

ACTIVITY 28: REDISCOVERING THE CITY THROUGH OUR BODIES

Overview of the activity

This activity uses performance and Image Theatre as a way to reconnect from different dimensions and rediscover different sites of the city.

Objectives

- Reflect on how different elements of the architectural heritage of the city ‘dialogue’ with the bodies of the participants
- Express feelings and thoughts about heritage sites through the body

Duration (in minutes)	Min/max number of participants	Room/space requirements
90 minutes	• Recommended: 16 • Minimum: 4 • Maximum: 25	A classroom or similar space where participants can move freely Outdoor activity with sites that are walking distance from the classroom

Materials needed	Preparation
None required	Choose and prepare an object that all of the participants will carry, such as a handkerchief or a piece of cloth of the same colour. You can also ask each participant to bring an object they value from home. Or you can also do the exercise without the use of the object, simply using image theatre.

Minimum knowledge requirements of participants

Please read the following extract about Image Theatre from the book, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, by Augusto Boal:

‘Dealing with images we should not try to “understand” the meaning of each image, to apprehend its precise meaning, but to feel those images, to let our memories and imaginations wander: the meaning of an image is the image itself. Image is a language. All images also are surfaces and, as such, they reflect what is projected on it. As objects reflect the light that strikes them, so images in an organised ensemble reflect the emotions of the observer, her ideas, memories, imagination, desires. . . . The whole method of Theatre of the Oppressed, and particularly the series of the Image Theatre, is based on the multiple mirror of the gaze of others – a number of people looking at the same image, and offering their feelings, what is evoked for them, what their imaginations throw up around that image. This multiple reflection will reveal to the person who made the image its hidden aspects. It is up to the protagonist (the builder of the image) to understand and feel whatever she wants to or is able to take from this process’.

We suggest the facilitator of this activity be familiar with Image Theatre, preferably having practical experience with the method.

If you do not feel confident to engage with Image Theatre, you might replace this activity with the ‘Put Your Name On It’ activity (Activity 12)

Instructions

1. Ask the participants to divide into three groups. Each group must decide on a heritage site in the city: one group will decide on an old site, the other on a new site, and the third group on one related to a minority culture (e.g. a non-Christian place of worship). Each group must do some research about the chosen sites. Each group will write a text (about a paragraph) and choose a person from the group to read the text once on the site.
2. Distribute the common object to all the participants (e.g. a piece of red cloth) or ask each participant to carry their own object.
3. As a group, move to the first chosen site (the old site) and draw on Image Theatre techniques, using the body and the common object to 'dialogue' with the site:
4. Read the text prepared for the site out loud.
 - Ask a participant to choose any space at the site and propose an image, positioning their body in whatever way they wish and freezing like a statue.
 - Ask another participant to complement the image in any way they want. Ask the next participant, and so forth, until all participants are now 'frozen', creating a kind of tableau vivant image.
 - Take a photo of the image from various angles. Feel free, if desired, to ask any curious passer-by to 'read the image', that is, to explain what they see. In the meantime, participants must stay frozen.
 - Unfreeze each participant one by one, so that they can look at the image, and then ask them to go back to their place in it.
 - Once all participants have had a look to explore the image from outside, unfreeze the image.
 - Note: this process might take a while, and some poses might be uncomfortable. Make sure participants can relax for a few seconds every so often and then go back to their image. This will avoid cramps and other discomfort from holding the image too long. If a participant proposes an image which is impossible to hold for more than a few seconds, invite them to change it to something equivalent in energy but that feels more comfortable to their body.
1. Move on to the next two sites and repeat Step 3.
2. Once back in the classroom, share the experience and the photos by projecting them on a screen and engage in discussion and reflection about how the experience felt.

Learning outcomes / evidence collected

- Photos of the theatre image created on the sites
- Photos of the personal objects participants brought with them, if this was part of the activity

Evaluation

Ask participants to evaluate their experience with the help of these questions:

- *How did you feel? What was easy and what was difficult?*
- *How do you feel having 'used' the public space, particularly with regard to a heritage site?*
- *What role did your body play? And would it be different on your own rather than as a group?*
- *How did this change things?*
- *What role did the different objects play?*
- *What role did the heritage site play? And the people passing by?*
- *Do you feel differently towards the different sites visited?*
- *Would you have liked to intervene and/or interact with the sites in another way?*

Teaching tips, stories and experiences during piloting

Leave freedom of movement to the participants so that they can express themselves, while at the same time establish spatial limits so that the whole group appears in the photos.

Additional resources

For more resources on Image Theatre and Boal's technique, see: *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*
<https://books.google.es/books?>

Questions for self-reflection in the teaching practice

To what extent are the rules and dynamics of your teaching practice open to participants' feelings and suggestions? Could you think of ways in which art could help you democratize your teaching practice? Could you think of ways in which art-based games would be useful to gain insights and feedback from participants?