

“Thinking” and “Doing” Space – workshop 8.

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The workshop was built around examining how teachers and theatre practitioners can set out to create dramatic learning possibilities through the use of space and objects for young people of different age groups. As the length of the workshop was two hours I had only set out to offer one possible framework and discuss the multiple options that it creates for working with young people from very different backgrounds and with a variety of abilities and interests.

The short introduction from the facilitator was followed by the participants of the workshop introducing themselves. Then they were asked to watch a short piece of action, the actions of a 15 year old girl. I had asked one of the students of the *Hochschule* to take this role on (Thank you, Elisabeth!), which was signed by a baseball cap. There was also a piece of masking tape on the floor that signed the door of the space this girl was sitting in and somewhere halfway between the girl and the door was the key that opened the door. She sat with her back to the wall and looked at the door and then the key. After a while she got up and reached for the key, but stopped at the last moment without touching it. She sat back to the same place as she was sitting before.

The participants were asked what they saw. Responses came on different levels of generalisation (eg: *“she was afraid to go out”* or *“a young person whose fears are stronger than her need for freedom”*). Then they received two different coloured pieces of paper and were asked to write what could be driving the girl out of the room and what could be keeping her from going out. These papers were then placed in the space one by one.

I told the participants that after some time the girl finally left her room, but I didn’t know how that happened. I asked a volunteer to take her role and show us how the girl finally leaves the room. A number of participants tried out different variations and the people watching made meaning, analysed the differences in how the crossing of the threshold happened. Everything carried meaning, how she picked up the key, how the door was opened and what happened to these objects and her cap. Everyone had the chance to have his/her own reading of the action, there wasn’t one solution, but a careful analysis of dramatic action.

The next section of the workshop was centred around building a specific space, the girls room. The boundaries of the room were marked with masking tape, creating a life sizes room with the most important furniture and window also marked in it. Of course, all this was done collectively, so the girl’s room belonged to the whole group. Specific tasks were then given to the smaller groups. One group drew and made everything that was on the girl’s table, another group created the content of the bin beside the table, a third group made something that was under the bed, while another group made the pictures and posters that decorated her wall and so on.

These objects were then placed in the room and possible connections made. All objects brought in different questions and problems that created the possibilities for further investigation for the group. The content/meaning/possibility carried by the different objects was discussed first, then the group

collectively decided which object they were most interested in, what problem would they like to engage in first. In this case it was a one-way aeroplane ticket to New York that was hidden under the bed. Different dramatic actions were created around this object by different participants of the workshop – the moment when she hid it under the bed; the person who was closest to seeing the ticket but had not found it finally, and so on.

The groups were then asked to think about further dramatic activities that could be done in relation to all the material created. These were shared and some bits of them tried out, to clarify the examples. Some of the following possibilities emerged: the use of *teacher in role* to create dramatic situations, show different perspectives and influence the development of the storyline from inside. The use of different *drama conventions* like hot-seating, overheard conversation, writing letters, diaries, journals, thought tracking, etc. Making *the story* of one particular object and creating the situations around that. *Framing* the participants in a particular role, that has a task with the room (Police detectives putting together trying to find the girl who has disappeared from home). It was clear that the possibilities are endless.

The richness of the material came from the objects and the stories created by group – they themselves offered the problems they wanted to engage in, investing their creative energies that gave further motivation in solving the problems created. The role of the facilitator was to provide the appropriate forms of dramatic exploration.

The final part of the workshop gave examples from the practice of Round Table Theatre in Education Company, the first theatre in education (TIE) company in Central Europe, showing different spaces created in different programmes and the variety of the engagement of children participating in these programmes. There was also a brief summary of the theoretical background of this approach to drama education based on eminent psychologist L. S. Vygotsky's theory of *mediation* and scaffolding – in this case the participants created the tools of further exploration for themselves – and also one of the most important contemporary playwright's Edward Bond's work on *Site*, which discusses the possibilities of bringing different cultural, social and personal elements together to be examined dramatically.

The workshop didn't offer a closed structure, a straightforward solution to the use of space and objects in creating learning opportunities, but offered one example and a line of thought for those interested in making it possible for young people to determine the content they want to engage in more freely.