we added a couple of exercises we found very useful to prepare the group.

1. **"How are you?"**, is an exercise based on body images where at turn one person asks the person in front "How he/she feels"; after the answer the person asking makes an image with his/her own body "translating" the speech heard.
2. **"Active listening"** comes from Thomas Gordon research and basically is a work in pairs where person A tells a story and person B actively listens to, that is to avoid interruption, judgement, evaluation, counselling, but most mirroring the emotions into the story.

Axcent Experience

Axcent does not have a group of young people directly associated with the organisation. This created an additional challenge for Axcent, as the group had to be formed from scratch. Axcent decided to join existing initiatives and so joined forces with the young people of KAJ De Mug and D'Broej Centrum West. KAJ De Mug is a Multicultural Urgency Group. Their meeting place is located in the centre of Brussels, close to a registration centre for refugees, which ensures that many unaccompanied minors find their way to the organisation. The age of the participants is mainly between 16 and 21 years old. The group is mixed in several ways: both boys and girls are present, first-generation and second-generation newcomers and different convictions: Muslims, Catholic and not religious.

D'Broej Centrum West is a youth centre in Molenbeek. Centrum West is committed to the wellbeing of the youths in the neighbourhood. They have a social service and they provide meaningful and fun leisure time. The participants from D'Broej Centrum West were all boys between 15 and 18 with the same religious background, they were all muslim. They all grew up in Molenbeek and have a migration background, but none of them were migrants themselves.

Axcent also contacted the Red Cross refugee Centre in Alsemberg, a nearby refugee centre, where unaccompanied migrants are staying. Two Afghan boys from the refugee centre participated in the project. They were 15 years old and had only arrived in Belgium a few months ago.

Initial objectives and chosen path



In Brussels we first did two activities of two hours each. The first one with KAJ De Mug when they were on weekend in February 2023 and the second with Centrum West in March 2023. The purpose of the first two activities were mainly to introduce young people to Axcent as an organisation, to the project and to the methodology of Theatre of the Oppressed. It was only after these two activities that we decided how to proceed, as we felt it was important to use a formula that would suit the needs and wishes of our target group. We decided, on the request of the youngsters, that we would go on a 3-day-weekend. In total, we spent 16 hours over these three days on activities related to

interconvictional dialogue and Theatre of the Oppressed. In addition, there was also room for other dialogic ground forms such as eating together, a game night and going for a walk together and listening to each other's favourite music.

The main aim of the weekend was originally to enable interconvictional dialogue by applying Theatre of the Oppressed. But as the weekend progressed, we found that we had to adjust our goals. Providing young people with a quiet, safe place to talk about their experiences became the first priority. Only when this was established, we could apply Theatre of the Oppressed, trying to achieve interconvictional dialogue.



Stages of the process and methodology used

The first stage of the process was getting together a group that would want to participate in the project. So we did the first two activities at KAJ De Mug and Centrum West, to introduce and warm up the young people to the project.

As the group was mixed, coming from different organizations, **in the second phase**, we put emphasis on forming a group, getting to know each other and creating a warm and safe space in which the group could rely on and trust each other. We put a lot of emphasis on creating this group feeling during the process, as we felt this was crucial for the following steps: to be able to talk about situations that could be used for Theatre of the Oppressed later on.

In the third stage of our process, we distinguished the differences between controversy, polemic, debate and dialogue. To arrive at interconvictional dialogue, we found it useful to have participants reflect on what exactly dialogue is and how it differs from other modes of exchange.

Because Theatre of the Oppressed is also about (portraying) emotions, we also spent time **in the fourth phase** of the project on reflecting on different emotions. During the introduction activities, we noticed that often only the basic emotions (fear, joy, anger and sadness) were discussed, so we tried to go beyond these basic emotions in this exercise. By talking about emotions less superficially, situations can also be played with more complexity and depth.

After discovering the variety of emotions, **in the fifth phase** it was time to explore situations that could possibly be reenacted. This ultimately proved to be the most difficult phase, about which more is in the next section about difficulties.

In the sixth phase, the aim was now to effectively reenact these situations. Since exploring the situations was difficult and there were also only a limited number of participants present at the weekend, the part that was supposed to be the apotheosis of the weekend ended up being only a limited part of our project.

In stage seven we made time for an evaluation with the participants. We made use of a local exhibition and asked participants to choose an artwork that matched their experience of the previous weekend. This evaluation was a crucial part of the process for us, as it helped us learn which aspects of the project were most remembered and most or least appreciated by the participants.

In the eighth and final phase, we held an evaluation with the facilitators among ourselves. From this we learnt which exercises worked and which did not. We also reflected on our role as facilitators, which issues we would approach differently in the future and how Theatre of the Oppressed can be an added value, but is not the only way to achieve interconvictional dialogue.

Difficulties encountered in the process and intervention strategies applied to address them



Forming a group

The biggest difficulty for Axcent was creating a solid group to participate in the project. We therefore decided to join existing initiatives such as KAJ De Mug and Centrum West and this was a success. In the first activity with KAJ De Mug, we had a total of 25 participants joining us. In the second activity with Centrum West there were about 15 participants. But when we organised our own weekend, we noticed that it still proved difficult for young people to find their way to the project. Only three participants joined us during this weekend.

From this we learned that going to youngsters in their familiar and trusted environment is more effective than expecting the participants to come to us.



Finding the appropriate description

We had a hard time describing the project with the right words to make it as accessible and appealing as possible to young people. Both the terms theatre and interconvictional dialogue carry certain connotations. Not only in this project, but also in the daily operations of Axcent, we are still looking for a word or a way to make interconvictional dialogue sound attractive to young people. So it took a while to find the right language and like Red Incola, we did not use these terms in our promotion. During the introductory activities, we did not shy away from the words, but were just able to give them more explanation and context.

I changed, now I think how may I express my convictions without hurting the others... and also how can I argue my position better and keeping calm...



Dealing with traumatic experiences

Another challenge we faced during the activities was the heaviness and severity of the situations of oppression the participants already faced, despite their young age. Especially among the participants from the refugee shelter, these experiences are still very recent. These experiences are not only about feelings of oppression, but go further and can even be described as traumatic events. This made us feel that as facilitators, with backgrounds in social work, philosophy, theatre, humanism and world religions, we could not always provide enough support to work with these stories and turn them into a Forum scene. Therefore, as the weekend progressed, we shifted our priorities and goals. The point we originally wanted to work towards, playing a scene, was no longer our main goal. The main goal now became providing a moment of rest and reflection for the participants, with space for dialogue. We shifted the focus to creating a safe and warm space.



Language

Finally, we noticed that language sometimes posed a challenge during the weekend. To explore and then reenact situations, it is crucial that we understand each other well. Language also played an important role in certain exercises. To deal with this challenge, we used several strategies. As facilitators we used various languages, including French, English and Dutch, which proved to be very useful. Besides using different languages, we always took enough time for the participants to translate among themselves. If one participant did not understand something well, someone with the same mother tongue could provide a translation. In addition, we used tools as Google Translate during certain exercises. We also used body language, movements and images (Image-Theatre) as helpful tools for bridging language gaps. Expressing a value by making a statue with your body adds to the understanding of that value, beyond words and translations. Finally, we tried to shift our view on different languages. Instead of viewing different languages as obstacles, we started to see them as assets. For example, during the exercise on controversy-polemics-debate-dialogue, looking for an appropriate translation in the mother tongue of the participants made it possible to reflect deeper on the meaning of the words, on the nuances of each word and what distinguished them from each other.

**Using
forum-theatre
for IR/IC dialogue**

4.1

A promising but tricky issue

Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) and Forum-Theatre (FT) are usually tools for working against oppression, while IR/IC dialogue is a way to promote a change in the relationship with different people with different convictions.

Apparently they are similar as one works on negative situations to transform them, the latter on misunderstanding/rejection/dogmatism, to promote mutual understanding and respect.

The goal is to improve a human relationship, but here appear some differences:

- TO aims to change the persons implied, but also the structures of power where they are and the mechanisms of oppression, while IR/IC dialogue seems to emphasise mutual recognition among peers.
- TO analyses the mechanisms of oppression while the other approach focuses on the mutual attitudes and stereotypes, trying to promote openness and de-centralisation of points of view of both.
- TO distinguishes between oppression and miscommunication: oppression is a power relationship where one pole is exploited by the others, silenced, diminished in his potential, while miscommunication occurs mainly among pairs.



So this brings us into the question of power relationship.

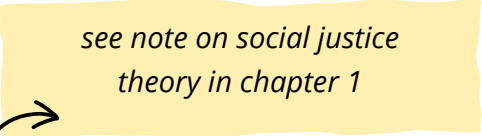
See Conclusion - Lesson learned

4.2

What does TO+FT add to IR/IC Dialogue

TO is the general method and FT is the specific technique; both can bring something useful to our topic, despite the differences mentioned above.

In many ways TO+FT can be useful for IR/IC Dialogue:

- TO+FT help to be aware of the power imbalances in groups. Symmetry is a necessary requirement for dialogue, but in reality, this symmetry is often missing due to inequality in society 
- TO+FT can help to raise awareness and explore the power imbalances in a group. They can be a necessary requirement before we can enter "a real dialogue".
- If the usual way is to talk about religions or convictions, TO+FT push this debate on real life by acting and embodying the issues. One thing is to talk about respect, another is to practise it. One thing is to reflect on listening, another is practising.
- If you use games or other active ways to, for instance, create a trusty atmosphere in the group, you can still benefit from Forum-Theatre as it stages real situations and allows the audience to analyse and transform them, studying strategies, proving attitudes and communication, etc.
- Forum-Theatre is not simply a role-play, but a research around problems among human beings, so the idea is to discover oppression and their mechanism, not simply explore how a role can be better played.
- Forum-Theatre respect to a problem solving method based on speech adds more engagement of emotional and body language. That implies a development of emotional intelligence and closes the gap between "thinking the best solution" and "being able to apply it in reality".
- Putting on stage a concrete lived situation allows a more generous distancing from that reality and therefore increases the possibility to better understand it and find some alternatives.
- Forum-Theatre is also a more democratic space as you can use body language and verbal one, so people that are not used to talking in public or do not have a fluent verbal language, can intervene however in a fruitful way onto the stage.

4.3

What does TO+FT add to IR/IC Dialogue

A FT-IC workshop has many stages. Some are necessary, other are optional and based on group dynamics present, timing, etc

The logic hiding the steps is to guarantee a gradual progression, that helps to keep the group motivated and safe, but in the meantime challenge it.

In a very large framework, we can foresee 11 stages, not all obligatory:

1. Introduction
2. Group and trust building
3. Theatre literacy or de-mechanisation
4. Listening improvement, stereotypes de-construction, active listening
5. Core activities on Dialogue: what is and what is not
6. Core activities on Convictions
7. Core activities to explore topics, collect stories, stage them
8. Forum-Theatre session, internal or external
9. Power, Structural and Cultural Analysis
10. Debriefing
11. Closing



All steps should be checked and depending on the group; some should be more elaborate than others.

Here are more details step by step.

*I have more tools to solve
conflict even small...*



4.3.1 *Introduction*

Path, rules, goals need to be explained as an introduction, also say why we are here. Depending on the group and time, on the timing of the path, on circumstances, this step can take a few minutes or an hour. Some groups need to know a lot before starting the practical phase, other ones are more open to try, idem with individuals. So the Joker should be attentive and perceive how long the introduction should be. One key area, not compulsory, is to explore the expectations of the group, to regulate the activities accordingly.

Also explaining that we try to implement the concept of Dialogue in all the activities, so we are applying the same approach to this experience can be useful. Someone likes to make a clear agreement with the group about basic rules within the workshop. We think a Joker should choose what is appropriate to him/her/the group/the context. However we can agree that expectation, rules of behaviour, process, are key elements of this experience, but they can be made explicit in this step or in other ones, or put implicitly in the activities, or reflected after something happening in the group. This choice is up to you.

4.3.2 *Group building*

Before touching the hot topics related to dialogue and convictions it is better to create an appropriate atmosphere; the same happens in TO when you are approaching the topic of oppression. In some books this step is called warming up, in Boal's terms de-mechanization; other approaches call this task "to create a safe and brave setting (free, safe and challenged)". In any case the phase is important and useful to create the group feeling, to facilitate the opening of people, to give the conviction to each participant that he/she is in a safe space, to build trust with the trainers, etc.

Maybe a group can already exist before the workshop, but that there always needs to be a group building to also build confidence with the joker. If the group is completely new, though, the group building will involve both within the group as with the joker. So group building is always an essential aspect of the path.

There are a lot of handbooks about exercises to warm-up, to improve senses, to trigger trust, etc. in every kind of theatre practice and over, so we here just mention a few examples in chapter 5.

4.3.3 *Theatre literacy or De-mechanisation*

The warming up is also needed to prepare participants to the specific language of theatre, especially if they are not used to it. Many exercises can be used at this stage, gradually more difficult, starting from the experience of the group.

De-mechanise means to break down the usual patterns and discover we are richer than the habit. Physically means to use the body in unusual ways, discovering more possibilities; emotionally means to practise, through improvisation, different emotions and be able to manage them; verbally means to de-construct our way of communicating and discover others, thanks to specific exercises, improvisation, character's work.

In Boal's view it is also a preparation to change reality, to intervene in a Forum play, to extrapolate what we learnt in a workshop into real life; it is not just to warm-up the body, it is much more.

4.3.4 *Listening improvement, stereotypes de-construction*

The basis of dialogue is listening; if people are not able to deeply listen to others how can dialogue be a real one?

In our experience some exercises based on "Active listening" can be really helpful and push us to discover how little we usually listen to. Stereotypes are another barrier to dialogue; when I perceive the other filtered by a stereotype I do not listen as I already know what the other wants to say. So I think about my answer. Here again some exercise to make people aware about stereotypes or exploring stereotypes in a mixed group, can help even if they are delicate and potentially hurtful.

4.3.5 *Core activities on Dialogue*

We can have different kinds of discussions with people who are different from us.

In this step we can explore in practise the different forms: polemics, controversy, debate, dialogue and feel how we feel in the 4 situations, what are the differences, what is our favourite relationship with the Other.

4.3.6 *Core activities on Convictions*

Be sure to have created enough safe conditions before challenging the group in this way. Expressing your convictions can be a taboo and people can feel vulnerable or easily attacked. So be careful not to push people to express themselves. We can also add that even with a group that seems homogeneous in their convictions at first sight, there are always differences in how they interpret or apply this in their own lives. So don't assume that you know the answer yet.

To focus on dialogue, values, types of discussion, convictions, etc. read chapter 5 to get some exercise you can use.

4.3.7 *Core activities to collect stories and stage them*

The core activity should address 3 steps:

1. to collect stories related to a lack of dialogue
2. to improvise the so-called theatre embryo
3. to clean the play in a way suitable for a Forum-Theatre session.

Collecting stories

To collect stories you can simply discuss in the group, but sometimes it is better to start with pairs as it creates a more intimate space where people can feel better to share bad stories. Another idea is to create images with the exercise sculptor and clay

see chapter 5

The input to tell stories and create images can be various:

- tell a story where you experimented difficulty in dialogue
- where someone tried to impose on you one value/conviction
- where you had difficulties to create a listening situation
- where the values around you are opposite to yours
- etc.

Improvising

The second step is to choose one or more stories and start to improvise.

The created scenes can be explored throughout specific tools called “rehearsal techniques”.

The first step is to improvise a story that was told, so you can just invite participants to take on a role and play following some indications from the teller. It is not important to keep exactly what happened to an individual, but more important is to describe a typical situation with its specific mechanisms that can occur to more people. In TO we are talking of “us” not about “I”. In order to better improvise, insist that improvisation should be free from judgement and evaluation; only after having improvised you can discuss what should be kept as essential or stimulating and what is creating confusion or is not important.

At the end of this phase the should have one or more scene representing situation of non -dialogue with the following basic characteristics:

- No happy ends, the story should pose the problem, not the solution.
- At least a Protagonist, searching to open a dialogue and an Antagonist that does not want, therefore a conflict (explicit or not) between these two characters.
- The Protagonist should clearly show his/her desire to implement the dialogue but is not able to manage the Antagonist’s behaviour.
- The characters in the play should be as real as possible, avoiding caricature as this is nice for catharsis, but not for a change in reality.

Cleaning the play

The first improvisations, with non-actors, usually are not so rich and precise; they can be confused, or keeping elements not crucial for the problem, or caricatures instead of honest characters, etc. For these reasons it is important not to stop at the early improvisation, but to deepen the play by alternating improvisation and discussion also in sub-groups.

Some techniques can be playful and useful for that.

Rehearsal techniques

They are techniques invented or adapted by Augusto Boal, to improve the created scenes. There are dozens of these, useful for different purposes. Here we explain some of the simplest and powerful:



- **Stop and think:** the scene starts and the Joker says to the actors <Stop!>, the scene stops and the Joker says <Think!> to everybody or one specific actor who starts a monologue. After 1-2 minutes the Joker says <Go!> and the scene resumes from the moment it was interrupted. The sequence is repeated several times. It allows actors to go deeper into the character, revealing the inner thoughts.



- **Analytical rehearsal of style:** the scene starts and the audience is allowed to say stop and suggest a style, like comedy, tragedy, soap opera, musical, spy story, science fiction, opera, western... The actors have to change the style of acting, immediately, keeping the key points of the plot but adding each element they can imagine, which comes out from improvisation. Usually this tool makes a lot of fun, but also allows us to explore nuances in the play and to enrich the story.



- **Interview to character:** each character in turn is in front of a small group of 3-6 people who bombard him/her with every kind of questions, from the biography to the preferences, from family to job, from hope to fears. The person in charge keeps the character and answers promptly as character. This exercise helps a lot to build a deeper character and avoid black and white dimension or stereotypes.



- **Analytical rehearsal of emotion/motivation:** the scene is played many times as we need to explore different emotions/motivations in each character. For instance we play the scene with love; each character should express love, even if the situation is conflictive. Then with fear. Possible variation: each character explores a different emotion in the same scene, or the exploration is about the will so each character defines his/her will and then plays the scene with this strong motivation. Very useful to create nuances in characters.

In this application of Forum-Theatre to IR/IC Dialogue, we think that particular care should be put on values and convictions that can be shown clearly to the audience: by explicit verbalisation, through a narrator, with a song, included implicitly in the characters' behaviour, etc.

The Joker can help the group explore values and convictions behind the behaviours and be aware about them. This research is useful not simply for the Forum play creation, but as results of the entire process.

Specificity of this kind of Forum play.

The question of convictions: how to introduce them in the dramaturgy and interpretation?

We propose during the cleaning in embryo phase we can add a step and some activities to enrich the characters with a research around the conflictive convictions related to the Protagonist's character and the other ones and the story.

We can brainstorm them and then to rehearse each value by improvising different situations and using the Analytical rehearsal of emotion/motivation like a shape. Similarly we can introduce in the play objects and words that refer to the convictions played in the story; in this way we are using the technique more specifically and not simply staging a conflict, as commonly used in TO.



The path brought reflection, dialogue and curiosity about religions...

4.3.8 *Core activities to collect stories and stage them*

Forum-Theatre is a simple technique where a group shows a story (in TO about oppression, here about non-dialogue, that sometimes can coincide with oppression, sometimes not) and an audience can see for the first time, discuss a little the problem and then the show re-starts. This second time the audience is invited to say stop, when they want and to bring an idea to improve the situation, by replacing the protagonist in trouble or possible allies.

Forum-Theatre can be difficult to manage depending on the public reactions. See also the Joker's role in this chapter.

Here we just point out that at the end of the process you can set up a session internally, where each sub-group shows the story to the other groups as an audience or you can decide to bring these stories out to a new audience. The goal can be different, in one case more related to an internal discussion, in the other, maybe to sensitise people about interconvictional Dialogue.

The steps of Forum-Theatre are usually these ones:

1. The facilitator, called Joker, introduces the session explaining something essential to the audience
2. The Joker activates the audience in order to make them think they can be active protagonists. Usually questions and simple games are used for this purpose.
3. The play is shown by the actors.
4. The Joker guides a debate asking what is the problem, if someone has any idea about what to do in that situation. When a person expresses an idea the Joker invites the spect-actor to act his/her solution onto the stage, by replacing the Protagonist or their possible allies. Each person who wants, enters the scene, in turn. The Joker does not judge the intervention but asks questions to problematize what seems too easy, or about the consequences of a strategy, but also supports the audience to find more solutions and try out onto the stage.
5. The Joker summarises what has been done, with no judgement, but inviting people to reflect more and to export the passion and ideas into real life.



Read also the Joker's attitude here below.

To lead properly and in a meaningful way a Forum session the Joker has to pay attention to several aspects. Here we underline two:

- power relations
- Joker's role.

**For more reflection
read afterwards
about the Joker's
attitude (Chapter 4.4).**

The audience

When we offer the Forum play to an audience we have to be careful about its composition. Boal affirmed that TO is a concrete tool for oppressed people to explore an oppressive situation and find solutions; what happens therefore if the audience is made by people who do not share the same oppression? The risk is the tendency to give suggestions to oppressed people like: in a story of police profiling where a black person is stopped by police a white man could suggest to claim for own rights not to be mistreated. Giving advice to the oppressed people is not a TO goal, the contrary. So what is the matter here about IR/IC dialogue? As Joker, keep in mind to pay attention to invite the suitable people to the play and also to what is going on in the room and in case this tendency emerges please, deal with it (see Lesson Learned).

4.3.9 *Power, Structural and Cultural Analysis*

We believe that dialogue is constitutive of Theatre of the Oppressed or Freire's thinking, but this dialogue is not merely to talk and to listen to, but is also respecting each other. This implies the question of power.

How may I feel safe and open in a power relationship where I cover the minor position, the weakest role?

So dialogue implies also to recognize where there are differences of power, therefore privileges and unbalance.

We mean that a first step in the power relationships, before starting dialogue, is to recognize that, then dialogue needs a re-equilibration of power.

Can a student feel free to dialogue when they are afraid about the vote the professor can give him/her?

Can a citizen in an authoritarian democracy or dictatorship feel free to dialogue with a policeman or representative of authority?

Can an employee feel free to dialogue with his/her boss, when is afraid to risk the job?

Our idea is that dialogue can be established when the power is similar, if not we need to recognise the situation as power unbalance and try first to change it. This is dialogue according to Boal and Freire.

In other words we pursue, also through this IR/IC dialogue, the goal of social justice and for that purpose we need critical awareness for both side:

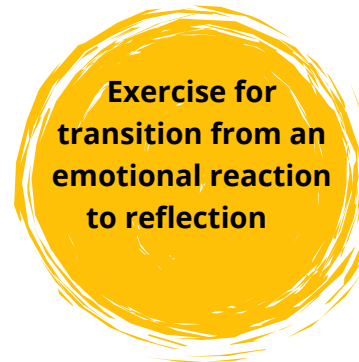
- the oppressors should realise their privileges and power
- the oppressed should find a way to dismantle the system of oppression, without recreating a new oppression, in other words without replacing the oppressors. The task for them is to realise they are oppressed and find ways out.

In this direction it is not enough to stage a play whatever, but to analyse the system of oppression where each person plays a role. How to do it concretely in a path like this we are proposing?

Some exercises in chapter 5 like "The great game of power".

4.3.10 *Debriefing*

Debriefing is an essential moment in order to achieve, with the help of the Joker's maieutics, different perspectives/opinions, a deeper knowledge and fix the discovering. It is also important to leave the strong emotions and learn by them instead of leaving them to overwhelm the individual. The possible debriefings can be just to discuss starting from questions, on personal and intellectual level. In this phase we like to indicate an exercise to prepare for this step, dealing with the emotions likely activated by the previous steps, especially during the Forum session.



Invite participants to lie down in a comfortable position, close their eyes and focus on breathing. Invite them to scan their own bodies, feeling the sensations, the tensions or relaxation, following your voice. Guide participants by mentioning each part of the body, inviting participants to be mindful of what they feel. In conclusion, invite them to breathe deeply three times, then ask them to open their eyes, slowly start moving and stand up again. There are many other ways to relax and pass from emotion to reflection through relaxation, breathing, play or physical work.

4.3.11 *Closing*

Closure is a ritual moment to reinforce the changes, to evaluate the journey and the results, to share the final emotions of the end, to ritualise the departure. Some can also prepare the future, a thing that Boal named “extrapolation”.



- **Visualise the future:** close your eyes; imagine a situation of non-dialogue that you have to face likely soon, as protagonist or witness. Focus on details like noise, speech, images, colours... See yourself from outside, as a spectator of yourself. Suggest to you in the image what to do/to say to manage the situation... Breath and open your eyes.
- **Experiment the future:** in pairs, recover a situation of non-dialogue that you have to face likely soon as protagonist or witness... Tell the situation to your partner and ask him/her to improvise taking the counter-role. Repeat the scene once as you are afraid it will happen. Then again, but now try to do your best to manage the situation better. Ask feedback to your partner.



We suggest closing the workshop with tools focusing on four dimensions: emotional sharing, evaluation, learning, closing ritual. Here are some examples:

Emotional sharing:

- Circle of sights: stand in a circle hand by hand and look in the others' eyes, one by one.
- Image of emotions: the joker asks the group to make a sudden image with one's own body when he/she will clap, linked to the lived emotions in the workshop.

Evaluation:

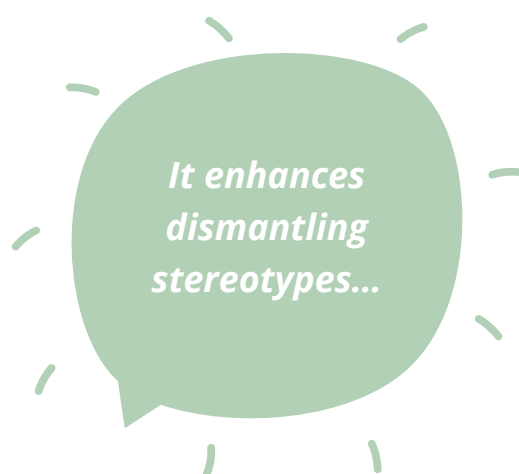
- The object: in a circle participants pass each other an object while they share their thoughts and feelings about the workshop experience in the form of a short speech. The rule is to speak only when the object is in your hands, listening without interrupting or commenting on others' speeches.
- Barometer: the Joker points to an imaginary line on the floor, then asks the participants some questions about their perception of the workshop: "how did you evaluate the workshop: the leading, the organisation, the contents, the methodology?". Participants stand on the line, positioning themselves on the range from 100% satisfied to zero. Short comments can be asked to get more details.

Learning:

- In pairs, participants share what they have learned from the workshop. Then each pair briefly reports to the whole group or shows a poster with their learnings.
- Give each participant a post-it where they should write one concept that has been clarified by the workshop, or some knowledge acquired thanks to the workshop. Post-its are collected on the wall, arranged and grouped as participants like, shown and commented on as a collective work.

Ritual to close:

- The 3 Ury's breaths: participants stand in a circle, with eyes closed. The Joker invites them to breathe deeply, then proposes to dedicate a first deep breath to the past generations; a second breath should be exhaled as a gift to the community created during the workshop and a third breath is dedicated to oneself.
- Run to the centre: participants stand in a circle hand by hand. Then they look into each others' eyes and run three times to the centre, screaming.



4.4 *Joker's attitude*

Here are some basic attitudes we consider important to keep as Joker, while preparing and leading the IR/IC Dialogue workshop.



Awareness

The Joker should be aware about the issue of dialogue among religions and beliefs and what this means in a society that is structured through inequality and oppression; they also should consider that where some religion/beliefs are dominant, they are linked to structural problems, not simply personal ones. They should be actively working on deconstructing the idea that the problem is only mutual understanding, where the basis is inequality, so they should also question the social structures and their own privileges and stereotypes that support inequality.



Maieutics

The Joker should not judge the solutions of the groups, but constantly encourage the group to question their solutions, using problem posing and questions as main tools to increase the group and individual awareness. Judgement is a top-down relationship that is not consistent with the process of liberation we are pursuing (Pedagogy of the Oppressed as reported in the chapter References).

This can help find a delicate and challenging balance, that is staying in between: between allowing the group to become more and more autonomous, but at the same time “problematizing” some statements from individuals or the group, like the ones linked to stereotypes/power/privileges. The best way is giving open and real questions to help people to go deeper in the issue, pointing out the consequences, the contradictions, the implications, the implicit assumptions.



Flexibility and following the group mood

It is particularly important to adapt your work to the different contexts, groups and steps in the process and not being rigid in following the schedule you have prepared. Design an agenda with some options if the first proposal does not work. It helps you not to fall into anxiety as you have a plan B. To keep the path close to the group evolution is also the best way to be effective in change.



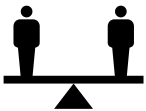
Observation

It plays a key role in adapting the agenda to the process in your specific group at that specific moment. Joker should propose and then observe the group reactions and modulate the next steps according to this observation. To observe implies to make hypotheses and not to read the situation in a rigid way by using our “normal” eyes, but be open to the unexpected. Observation helps also share mine with the co-leader’s and go deeper in understanding the process.



Non-judgment

A smart Joker should stay aware of what happens during the exercises. Leading a group is a constant process of proposing activities, observing reactions, making new hypotheses and adapting the schedule according to the feedback. The role of a Joker is not to evaluate/judge the group or a participant, but to learn from the group/individual reactions and adapt their proposal. A welcoming and non-judgemental atmosphere helps people open up and is a strong teaching practice for a dialogical work. That does not mean to be neutral (with no values), but to choose to have a maieutic attitude (see above), questioning and questioning again.



Objectivity-Neutrality-Impartiality

Often people ask us if the Joker can or not express his/her own ideas about the staged problem. Boal said Joker is not an expert, a professor, a priest, or a politician... The attitude is maieutics, as explained already. Under another angle we can reflect if it is possible for him/her to be objective, as he/she is maybe not involved in the issue. Objectivity is impossible as each of us has his/her own filters, created by society, culture, specific experiences, etc. So we read the world in a specific manner, we are not on the top of the universe, seeing the world as a god. So should the Joker be neutral?

His/her task is just to foster the debate and facilitate interventions?

Again we would say no: being neutral means that all values are the same, we do not stand for one side, we don't care about differences. Moreover, to be neutral is really difficult as the way we behave is full of our values, the way we move, we pay attention to or not, how we speak, we stop the audience, we question, we choose the questions.

We propose, according to Boal, to set the role as impartial, that means the Joker should give space to each opinion in the room, without manipulating or censoring. But at the same time, based on the values he/she has, they should questioning, problematising all solutions carried on the stage. Impartial means "I am anti-racist", but I let a spect-actor express a racist opinion/solution, then I question the audience if all agree, I guide attention on the consequences of a violent/racist solution, I can also express my personal disagreement, but I accept the person come onto the stage to propose his/her idea. Sometimes racist/machist/classist opinions are superficial, so better to put them into dialogue and reflections instead of censor them. Joker believes people can raise awareness through dialogue and are not afraid of differences or opposite ideas.



Diversity-oriented

In our view, two Jokers with diverse backgrounds add value to the workshop as they bring different perspectives and cultural sensitivity and this is also facilitating dialogue in the group. It can also be helpful to have some experience in dialogue or in working with migrant youth, but this is not an absolute requirement.

4.5 *Challenges and advantages*

Some limits of our proposal:

- When in the group there are people traumatised, as it can happen when they are migrants or refugees, it can be very hard and painful to remember those situations, so when the step asks them to tell lived stories the trauma can be awakened. In this case we suggest or to limit the type of stories or to be helped by a specialist or to use other methods like the tree of life, a methodology developed by Ncazelo Ncube and David Denborough or 'protective wraps' (beschermjassen), developed by Kitlyn Tjin A Djie.
- When the group does not have a common language, it is really hard to go deeper in the verbal exchange and this limits a lot of real and deep dialogue. We suggest to avoid composing such groups or to use mediators during the work.
- When a group has internally a big power gap, with some people really powerful and an unbalanced relation with the others, what can happen is the silence from the weakest part: imagine a group of students with teachers, or natives and migrants. We suggest taking care of this situation and empowering the weakest part or, in case, to work separately for a period and then coming back together when the weakest group is stronger and has clear ideas to carry on. The background of the Joker also always plays a role. Because of this the group, or certain participants, can feel a power imbalance towards the Joker, even if this is not intentional.
- Another situation is when during a Forum-Theatre session the audience is mixed or there are oppressors and oppressed people in the room. What can happen is that oppressors do not recognise the situation as oppressive or try to intervene to suggest the right behaviour to the oppressed. In this way Forum-Theatre becomes a teaching session where the oppressors show the right behaviour the oppressed should take. Our suggestion is to highlight what is happening, make it evident; but also questioning the oppressors if they do not see any oppressions on stage and why. In certain cases the honest oppressors can recognise partially the oppression and learn something new or even feel more empathy.



The advantages that Forum-Theatre brings to IR/IC dialogue based mainly on debate and verbal exchanges are just these ones:



- In a Forum play the verbal skills are important but also the non-verbal ones; in other words Forum-Theatre is more democratic as each person can intervene, speaking mostly but also acting.
- Staging a story makes more visible the power dynamics as it includes the body, nonverbal communication and action.
- The ritual of theatre creates a container for dealing better with emotions and opposite ideas; it is a device where differences can be respected as each person will have a turn to express his/her own opinion or strategy.
- There is no competition and the frame is more a common research, a common goal (to overcome oppression).
- Most youths want to discuss values and convictions and there is little space in their ordinary life to do that in groups. Forum-Theatre sessions provide them with such a space.

Activities and exercises

This chapter spotlights a total of 10 exercises that had a valuable impact in our project and that we want to share with you. Some exercises were inspired by Augusto Boal, others were gradually created by our own experiences while working on this project.

Throughout the project, we encountered a multitude of exercises. While we've only selected 10 of these exercises to share, it is essential to acknowledge that this is just the top of the iceberg. If you want to elaborate on more exercises we have experienced during To Believe Or Not To Believe, you can read further on them in [this document](#). If you want to dive in deeper, we can recommend Augusto Boal's book Games for Actors and Non-Actors, which has been a huge inspiration for us.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE WORKSHOP

SPACE

a room suitable to the group size, comfortable and quiet, better a wooden floor to lie down. If you plan to work in sub-groups, it is preferable to have some smaller designated spaces to split the group.

EQUIPMENT

you could need some music, in this case suitable equipment can be necessary.

TIME

the estimated exercises' time does not include the debriefing phase, which is challenging to foresee, as its length varies according to group dynamics and emotions. It's the Joker's responsibility to feel how much time participants need to re-elaborate, benefit from the experience and manage their feelings.

DURATION

we designed a 20 hours' workshop as an ideal time for this process. Less time can be too short to develop a meaningful process while more time can be difficult for recruiting people.

OBJECTS

sometimes we use objects or to enrich imagination or because they are necessary. You find the requirements in each exercise but feel free to add or not use if unnecessary.

GROUP SIZE

for a workshop-based theatre practice, the preferable number of people is approximately 12 to 24 persons. Working with fewer participants makes it challenging to carry out some techniques and may limit group interactions; a larger group makes it harder to provide a floor to everyone and create a warm group atmosphere.

Different suggestions are in the exercise/technique description.

Working rules: at the start we negotiate some basic rules to keep a safe space like:

- Avoid, as much as possible, making judgements about yourself, others and the activity unless expressly asked to do so (such as in the evaluation phase of the workshop).
- None is obliged to do any activity proposed if he/she is not comfortable with it.
- Keep private the intimate stories that someone could tell during the workshop.
- Use respectful language; decide what it can be shared with the group.

1

MOLECULES

Phase 1, group and trust building



10 min



OBJECTIVES

- Break the ice
- Obtain information about the participants in a very visual and fast way
- Contribute to group creation
- Ensure that participants begin to get to know each other and thus contribute to the preparation of a safe and trusting space



DESCRIPTION

All the participants are atoms that walk through space and will have to come together in molecules with the persons with whom they have something in common. The Joker will indicate to participants the aspects that should unite them.

- Hair colour
- Country of origin
- Mother tongue
- Knowledge of the entity that organises the workshop
- Previous participation in Theatre of the Oppressed or theatre activities in general
- Hobbies
- Convictions

2

THE TRAFFIC LIGHT OF EXPECTATIONS

Phase 1, group and trust building



15 min



OBJECTIVES

- Know the expectations and fears of the participants regarding the workshop
- Reduce fears and make participants feel like protagonists of the process



NECESSARY MATERIAL

- Green, pink and orange post-its.
- A cardboard traffic light



DESCRIPTION

First Part (3 minutes)

The participants sit in a circle and the Joker gives them several different coloured post-its and asks them to write the following on them:

Green Post-it: What we expect or what we would like to achieve with this workshop.

Pink Post-it: Our fears regarding the workshop, what we don't want.

Orange Post-it: Other information that we consider important and want to share with our colleagues.

Second part (12 minutes)

In turns, the participants one by one will get up and place their post-its on a cardboard traffic light (each post-it has its corresponding place). Sharing the information they want with the other participants.

3

PORTRAITS

Phase 1, group and trust building



20 min



OBJECTIVES

- Get participants to know each other
- Contribute to creating a climate of trust
- Obtain information (in that will later help us remember the names of all the participants)
- Prepare the participants for de-mechanization exercises



DESCRIPTION

The participants are divided into two equal groups. The first group forms an inner circle, with their faces towards the second group, who are called the outer circle. So each person has one person standing in front of them. The people from the outer circle get something to draw with, the people on the inner circle hold a blank piece of paper with something rigid underneath, so that the people from the outer circle are able to draw on this piece of paper.

During the exercise two things happen: the inner circle answers questions the Joker poses and in the meanwhile the people from the outer circle will listen to this person's answer while drawing a part of the portrait of the person standing in front of them. Which details they have to draw is given by the Joker (eyes, nose, ears...) and they only have 15 seconds to answer the question and draw the detail.

After every question and every detail drawn, the inner circle remains in place while holding (a part of) their portrait and the outer circle moves to the person on the left, working further on the portrait. The outer circle keeps moving until the portrait is finished or until they meet the person they started out with.

A list of questions that can be asked by the Joker:

- If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go? (while drawing the lips)
- If you were an animal, what animal would you be? (while drawing the eyes)
- If you had 10 million euros, what would you spend it on? (while drawing the eyebrows)
- If you could talk to anyone in the world, who would it be? (while drawing the ears)
- If you could live in any period of history, when would it be? (while drawing the hair)
- If you could change anything about yourself, what would you change? (while drawing the nose)
- If you had one day to live over again, what day would you choose? (while drawing a complement)

4

INTERVIEW AND SWAP THE ROLE

Phase 3, Listening improvement, stereotypes deconstruction, active listening



20 min



OBJECTIVES

- Foster empathy
- Get to know participants



DESCRIPTION

The group forms pairs.

First Part

Person A has 3 minutes to interview person B with the aim of knowing this person better.

Second Part

The Joker stops, each person A gathers together, creates a circle and closes their eyes. The Joker guides them to take person B shoes, to enter the character. The Joker can guide person A by saying things like: "recover the answers heard, try to figure out the world of person B... maybe he/she is different from you or not... you have listened to them but also you have had insight... so try to imagine the whole person... then, instead of seeing this person try to become him or her, to perceive the world as person B, to feel as person B... When ready, open your eyes."

Third Part

Now each person A goes back to person B and starts telling his/her story in first person:

"Hi, my name is (the person B's name), I am married, I studied... I hope... I am scared of..."

Fourth Part

It is a sharing in pairs about the experience: how was it to be person B, what you A discovered as similar to your life, how the feed-back was accurate...

After a while the sequence is repeated by swapping the roles. Person B interviews person A.

5

SIXTY SECONDS

Phase 3, Listening improvement, stereotypes deconstruction, active listening



15 min



OBJECTIVES

- Work on rhythm
- Reflect on the social pressure exerted by the environment in which the participants live, on their convictions



DESCRIPTION

The participants are standing in a circle, with their eyes closed. At the Joker signal, each participant begins to mentally count from 1 to 60, trying to count exactly for 60 seconds. When a participant counts 60 they sit on the floor. Obviously each one will sit at a different time since it is impossible for everyone to count at the same rate. Surely the people who remain standing will unconsciously feel pressured to count faster because they will understand the noise of those who have been sitting down before.

Reflection after the activity:

1. How did you feel doing the exercise?
2. Did you feel pressure to sit down when you heard that others were sitting down?
3. What happens in the field of religion or of convictions? Do we believe that our context exerts any pressure? If we had been born in another country, in another family, would our convictions be the same? Do we believe that the current context can influence what we believe?
4. Is there any value or principle that is immovable for us and we believe that no matter how much the context changes, we would continue to think the same?

6

POLEMICS - CONTROVERSY - DEBATE - DIALOGUE

Phase 4, Core activities on dialogue: what is it and what is it not



45 min



OBJECTIVES

- Teach and experience the difference between polemics, controversy, debate and dialogue



NECESSARY MATERIAL

- Four (large) sheets of paper: one with polemics, one with controversy, one with debate and one with dialogue written on them
- Markers



DESCRIPTION

Four sheets are lying around in the room: one with polemics, one with controversy, one with debate and one with dialogue written on it.

As a facilitator it is important to have gone through the background information on polemics, controversy, debate and dialogue from chapter 1 in this toolkit.

The Joker explains each concept. Starting out with polemics, then move on to controversy and debate and finish with dialogue. On the sheets of paper, the participants write down associations they make with the words.

If necessary, a translation of the concepts into the participants' mother tongue and writing them down on the sheet can create even more clarity.

When the Joker feels that the concepts and the distinction between them are clear, the participants should now try to depict the concepts. The Joker starts out by asking one person: how would you portray polemics? This participant starts by making an image with its body and one by one the other participants join in and complete the picture of polemics. The same for controversy, debate and dialogue. The idea is to follow this order and see how more openly their body posture becomes.

7

THE HANDKERCHIEF GAME WITH IMPROVISATIONS



30 min

Phase 4, Core activities on dialogue: what is it and what is it not



OBJECTIVES

- Lose the fear of improvisation
- Reflection
- Theatrical practice of dialogue in a very light, naive and "playful" way. It is important to insist on that lightness to avoid anyone being offended



NECESSARY MATERIAL

- A handkerchief or scarf



DESCRIPTION

First part - Warm-up game

Participants are divided into two rows of equal numbers, one facing the other. The Joker explains that they are going to play the classic "handkerchief" game. Each of the members of a row will have a different number, the Joker will come forward at an intermediate point between the two rows and will call a number. The two people with that number (one for each row) will run out of their row trying to reach the Joker to grab the handkerchief they are holding and return to their row before the other can do the same. The people who manage to bring the handkerchief to their zone (row) will earn a point for their team. The persons who fail to catch the handkerchief can try to tag their partner (who has taken the handkerchief) before they return to their row; if the participants manage to do so they win a point for their team.



After calling a few numbers, the Joker explains that from now on when they call two numbers, one contestant from each team will be the horse and the other the jockey. The horse carries the rider on its back and the latter will try to catch the handkerchief before the other team's rider does, he will also try to prevent the other rider from touching him/her. They can only steal the handkerchief if they are in the position of horse and rider and it is them who have to decide the roles.

After a few times, the Joker explains that from that moment on when they call three numbers, two participants from one team will form a seat and the third will sit on it. The rest of the dynamics is the same. When the Joker calls 4 numbers they have to make a plane, two participants make a seat with their hands, while the third supports their chest on them and the fourth makes the tail of the plane holding their partner's feet.

Second part - Improvisation

The Joker calls a number and two people leave their respective rows. When they are close to the Joker, they will yell "Stop" and the two people will freeze a few metres from the handkerchief. At that moment, the Joker poses a situation of conflict and the two people who were frozen in front of them will have to improvise on the spot, without preparation and without deciding what role each one plays. They will simply have to start improvising and accept the other's proposal, without losing sight of the handkerchief. The Joker lets them improvise a bit and after a while they yell "go ahead" and the two "improvisers" will have to run to get the handkerchief following the previous dynamic. The Joker could also call two or three numbers and they would all have to represent a character within the story.



7



The proposals of conflict that can be raised are:

1. Baptism of a child. The father is Catholic and wants to do it, the mother defines herself as an agnostic and prefers not to do it and for the child to decide when she is 18 years old.
2. A doctor and a Jehovah's Witness who needs a blood transfusion but refuses to give it for religious reasons.
3. Discussion between a wedding couple, for her it is important to be a virgin at marriage for religious reasons and he does not understand it.
4. Wedding between a Catholic person and a non-believer. Here three numbers are called and everyone will have to play a character.
5. Pregnant teenager asks her father, her opus doctor, to perform an abortion on her. Two numbers.
6. A Hindu, a Buddhist, a Jew, a Muslim and a person with a passion for meat have to decide the menu for an important dinner. Five numbers.

Reflection after the activity: it is important to allow time for the participants to discuss what they have felt, seen, experienced and reflected from the activity. The difference between polemics, controversy, debate and dialogue is also introduced.

It is recommended for the Joker to explore the proposed beliefs and convictions before carrying out the exercises to eliminate prejudices or understand the situation more.

Third part: Debriefing

What has happened in each of the situations that have been created? In any of the cases has it been possible to resolve the existing conflict? If so, what strategies have been used?

And if the conflicts could not be resolved, what do we think is the reason?

The concepts of dialogue, debate, controversy and polemics are introduced at this time and we analyse related to these terms how the different improvisations that have emerged have been.



BOMB/SHIELD/TALISMAN

Phase 5, Core activities on convictions



8 min + 30 min of
Image Theatre Activity



OBJECTIVES

- Activate individual and group reflection
- Work on attention to others



DESCRIPTION

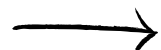
First part

The participants stand in a circle, very close to each other. The Joker asks each of the participants to choose three people from the group, without saying anything and assign them 3 numbers.

The Joker asks the participants to start walking through space (trying to walk in different directions) and when they have walked a bit the Joker tells them that the person who has been assigned the number 1 will be a bomb that could explode at any moment, so they should try to stay as far away as possible. Person number 2, however, will be their shield, the only one who can protect them from the bomb blast, as long as they are between him/her and the bomb. And person number 3 will be the talisman. When the bomb explodes they will have to be close to their talisman and protected by the shield.

The participants quickly move around the space, trying to fulfil all three conditions. The three conditions are introduced gradually. After the participants have experienced walking trying to have the person to whom they initially assigned the number 1 as far as possible, the second condition referring to the person they have assigned is introduced.

The Joker goads them on by yelling "Where is your bomb?! Stay away from it! Where is your talisman? Stay close to it!" After a minute, the Joker announces that in 30 seconds the bomb will explode and kill everyone who is not safe with their talisman. Then a countdown begins, as the movement of the group becomes more frantic. At the end of the countdown the Joker shouts: "Boooooom!" and the group freezes. At this point the Joker asks some participants where their bomb, shield and talisman are, to understand who has managed to be safe from the bomb.





Second part

In the position in which they have remained, the participants are asked to bring the activity to their own religious convictions and to reflect on what the talisman would be for them, what value, principle or rule, is fundamental for them, what they defend and what gives meaning to their beliefs.

Then they are asked to think about the bomb, as what they consider could endanger their talisman (the social pressure of the majority or my peer group, judgement and prejudice, indifference, the media...) and finally in the shield, in what they can protect themselves to defend what they believe.

The bomb, shield and talisman are concepts used as an accessible way to introduce talking about conviction. It makes it possible to reflect on values and convictions (talisman), things that could threaten their values and convictions (bomb) and things that can protect them (shield), in an indirect way.

Third part (15 minutes)

To carry out this third phase, it is necessary that the participants have previously practised the body modelling technique (sculptures) in pairs. (approximately 7 minutes)

Afterwards, 2 couples get together and form groups of 4. Between them they give themselves an order of 1 to 4.

- Person number 1 is the first sculptor and will have to model their colleagues to create the image from a well-known movie.
- Person number 2 will recover the reflections from the activity “Bomb, shield, talisman” and will try to model their companions to shape the value, principle or fundamental rule in their religious convictions.
- Person number 3 will model their peers to represent what they had previously identified as a “bomb”, what they believe can jeopardise their talisman (social pressure from the majority or from my peer group, judgement and prejudice, indifference, the media...).
- And finally, person number 4 will model their clays so that they can represent the “shield”, what they can take refuge in to protect what they believe (community, association, family).

Each group experiments with the different sculptures and then shares them with the larger group.

Fourth part - reflection (7 minutes)

How was it? How did you feel? What challenges did you encounter? What did they discover about themselves and each other? Was it better to be the sculptor or the clay? What did they feel when they were clay?

**OBJECTIVES**

- Make the participant reflect on what they think is important
- Get participants to reflect on what others find important
- Warm up the body through movement
- Creating a group feeling

**NECESSARY MATERIAL**

- Balloons enough for each participant
- Markers to write on the balloons

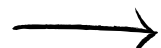
**DESCRIPTION**

Everyone gets a balloon. On this balloon, each participant writes what he or she thinks is an important value in life. Make sure that the participants have enough time to think about which value is the most important. Depending on the needs of the group, this exercise can precede a conversation about values, but this is not a prerequisite for the exercise to succeed.

When all participants have written their most important value on the balloon, this balloon symbolises from now on this value. The Joker can tell the participants they should take good care of it because the value balloon is fragile: it can explode or be blown away by the wind. So they have to take care of our value balloon.

The task now is to keep one's own balloon in the air for several minutes by tapping it gently each time, with the emphasis on gently. Participants walk through each other, but stay focused on their own value balloon to keep it in the air.

When successful, after a few minutes, the Joker gives a signal where everyone gathers in a circle and duos are formed. First, each duo randomly chooses one balloon to keep in the air together. When successful, they can try to throw both balloons at each other in the air, again without touching the ground.



If you want the pairs to be formed randomly, hand out two balloons of each colour in advance through which the participants have to find their match.

Depending on whether the number of participants is even or odd, the Joker can join the group.

After a few minutes, the Joker calls stop and everyone stands in a circle. Each participant now tells the group which value he or she has written down and why this value is now the most important one.

As a facilitator, you can ask additional questions:

- Have you ever felt this value was compromised?
- Do you think this value is also important to others?

Then the group chooses one value balloon in dialogue that everyone can agree on. The group stays in a circle and touches hands. The balloon is thrown in the air in the middle of the circle. The idea is for the group, without verbally communicating, to ensure that the balloon is kept in the air. The goal is to keep the circle as close as possible, therefore only one person may enter the circle each time to tap the balloon up. If this succeeds with one balloon, it is possible to add a second or even third balloon. The group thus learns to sense each other: who will step forward to keep the value balloon in the air? On the other hand, the group also works together towards the same goal: keeping the value balloon in the air.



THE GREAT GAME ABOUT POWER

Phase 8, Power, structural and cultural analysis



20-40 min



OBJECTIVES

- Sensitise about power
- Share different ideas about it



NECESSARY MATERIAL

- Several chairs (Boal used 7)
- 1 Table
- 1 Bottle



DESCRIPTION

Introduction

We constantly live within power structures. In a theatre we have two very different areas: the stage and the stalls; in a classroom: the teacher's table, sometimes on a platform and the students' desks; in a church: the altar, the pulpit, the choir, the place where the faithful are, the confessional, etc.; in a bank, in a company... there are always power structures. Even in our house, in our living room, the father has his place and the mother hers, these are sometimes fixed, there is a person who is closer to the television or the telephone... The place where one sits determines a certain power, defined by the same spatial structure and this is what this game analyses.



First part

The Joker places several chairs next to each other and then a table and a bottle on the table. All chairs have practically the same power, it would be the same to sit on any of them. From there, the Joker asks a volunteer to arrange the objects so that a chair can give the person sitting in it more power, for example, one chair behind the table and all the others in front and in a row, as if it were a school classroom; a chair on the table and the others around it, one on the table and the others next to it as if they were protecting it, one on the table and the others turned or tilted, etc.

**Second part**

The Joker will keep a structure, for example that of the school and those who wish will be able to integrate their bodies into it, trying to gain maximum power but without modifying anything in the structure, since it must remain identical. Where will the first person be? Surely it will not be under the table, perhaps it will be on the chair that is in front of the rest, or on the table. The second person who wants to integrate into the structure will not be able to modify the arrangement of the tables and chairs or the body of the other person who has already been placed, but will try through his position to obtain the maximum possible power to itself. And so on.

Third part

Debriefing about what has happened and how we interpret it.

Chapter **6**

Conclusions
Lesson learned

Nowadays, proposing to a group of young people in Europe to get together to discuss their religious convictions is not an easy task and if they are also told that they are going to use a theatrical methodology to do so, things get even more complicated. Religion is an uncomfortable subject, especially with intercultural groups in which there are people with different convictions.

But we believe that addressing this issue is of vital importance, since reflecting on and talking about convictions makes us better know ourselves and others and helps us build our personal and group identity. In addition, in intercultural groups it can help prevent and avoid conflicts that are often called religious and that hide stereotypes, preconceived ideas and prejudices.

The experience of the TBnTB workshops in the three countries have provided us with evidence that we must take into account to facilitate interconvictional dialogue through Theatre of the Oppressed:

01

It is essential to work on the creation of a safe space. The IR/IC dialogue touches on sensitive topics. It is impossible to create dialogue when the participants are afraid of being judged or there is some kind of social pressure in the group. It is therefore essential to work on knowledge, trust and freedom of expression always within a framework of respect and tolerance.

02

It is also important that there are no obvious power differences within the group, since these would produce an imbalance and make dialogue difficult. In interconvictional dialogue we think we have to pay attention when a situation is staged, as there are many different situations where Forum-Theatre can be useful, but depending on the situation we have, we should need to analyse the structure of power behind the interlocutors, as sometimes to dialogue means first to fight in order to push one side to dialogue truly on a level of fairness. If there is an imbalance of power no true dialogue is possible.



We live in societies based on inequality of access to health, education, housing, labour market, mass-media system, decision making, possibility of my voice to be heard, etc. We have different powers and privileges depending on the social groups we belong to and characteristics like gender, age, ability, race, social class, sexual orientation... can be crucial.

Concretely if I have a job interview or I am sentenced by a tribunal or I meet a police stop I have less or more options, less or more chance to manage the situation.

Dialogue is not merely to talk, as Paulo Freire among others stated, but to have a balance of power, a mutual respect of the needs and respect of Human Rights. Only in this case dialogue is honest.

What can be the dialogue between an Israeli soldier and a Palestinian youngster? Or between teachers and pupils? Or prison guard and inmate? Or boss and employee? Violent man and female victim?

Where there is a big conflict of interests, more imbalance of power, dialogue and fight are connected (i.e. Martin Luther King or Gandhi), as the first step for an honest dialogue is to re-balance the power, to challenge the stereotypes around, to create a fair common ground.

Where is the common ground Hicham was talking about, in the case of power relationship? The research of truth?

And how does this reflection affect IC/IR dialogue?

If in the group composition there are such power differences, we have to be carefully to:

- give welcome and evidence to all present identities
- raising awareness about them and their effects on people life
- give floor to the homogeneous weakest groups to discuss internally the relationship with the most powerful.

This is the first step: re-balance of power, then to create a common ground.

After that maybe a real dialogue on convictions is possible.

Or, alternatively, it could be better to work with homogeneous groups in terms of power first and then to have other steps in mixed groups.

Examples from Axcent application: in one of the activities of Axcent all the animators were white, middle class women, while all participants were teenage boys with a migration background, living in a deprived neighbourhood. This created a certain tension and the participants weren't fully participating in the activities. We changed the situation by stopping the activities we had planned, sitting down with the group and asking them how to proceed.

Language can also lead to a power imbalance. Axcent worked with youngsters with a recent migration background and others from the second and third generation. The latter were fluent in French or Dutch, while the ones with a recent migration background used English or other languages trying to express themselves. We adapted the exercises and took time for translation so that all youngsters could fully participate.

Examples of exercises to reveal chapter 5.

In relation to the **characteristics of the group** of participants:

- To have an IR/IC dialogue experience, the ideal is to have a group of participants characterised by diversity: both gender, cultural, as well as life and religious options, including non-believers and people from different convictions. This diversity will help to share individual convictions, stories and experiences giving much more richness to the activities. We could also propose working with a group that is not diverse as an opportunity to approach entities that work with migrant populations, religious communities or humanist movements to offer them to actively participate in the experience. In this case, it will be necessary to complement it with actions to publicise diversity, experiences and testimonies. This diversity might seem at odds with the second lesson on power differences, but we believe that the differences in group composition can be something that can be an enriching element for the group and the work with it, but care must be taken that this does not imply power differences or at least power differences so pronounced that they make the work difficult.
- Regarding the **age of the participants**, the activities presented in this toolkit are designed for adolescents and young people. It would also be possible to try to work with Theatre of the Oppressed to obtain an interconvictional dialogue with children, but with these obviously the capacity for reflection is different and the methodology would have to be adapted. We also observed that our activities could be done with adults. One aspect to take into account is that the age of the group implies different ways of being aware of the oppressions and can also see a change in the oppressors.
- It should be taken into account whether there are **participants with a migrant background** if you work with "first generation" young people (born in the country of origin, recently arrived) or "second generation" (made up of young people who were born in the destination place or who are deeply rooted). In this sense, the experience and integration processes of these young people can be very diverse and therefore they are likely to have different interests, priorities and/or difficulties that may intervene during the implementation of the activities.
- **The linguistic and cultural barrier** is another of the limitations to obtain dialogue with this type of methodology. If this exists, it would be necessary to look for instruments or strategies to minimize it. Many times in this type of group there are young people who can act as bridges between various cultures (since they have been in the host culture for several years or are second generation immigrants). These young people can act as true linguistic and cultural mediators between their peers.
- Theatre of the Oppressed is a methodology that allows emotional engagement and that connects directly with the emotions and feelings, as well as with the life stories of the participants, in this sense we will have to be very attentive to possible **traumas** that people may carry with which we work, since these could also block the dialogue process and it would be convenient to work on them and even resort to professionals who can help us deal with it.

04

Timing and sequencing of the workshops: we have realised that a methodology such as Theatre of the Oppressed requires a certain continuity. If we choose to work in different sessions, these should not be spaced more than a week apart, as a methodology of this type is based on shared stories, on provoking emotions and reactions and, furthermore, everything is a process.

- When scheduling workshops, it is important to incorporate actions that encourage commitment and thus prevent people from dropping out of the activity.
- Running the workshops intensively with a residential or cohabitation model would be ideal, but we are aware that this is not always possible.
- As for the number of hours that should be dedicated to a workshop of this type, it is difficult to give a precise number, as it will depend a lot on the starting conditions. The difficulties mentioned above (power differences, language barriers, trauma, etc.) will obviously mean that more time will be needed. In "ideal" conditions, in order to follow the whole process envisaged by Theatre of the Oppressed and the setting up of a Forum-Theatre, we believe that a minimum of 20 hours is necessary.
- In programming, it is advisable to consider how we can continue working with the group after the end of the workshops. The links created are strong and we believe that this is a potential activity to continue working with the participants on the theme of interconvictional dialogue.

05

Choosing a **catchy name for the activity:** references to religion, convictions or theatre are concepts that may be far from the interests of young people. When carrying out this experience we reflected on how we could disseminate the activity in an attractive way for young people, replacing these words on the posters and explaining the aim of the project at registration or during the first session. A creative name can be the key to be able to have a sufficient number of participants.

06

We believe that **Theatre of the Oppressed** is ideal for creating spaces for reflection, seeking solutions and establishing alternatives to the problems generated by the lack of understanding between people with different religions and convictions. But sometimes in a group, it is more important to establish bridges, before starting to talk about inequalities or work on situations of oppression. In those cases it is better to start with other resources and activities within a non-formal educational approach and only move to Theatre of the Oppressed at a later stage.

The activities proposed through this methodology offer the possibility of exploring people's identity and past: what is important to me, my values and provides a tool to express it. It is a methodology that helps to share emotions, personal stories and experiences, even in participants who initially think they have nothing to share on this topic. These aspects must be taken into account to apply tools to manage emotional change.

07

During the experience we believe it is necessary to explain the concept of "interconvictional" and also delve into what dialogue is and what it is not.

- At first, the concept or the subject may be distant or abstract, but when you begin to work, it becomes close, it touches everyone.
- The knowledge of the different convictions and religious traditions of the members is carried out as the IR/IC dialogue is generated. It must be taken into account that this knowledge is from the personal, that is, from the experience and beliefs of each person and therefore it is better to complement it with other activities that provide a more global vision of plurality and religious convictions to the participants. One element that can contribute to the quality of the activity is to talk about "common ground" such as values or "the golden rule".

08

The role of the Joker (facilitator) is fundamental. It has to be impartial and able to connect Theatre of the Oppressed with the interconvictional dialogue. In this sense, we believe that it is important to have people trained in both areas to complement each other and to ensure that the experience is of quality.

09

In relation to the evaluation, we observe that it has been of great value that the young people themselves participated in the design of their own evaluation questionnaire, since the result has a greater impact than a "standard" evaluation. In this sense, although conducting an evaluation through the "most significant interview" method may be more complex, the testimonials generated also have a greater impact.

10

An added value to the experience is the organisation of informal meetings such as coffee or celebrations of religious festivities that may coincide during the process. These meetings encourage relationships, information is exchanged that helps us to get to know the participants more deeply, identify leaders in the groups and also provides us with information about the interest and impact that the activities are having.



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