

TOgether Project, a community of practice for the development of the Theatre of the Oppressed in Europe. Evaluation of a research-action path

TOgether Project, a community of practice for the development of the Theatre of the Oppressed in Europe. Evaluation of a research-action path.

Alessandro Tolomelli

Autore per la corrispondenza

Alessandro Tolomelli

Indirizzo e-mail: alessandro.tolomelli@unibo.it

Ricercatore e Professore aggregato dal 2010 all'Università di Bologna, svolge le sue ricerche nell'ambito della Pedagogia generale e sociale. Gli interessi di ricerca sono rivolti in particolare all'epistemologia delle professioni educative, alle teorie e modelli dell'Empowerment, al Teatro dell'Oppresso, alla dispersione scolastica, ai metodi di promozione della partecipazione attiva. Scuola di Psicologia e Scienze della Formazione, Dipartimento di Scienze dell'Educazione, Dipartimento Scienze dell'Educazione, Via Filippo Re, 6, 40126, Bologna

Sommario

Theatre of the Oppressed is an aesthetics approach aimed to use theatre as a tool to interpret and to transform reality, developed by Brazilian playwright and director Augusto Boal. Basing on this methodology, seven European partners have been working on the European research-action Project TOgether to achieve three main goals. The first regards the development of a curriculum for a qualified trainer of Theatre of the Oppressed. The second task is the experimentation of theatre for the community-based empowerment at local level and the third goal is the production of International Forum-theatre plays. The network is active since 2011, and with the performance of the piece Hotel Europa at the Fringe Festival (Edinburgh, 2016) has finished its first path. Such articulated project included an evaluation process with a qualitative and participatory approach in order to enlighten the connection between the three pillars. In fact, in a pedagogical perspective an educational process have to be address not only to the acknowledgement of the participant, but also to the social transformation, helping the people to become protagonists of their change itself. This article has the aim to resume the evaluation process of TOgether Project

and to describe the innovative outcomes of this partnership.

Parole chiave

Theatre of the Oppressed, Augusto Boal, Education

Abstract

Theatre of the Oppressed is an aesthetics approach aimed to use theatre as a tool to interpret and to transform reality, developed by Brazilian playwright and director Augusto Boal. Basing on this methodology, seven European partners have been working on the European research-action Project TOgether to achieve three main goals. The first regards the development of a curriculum for a qualified trainer of Theatre of the Oppressed. The second task is the experimentation of theatre for the community-based empowerment at local level and the third goal is the production of International Forum-theatre plays. The network is active since 2011, and with the performance of the piece *Hotel Europa* at the Fringe Festival (Edinburgh, 2016) has finished its first path. Such articulated project included an evaluation process with a qualitative and participatory approach in order to enlighten the connection between the three pillars. In fact, in a pedagogical perspective an educational process have to be address not only to the acknowledgement of the participant, but also to the social transformation, helping the people to become protagonists of their change itself. This article has the aim to resume the evaluation process of TOgether Project and to describe the innovative outcomes of this partnership.

Keywords

Theatre of the Oppressed, Augusto Boal, Education

The Approach of Theatre of the Oppressed

Theatre of the Oppressed (TO)¹ is an aesthetic method founded by the Brazilian playwright Augusto Boal with the aim of transforming reality. It stimulates the critical observation and representation of reality, envisioning the production of consciousness and concrete actions. Theatre of the Oppressed proposes the elimination of the barrier between the stage and the audience to establish a free transit between artists and spectators, who are invited to act as subjects and producers of culture and knowledge, and to discuss concrete proposals in a playful and democratic space.

In TO, the two words/notions that give the method its name constitute a unitary concept, a programmatic and theoretical manifesto that guides the practice. However, it is necessary to delve deeper into the definition of *Theatre* and *Oppression* in order to avoid misinterpretations and to understand exactly what the two terms in the TO approach mean. We know that the etymology of the word *Theatre* is related to the place, the physical space where the representations are held (Boal, 1993). In fact, first of all, the theatre it is a place where actors and spectators meet, where a ritual is performed and where a community comes together. Even today, we use this term to mean the physical space where specific facts and events occur. On the other hand, a second definition refers to what is being watched and what draws our attention and is therefore something that interests the audience, stimulating admiration and engaging our concentration. In this

sense, the core has the position of looking at the form of our observation that transforms the object which we turn our eyes to, which makes it worthy of attention (Brockett and Hildy, 1978).

In summary, the theatre can be interpreted as the place where the eyes are called upon to pay attention, in which the senses are present to the experience of the subject and in which an aesthetic experience is realised that involves the cognitive and affective dimension of the beholder at the same time. In «Poetics», Aristotle (Boal, 1991, p.47) interprets the strength of stories, represented on the stage as tragedies, as a cathartic function, inasmuch as the narration allows for the cleansing, lifting and brightening of the viewer's mood. The catharsis is therefore determined by liberating the dispassion and violent impulses contained in the facts narrated in the play.

Aristotle sees the tragedy as mimesis, an imitation of reality, and he emphasises its social function to appease the conflicting trends in the community. Catharsis serves as an antidote to the risks of violence and the radical change of will in society (Boal, 1991). Augusto Boal proposes an anti-cathartic kind of theatre in the sense that in his intention, taken from Brecht, theatre should be used instead to make the audience aware of the possibility, which might be hidden, of a change in reality through a mechanism that we can call empowerment. In theatre, the spectator has an experience of belonging to two distinct places that are simultaneously present: the space of stage fiction and the space of real life. This dual belonging was defined by Boal as *metaxis* and it refers to the state of complete and simultaneous membership of the subject to two different and autonomous worlds.

The concept of *metaxis* dates back to Plato (*méthexis*), who described the human condition as structurally characterised by a suspension between polarities - eternity and time; unity and plurality; intellect and emotions; desire, need for novelty and security, making the often irreconcilable contradictions of reality itself evident. Boal applies this concept to the specific field of theatre and in particular to the practice of TO, in which this dual belonging allows the subject to experiment with the connection between the «evidence of change» in the «protected reality of the stage fiction» and the ability to activate the processes of change in real life at the same time (Boal, 2009, p. 65). While in conventional theatre the existing gap between the two worlds in which subjects are suspended has not been reconciled and instead they are led to the realisation of that catharsis, in TO an osmosis mechanism between the two worlds (theatrical fiction and life) has been activated, through the direct involvement of the spectator. Thus Boal's innovation allows a real pedagogical process of consciousness, designing and testing the change, thanks to the theatrical system. In this sense, theatre regains its pedagogical nature, not purely in a didactical direction, but in a hermeneutical and transformative dimension (Mezirow, 1991).

In other words, the link between theatre and pedagogy in TO is not limited to the educational use of theatre and drama as a discipline or as a way to better involve the students, it lies in the convergence of theatrical experience and education, having also a simulating function of change (Massa, 2001). Theatre becomes a process of exploration of deeper and hidden meanings, providing an experience of «authentication of reality» (Massa, 2001 p. 67), which becomes more understandable even in its conflict underlying the mechanisms.

TO develops a concrete path of «conscientisation» (Freire, 1971), which allows individuals and communities to reflect and be protagonists during the dramatic action. Situations in everyday life are deciphered with difficulty, often people are inhibited in action because of the body and social mechanisation, and because of the social masks that we are compelled to wear. Perhaps this is where Boal's greatest pedagogical achievement lies: the fiction of theatre makes us authentic through a simulation in which the possibility of accessing a more authentic dimension of what characterises daily life

has materialised (Massa, 2001, p. 41). By analogy, we can say that the educational process, as a protected simulation of real life, allows action on reality using the principle of metaxis and turns «action» into «experience» because action and reflective capacity during the action itself transform every lived situation into a learning opportunity (Cappa, 2016, p. 45).

In education, as in TO, a field of action that enables the exploration and the understanding of the meanings of reality is established, suspending the flow of life and constituting a time and a space where the subject can give sense to reality and anticipate its transformation. To reveal the contradictions and hidden truths, it is necessary to side step (or ascend telemicroscopically in the words of Boal) to enable us to perceive ourselves as simultaneously «in» and «out» of the context and to understand the motivations and the state of things caused as a result. Boal affirms that understanding reality means transforming it (Boal, 2008, p. 78).

It is important to underline that TO aims to build dramaturgies coming from people's personal experiences. It means that TO does not work on pre-existing dramaturgies written by important authors, but it does allow everyone to be a playwright, director and protagonist of their own story. The dramaturgy in TO is the result of a collective production rather than one person's work and it involves the whole group of participants at the theatre session. In this process, TO provides metaphors of reality that do not correspond to reality itself, but interpret it starting from the participants' viewpoints, also explaining and showing the invisible aspects of such a context. We could say that to transform reality we need to rework experiences from the flow of life. It means understanding events by putting ourselves in a position of learning from action. TO proposes a path, where images are built as metaphors of a reality that can be acted on and then returned, by extrapolation, with new facts, to everyday life.

We can affirm that Freire's pedagogy establishes a consistent application in TO because, like in Freire's view of education, Boal's vision of theatre is not reduced to a sterile ritual or to a narcissistic mode, rather it is intended as a real empowerment process and liberation from social conditioning mechanisms (Tolomelli et al., 2008). As mentioned before, historically speaking, theatre is the place of the life of a community for the purpose of communication. Tragedy and comedy were the ways through which community issues were transformed, allowing the audience to be cognitively and emotionally part of the narrative. Faced with the strength that other iconic and multimedia languages have achieved in our society, on one hand we can notice that they have stolen space and meaning from theatre and, on the other hand, they have reduced the area of influence of education. We need to reflect on the space of influence that theatre and education still have today, extending towards public opinion.

Starting from the Meaning of the Word «Oppression»

Previously, on the subject of the pedagogical value of TO, I stated that this method renews the original political potential and sense of theatre as well. In fact, based on etymology, TO helps us to better understand the reality that we are exploring in the theatrical narrative, also reaffirming the co-presence of the audience and actors, united in the common destiny of the polis. Therefore, it is clear that if theatre still has a purpose in complex society, it lies not only in the artistic value of a one-way communication between the observer and the observed, but in the political value; in the etymological meaning; in the meeting between citizens who together develop knowledge and original interpretations of reality.

Regarding the debate on the correct definition of *Oppression*, we cannot solve it quickly in a few pages. For the definition of oppression, I choose to look at Julian Boal's

explanation: «a concrete relationship between individuals who belong to different social groups, a relationship that benefits a group at the expense of another. In this attempt of definition, oppression goes beyond individual relationships, not down to what the British call «one to one relationship» and always brings something extra» (Boal, 2010, p. 124-125).

A few years ago, a joke was popular about how aliens might interpret the causes of a fire on earth. Analysing the phenomenon of fires seen from space, aliens noticed that where a fire occurred there was always another feature: the presence of firefighters. Such evidence led the aliens to the unequivocal conclusion that firefighters were the cause of these fires. What in this reading led to a mistaken evaluation was the lack of understanding of what

remained hidden in the perception of events. What is not visible but present in the relationship between the two factors (fire, firefighters) is absolutely necessary to understanding this reality. The same happens with situations of oppression: the relationships between individuals can be understood only within the context, which is often invisible. «We cannot understand the relationship between a worker and an owner without trying to understand capitalism, nor the relationship between a white and a black person regardless of racism, or the relationship between a man and a woman without considering patriarchy.

Oppression was a widely used term during the 70's. Today we see the proliferation of other expressions, such as "victim" [...]. What do they mean? The victim, in general, is presented as someone who is not opposed to the fate knocking at their door, as someone we need to take care of, feeling guilty or having remorse; never as someone with whom we can establish solidarity or with whom we can position ourselves as brother or sister in the struggle» (Boal, 2010, p. 124). The victim is usually powerless. Used out of context, the concept of *Victim* emphasises the irrational aspect of life in society and removes responsibility from the oppressor groups. Conversely, the word oppression insists on the midpoint of injustice as the foundation of our society. «We must recognise that there is no revolutionary romanticism in the word oppressed. Being oppressed is a social position not a political strategy. Being oppressed is, sadly, a guarantee to rely on an appropriate strategy to fight against their oppression. [...] Ourselves, we can escape oppression, go around it, negotiate with it, but never win. A black person can become president of the United States of America without racism ending, a woman can become the Prime Minister of England without patriarchy ending and a worker can become the president of Brazil without the ending of exploitation. Winning oppression is not a task for a hero or a Messiah; it is a task for the community. And in this task the theatre can help a lot, but it cannot do everything. The actor must go back to being an activist, leave the stage and go into the street. Like Augusto Boal used to say, TO is a test for change, which means that it is neither the change nor the revolution itself. How do we define who is oppressed, who is the oppressor? How do we establish strategies to achieve the opposite of oppression, emancipation? These questions are central to TO and we cannot abandon them, because they are the ones that allow us to distinguish the oppressed as cultural entertainment for the excluded from occupational therapy for victims» (Boal, 2010, p. 125).

The idea of *Oppression* leads us towards a vision of our commitment in education as a path to reveal what is hidden, to address the learning process to the development of a critical view of reality. Our society is based on injustice, even if the consequences of this situation are not always so evident. In the heritage of Freire's thought, education should be a way to understanding the origins of injustice, building processes to overtake it. Theatre could be a useful tool in such a challenge.

Theatre of the Oppressed is currently a widely-used method, although for a long time it has been a niche practice and not considered an authentically theatrical approach by experts and professionals. Even if the mass popularity index does not represent a

qualitative value in itself, the spread of TO, on the one hand, denotes interest and, in some ways, success in terms of the effectiveness of the method. On the other hand, this diffusion of the method requires a good understanding of the purposes and objectives of Augusto Boal's theatre. From these assumptions the European Project *TOgether* (TP) was born.

Aims of the *TOgether* Project

Coordinated by GTO (Group of TO) Lisbon, seven partners² of experts with experience of application of the TO approach in community groups from seven European countries (Portugal, Germany, France, Croatia, Scotland, Spain and Italy), have been working for three years and the network is currently active in the *TOgether International Theatre of the Oppressed Company* under the artistic direction of Barbara Santos. This TO practitioners' community (they call themselves «art-tivists», a portmanteau blending the two words «artist» and «activists») has socialised layered experiences during the TP process, giving shape to a research network.

The TP was funded in the first three years (2011-2013) by the Grundtvig Programme of the European Commission, and its first goal was to create a defined curriculum, shared among all members, in order to qualify the TO trainer (*Kuringa* or *Joker* as it is called in the TO environment). This unusual figure of engaged expert and researcher also has the task of directing the performance of TO and facilitating training sessions, embodying the three souls of the method: aesthetics, politics and pedagogy. To achieve this goal, the TP group experimented on and contributed to the further development of the training program for *Jokers*, elaborated by Barbara Santos in her twenty years' experience of cooperation with Augusto Boal (Santos, 2016). Moreover, each group member of the network developed projects at a local level, using TO applied to various contexts (schools, communities, women's groups, informal groups of teenagers, and more).

As a community-based project, the TP aimed to develop a community group that uses TO as a tool for elaborating and questioning the reality in which participants live, in each partner's local context, enlightening common issues and conflicts. These experiences represented an opportunity among the participants to reflect on critical issues, strengths and theoretical elements emerging from the practice in a perspective of grounded theory (Tarozzi, 2008). The third pillar on which the project is based is the aesthetic production of the Forum Theatre piece «Hotel Europa». In this production process, TO was used as a tool for investigating the economic crisis which has affected Europe since the year 2008 and that represents a threat to the European Union itself. Each partner was involved in a path that used theatrical instruments and potentialities to explore the different meanings of the economic crisis, which were at times hidden, and the social consequence of such an emergency with its effects on all the citizens of the European Union. Thus, TO provided a setting for action and reflection on an issue with different nuances depending on the country, also providing an opportunity for synthesis between the viewpoints.

Different visions constituted the base of a common aesthetic production, which focused on a social issue, presented a political perspective and was developed through a pedagogical framework. In this sense, we can say that Theatre of the Oppressed is a «learning by doing» approach, in which the theatrical device is used in a continuous research view (Tolomelli et al., 2008). However, the *TOgether* aesthetics and learning process is still a work in progress since TO is first and foremost a questioning of reality theatre, rather than a theatre that provides answers. TO evolves by approximation to the response proposing questions. The goal is not to get a single right answer, but to get all the people involved in the revolutionary process of approaching new understandings of reality (Boal, 2009, p. 24).

Programme Description

The TP network includes as local organisation partners GTO-Lisbon (Portugal, coordinating partner), KURINGA (Berlin, Germany), INK (Istria Region Theatre, Pula, Croatia), Active Inquiry (Edinburgh, UK) and uTOpia (Barcelona, Spain), with the collaboration of practitioners from Italy (Krila, Bologna) and France (Pas à Passo, Amiens), and with the participant assessment of the Department of Education *Giovanni Maria Bertin*, Bologna University. The TP is an adult learning project focused on strengthening local community communication, self-organised TO community groups as non-formal adult learning initiatives and the artistic quality of community theatre plays in order to increase recognition and encouragement for social transformation. Through the joint production of an international play and support for local adult learning methods with theatre, trainers' skills and learners' experiences developed together. Workshops for trainers and learners increased knowledge and gave space for exchanging experiences.

Many learners come from disadvantaged community groups and have had access to European mobility for the first time. The international productions and seven local Forum Theatre plays were staged at international festivals and theatres to ensure visibility of the project's results. All seven partners used the Theatre of the Oppressed methodology as an innovative non-formal adult learning approach aimed at fostering individual and community development and emphasising learning processes for social and individual transformation. Due to an ever more complex society, all partners worked with their Forum Theatre plays in situations where difficulties of communication between different groups impeded mutual respect and solidarity. Whilst aiming to support local community development and empowerment processes, all partners faced challenges in applying a self-organised adult education approach by initiating sustainable local Forum Theatre groups.

Working with non-actors in community groups, all partners came up against methodological and aesthetic limitations in realising the full artistic and social potential of community-based Theatre of the Oppressed productions. Thus, the TP is also a participatory action-research programme in which TO experts investigate possible uses of the method. Even if the Together Projects were developed as unique action-research programmes and learning processes, the Project's aims relate to three different areas, which address three work models: training, multiplication and evaluation. On the one hand, the TP served as a pilot project, as it was run for more than two years and had as its primary goal the elaboration of a TO Training Qualification Programme based on the one from KURINGA³ developed by Barbara Santos.

On the other hand, it aims to stimulate and strengthen the groundwork for the transformation of reality through setting up exchanges between community groups. To achieve these goals, the initiative was structured in alternating periods of training (workshops and seminars) and multiplication (practical application in local contexts) and monitored by evaluation processes (written and visual reports, discussion groups, monitoring visits, conferences, and artistic and theoretical productions). In this way, the Project attempts to provoke a critical and productive dialogue in which the training activities influence the course of practical work and the practice helps to identify the theoretical gaps and the skills that training requires.

The point of contact between these two aspects is the production of a Forum Theatre play. At this point the artistic production was converted into a practical application of theoretical concepts explored within the training process. The Forum Theatre play has the function of a reference matrix for the multiplication process and it takes inspiration from the training modules. The theme chosen for this aesthetic research is the economic and social crisis in Europe. Through this dynamic of reflection-production-reflection,

participants of the *TOgether* Project seek to improve their abilities as Theatre of the Oppressed practitioners (artists-activists), ratify their commitment to work for the transformation of reality in their local initiatives and advance the aesthetic work in the artistic productions of their community groups. Thus, this new concept of *pedagogical theatre* envisages a strong link between educational and political aspects, since both areas are aimed at the emancipation of the subject (Freire, 1971).

As expressed by Boal in his later works (Boal, 2008), to allow theatre to regain its political function it is necessary to bypass the separation between «makers» and «consumers» of aesthetic scripts. It means encouraging all subjects to re-appropriate the awareness of their ability as makers of images, sounds, words, and artistic and cognitive meanings. Contemporary media society tends to homologate our way of thinking also through «the invasion of the brain» (Boal, 2008, p. 15) by which subjects are reduced to the passive role of consumers of cultural products with the purpose of repeating the logic of consumption. Conversely, the Aesthetics of the Oppressed and the Theatre of the Oppressed as a whole are led by Freire's idea that knowledge is something that all people have to build up autonomously, encouraged by dialogue with others. Knowledge is gained through the production of meanings of which the subject is itself a maker. Thus, knowledge is not something that has to be acquired through the practice of «banking education» (Freire, 1971, p. 32), which means that blank minds have to be educated by the teachers pouring contents into them.

The real protagonist of the educational process can only be the student and no longer the teacher as it was in the past; the function of theatre and art in general must return to the original sense of being instruments available for all subjects to explore reality and to give it meaning. Theatre provides a critical interpretation of reality and is not a way to encourage a narcissistic contemplation of it. In Boal's vision, theatre becomes the process of searching for ways which allow us to read and transfigure reality, and to reveal archetypes, eschewing any hedonistic shortcuts and giving back to the people the control of their path of understanding. In the First International Theatre of the Oppressed Conference, held in July 2009, in Rio de Janeiro, at the Centre of Theatre of the Oppressed,⁴ it was said that there was a shortage and urgent need to offer in-depth and more structured skills, addressing the theoretical background and critically analysing the practice of the method.

The TP initiative aimed to overcome this shortage of continuous and structured qualification in the various techniques of the Theatre of the Oppressed method. Thus, the first pillar of the TP was to produce a base for a consistent and reliable curriculum for permanent qualification courses in TO. With Bárbara Santos⁵ as training process coordinator, the TP was inspired by the KURINGA qualification programme as a concrete action in the construction of the required path. The training programme in TO consists of 10 modules and it aims to combine in-depth theoretical analysis with practical experiences and abstract discussions with real enlightenment, enabling consistent development of the method.

The second pillar of the TP consisted of a community-based project developed by each partner at a local level. Each partner disseminated the training experience at a local level, holding TO training courses or providing TO aesthetics paths («multiplication process» in TO vocabulary, cfr. Boal, 2009), addressed to local communities or groups. This part of the programme has the double meaning of sharing and spreading knowledge and skills – since TO is a Method aimed at returning the theatre attitude to people – as well as giving opportunities to TP members to experiment with TO as a method of political and social engagement. The community-based groups presented their works (as Forum Theatre plays, or Newspaper theatre pieces, or simply as work-in-progress materials) in some of the network meetings. The third pillar was the production of the Forum Theatre piece, called *Hotel Europa*.⁶ This third pillar of the Project had the aim of exploring the

potential of TO as a tool for active and aesthetic reflection, developing a collective artistic product. With the direction of Barbara Santos, *Hotel Europa* took shape and was inspired by Aesthetics of the Oppressed^Z as a path for the theatre production. Inspired by the events of the European economy and social crisis of the last few years, *Hotel Europa* brings together a European cast of actors and European citizens at the same time. The piece tells the story of a middle-class family who are affected by the austerity measures imposed by governments and the accompanying striving for more profit from an unreformed banking sector. Exploring the historical foundations of the current crisis, the piece invites the audience to ask themselves how we can challenge a neo-liberal ideology whilst living within a society based on these principles. Through *Forum Theatre* the cast poses the question: what would a different future for Europe look like? A Forum Theatre play challenging the current ideology and creating a space to explore what a different Europe could look like.

The presentations of the play in different European environments, with audience interventions – as in the philosophy of TO – represent the opportunity for the TP team to re-elaborate the play itself, bearing in mind the audience's suggestions and interpretations. Therefore, *Hotel Europa* became a work-in-progress play, which changes and develops after every presentation, because in TO the relationship between stage and parterre, actors and audience is also part of the theatre's investigation of reality. To continue this project as a TO practitioners' team, the Together International Theatre Company was founded in the year 2015. It involves the TP international team who are currently working on *Hotel Europa* production development and are thinking about new joint productions.

Evaluation Methodology

Evaluation in the educational process must take into account the complexity of the processes itself. In addition, the focus of assessment in adult education has to be on the adult. This seemingly trivial or tautological affirmation has been made to emphasise that before looking at methodological and technical issues, it is crucial to focus on the subjective presence in the process. Therefore, evaluation should be played out in the field of the relationship between the subjects. This perspective leads to a model of shared and constructive actions, as well as to the importance of aspects of an emotional and motivational nature. In the transition of these ideas to the principle aspects, we can say that thinking about the evaluation of adults means entering into a permanent perspective of change, which does not necessarily take place in a linear fashion but in a continuity-discontinuity game.

«A basic purpose of the evaluation is to stimulate growth and improvement. All other purposes, while respectable, are just facets of the overall effort needed to assess the present conditions as a basis for development. An evaluation that does not lead to a development of practices is sterile» (Kempfer, 1955, p. 399). From this point of view, the structuring principles of lifelong learning, competence and inter-subjectivity were placed at the basis of the evaluation process. The idea of evaluation as a «tool», rather than having the purpose of development, places the action of the assessment in the dimension of the future and recurring learning. The concept of learning that lasts a whole lifetime provides models which give quality to actions in adult education. Once individuals have acquired it in the perspective of lifelong learning, their ability to learn how to learn becomes central; thus assessment should strive to promote the self-direction of individuals in evaluation as a general strategy for learning to learn. The object of adult education is expressed in a special way in terms of competence and not just knowledge. This reversal of perspective involves an integrated view of knowledge (defined as knowing that, knowing how, knowing and being able to act) and a new vision of the

practice, as an expression in the situation of competence, hence attention on strategic action models based on experience. Therefore, skills assessment may not coincide with the fairly widespread practice of requiring a «replica» of the knowledge statically, which matches criteria outside the universe of the meanings of those involved. Here, an evaluation model characterised by a shared making process is chosen, which, as far as possible, is orientated towards building and creating knowledge in practice. The condition of activating a global reflection strategy is the fundamental aspect of the evaluation. This fact is expressed in a wide range of factors, taking the organisation, individuals and processes into account. It has been said that evaluation refers to the concept of value. Value is a form of attribution of meaning produced by an activity of interpretation.

Each construction of meaning is understood within a frame of reference that provides general purposes and specific objectives. Therefore, the objectivity of the evaluation is the result of sharing and expressing theories of reference. It is evident that the same event can give rise to different interpretations. Indeed, in the most radical way it can be stated that the event itself exists only because each person builds up a personal representation based on a meaningful allocation process. Therefore, assessing the quality of a training course can mean carrying out many different representations (number of participants, achievement of goals, satisfaction of customers, learned knowledge, changes in the students, etc.) as opinion varies as to which is the best starting point. In training evaluation, the underlying vision depends on a number of assumptions related to ideas and values that normally affect knowledge, training, teaching and learning as well as the assessment itself. For this reason, when we talk about the system of reference we refer to a set consisting of philosophies, theories, principles and concepts which we refer to, explicitly or implicitly, to address the evaluation.

The reference system directs us in our choice of criteria, subjects, objects, measurements and tools. In real life situations, there are no clear divergences between qualitative and quantitative leanings. Rather, the adaptation of the theory to the practice and the choice of «impure» methodology occur because of the interweaving of multifarious needs and the coexistence of different objectives. Thus, it requires the mastery of different methods and techniques. In the case of the TP, it means that knowledge of the process is more important than assigning a rating to the product. The training action is determined by a multiplicity of factors because of complex event types. It is evident that the evaluation cannot be an extemporaneous activity. In fact, a limit that may be characterised by the evaluation activities of the training actions is related to the absence of an overview, which correlates to the inability to functionally integrate the assessment in the education as a whole. These risks of weakness can be avoided if a sharing process of the project design is provided.

Grooming each and every aspect that characterise the complex evaluation framework requires the involved subjects' commitment to establishing a structural «frame» where practical operations have a place. In this way, evaluation becomes a bottom up perspective, which accompanies the entire project and which concerns each subject involved. The assessment was set through a process that led us, on the one hand, to know and to share the constituent aspects of the project:

1. the reasons that underlie it;
2. the goals to be pursued;
3. the elements that characterise it (internal and external users, organisations, contexts, objectives and practices).

On the other hand, the process of defining the evaluation problems has as its focus the construction of a local culture of evaluation based on reflection and the legitimacy of every point of view. It was a cognitive process of:

1. awareness of the ideas, beliefs and representations of each person on the evaluation of the training;
2. collective confrontation;
3. restructuring of initial representations based on a shared

In adult training experiences, it is important to provide participation of the subjects in the process of defining the evaluation design and sharing meanings. Here, participation indicates the provision of spaces and moments in which meanings are negotiated and shared.

Evaluation of the project

The evaluation process was developed as a collective work of self-assessment, under the supervision of the Department of Education, University of Bologna. During the TP, participants dedicated specific stages to the evaluation of the learning, working and producing processes themselves. The research methods used in the evaluation were qualitative in order to give participants the possibility to express their reflections about the project's actions and to carry out actions to address the process itself, from their viewpoints. For these reason, the evaluation tools used were self-reflection modules, interviews, *focus group* sessions, participant observation and *world café* sessions. Moreover, the TP provided many materials, which documented the activities, such as videos, photos, meeting reports and records of the training sessions. Such material will be the base for an international publication edited by University of Bologna.

The evaluation process was designed not only and primarily to assess the competences achieved by the participants, but mostly to carry out and enlighten the outcomes in terms of:

1. how to use TO in the community as a tool for empowerment;
2. defining aspects of the TO curriculum as non-formal education (training process);
3. assessing the play production process in terms of methodological and aesthetical outcomes;
4. contributing to the networking process with the aims of improving the exchange of practice and knowledge between the European

The first step was for each partner to write a summarised report focused on «what are the main questions for us in our work as TO Jokers, trainers, directors and activists?». This report intended to clarify the different visions of TO between partners and their applications in specific fields. Evaluation in this starting stage was aimed at sharing technical, political and aesthetic positions, bringing about solidarity and a common vision between the partners. The discussion on the concept of *Oppression* helped the group to define a common base from which they started with the project's path. Among the partners, we started with the question «what we think» and we agreed on «how to do it» together, in such a way that the Jokers could empower themselves and also develop TO skills in a better and more efficient way. Subsequently, focusing on the concept of *Theatre* the group analysed and experimented with the aesthetic possibilities connected with the research potential of this apparatus of expression. Later on, the evaluation focused on the 3 levels of actions within the *TOgether* Project:

1. the training programme;
2. work at a local level using TO in a Community Based approach;
3. the play producing

The evaluation process was developed throughout the project itself, with written and

visual reports, group discussions, follow-up visits, conferences and artistic and theoretical productions. Evaluation meetings took place during the exchange mobility. Every one of the meetings included on-going evaluation activities of the process that had happened up to that point. In the first trainers' coordination meeting the partners developed a logical framework for the TP, which specified goals, strategies and expected results, so that the project was evaluated and developed concretely, and where necessary they discussed the transformation of aims or strategies according to changing framework conditions.

At the end of every learners' meeting, evaluation took place, where partners used participatory and theatre methods for the evaluation. Results of the TP are the seven local plays and the one international play produced, staged during the meetings and many times in between, as well as a curriculum which developed the potential of TO as an adult learning method.

The training process for the curriculum qualification of the TP was developed basing it on the Barbara Santos model designed for the Organisation KURINGA, and it was properly updated during the project itself. Participants provided elements of pedagogical assessment and teaching structure that enabled them to formalise a training qualification curriculum for TO facilitators that responds to educational standards of quality and effectiveness. Thus, the curriculum developed within the TP represents a model that can be considered internationally efficient and provides knowledge and competence suitable to the profile that it aims to train. The seminars provided a deeper understanding of all relevant steps in the community-based application of the methodology. Moreover, it created more contact between European TO trainers and groups (learners), which will prepare the ground for more intense future cooperation. For a big number of disadvantaged learners in the participating community groups we expect an encouraging experience of European mobility, which will open new perspectives of thinking about their own commitment to change and their private social and professional situations. For the participating institutions we expect a remarkable improvement in the effectiveness and artistic quality of their Forum Theatre work. It is difficult to provide a comprehensive assessment of this community-based work section of the TP.

From observations made in local communities it was possible to verify how TO represents an extremely useful tool for the empowerment of the communities themselves, but also to encourage questioning and a research process regarding reality, by subjects often banished to the role of passive spectators. For the learners and their local groups a strengthened local community adult learning process has been developed, which hopefully will improve the quality of their plays and encourage their local commitment for social inclusion.

Conclusion

«Anyone can do theatre, even actors. Theatre can be done everywhere, even in the theatre», Boal used to repeat (Boal, 1991, p. 49). He used that phrase to underline that the theatre attitude does not only belong to actors or drama professionals. Regaining the aesthetic attitude for everybody means firstly returning the right to use all the languages of our expressive potential to people. TO aims to help people discover theatre as human potential to better understand the world in which we live, as well as being a mirror of the mind inside us. Moreover, approaching reality with a practice, which helps develop critical thinking and expressive capacity, has to be considered an important factor for the educational process. Despite this, theatre is a learning path that has not yet been sufficiently explored in the educational sciences, or at least it is not considered a fundamental discipline in school curricular.

The *TOgether* Project is based on the consideration of how important methodologies

focused on the global development of the subject are, instead of specialised focalisation only on disciplines separated from others. Helping people to discover human theatricality as an instrument of knowledge, TO gives back to the person their leading role in the theatrical action of everyday life. In his last public talk, held at UNESCO in Paris in March 2009, on the occasion of his appointment as Ambassador of the World Theatre, a month before he passed away, Boal reaffirmed his belief: «All human societies are spectacular in their daily life and produce shows in special moments. They are spectacular as a form of social organisation and produce shows like this that you are attending. Even when they are unconscious, human relationships are structured in a theatrical form. The use of space, body language, choice of words and voice modulation, the confrontation of ideas and passions, everything that we do on stage, we also do in our lives: We are theatre!

There are no weddings or funerals without a dramatic framework, and daily rituals also exist and, for their familiarity, they are not perceived as such by the consciousness of the subject. There is no breakfast or good morning, timid love affairs or big passionate conflicts, a session of the Senate or a diplomatic meeting unless there is theatre. Everything is theatre! One of the main functions of our art is to bring back to consciousness this spectacular dimension of everyday life, where the actors are themselves spectators, the stage is the audience and the audience is the stage. We are all artists: doing theatre we learn to see what is present but we are unable to perceive because we are used to perceiving it distractedly. What is familiar to us becomes unseen: doing theatre, on the contrary, we illuminate the stage of our lives. Seeing the world beyond appearances, we see oppressors and oppressed in all societies, ethnic groups, genders, classes and castes, we see an unfair and cruel world. So, we have an obligation to invent another world because we know that another world is possible. But it is up to us to build it with our hands, entering the scene, on stage and in life. The Theatre is not just an event, but a form of life! We are all actors. The citizen is not someone who lives in a society, but someone who transforms it by his or her own actions...» (Santos, 2016, pp. 162-165).

References

- Boal A. (1991), *Teatro do Oprimido e outras poeticas politicas*, Rio de Janeiro, Civilização brasileira.
- Boal A. (1993), *Theatre of the Oppressed*, London, Theatre Communications Group.
- Boal A. (2008), *A estética do Oprimido*, Rio de Janeiro, Garamond.
- Boal A. (2009), *O teatro como arte marcial*, Rio de Janeiro, Garamond.
- Boal J. (2010), *Opressao*, Rio de Janeiro, Metaxis.
- Brockett O.G. & Hildy F.J. (1978), *History of the theatre*, New York, Pearson.
- Cappa F. (2016), *Formazione come teatro*, Milano, FrancoAngeli.
- Freire P. (1971), *La pedagogia degli oppressi*, Milano, Mondadori.
- Kempfer H.H. (1955), *Adult Education*, New York, Mc Graw Hill.
- Massa R. (2001) (Cappa F. & Antonacci F. eds.), *Riccardo Massa: lezioni sulla peste, il teatro l'educazione*, Milano, FrancoAngeli.
- Mezirow J. (1991), *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.
- Santos B. (2016), *Teatro do Oprimido. Raizes e Asas. Uma teatria da praxis*, Rio de Janeiro, Ibis Libris.
- Tarozzi, M. (2008), *Cos'è la Grounded Theory*, Roma, Carocci.
- Tolomelli A., Gigli A. & Zanchettin A. (2008), *Il teatro dell'oppresso in educazione*, Roma, Carocci.

TOgether Project Partners

Filipa Simoes, Anabela Rodriguez, Gisela Mendoza (GTO Lisboa, Portugal, www.gtolx.org),

Barbara Santos, Cristoph Leutch, Till Baumann (KURINGA Berlin, Germany, www.kuringa.org),

Aleksandar Bancic, Marijana Persic (INK Pula, Croatia, www.ink.hr),

Gavin Chricton (Active Inquiry Edinburgh, UK, www.activeinquiry.co.uk),

Antonio Masegosa, Miriam Camp (uTOpia Barcelona, Spain, <http://utopiabarcelona.org/>),

Giulia Allegrini, Federica Viti, Alessandro Tolomelli (KRILA Bologna, Italy, www.teatrodelloppresso.it),

Claudia Simone, Bastien Villart (Pas à Passo Amiens, France <https://www.facebook.com/PasaPassoTheatredelOpprime>),

Alessandro Tolomelli (Department of Sciences of Education «Giovanni Maria Bertin», Bologna University, Bologna, Italy, <https://www.unibo.it/sitoweb/alessandro.tolomelli/en>)

Note

¹ Theatre of the Oppressed is the result of the artistic research and the political commitment of the Brazilian playwright Augusto Boal (1931-2009). Nowadays the method is used in more than 70 countries in the world.

² Originally, the TP involved five partners and after the first year, also partners from Italy (Krila and University of Bologna) and France (Pas à Passo) were added to the network.

³ KURINGA is a space for research, production and qualification in Theatre of the Oppressed, located in Berlin (Germany) under the artistic direction of Barbara Santos. Its activities are aimed at the development and the creative multiplication of the method; artistic production based on Aesthetics of the Oppressed; formation of and exchange between community groups; qualification of practitioners; the establishment of solidarity networks; and political activism for the transformation of reality.

⁴ The Centre of Theatre of the Oppressed - www.cto.org.br, founded by Augusto Boal in 1986 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil- is a centre for researching and disseminating Theatre of the Oppressed. It implements socio-cultural projects, which encourage the active participation of the oppressed layers of society.

⁵ Coordinator of the Centre of Theatre of the Oppressed, 1994 to 2008. She worked with Augusto Boal, 1991 to 2009, in various productions, such as Legislative Theatre and Aesthetics of the Oppressed. Dedicated to the development of the Madalenas Laboratory (TO of and for women) and qualification programmes in TO. She is artistic director of the space KURINGA (Germany) and editor of Metaxis magazine (Brazil).

⁶ Local organisations produced and performed plays at the International Forum Theatre Festival in June 2012 and June 2013, ensuring the international dissemination of the project outcomes and creating international impact on the artistic use of Forum Theatre as an adult learning method. By producing together an international Forum Theatre play, partners shared many practical experiences and improved their skills in the fields of dramaturgy, aesthetics and contextualisation of social problems within the Forum Theatre plays. Moreover, Hotel Europa was presented several times in many European countries, with a big impact on audiences. In more than 10 presentations, the play had an average of 100 people (the play was also performed at the Fringe Festival, Edinburgh)

2016) in the audience and many parts explaining different topics, stimulating reflections and activating exchanges between actors and spect-actors. Moreover, with Hotel Europa the TP team achieved the goal of integrating TO into the field of theatre as artistic expression, escaping from the diffused consideration of TO only as a social and educational tool. From the TP came the TOgether International Theatre of the Oppressed Company.

⁷ The Aesthetics of the Oppressed is the latest research developed by Boal and the staff of the Centre of Theatre of the Oppressed in Rio de Janeiro. It is founded on the belief that human beings are naturally expressive and have the possibilities to create aesthetic products even without a specific technical education. Through aesthetic means – which provide the discovery of productive and creative possibilities, and the ability to represent reality producing words, sounds and images – promoting artistic synaesthesia that drives self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence and propositional dialogue that encourages the transformation of reality (Boal, 2008, p. 79).

⁸ Theatre of the Oppressed is the result of the artistic research and the political commitment of the Brazilian playwright Augusto Boal (1931-2009). Nowadays the method is used in more than 70 countries in the world.

⁹ Originally, the TP involved five partners and after the first year, also partners from Italy (Krila and University of Bologna) and France (Pas à Passo) were added to the network.

¹⁰ KURINGA is a space for research, production and qualification in Theatre of the Oppressed, located in Berlin (Germany) under the artistic direction of Barbara Santos. Its activities are aimed at the development and the creative multiplication of the method; artistic production based on Aesthetics of the Oppressed; formation of and exchange between community groups; qualification of practitioners; the establishment of solidarity networks; and political activism for the transformation of reality.

¹¹ The Centre of Theatre of the Oppressed - www.cto.org.br, founded by Augusto Boal in 1986 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil- is a centre for researching and disseminating Theatre of the Oppressed. It implements socio-cultural projects, which encourage the active participation of the oppressed layers of society.

¹² Coordinator of the Centre of Theatre of the Oppressed, 1994 to 2008. She worked with Augusto Boal, 1991 to 2009, in various productions, such as Legislative Theatre and Aesthetics of the Oppressed. Dedicated to the development of the Madalenas Laboratory (TO of and for women) and qualification programmes in TO. She is artistic director of the space KURINGA (Germany) and editor of Metaxis magazine (Brazil).

¹³ Local organisations produced and performed plays at the International Forum Theatre Festival in June 2012 and June 2013, ensuring the international dissemination of the project outcomes and creating international impact on the artistic use of Forum Theatre as an adult learning method. By producing together an international Forum Theatre play, partners shared many practical experiences and improved their skills in the fields of dramaturgy, aesthetics and contextualisation of social problems within the Forum Theatre plays. Moreover, Hotel Europa was presented several times in many European countries, with a big impact on audiences. In more than 10 presentations, the play had an average of 100 people (the play was also performed at the Fringe Festival, Edinburgh 2016) in the audience and many parts explaining different topics, stimulating reflections and activating exchanges between actors and spect-actors. Moreover, with Hotel Europa the TP team achieved the goal of integrating TO into the field of theatre as artistic expression, escaping from the diffused consideration of TO only as a social and educational tool. From the TP came the TOgether International Theatre of the Oppressed Company.

¹⁴ The Aesthetics of the Oppressed is the latest research developed by Boal and the staff

of the Centre of Theatre of the Oppressed in Rio de Janeiro. It is founded on the belief that human beings are naturally expressive and have the possibilities to create aesthetic products even without a specific technical education. Through aesthetic means – which provide the discovery of productive and creative possibilities, and the ability to represent reality producing words, sounds and images – promoting artistic synaesthesia that drives self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence and propositional dialogue that encourages the transformation of reality (Boal, 2008, p. 79).

DOI: 10.14605/EI1521702

© 2017 Edizioni Centro Studi Erickson S.p.A.

ISSN 2421-2946. Educazione interculturale.

Tutti i diritti riservati. Vietata la riproduzione con qualsiasi mezzo effettuata, se non previa autorizzazione dell'Editore.