



Project Number: 2017-1-LT01-KA201-035235

4. Practical Examples of Theatrical Laboratories

4.1 Case Study

4.1.1 1st Case Methodology (Context, Characteristics, Research Methods and Design)

4.1.2. 2nd Case Methodology (Context, Characteristics, Research Methods and Design)

4.2 Case Studies Outcomes

4.2.1. 1st Case Outcomes

4.2.2. 2nd Case Outcomes

4.3 Theatrical Laboratory Tabs

4.1 Case Study

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to thoroughly investigate a subject of analysis in order to reveal a new understanding about the research problem and, in doing so, to contribute new knowledge to what is already known from the previous approach. In this chapter, we present the findings from two theatre laboratories. We explain how the laboratory was done e what specific outcomes were obtained.

4.1.1 1st Case Methodology (Context, Characteristics, Research Methods and Design)

A Secondary School (Italian name: Scuola Secondaria di Primo Grado "Meda-Ferrarin" dell'Istituto Comprensivo "Madre Teresa di Calcutta") located geographically in the south-eastern area of Milan suburbs (economic and social characteristics can be found at Online Resources for Paragraph 4.1.1) has decided to start a series of projects aimed at solving the school leaving issues and to encourage inclusion processes within the school environment.

The economic and social contradictions of the geographical area in which the project fits, cohabit even within the school, as well as the phenomena of deviance and difficulty of inclusion. In addition, due to students' age, they also reflect typical preadolescence difficulties. A physiological identity crisis, which often results in provocative behavioural attitudes is typical of preadolescence phase.

In this context, and within the project, the theatrical laboratories (of the typology specified in OFF-Book project) are inserted. The school centrally enhances the Theatre Lab with afternoon courses over a prolonged time led by internal professors. The teacher in charge to lead the Theatre Lab was Fiorella Merlin. All the internal professors involved preliminarily have made long training and coaching courses to let them lead theatre laboratory.

These educational projects were funded 75% by the Municipality of Milan 4, by the Teatro Stabile di Grosseto through the "Giorgio Gaber Prize for New Generations" and, in the current school year, by the European Structural Funds.

This current school year the school promotes a Theatre Lab with the topic "mind confusion: the difficulty of accepting yourself and others". Students named the project "Confus@mente".

The adhesion to the project happened spontaneously without any selection.

The laboratory, for third-year classes, has been open to all registered students over a prolonged period of time and at a normal time and it is considered an "extension of the educational offer".

The course involved 22 students, including 13 females and 9 males aged 13 or so.

The contest was complex: some students with Special Educational Needs, students with behaviour problems



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



Project Number: 2017-1-LT01-KA201-035235

(disciplinary sanctions for serious behaviour and inability to control negative emotions), students with home difficulties such as families with parents under house arrest; students with learning disorders, or severe emotional disorders; youngsters of very recent immigration and very complex clinical health cases.

The route started on 27th September 2017 and ended on 4th May 2018.

The cadence of the meetings was weekly for two hours each

The attendance of the students at lessons was 95%.

The physical space of the project is represented by a wide corridor, especially obscured, without any furniture, artificial light and no stage. The music is reproduced with a simple amplification system. A room called "theatre hall" is also used, where material of all kinds is found, such as fabrics, old objects, masks, sound objects of different kinds, umbrellas, chairs of different shapes and sizes and much more.

The first phase of the Lab consisted in knowing the group of participants and verifying that their membership was free and not forced.

Students expected a theatre centred on the recitation of a pre-established script with main and secondary characters and most of them were afraid of not being able to do so.

Also, for this reason, the first purpose is to lower their anxieties of performance and make the Theatre be perceived as a language at their service, a tool that responds to their need for growth and self-knowledge.

It deals with work on the person and not on the characters.

The Theatre Lab is always an opportunity to investigate adolescent daily with particular attention to emotional and social discomfort. This is how stage products are created, and in this way, students give voice to their subjects such as growth, the relationship with one's body, relationships with parents, the social network and much more.

This is the only way in which a personal story becomes a common story.

The living common space is a free space in which everyone can give her or his contribution. The students' thoughts become emotional images, free actions, metaphors, poems.

This is the dramaturgic basis, containing images and the groups' thoughts.

To stimulate images and thoughts the trainer/teacher asks the students to define:

- "A good boy "
- "A bad boy"

Or he asks the student to describe himself or herself in some situations as:

- "I'm envious when ..."
- "I am loved when ..."
- "I am disappointed when ..."
- "I wish I could tell you ..."
- "I say no to"

The final "text" is the complex result of the answers.

The trainer/teacher, always in contact with the students, can read carefully through a very truthful vision of adolescent nodes, which they change every year by assuming different nuances.

Once the common issue is focused on and some answers found, all the messages assume the structure of a real theatrical performance.

Online Resources

School contest

<https://off-book.pixel-online.org/files/guidelines/4.1 Milan Background.pdf>

Description of the social and economic contest in which the Theatre Lab took place



Project Number: 2017-1-LT01-KA201-035235

4.1.2. 2nd Case Methodology (Context, Characteristics, Research Methods and Design)

In a secondary school near Vicenza (I) there is an interesting experience of theatre laboratory in the style of OFF-Book. It is a trade school, with technical, economic, technological, industrial and commercial disciplines. It is unique in the territory and so it receives more than a thousand students of middle-low social background and of different ethnic origins.

There are boys and girls in need of professional skills, to get a job mostly in the territory firms and factories; sons of white and blue collars and sons of immigrants.

There are lots of familiar issues, such as separated parents, instability, hard unemployment. The composition is multi-faceted, mixing learning difficulties, ethnic groups, teenage issues.

The approach of the method, now proposed as OFF-Book Theatre Laboratories, proves to be successful; work based on encounters, sense of the team, empathy. So that everyone lets her/his specific characteristics come out, learns to increase them and grow up with.

The theatre laboratory, in the OFF-Book style, is very rare in Italy in a trade school, and it has been in this institute since 2012, thanks to the headmaster's and the teacher's enthusiasm. They acknowledge the educative value of the theatre lab, its importance in inclusion, aggregation, social and cultural development for the school and the territory.

At the beginning it was an experiment, but very soon the theatre project has become very successful in the school environment and in the community, with special feedback from *The Giorgio Gaber Prize for new generations*, from *The School Theatre Festival* in Bologna and from *The Little Stage Contest* in Venice. The financial contributions from the prizes guarantee the project to be renewed year by year.

The Laboratory experience we are talking about took place on a weekly basis from November 2015 to May 2016 (20 encounters). There were twelve voluntary participants, joining the lab for free, coming from different classes. Nine males and three females, from the age of 14 to 20. The 50% was made by Italian students, while the other half was made by Albanians, Russians, Indians, and Africans. The frequency was optimal, considering that some students work or have to help at home. The work took place at school, in the main hall. This room is furnished, has a sound system and it is possible to obscure it. The participants had to set up the space before starting working, by removing chairs and other objects and to clean it, and at the end of the work session they had to fix everything. The presence of two reference teachers was steady and precious.

The theme was 'Sea Voyage', focussing the work on the issues of migration and reception. By analysing a relevant subject of current events, one can easily find an occasion of working on oneself.

Since the beginning, the work develops as a group process, a teamwork. The first four meetings were focused on the knowledge of the others and of oneself. Physical exercises based on the group, on the space; moving the body all together, experiencing the contact, the voices, the rhythm, they are all techniques to let students understand the energy of the team, trust and self-confidence, the power of listening.

The aim, to be developed in the second part of the path, was deconstruction: to get free from judges and rules, to be ensured that mind and rationality don't always govern your actions and feelings. This was the most difficult objective to be reached, however exercises on listening and confidence are useful to be repeated in this part.

Quite at the half of the path, it was the right moment to introduce the theatre work on the chosen topic. The way to do this was asking the participants some questions which are supposed to be answered in different ways: physically, in writing, improvising, choosing an object, singing... working alone or in team.

Who are the strangers for me? When do I feel a stranger? When did I feel a stranger? Do people marginalise me? Why? Where is my safe haven? Which is my sea voyage?

These were the questions we worked on to build the final performance. Every scene was built together with the students, with their ideas, and their proposals. The growth and the rehearsals of the final performance enforced the team and gave them the satisfaction of doing something together with their own ideas and energies.

Online Resources

Schools website presentation of Theatre Laboratory performances.

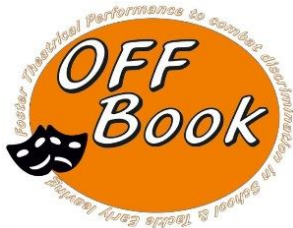
<http://festivaldelle Scuole.it/site/lang/it-IT/page/39/show/690#.WP3QNYjyj9A>

Description of the final performances coming from the secondary school theatre laboratories. On this website



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



Project Number: 2017-1-LT01-KA201-035235

the performance coming from the OFF-BOOK Theatre Lab described in 4.1.2. will take place in 2018.

Piccoli Palcoscenici.

<http://www.culturaspettacolovenezia.it/node/30988>

Piccoli Palcoscenici is a theatre performance competition and it was born to enhance the training and theatrical research activity and brings together the essays produced in laboratory activities promoted by schools.

4.2 Case Studies Outcomes

In this chapter, we present the findings from two theatre laboratories and the outcomes obtained. We describe the findings revealed from the work we did within the group during theatre laboratories. We highlight all findings that were unexpected or especially profound.

4.2.1. 1st Case Outcomes

The project "Confus@mente" has generated more than a final outcome both in terms of performance and of the educational result. We can indeed consider it a success even in the students' perception.

We list the following educational activated pathways as project outcomes:

- Participation in a workshop of "stagecraft";
- Production of a short film against bullying: "tell me why I'm alive" (See: *Online Resources for Paragraph 4.2.1 1st case outcomes*)
- Realization of a laboratory of expressive reading: "Loud";
- Realization of a poetry workshop: "fragments of light";
- Educational workshop toward cyberbullying prevention;
- Laboratory of mediating conflicts;
- "Shadows" theatre workshop;
- Rhythm lab and "body percussion".

To enhance the request coming from the students, the school has created several opportunities including the students' participation in national theatre educational events. The project has also achieved some not budgeted results.

Almost at the end of the Theatre Lab, for example, new students joined the rhythmic laboratory n° 4. They were able to add meaning to the final performance, through sounds and rhythms. We can treat it as a good educational result, as it showed how the group was able to open up and integrate new actors accepting constructive suggestions from them.

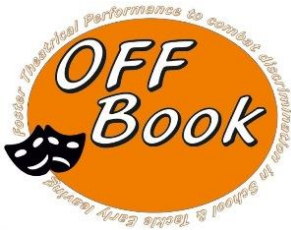
Added value achieved by the project "Confus@mente" was also the big network synergy that was created among the public institutions. Thanks to the City Hall of Milan, a criminologist and a specialist from the Justice Department Authority were invited and involved in the project. Dr Walter Vannini and Dr Piero Oven gave their effort to build up an effective network between institutions. Another big project result was the participation of teachers "not experts in the Theatre Lab". The teachers joined the Theatre Lab as observers, creating a real opportunity of training for themselves. The object of interest was the Laboratory focus on growing students' motivation in school and lowering the risk of school drop.

We are now going to summarize the meeting event between the project staff and the public:

- 23rd February 2018 presentation of the performance at the Teatro Delfino di Milano (target audience: Milanese territory students and their families).
- 3rd April 2018 participation at the 9th edition of the "Giorgio Gaber for new generations" (target audience: students of homogeneous range in age from the whole Italian territory).

During the final performance, the presence of all families and friends was very important.

Families discovered, at this event for the first time, some problems related to adolescence. Some emotions



Project Number: 2017-1-LT01-KA201-035235

involved and some ways of coping with this difficult period of time. Families understood the reasons of silence and the sadness hidden behind.

In some cases, the final performance discussion created significant dialogues within the family.

A further step was the activation of a WhatsApp group dedicated to the project that has become a space of encounter and relationship, a "no-place" where students could maintain relationships and develop further communication.

Online Resources

School project report

<http://www.mtcalcutta.it/teatro11.htm>

Web page from Istituto Comprensivo Statale Madre Teresa Di Calcutta. Here, there are some project abstracts run by the school.

Final short movie outcome: Tell me why my life?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufUWRCrySDE>

Final performance outcome from "Confus@mente" project.



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



Project Number: 2017-1-LT01-KA201-035235

4.2.2. 2nd Case Outcomes

The final performance *Sea Voyage* debuts in April 2016, in the theatre. The event was free and opened to the whole citizenship. It was promoted by the school, the municipality and the teenagers themselves.

At the end, the student talked to the audience presenting the work and reported the process of creation of the performance. In some cases this discussion opened important dialogues with friends, teachers and family.

Both the show and the final talking happened again the day after, with a special second show for the students in the first and second years in school.

The project *Sea Voyage* also participated to a selection for students' performances in Mestre, near Venezia.

The whole group moved to Mestre on 18th May to perform in a contest of school theatres and it won the first prize. During the prize-giving, students still had the occasion to talk to the audience (made up of other school theatre groups) about their laboratory experience.

In this period a page about the theatre laboratory at school was created on the web site of the institute, and also a Facebook page. Furthermore, a WhatsApp group was activated and it has become a space where students could maintain relationships and develop further communication.

The reached results of the training are significant. Those who have participated in these projects never abandon school, they develop long lasting relationships with companions and other contemporaries, due to confidence and communication skills.

Teachers reported increased emotional control, participation in school and class life, more awareness of one's skills and of teamwork benefits.

Parents reported improvements in their children's emotional management and communication skills.

Moreover, getting passionate about a project makes a teenager less lethargic and more proactive at school and in general.

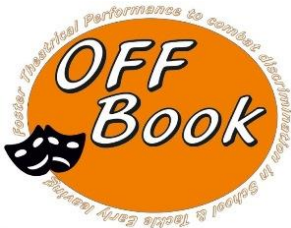
There are also many other outcomes, more difficult to match, because they are intimate and connected to the emotional, psychological and social growth of every individual.

Online Resources

Giorgio Gaber Award in New Generations - Freedom is participation

<http://www.premiogaber.it>

"Giorgio Gaber Award in New Generations - Freedom is participation" annually hosts three workshops experience for each of the 20 Italian regions for a total of 60 theatrical educational projects, covering the whole Italian school system according to each grade. Groups of thousands of students and hundreds of teachers exchange their experiences in a shared three-day session, which represents an important moment of encounter, dialogue, human exchange and training.



Project Number: 2017-1-LT01-KA201-035235

4.3 Theatrical Laboratory Tabs

To better complete the OFF-book project's output, we are now describing n° 15 Theatrical Laboratory Tabs' examples.

Tabs are described following these specific criteria:

- General Purpose
- Challenges to be Addressed
- Aim to Be Achieved
- Exercise Procedure – The Students' Role
- Laboratory Phase
- Group Size
- The Leader's Role
- Setting
- Equipment Needed
- Possible mistakes
- Safety
- Final debriefing

Tabs are a tool for the educator and can be implemented according to the specific needs of the group involved.

The implementation is carried out, in a discretionary way, adapting the management of the laboratories and thanks to the specific skills of the educators.

Teachers who want to use Tabs and start a proper OFF-book Theatre Lab need a training course and a training on the job phase before.

Training course and training on the job phase are two fundamental aspects of the teacher's preparation, they are not separate from each other but are complementary: all are necessary to allow the teacher to acquire more and more skills and competencies in the development of effective systems against the expenditure of school dispersion through the use of OFF-book Theatre Lab.

As example, in the case of the use of a particular activity aimed at helping the inclusion of the class members, the information for the passage to be followed and the errors to avoid is contained in the descriptive tabs; *the training* takes place in the acquisition of skills to use and handle successfully, the *training on the job* is to focus on the style to be kept and the precautions and details to be garrisoned.

A specific *training* allows the teachers to acquire the necessary skills to properly perform their duties within the project; the *training on the job*, however, consists of learning concretely the correct use of the Tabs, putting into practice what is indicated in the Tab itself.



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.