

Discussion Paper



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**Applied drama and forum theatre in the
classroom: An arts-based research in
social integration**

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Proposal Information

Applied theatre and drama in the school are able to reveal aspects of social life on dramatic, narrative, reflective, symbolic, and aesthetic levels (revealing the necessity of human conditions), thus eliciting a reaction from the audience: committed creative work and self-reflective feedback, during the increasingly deeper learning process transform the “spectator” into a thinking-playing individual (Boal, 1979/2000).

The applied theatre of the 20th century derives from the critical theatre forms developed by Brecht. It is also informed by the critical pedagogy issues of Paulo Freire, the Oppressed Theatre works of Augusto Boal, and British theatre in education programs, while based upon other important antecedents and practices (Boal, 1979/2000; Conrad, 2009; Prentki & Preston, 2009, p. 12). By the beginning of the 21st century, applied theatre practice as a social and pedagogical intervention, associated with the international trends, has been manifested as participatory action research and arts-based research (ABR), making an impact upon traditional theatre art and the social sciences as well (Leavy, 2015, p. 11).

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At the center of these projects are often parts played by social groups, which do not enjoy a sense of empowerment without theatre. The applied theatre tools give them the opportunity to use their own voices and to represent themselves. Moreover, as expressed by Prentki and Preston (2009, p. 10), the theatre has to appear “for” community, “with” community, or “by” community. theatre communities apply different forms according to their different aims – understanding social problems better or building the empowerment of marginalized or oppressed groups, which play a limited or insufficient role in the activities of their communities.

At the beginning of this century, the research-based practice of Applied Theatre has manifested as an innovation, action, experience and arts-based intervention, as well as a platform or forum with social-critical intensions (Denzin, 2003; Hartley, 2012; Leavy, 2015; Norris, 2009; Saldaña, 2011).

Forum theatre is a community theatre form, associated with other theatre-based forms, which has arisen from Augusto Boal’s work, like “Theatre of the Oppressed” or “Verbatim Theatre.” The aim of these forms is to develop skills of the participants through workshops and community building activities (Gallagher, 2015).

The subject of the project is “*Preparing youth at risk and clients recovered from substance use for family life with applied drama and theatre therapy methods.*” Using several methods of research allows us to examine both the results and the process of investigation. It permits us to ask not only what happened but how it happened (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Forum theatre is applied to the educational process to help students to explore their possible role in taking part in social and personal level of social participation. How does this forum theatre project influence on the attitudes of participants on social integration issues?

We observe how works the forum theatre-based project during the examined period and use the performance and different dramatic-based practices as research tools. The main goal of our research is to explore social involvement of participative and school groups. We focus on social activity and equality issues such as social inclusion, disability issues, lifestyle problems, and conflicts between generations (e.g., How the students can respect the other’s own reality?). During the project, our purpose is to analyze the narratives of the participants on their experiences generated by forum theatre method.

Methods

In ABR, the researcher examines the way the student absorbs the experience and the way she/he interprets gestures and movements in the accentuated space. In ABR, the performance becomes the subject of qualitative research (Leavy, 2015).