Pedagogy of paradox: discovering the role of drama-facilitator in the secondary school classroom

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Abstract

This article describes elements of research that were carried out in four secondary schools in Spain's Basque Country—particularly concerning the role of facilitator in the study's framework. This research studied the usefulness of theatre as a tool applied to promoting coexistence amongst secondary school students. As researcher, I designed and implemented a drama-based program in four secondary schools, and I facilitated the sessions. From my experiences, I have extracted relevant elements that may be considered by others assuming the role of facilitator: creating structure building *organizational consistency,* and spaces guaranteeing *trust* and *freedom*; context management and facilitator´s self-regulation strategies by *drawing boundaries* and developing certain doses of *tolerance to uncertainty*.

Key words: theatre, drama, facilitator, secondary, education.

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to describe some of the elements of the facilitator's role, drawing from my own experiences with adolescents while pursuing my research (Uria-Iriarte, 2018; Uria-Iriarte & Prendergast, 2020). I analyzed the implications of employing drama as a pedagogical tool in fostering coexistence between high school students.

From January to May in 2016, this project was carried out in four secondary schools with students in second year (the 8th grade in North America) in Spain´s Basque Country. The Basque Government Education Department proposed four secondary schools for which the development of the program was considered pertinent. The schools are public institutes located in different towns of the Basque Country's Gipuzkoa region and participant students belonged to model D (teaching in Basque as a vehicular language, except during the subject of Spanish Language and Literature). Compared with Basque Country averages, these schools enrolled higher percentages of foreign students.

The program was a research-based theatre project (Belliveau and Lea, 2016) focused on a playbuilding process (Norris, 2016), based on topics attracting adolescents' interest. It must be mentioned that because theatre/drama subject programming is not offered in the Spanish—and, therefore, Basque—curriculum, students' experience of theater is generally limited. In spite of this, after 16 sessions (except in one school where 19 shorter sessions were held), this process culminated in the presentation of four Forum Theatre (Boal, 2011) plays (one per school), in which the teenage students, themselves, depicted the protagonists. Each piece addressed specific themes: substance abuse (school 1), family breakdown and professional orientation (school 2), bullying (school 3), or sexual identity (school 4).

This research was based on a mixed data collection, both quantitative and qualitative. To measure the quantitative study's impact, socio-emotional skills related to

coexistence were taken into consideration, including empathy, self-image, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, assertiveness, and self-perception within group dynamics (see results in Uria-Iriarte, 2018; Uria-Iriarte & Prendergast, 2020). However, I must also highlight emerging findings that were collected using qualitative instruments. In addition to holding interviews with participants, I systematically wrote diary entries in which I collected my observations, thoughts, reflections, and feelings—not only as a researcher, but as facilitator in adolescents' context.

Adolescents' world

Malekoff (2004) suggests that, despite efforts to emotionally, morally, physically, and spiritually emancipate themselves, adolescents continue to need the involvement and support of caring and competent adult figures. However, working with adolescents is a complex process and a constant challenge for professionals facilitating these groups. "Perhaps the greatest challenge in working with adolescent groups is that no matter how prepared one is, one is unprepared" (110).

Blair (2010) writes that, paradoxically, even though adolescents' "hunger for freedom" (105), they may still powerfully desire structure. They may project resistance to any rule or regulation and exhibit chaotic behavior, declaring their autonomy even though they may sometimes feel unable to act independently. Such striving for independence leads Blair (2010) to state, "Make no mistake about it, these multiple paradoxes are not teenage problems; they are teenage symptoms" (105).) Nelson and Finneran (2006) agree that it is appropriate to provide structure and predictability when working with adolescents, even though this may seem at odds with their desire for autonomy. The facilitator plans activities in advance and sources the necessary materials to be able to react spontaneously: "As paradoxical as it may seem, planning and flexibility must go hand in hand" (64).

Therefore, the provision of organization and order are an important premise, along with flexibility and an attitude of openness. A competent professional must feel confident and be equipped to make decisions that are both creative and educational during "the present of the drama" (Heap, 2015, 246)—"overcoming the obstacles that appear in each work session" (Mantovani, 2014, 48), while being in a constant state of expectation of the unexpected.

Introducing in facilitator´s concept

Prendergast and Saxton (2016) state that although there are several terms that describe those who work in the field of applied theatre—including *teaching artist*, *co-creator*, *artistic assistant*, *director*, *joker"*, etc.—it is *facilitator* that is most appropriate. This term holds a connotation to the ability to "make easy" (17).

An effective facilitator contemplates a multidisciplinary role. She/he has to know about theatre aesthetic processes, as well as pedagogical strategies or teaching-learning processes (Prendergast and Saxton, 2016, 2013; Taylor, 2003). Taylor (2003), points out that a facilitator has to adopt several roles: critical thinker, risk-taker, theory generator, and storyteller. The facilitator is mentally open, flexible, and collaborative. Bowell and Heap (2005) assert that the drama-teacher, as facilitator, must fulfil the functions of playwright, director, actor, and educator.

As program leader, I adopted all of these roles. I acted as a playwright (writing Forum Theatre plays from generated materials); director (in the final phase´s rehearsal process); actor (jumping on stage during the drama-sessions); and educator (introducing pedagogical strategies). To this list of roles that I assumed, I could further include story-teller (in drama sessions) and joker (dynamizing Forum Theatre). But I would like to

emphasize Heap´s (2015) *self-spectator* dimension, which is essentially the critical awareness that the facilitator maintains while operating in each of the aforementioned functions. The drama facilitator can transfer this self-awareness to teaching-learning contexts, thus, developing her own self-knowledge

I connect concepts of self-spectator and self-awareness with Schön`s (1992) notion of the reflective professional who considers that the facilitator's approach be based on learning from practice and in practice. It is necessary for the facilitator to place him/herself in the "here and now", as an attentive observer of all that is happening in the scenery under her/his practice. This reflection developed from my own facilitation experience of continuously switching back and forth between practice and theory. Continual reflection allowed me to discover some of the dimensions of the facilitator role in adolescent contexts: *creating structure* (knowing that participants would contribute to destructuring it) and *assuming uncertainty*. With the aim of describing these dimensions, I put into dialogue my own experience with reviewed literature authors facilitating adolescents' contexts.

Creating structure

Structural and organizational consistency

During the drama-based program, and according to Prendergast and Saxton (2013), we (me and a collaborator assistant per each school) tried to prepare spaces that were warm and inviting. This required that we radically transform some schools' classrooms before each session. The facilitator ensures that the space appears clean, clear, and tidy; helping to assure that the context is perceived as physically safe and inviting for participation. "It is important to have a warm room. Even if you need time, it is preferable to prepare it. This helps to [participants'] concentration" (diary-school 4). Likewise, the preparation of the physical space included careful contemplation of the chair arrangement as a way to start the session—forming a circle became one, among many practices, that established structural routine in the process.

Further, Garaigordobil and Valderrey-Martínez (2015) suggest that an intervention program should be structured on the basis of constancy of space-time, holding classes on the same day of each week, at the same time, and in the same physical space (one that is clean and free of obstacles). It is also important to provide constancy in the adult professional offering the instruction and in the sessions' structure.

To provide such constancy, I was the main facilitator in all four schools and relied on various collaborator-assistants at each school. Constancy in space-time was taken into consideration by holding a weekly two-hour session in two of the participating schools. In the other two schools, we had less allotted time and, therefore, less consistency in time and place. In one school, for example, we could only schedule a weekly 50-minute session, held alternately on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Some weeks the sessions were held on both days. The logistical circumstances in these schools required us to change class spaces several times. These inconsistencies can be potentially disorienting for both the facilitator and participants. Trying to find an ideal consistency in place and time, the reality is that sometimes one must accept what is offered when negotiating availability within participating schools. The facilitator might find him/herself accepting the "realities of what is or is not possible within a short space of time" (Taylor, 2003, 38).

I also valued consistency in the session's structure: its introduction (warming-up games), development (drama activities) and closing (evaluation). In this regard, I agree with Prendergast and Saxton (2013) about the importance of the closing phase—the evaluative and reflective portion—should provide enough time for people to reflect and

connect the experience to their daily lives. Even when the class length was only 50 minutes (in one school), and knowing that the end of this short session would be suddenly announced by the school bell, I scheduled at least five minutes at the end for reflection on the session.

Trust

Influenced by Prendergast and Saxton (2013), my assistants and I attempted to ensure a safe space where participants could express their opinions and feelings in conditions of mutual trust—an environment that might initially require some time for its construction. As the authors suggest, the practice of applied drama should include creating a secure space where the group, in a protected manner, is provided an opportunity to analyze and reflect on complex issues in their lives. According to Cutillas (2006), theatre offers powerful tools that must be handled with caution and enough training to take advantage of its many benefits, while avoiding possible risks. "The participants may have a range of assumptions and anxieties about the project they are about to begin" (Weigler, 2001, 3). In this way, the activities of the first five sessions of the program focused on building trust and group cohesion as the basis for further work. In addition, it was important to adopt strategies helping participants not to feel too personally exposed. This potential for vulnerability, intrinsic in drama, would happen gradually and comfortably through the games, dynamics, and adaptation of activities offered during class. For example: "Some students tell me that they don't want to perform. I tell them to write the scene, and I invite them to present the scene only through images. They accept" (diary-school 3). In this sense, to part from students' reality's issues stimulates their participation.

> It works that we accept their ideas and what they contribute. It works for them not to find something external, that they feel is something of their own. That made them have a motivation and desire to work (assistant collaborator- school 4)

In this way, it was important for me—as facilitator—to make sense of the process by establishing coherence in both the project's intentionality and purpose. Weigler (2001) suggests that formulating a picture of what is ahead could assist participants in remaining dedicated throughout what could be an unfamiliar process. I constantly accompanied my practice with explanations, clarifications, and reviews of what emerged during each session—aiming to make explicit where we were, initially, and where we were going. In the same way, I established a routine of collecting and reviewing what has happened previously as a way to build a connection among sessions and, therefore, coherence to all the process; never mind if I would need time for this: "Today we have made a long introduction. I have asked them [to remember and speak] about the previous session" (diary-school 2).

Likewise, it was important to adopt accompanying strategies "to enable participants feeling valued" (Taylor, 2003, 51) by means of "unconditional positive feedback" (Owens and Barber, 2011, 74), and by "explicitly acknowledging participants′ participation" (Weigler, 2001, 2). This required providing constant recognition and positive feedback, establishing relationships based on positive stimulation helping participants holding a perception of achievement and success: "Mainly it has been to create trust, connection and contention through support and positive reinforcement" (collaborator-school 1); "I tell them that with today's scenes we would already have a play, and that they have done a very good job" (diary-school 3).

Freedom

Although the students provided signed, informed consent to voluntarily participate in the program, the truth is that this consent was individually placed within the curricular space. This added some sense of compulsory attendance to the sessions. Therefore, we attempted to create a space of freedom whereby participants could decide whether or not they wanted to join us and, following Nelson and Finneran (2006), reserve "the right to pass on activities that might be too threatening" (67). In this sense, the philosophy was to invite the students to participate without them feeling forced (Neelands, 2009; Owens and Barber, 2011). This approach is consistent with Owens and Barber's (2011) assertion that, "you cannot 'force' an individual or a group to imagine, play, pretend, or act" (75).

As Neelands (2009) suggests, the participation of young people in a drama session requires that they put themselves in a situation of vulnerability and visibility, for which they need to know that there are conditions guaranteeing them mutual protection and respect. Neelands (2009) points out that the facilitator should generate an environment where the pedagogy of choice thrives, that is, during each drama session the students ideally perceive that they are deciding whether they want to be there or not. Without this will, commitment, and interest, there cannot be an active drama process. "Imagine if every lesson in every subject in the curriculum was taught as if the students had the choice to be there, or not" (10). Boal (in Duffy, 2010) writes:

> If they say, "I don't want to do it", then I say, "Don't do it. Sit down and observe the others." I prefer that everyone participates, and sometimes I insist a little bit but I never force participants. And then they feel that I respect them and then they respect themselves too. And I respect myself also. (p. 255)

The factors that may be relevant when evaluating the students' forms of participation, in my experience, concern the novelty of the proposal, possible unfamiliarity with the medium, and the degree of exposure entailed in theatre activities. Therefore, this could generate different motivation levels. Following Mantovani (2014), I adopted strategies encouraging students to feel more free about their ways of participating, underlining the importance of explaining to the group the possibilities that theatre offers to exercise different roles—since the group of teenage participants are likely to come with preconceived and potentially limiting ideas of theatre as based only on the figure of the actor. Therefore, from the beginning of each program, I clarified that theatre is not only acting, but implies other roles as well. It is important to make visible the range of possibilities that theatre also offers: director, set designer, playwright, makeup artist, costume designer, etc. My challenge was to make clear that each one could decide how to participate and not to force that participation. "Yes. When you gave her a role, you gave her the technical issues ... she loved to watch. Then, in addition, she was given a tiny role and felt more secure. She didn't have to show herself so much to the public" (teacher 1-school 1).

In this way, we sought to know participants' skills and preferences, asking them, as Weigler (2001) suggests, to list "one or two things that they are good at" (2) to increase participation and motivation. This adaptation to each person's interests—and the possibility of adopting a different task—encouraged those who were reluctant, who barely participated, or who even skipped sessions, to take part in the playbuilding in one way or another.

> I propose that perhaps she can create atmospheres with the guitar and fill transition spaces. She seems to like it. I ask her if that would motivate her and she answers "yes." We agree that the next day she will bring her guitar. (diary-school 3).

Likewise, the facilitator must guarantee conditions in which people feel free to express their opinions. As underlined by Spry (1994), it is important encouraging students to assume responsibility for themselves so that they are the ones who decide whether or not they are prepared to deal with a certain issue or not, holding the freedom to say no, or speaking about their problems without feeling judged. "Flexibility is the key" (179). We asked for confidentiality (Prendergast ad Saxton, 2013, 33), to guarantee that students did not feel over-exposed expressing their ideas and feelings.

It was relevant then to establish a democratic space (Morgan and Saxton, 2006) of reflection; leaving time for dialogue after each scene, and promoting a context of mutual care in which all ideas were welcome. Therefore, all participation, however insignificant it may seem, was valued, reinforced, and recognized.

> Perhaps because he does not know where to start, or he is thinking that what he is going to say is nonsense and is not worth it... It is then that you have to be with that student, listen to him and recognize that what he thinks or proposes is not nonsense [...] because his is as valid as any other's idea. (collaborator-school 4)

We tried to create a safe space wherein participants could feel that they had permission to freely express their ideas and feelings, as well as to experiment with other ways of being and existing. Mantovani (2014) maintains that during a developmental stage when the adolescent's personality is consolidating, the drama facilitator should guide the students by applying an attitude of respect while listening—and while promoting both appreciation and the right to disagree. As Taylor (2003) suggests: "creating a scenario to provoke significant dialogue from the participants so that they can see that their opinions and viewpoints are able to directly influence the outcome and development of events" (11).

In this way, I undertook to accompany student participants in the process, taking into account non-invasive approach strategies. For example, in critical moments where students could be emotionally moved: "I sit down next to him [he is crying]. I ask him what he needs, and he tells me that he needs to go to the bathroom, drink water, and rinse his face and mouth. I wait for him" (diary-school 2); "Natalia[1] cries inconsolably. I sit by her side. I ask if it [her problem] can be spoken" (diary-school 3).

I intended to facilitate that group built their own meanings through strategies which could help amplifying teenagers' voices, while stimulating the generation of proposals and ideas. The group had to adopt the role of leader in their own process of collective creation. "The facilitator must be willing to allow the teen´s culture to emerge" and "try to join that culture, not to change it" (Nelson and Finneran, 2006, 65). I avoided making statements and, instead, I adopted the strategy of asking questions (Morgan and Saxton, 2006; Taylor, 2003) as a way of building a group´s collective knowledge. These questions, asked by the facilitator, connect one with real life or the current context—with the aim of problematizing issues of the adolescent world and, thus, opening a space of awareness, analysis, and deepening of the topics that concern the collective. The question is one of the main tools one may employ, both to inquire of students what they want or how they feel, and to inquire into the issues that are emerging in the process. The

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[1] Pseudonym

pedagogy of the question is what activates processes of exploration, inquiry, dialogue, reflection, and a group´s decision making.

Context management and facilitator´s self-regulation

Drawing boundaries

A methodology based on theatre—on play and living experience—can be perceived as a space with less control and fewer limitations. Therefore, it was necessary to establish clear limits, in order to regulate some behaviors and, thus, build the minimum conditions facilitating the development of the sessions being held. The first guideline, I mentioned at the beginning of the program, was "taking care of oneself and caring for the other".

Employing this fundamental premise, I found it useful to co-create a contract (Owens and Barber, 2011; Prendergast and Saxton, 2013; Weigler, 2001) with each group, from the beginning of the process. This contract establishes "how we want to work together" (Owens and Barber, 2011, 17) and, in this way, it is a strategy for establishing that the building of norms takes place within the group—increasing student commitment and self-regulation. It is about negotiating the "rules of the game" of our coexistence. As Owens and Barber (2011) state, "often the rest of the group eventually reprimands the person who [has] boycotted (...) and, in effect, has broken the agreement" (74).

> During the session, I realized that when I provide instruction on behavior (referring to the contract) it works. It is something agreed by them. It is not me who orders and commands them. Therefore, they accept them [behavior norms] better. (diary-school 4)

Nevertheless, some groups were disruptive to such a degree that a fluid development of the sessions was hampered and my patience was tested. For some students, engaging activities and working in wide physical spaces during class challenges their ability to self-regulate themselves. As a result, as facilitator, I perceived difficulties in creating the fluidity required for our tasks. "Just with an individual or a small group continually interrupting, it can be difficult, if not impossible, to carry out any process" (Owens and Barber, 2011, 74).

The pedagogical philosophy of this program was to function from a democratic and non-directive space. In this way, I attempted to adopt group management strategies that would prevent me from imposing my will and vision on the students. My approaches included:

Wait and silence. Adopting a patient attitude of waiting, lowering my voice, or even remaining silent.

Time out. Briefly exiting the space with the aim of disrupting any rowdy dynamics within the group and promoting its self-regulation. "I decide to go out and spend some time outside. Then I go back and re-join the session" (diary-school 2).

Expressing discomfort. At times when I felt more powerless or angry, I avoided *YOU-messages* and tried to speak from *ME-messages,* by referring to how I was feeling and what I was valuing about the potential of our time spent together.

Call to order. A direct request for attention, accompanied by a clarification or explanation. "Without personalizing, I draw attention to the group in general, saying that I will not tolerate insults" (diary-school 3).

I suggest that consideration be also paid to the following strategies:

Space to let off steam. Nelson and Finneran (2006) assert that "if teens offer resistance, they usually are trying to engage the facilitator in a power struggle. However, if the facilitator refuses to struggle, there is no power struggle" (69). I offered spaces where students could release by freely expressing whatever it was that they needed in that moment, so that moving forward it would be easier for them to practice self-control. "'Do you need two minutes to make a little noise before we start?'" (diary-school 4). This was about incorporating exercises that harness the energy of disruptive behavior in a playful manner (dramatically, or with exaggeration), instead of merely suppressing it—to see if they would remain in this unruly attitude (Nelson and Finneran, 2006).

Humor. Using humor was the most important strategy to apply in this learning context. (Malekoff, 2004; Owens and Barber, 2011). As Malekoff (2004) writes, among the facilitator's greatest allies is the leaving of ego at the door and having enough of a sense of humor to not take herself too seriously. It was about being ready "to look foolish at times" (Nelson and Finneran, 2006, 64) as a way to regulate the context and capture attention provoking surprise, amusement, or confusion. "I threw myself to the ground faintly. It provoked astonishment, and attracted some attention" (diary-school 3).

Tolerance to uncertainty

However, each of these strategies have worked for me one day and then on another day did not. According to Malekoff (2004), facilitating teenagers' contexts means assuming a certain state of uncertainty: "In my experience, group work with adolescents is like a roller coaster ride" (p. xi). Thus, in this continuous "roller coaster" process, I have encountered my own contradictions, difficulties and errors in regulating the context. As Nelson and Finneran (2006) suggest, when working with adolescents, control is a tricky issue. "Remember that struggle with authority figures is a natural part of their development" (69). These authors assert that a facilitator should not appear either overly controlling, nor losing all control.

Therefore, establishing a balance was complex in this situation. This generated in me internal conflicts that challenged my own practice: "Am I held back by? Where is my genuine enthusiasm from the first day?" (diary-school 2); "My patience has hit its limit" (diary-school 4). In this way, I have seen myself sometimes resorting to strategies that might contradict my own initial philosophy (democratic and non- prescriptive) and that I, myself, would reject before this experience.

> I climb into the chair, and shout "silence". I hear an impressed, "damn!". [I say:] "As you can see, I can shout, although it is funny to ask for silence by shouting", I added with humor. Let's start again. I'm with them. They enter, and the energy flows. (diary-school 2)

Malekoff (2004) states that making mistakes is inevitable, particularly when dealing with groups of adolescents; groups of youths can internally affect the professional in many ways, even eliciting angry outbursts. However, he notes that if anger is generated in a warm space, the adolescent is still likely to prefer the heat of anger to a cold and controlled lack of interest. In this sense, when I interviewed research participants, I was amazed to hear comments that contradicted my disappointment at having failed my "ideal pedagogy". Surprisingly (for me in that moment), the students alluded to my facilitation as having been characterized by patience. Perhaps, the adolescents overlooked my outbursts of frustration because I have already initiated several pedagogic strategies-- including, a kind of *pedagogy of waiting.*

> So, it was pretty good and you had enough patience with the students because not everyone has it, not everyone is there, the other is talking, and the other, and the other…while you are talking. Because in the end you don't coerce us. (student-school 4)

The facilitator is, therefore, placed in a situation that involves a certain amount of "risk" and is required to remain in the "here and now," in an open and flexible way. Prendergast and Saxton (2013) write that a facilitator should be the type of person who enjoys people, feels comfortable in new situations, easily tolerates frequent changes, and can improvise in response to change. "This leader is willing to learn from the group and is willing to change course according to the group′s interest" (Nelson and Finneran, 2006, 62).

From my experience, while taking into account that it was a collective creation based on the group, I needed to start with preparations that could be modified at any time: "you have to be organized to be disorganized" (diary-school 1) and "even if I have written the session to be open to uncertainty" (diary-school 2). Therefore, it was a question of maintaining an attitude of listening that included changing, adding, or retreating from what was planned—as well as having plenty of material prepared, to respond to unpredictability.

It was also necessary, then, to adopt various strategies of context management, that is, to offer structure knowing that the class was going to be unstructured. It was necessary to draw a route that offers deviation at the margins. It was about offering participants a degree of freedom while at the same time creating an environment that was both structured and delimited with its own rules, as necessary conditions for assuring the students a safe space. This meant providing a tidy space for students with the understanding that it could surely become messy, even "upside down." Holding this delicate balance required large doses of stress management and patience on my part.

> I go with anxiety in the body, anticipating chaos. The truth is it's not chaos, it's sometimes messy. But you have to be tidy to be at times messed up. This is the game. Difficult, but it's the game. (diary)

The guidance of the adult figure must respond to contradictory demands made by the adolescent participants who are constantly moving between the need to find solid structures and the need to react against them. Such oscillation, on the other hand, is necessary to the consolidation of their identity. As Bond (2009) states, paradoxical actions are part of the strengths of change since: "The paradox is never absent from our mind" (72).

Could one then speak of a *pedagogy of paradox*? It is sustained with only the certainty of the principle of uncertainty. It lives in the here and now, in the listening and in the question as the only answer. It cannot accommodate rigid statements, sentences or prescriptions, but favors continuous changing processes. It is a space of opportunity that converts the uncertain as a chance to growth and change; structure that provides to adolescents the possibility of revealing themselves to a given context; political action towards the conquest of their adult status.

To conclude

Adolescence implies a metamorphosing phase that provokes continuous changes in mood and behavior characterized by a "logic disorder" intrinsic in this age. Facilitation of teenaged groups is not an easy task. Teens are struggling with their own identity and need to rebel against the established authority: parents, teachers, institution. At the same time

but from the other side, they need boundaries. It is about proposing a structural and organizational consistency, as a premise and, at the same time, maintaining an open attitude that allows undoing what has been done.

One could speak, then, about a *pedagogy of the paradox* where contradiction is welcome, comprehended and sustained by foundations of flexibility, waiting, patience and (why not!) a sense of humor. This combination does not turn out to be easy to provide. In this regard, the facilitator may find him/herself falling into strategies which could contradict the initial pedagogical philosophy. This could place her/him in a state of internal conflict (given her own difficulties and contradictions) when it comes time to reflect on her/him practice

Taking care of the intervention context involves creating a safe and trustworthy space. It is about trying to generate those minimal conditions through which the group can work together. In this regard, it is important to organize, in the first place, the physical space and provide a structural consistency in the agenda as well as in every session's routines.

Furthermore, the context should be framed as a space of freedom where the group itself establishes agreements and rules of coexistence. The facilitator must create a space where people recognize that they can decide whether or not they want to be there and how they want to participate. It is about creating a secure, yet cushioned context where people feel free when it comes to expressing their opinions with confidence in the belief that they will not be judged. However, this space of freedom contemplates limits based on an ethical premise of mutual care. In this way, positive feedback and reinforcement by the facilitator turns into an indispensable strategy for generating security among the participants. Being able to choose among the different roles offered within the sphere of theatre appears to be an important factor in people finding a comfortable place, according to their interests and abilities.

While promoting a democratic space for reflection, the facilitator activates the *pedagogy of the question* as a form of collective meaning-building. It is about flexible planning focused on the process where understanding is built bottom-up through the activation of the inquiry. The intervention of the facilitator is mainly based on activating strategies to amplify the voice of the group adopting leadership during the collective creation process. It is about generating a space wherein group reflection is established as a routine with the purpose of promoting processes of analysis, exploration, questioning, and searching for alternatives around matters concerning the community of teenagers

To sum up, as a facilitator I learned to become accustomed to uncertainty. Therefore, it was important to: (1) offer a safe and ordered space, being prepared for the disorder that could arise; (2) have plenty of material prepared, permitting me to adequately respond to unpredictability; (3) be flexible and open to respond to their needs.

Working with teenagers can be a "messy and noisy" journey. But with all these issues, I learnt to rely on the process and the participants. To be comfortable in a discomfited state and living comfortably in this disorder, a continuous state of "roller coaster", is a kind of learning.

I learnt that theory lives in books; it helps, of course, but practice is another reality. Facing challenges as facilitator, there are no recipes and I must go with who I am and with what I know. Not recklessly, but to do it and try it. I found that as a teenage groups facilitator, I often felt vulnerable. But I have learned that navigating my own vulnerability and accepting it has, in turn, helped develop within me self-knowledge and self-transformation.

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