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Applied Drama in the intersection of education and healing

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Abstract

The article aims at exploring how learning in the classroom becomes more engaging and a dynamic transformative experience for the learners when it becomes embodied through drama tools and conventions. It presents case studies of the work of Rangbhumi Applied Theatre, exploring the intersection of education and therapy; and investigates how Applied Drama tools such as drama conventions, Playback Theatre, and Theatre of the Oppressed, used in diverse settings and contexts, can temporarily suspend the conventional teacher-student hierarchy, create an action-reflection interplay, build trust, and invite deeper dialogues on inner conflicts, moving participants from their existing 'oppressive' space to a more enabling one. The research methods were: an initial survey interviews with participants; the reflections of the participants at the end of each session; the dialogues that emerged during the sessions; and the impact of the work, which was assessed through final presentations at the end of the programme. The performative pedagogy that evolved through the praxis model further provided a research base to understand the concerns and needs of the group. This article will critically examine the suitability of applied drama – specifically the use of Forum Theatre and drama conventions – in the Indian classroom, and in the varied communities where we applied these forms. In conclusion, the article shares the impact of drama tools and conventions as a 3E's model – engagement, experience and exploration.

Keywords: Applied Theatre, India, healing, Forum Theatre, education, drama conventions

Introduction

India has its own rich history of social, religious and cultural art forms. Theatre has been a major element in social revolutions, freedom struggles, and religious celebrations. Theatre activists such as Safdar Hashmi, Badal Sircar and Habib Tanvir have made major contributions in building socially engaged and immersive performances which have represented the issues of labourers and common citizens of India. They recognised the transformative power of art. They were aware of the revolutionising spirit that an art form like theatre can engender. Badal Sircar's "*Jhoolos*", Habib Tanvir's "*Charandas Chor*" and Safdar Hashmi's "*Halla bol*" are some of the historical performances which have impacted audiences in various ways. India's contribution to world theatre in the form of "*Natyashastra*" has been a major source of knowledge and wisdom for theatre practitioners (*Natyashastra* is a compendium of performing arts, drama, music, dance, and fine arts by Acharya Bharatmuni, composed around the 5th century BC).

With all this rich heritage and lineage, sadly, the power and potency of theatre has had a minimal role in Indian classrooms. The education system in India still encourages rote learning, and clearly establishes a power dynamic in the student and teacher relationship. It celebrates the students who score more highly and has no place for those who may like to pursue non-academic streams such as arts, sports, technology et cetera. The majority of Indian classrooms have about fifty to sixty students per teacher, which makes it even more difficult to create an engaging learning space, where students can express their thoughts and opinions.

From the time of Rigveda (which originated in ancient India in 1800-1100 BCE.), our ancient education system evolved over time to focus on the holistic development of the individual, by taking care of both the inner and the outer self. The system focused on the moral, physical, spiritual and intellectual aspects of life. The learning was imparted in *pathshalas* (centres for learning in a village, where subjects like grammar, logic and philosophy were taught), *tois* (learning centres in Bengal, in ancient India), *chatuspadis* (learning centres in Bihar, in ancient India) and *gurukuls* (a traditional form of education in ancient India, where students lived with their gurus in ashrams to receive knowledge and guidance). The focus of education in ancient India was more on learning about and preparing for life, and to progress towards the idea of "*Swaraj*," which means freedom within oneself, achieved through education. The new National Education Policy of India (NEP) (Ministry of Education, 2020) has the intention to bring back the meaning of education and learning as it was in ancient India. The NEP states that education must be "more experiential, holistic, integrated, inquiry-driven, discovery-oriented, learner-centred, discussion-based" (Ministry of Education, 2020). Performing Arts, Visual Arts, Theatre and Sports have been emphasised as methods and tools for learning. The framework clearly states that there will be no division between the arts and sciences; the arts will be recognised as 'core curriculum' rather than 'co-curricular'. This has brought a breath of fresh air and a ray of hope to the students and citizens of India, and to school leaders who have been struggling to achieve curriculum transference that builds innovative leadership in the country, emphasises critical citizenry, and nurtures empathy.

Literature Review

Applied Theatre refers to the practice of using theatre-based techniques as tools to discover and learn, to explore issues of concern to communities, to identify problems and actively rehearse solutions, and to provoke and shape social change (Center for Theatre Arts, n.d.). It supports students to have creative authorship, to reflect on their lives, social structures, and their community issues with care and sensitivity; and to actively “deconstruct the fixed power structure and ideological hierarchies and empowers them to re-construct their own perception and knowledge” (Wang, 2014, p.44). At the core of Applied Theatre are “creative practices that engage with the social, educational, and political functions” (Hughes and Nicholson, 2016, p.3) which allow it “to become a medium for action, for reflection but, most importantly, for transformation” (Prentki and Preston, 2009, p.14).

Applied Theatre is a new and developing concept in the Indian subcontinent. India has its own heritage of folk theatre and folk music, and its own Indigenous theatre practices. There have been pockets of work by noted theatre personalities in India that can be seen to parallel the Applied Theatre practices in the West. Theatre makers such as Safdar Hashmi and Badal Sircar, for example, developed *Nukkad Natak*, an immersive street theatre form which was aimed at supporting the rights of mill and factory workers. The Jana Sanskriti (JS) Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed, established in 1985, was the first exponent of Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) in India. Run by Sanjoy Ganguly, it has applied TO in work with many communities, to raise their concerns and voices. Jana Sanskriti has used Forum Theatre to work with issues of domestic violence, child marriage, girl child trafficking, child abuse, health care, and illicit alcohol. It has 30 satellite theatre teams in West Bengal, Jharkhand, New Delhi and Orissa.

Forum Theatre is an emancipatory method, to “center the voices, experiences, and epistemologies of communities that have been, and continue to be, ignored and underserved” (El-Amin and Brion-Meisels, 2024). It has the potential in education to engage learners, and transform the passive spectator into an empowered ‘spect-actor’: “When the spect-actor participates in the dramatic action by offering their own story or making changes informed by their experience in the world, it is meant to question the authority of dominant voices and give agency to the oppressed or marginalised spect-actor” (Shawyer, 2019).

Our organisation, Rangbhumi Applied Theatre, has used Theatre of the Oppressed as a process to develop therapeutic settings in classrooms. Through Image Theatre and Forum Theatre, we have created liberatory spaces for unheard voices, and ignored and marginalised realities. Students have created images of their oppressive realities through Image Theatre. This has given them agency to express through their bodies, when they could not articulate their experiences through words. Images of fear of failing in exams, violence at schools and homes, the pressures of academic study, economic oppression, and gender bias, have emerged as themes. Through Forum Theatre, they have acquired the agency “to do” what they “wished to do” in their lives. They could identify their issues, examine their personal and social beliefs, define the problems, and imagine and enact their solutions. This was a shift of power, from the hegemony of the knowledge of the teacher in classrooms, to a counterhegemony, which trusted in their expertise, and in the liberatory potential in sharing the possibilities of change. Participants identified their situations, and their consciousness of what was going on in their community

or classrooms; and discovered what they can become, or can change, by acting as a 'spect-actor' in Forum Theatre. This was liberating and healing. "The repeated embodied acts of spect-actors getting out of their seats and moving onto the stage, in order to prepare them for action outside of the theatre, support the aims of Boal's catharsis" (Sajani, Mayor, and Boal, 2020).

Boal's emphasis in TO was on addressing issues of social justice; but Forum Theatre has been applied in more therapeutic contexts. Iwan Brioc, for example, has developed an approach which he calls "Context Oriented Arts." He observes:

"I believe TO can support quite radical transformation towards a more expansive sense of self. You could say that it is the utility of the aesthetic space as an externalisation of consciousness that enables TO to have this therapeutic influence. TO – by holding the aesthetic space with the explicit intention of liberation through revolution, of freeing ourselves from the conditioning wrought by the external mechanisms of oppression – invites the possibility of a profound liberation of consciousness." (Blair, Brioc and Schutzman, 2019, pp.337-338).

The use of Forum Theatre, Playback Theatre and drama conventions create opportunities for dialoguing about themes which are not often spoken about in classrooms or homes. Playback Theatre is a form of improvisational theatre, in which group members tell stories from their lives, and watch them enacted on the spot. We have used it, for example, to invite the stories of female participants, of walking in fear in public spaces. This acknowledged their experiences, and created a collective witnessing of their shared reality. Forum Theatre took this further: it gave them the courage to 'act' and change their realities during the rehearsal process. This has created a collective healing process for participants, and a space for their unhealed selves.

The article describes my experiences using the practices of Applied Theatre -TO, Playback Theatre and drama conventions – with three varied cohorts in different socio-cultural settings and diverse demographics. It highlights the findings and analyses the impact of applying drama conventions and therapeutic practices of Applied Theatre in three major projects facilitated by Rangbhumi Applied Theatre, namely: working with "Teach For India" students in an underserved community in Bangalore (India); a project with grade 6 and 7 students of an International Baccalaureate school in Mumbai (India); and a workshop with a group of teachers from diverse educational affiliated boards in Surat (India).

Research Methodology in Practice

About Rangbhumi Applied Theatre

Rangbhumi Applied Theatre is an Applied Theatre organisation which works in a variety of ecosystems. This includes children in schools across all economic and socio-cultural backgrounds, as well as work with educators, community organisations, prisons, juvenile jail homes, and universities. The modalities that we use are Playback Theatre, Theatre of the Oppressed, Theatre-in-Education and Theatre for Community Development. Our work finds its place in the intersection of education, mental well-being, and critical enquiry.

Applied Theatre Case Study I: Teach for India – Bangalore, India

Background

In early 2022, students pursuing their fellowship in the “Teach for India” programme were invited to collaborate with us. In the programme, fellows are assigned a school as part of their tenure. We worked with Riya and Anjanawere appointed to a government-run school in an area of Bangalore called Magadi Road, and taught social science and science. The students who attended this school came from socially and economically disadvantaged communities. While they were in the first year of their time in the school, the fellows observed that the young boys of grade 9 had high absenteeism, and were involved in violence and substance abuse. Culturally in India, girls from the underserved communities are raised to be silent, and more involved in domestic duties rather in academic pursuit and excellence, and burdened with safeguarding the family’s reputation by following rules of not socialising with the men in their communities. As a result, the girls in the school were shy, less expressive, had low confidence, and had a culture of groupism excluding the academically less bright female students. This created a disconnection between classmates, together with bullying, small skirmishes in classrooms, and even cases of cyberbullying.

Process

My initial conversations with Riya and Anjana and with the cohort of boys and girls helped me to understand the context, and the demographics of the participants. We undertook a questionnaire survey with the children, which asked them about their current challenges, their dreams and interests, and secured their consent to join the Applied Theatre sessions. We planned the work, to take into account the social and cultural identity of the children, and the challenges and the needs of the fellows, as well as the space where the school was located, and the children’s previous experiences with the arts and theatre. As facilitators, we defined our research questions, to examine how social, economic, cultural and family roles and arrangements determine the behaviour of students in the school, and how this is reflected in their learning processes in classrooms.

Phase one of the programme focused on questions of identity and self. In the second phase, we worked on the emotions identified during the first phase – violence, anger and self doubt. With the girls, we identified themes of body image, and lack of social and emotional vocabulary to help them articulate their experiences. In the third phase, we worked with Applied Theatre modalities including Image Theatre and Playback Theatre, to explore issues such as violence, groupism and how the participants could channel their suppressed emotions. In the third and fourth phase, actors from Rangbhumi Applied Theatre created Playback Theatre performances based on the stories shared by the girls about how they felt unsafe living in that particular community, where there were many liquor shops, and this imposed restrictions on their movements in the late evenings, in order to avoid any harassing experience. Playback Theatre stories also gave us research data to understand questions of belongingness and safety which the girls felt about their own community. We believe that when participants’ personal narratives are given time and attention in this way, they “create a social bond among themselves” (Skeiker, 2021, p.31).

We facilitated a 'safe space' mapping exercise with the girls, and at the end of fourth phase, we introduced the idea of a newspaper created and published by them. These exercises helped build their confidence, claim their spaces, and gave them a sense of identity and self-worth. This was healing for them, as they did not feel confined to the social construct of gender stereotypes of a woman's role in an Indian society. Creating the newspaper together also cultivated a sense of community, inclusion and togetherness: "A person's social identities and their group memberships also play a critical role in a person's positive and negative trauma trajectories. Groups may offer people a sense of belonging, promote interpersonal relationships, and collective empowerment, which supports them in processing their trauma" (Muldoon et al., 2019, p.339). The girls interviewed people, and moved through the streets of the community, occupying and claiming their space; and at the end, they created and published their newspaper.

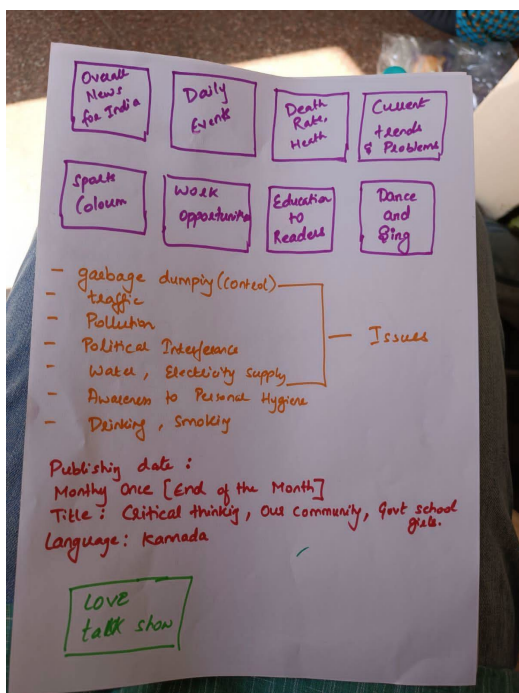


Figure 1: a draft of how the newspaper would look when published.



Figure 2: girls creating a draft of the newspaper

With the boys, we sought to introduce movement vocabulary through a classical Indian form called *Kathak*. In the final phase of the project, we created a performance with them called "Malgudi Days", which was about jealousy and competitiveness between friends in a school, leading to divisions between them.

Through the drama conventions and applied theatre modalities, the programme created an engagement of the participants, by valuing their lived experiences, encouraging them to share their challenges and fears, and giving them a voice to articulate their personal traumas. This created a therapeutic setting, and led to a healing experience for them. Here are two examples of tools that created a transformational experience: the drama convention 'Role on the Wall', and Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre technique.

Role on the wall exercise – this is a convention which is used to explore a certain character in a text or a performance, collectively. The participants draw the role of the character on the large sheet of paper, and identify his or her wishes, challenges, fears and dreams.

We invited the students to describe themselves through the Role on the Wall convention. We identified four elements – self-identity / social identity / challenges / dreams and hopes, The exercise became a form of thematic research analysis for us.



Figure 1: Role on the Wall- by a student

The girls shared issues around body image, relationships, and aspirations. They had ambitions to be medical officers, fashion designers, lawyers and engineers. They feared that, following the completion of their senior secondary education, they would be married and hence would have to give up on their dreams.

It was a revelation when the boys spoke about their fears and challenges. As a facilitator, I could observe subjective patterns emerging, based in questions of low self-esteem; exclusion-led behaviour; the role of 'absent father'; violence as a pleasure seeking and power-seeking behaviour; pornographic addiction; and teacher violence in school. Some of the students did not have their biological fathers living at home with them, so they took on the role of 'father' of the house. As a result of these experiences, the boys had suppressed anger, as they had the burden of being 'the man of the house', were subjected to violence by teachers, and had anxiety, attachment and avoidance issues.

As they could not channel this anger, anxiety and confusion, they became aggressive and violent. Through this exercise, a participant shared a personal trauma he encountered when his father left their home. He enjoyed working through drama methods, and after six months of the program, the organisers informed us that he was appointed as the youth theatre trainer for the next cohort of

participants who joined “Teach for India” schools. In this way, the tools of applied theatre and theatre helped to transform his trauma and channelled it in positive directions.

Forum Theatre

We presented a Forum Theatre piece on an Indian epic called *Rāmāyaṇa* (the story of Lord Rāma and his wife Goddess Sita, who willingly went into exile on the orders of their father). We chose to perform a particular scene which depicted the abduction of Sita by Ravana – the antagonist of the play. Sita, Ram, and Ram’s younger brother Laxman are in a small cottage in the forest. Ram leaves to hunt for a deer, Sita and Laxman hear his cries, and Laxman goes to help him. He tells Sita not to cross a line that he has created for her safety, which he called the *Lakshman Rekha*. Ravana takes the disguise of an alms seeker. When he sees that he cannot cross the line, he is angry, and says that he would leave without taking alms, which was not considered a pious thing, culturally. Sita then crosses the line, and was abducted by Ravana, who reveals his real self.

We paused the Forum Theatre here, and invited thoughts from the audience about how they felt about the scene. The girls observed that Sita did not appreciate how a man could overpower a woman. We invited some ‘spect-actor’ interventions. In Forum Theatre, a spect-actor intervention is when an audience member can intervene as a change agent in the scene: “When the spect-actor participates in the dramatic action by offering their own story or making changes informed by their experience in the world, it is meant to question the authority of dominant voices and give agency to the oppressed or marginalised spect-actor” (Shawyer, 2019). In this case, one of the girls took the position of Sita. She asked Laxman to leave to help Ram, but without drawing the *Lakshman Rekha*, as she said she was capable of protecting herself. In the scene where Ravana abducts Sita, the girl also challenged Ravana by starting an argument with him, and saved herself from being abducted. We then discussed this intervention with the audience, and enquired how easy it was for a woman to protect herself like this. We had multiple responses from the audience, ranging from: it is possible for a woman to protect herself, to: it is not physically possible for a woman to defend herself. Some girls applauded the intervention of the girl by sharing that she stood up and tried to speak for herself as a woman. It was evident that the young girls had a deeper desire, to live the lives which they aspired to, and wanted to affirm that their existence must be valued.

The Forum Theatre convention became, in this way, a tool of the ‘rehearsal for revolution’ as Augusto Boal puts it. Through the Forum Theatre and Image Theatre techniques, they found a language of expression and desire. They may or may not stand as bold in life as they did in the Forum Theatre exercise, yet it created a collective rejoicing and celebration. This performance, along with the emotional mapping exercise of their streets, created a sense of ‘power’ and ‘belongingness’ amongst the girls.

The conventions and Applied Theatre tools created an exploratory space for the participants to voice fears and anxieties which they could not share with their teachers or families. They discovered a new connection with themselves and their classmates, and found courage to voice their choices, gaining inner strength and sense of self-esteem, and engaging with arts and theatre to claim their space.

Applied Theatre Case Study II: An International Baccalaureate school in Mumbai – Grade 6 (2022)

“Drama-based pedagogy (DBP) uses active and dramatic approaches to engage students in academic, affective and aesthetic learning through dialogic meaning-making in all areas of the curriculum.” (Dawson and Lee, 2018).

“DBP offers educators tools and a structure to activate their pedagogical beliefs that align with sociocultural (Vygotsky, 1978) and critical theories of learning (Freire, 2007; Hooks, 1994) in the classroom, where participants co-construct their understanding and personal identities as part of the classroom culture.” (Dawson and Lee, 2018).

In this project, Rangbhumi, Applied Theatre has devised a drama-based pedagogical curriculum for grade 1 – grade 8 for a school in Mumbai, specifically for their English Literature subject. This was based on the ideas, philosophy and methodology of DBP, incorporating process drama, drama conventions, Forum Theatre and Playback Theatre. We were keen to understand how students form an understanding of the personal identities and social justice framework. We wanted to look at how a dramatic approach would support the critical examination of a text, and build a relationship of the text to the students’ real world. We based the work on a text, *Kabuliwala*, a Bengali short story written by Rabindranath Tagore in 1892. While we journeyed into the text, we also looked at the cultural experiences of the students, and explored what they felt about the character and theme. The story concerns a fruit seller, a Pashtun from Kabul in Afghanistan, who visits Calcutta each year to sell dry fruits. At the time, in 2022, Afghanistan was going through a war, where many people were displaced and had migrated to other lands. This made the text more relevant and contemporary. The students would gather the global news and opinions, and share them in our sessions.

To begin with, we used the convention of ‘teacher-in-role’. The facilitator entered the classroom, wearing the garments of a person from Afghanistan, carrying food items specific to Afghanistan, and speaking in an Afghan accent. These were signs or clues to the identity and demographics of the character. The students made their own observations, interpretations, and related them to their life experiences. We used an Augusto Boals exercise, ‘Colombian Hypnosis’, in which one participant leads another by hand, to initiate a discussion on the ‘oppressed’ and the ‘oppressor’. The children shared what, in their life, had been oppressive for them, such as the examination system, forced career choices, peer pressure etc. The students’ perspective shifted, through this exercise, to consider how the *Kabuliwala* found it extremely challenging to be in a new place, indeed a new country. They talked about the protagonist’s struggle for survival, and his financial needs to fulfil his commitment towards his family. We moved to the question of migration: who is a migrant? what is migration? why does migration happen? what can we do to ease and give comfort to migrants? how are the migrants perceived? We visited the idea of ‘conditional’ and ‘unconditional’ hospitality, as outlined by Jacques Derrida, who differentiates between the conditional hospitality of invitation, which subjects the arrivant to customs and police checks, and the unconditional hospitality of visitation, in which there is no longer a door, allowing anyone to come at any time and can come in without needing a key for the door (Derrida,

2000, p.14). We explored this later through a drama convention: was Kabuliwala a guest welcomed with hospitality, without conditions? If there were conditions, what were those?

We introduced the convention of 'Narrative Retelling' from Playback Theatre, in which actors retell and interpret a story which someone shares. One actor stands in the front, taking the lead to retell and enact the story, while the other actors stand on either side (like a geese formation when they fly), and pick up and repeat some key sounds, gestures and words in the narration. We used an extract from *Kabuliwala*, and identified the key points in it to compose a collective poem, and then perform it in narrative – retelling as an ensemble. Here is an example:

"Oh Kabulliwala! Oh Kabulliwala!

*Every morning I met Mini and times I could not meet her in the morning I met her in the evening
Ohhh! the friendship between Mini and Kabuliwala.*

He collects the debt, packs, and leaves to meet family once a year Hence, busy!

*It was surprising to see him and Mini went running saying "Oh Kabulliwala! Oh Kabulliwala,
Kabuliwala!!! I miss you so much. How was your trip?" Mini excitedly said.*

Students worked as an ensemble to create 'soundscapes' of the streets of Kolkata, where Kabuliwala would sell his wares. This was taken further when they created a scene through soundscape, replacing dialogue with sounds. In this way, we stressed collective work and collaboration, embodying the text through varied and interesting playful forms.

The drama convention 'Conscience Alley' was used for a passage of text where Kabuliwala is charged for allegedly stabbing a customer.

We read the text marked below ("Text 6"):

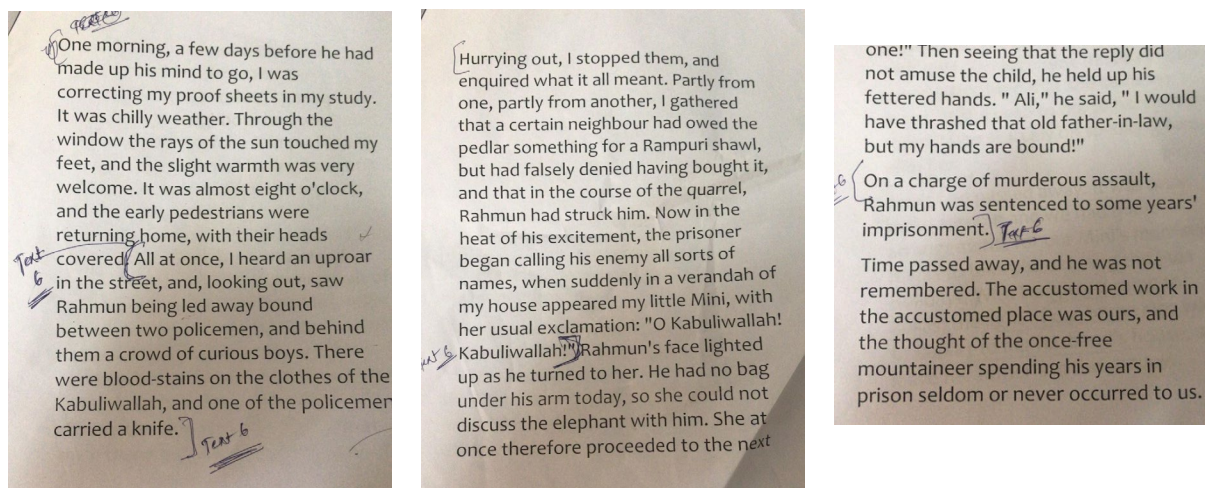
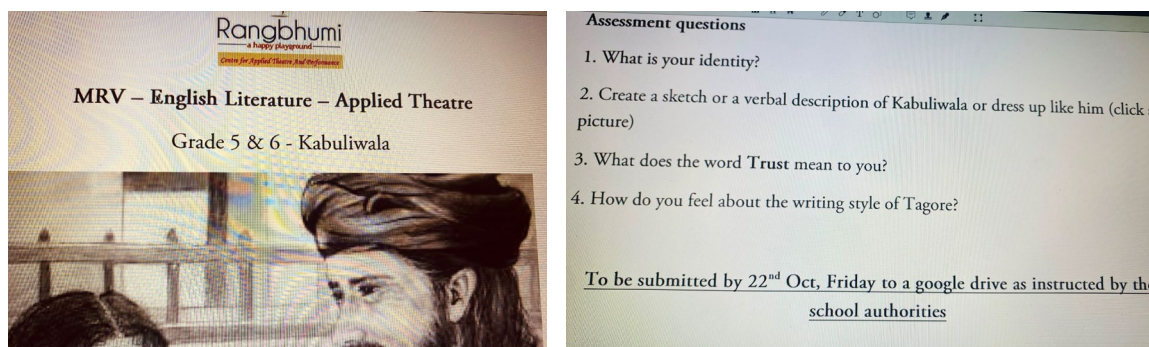


Figure 4: Text 6

We then invited the students to take on various roles, as the 'inner voices' of Kabuliwala, and advise him whether he should surrender to the police. This led to a discussion on laws and policies for migrants. Should there be some conditions on how a migrant from another nationality or state must behave, live

and earn? Should there be any conditions of hospitality, when a stranger crosses a border to be a part of another land? Or do we welcome the people from another land with unconditional hospitality? In this way, the study of the text became part of a transdisciplinary learning process, as literature, and as a reflection of socio-political history, and issues of the legal and civic rights of migrants.

The use of drama methods provided a deep stimulus for critical thinking for the students; it helped to deepen their understanding of the complex layering of the text; and also developed their understanding of processes of making meaning in art. The various conventions opened an exchange of ideas, engaged them in learning more about the policies and legal rights of immigrants, helped them to recognise stylistic elements in the text, and encouraged them to apply their own creative abilities, through devising poetry, performing the text, and drawing posters in their journals.



Applied Theatre Case Study III: Teachers Workshop, Surat, Gujarat, India and Goa, India

Background

A group of fifty educators gathered for a workshop on how arts integration in curriculum can be achieved through drama-based pedagogical tools. The session focused on the value of arts in education, and the role of the teacher in the classroom, and introduced some drama conventions. The workshop was organised to align teachers with the vision of arts-integrated pedagogy, as advocated in the new National Education Policy (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Teachers in India have a tight schedule for curriculum achievement throughout the year. Most of the schools in India have a 40:1 student-teacher ratio, which makes it challenging to create a joyful exploration of knowledge and learning. This system has become a 'banking model' education, as described by Paulo Freire (1970) where he equated teachers with bank clerks, and saw them as 'depositing' information into students, rather than drawing out knowledge from individual students or creating inquisitive beings with a thirst for knowledge.

Process

We began the session with some circle warm-ups and a circle song in Hindi to create comfort and familiarity amongst the group members. Teachers have a pre-patterned way of using their bodies when they teach in a classroom, and so we introduced some of Boal's 'de-mechanisation' exercises which are designed to overcome what he calls "muscular alienation" (McLaverly-Robinson, 2016). The

exercises created a more playful and relaxed space for the teachers, and also moved them out of the customary postures and gestures they assume each day.

We then used Image Theatre techniques dividing the group into teams and giving them a theme to build their collective images, based on classroom themes; a memory of their own school life, a painful moment, a celebrated moment and how they would like to reimagine their own classrooms. This exercise created a shared reality between the teachers. We also used thought-tracking: as the participants stood in a 'freeze frame', they shared how they felt in their roles/images.

The teachers revealed how, in their childhood, they often felt restless during particular subjects, or were mischievous with a certain teacher, were punished, and felt excluded based on grades, body image, or socio-cultural background. In the 'reflection circle', they expressed empathy for the students they teach.

We presented a Forum Theatre piece, 'Raise Your Hand only if You Know the Right Answer', which explored the student-teacher power dynamics, and how we can create more compassionate classrooms. The play was developed in workshops with students, and is performed by young people, and core company members. The play critically questions definitions of learning; it challenges rigid ideas of success, and the conditioned demand to be "always right" that allows no room for flaws, failure, and exploration. Performing the play creates a discourse between various stakeholders within the educational system.

In the workshop, the various interventions by the teachers as 'spect-actors' revealed how teachers as a community are also finding ways to create more compassionate classrooms. There is an awareness among teachers about the pressures on students, and how the education system only values those who score high marks. In one scene in the play, a child in class (called Neel) wants to share a conversation he had with his grandmother about the barter system; the teacher snubs him, because the examination system requires textbook answers, and not intergenerational wisdom. This scene led to many spect-actor interventions. Some spect-actors created space for the student to voice his view of barter system. In one of the interventions, a participant took the place of the teacher, and shouted at the other classmates, to let Neel speak. Through interventions like this, participants recognised how they could be biased in their behaviour in the classrooms.

The Forum Theatre piece enabled an investigation into the power a teacher holds in the classroom, and how powerless a child may feel who is not strong academically. It served as "experimental action research" in which the audience's views and concerns were "prioritised and are seen as important sources of data" (Crimmins, 2016; Pratt and Johnston, 2017). The interventions were data points of pattern or theme, emerging as codes in the research: for example, 'fear of failure', 'rote learning', 'teachers as power centric', and 'the social construct of the idea of success'. Through the interventions, teachers reflected on their own actions and behaviour in the classroom. There was a form of what Freire termed *conscientization*, meaning "the ways in which individuals and communities develop a critical understanding of their social reality through reflection and action. This involves examining *and* acting on the root causes of oppression as experienced in the here and now" (Steyaert, 2010).

Conclusion

The applications of drama-based pedagogy, drama strategies and conventions in multiple audience/participants settings have revealed three major findings that I have formulated as three "E"s:

1. Engagement – drama conventions had an engagement value for participants. In all the settings that I have described above, participants stated that they felt that they owned the learning process, and felt connected with it throughout the journey.
2. Experience – the application of drama-based pedagogy created a shift in behaviour, learning and socio-emotional skills. Unlike a traditional classroom setting, where the teacher teaches and the student listens, the various drama strategies and conventions immersed the participants in the process, with deep presence and heightened awareness.
3. Exploration – through the use of conventions, the participants were encouraged to go beyond what they thought they knew. We could witness what Vygotsky termed the zone of proximal development: the space between what a learner can do without assistance, and what they can do with adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers.

The challenge of this work in Indian classrooms is the number of children. India has very few schools which have a 25:1 student teacher ratio. This large number of students in the classroom makes it challenging for a concept like drama-based pedagogy to be executed with just one teacher.

There is also a general tendency to associate drama with entertainment. The vision of this work is still consumeristic and production-oriented. To share the vision of this work as a "process" and as a creative journey in schools will be a long battle. However, the future possibilities are immense, to create a spirit of free imagination and experimentation; to build a two-way communication between teachers and students; to develop a culture of critical enquiry amongst learners; and shape a better education system, dedicated to producing more conscious and aware citizens of the world.

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