ARTICLE

FROM ARTISTRY TO CLASSROOM MASTERY: APPLYING THEATER TECHNIQUES IN TEACHING

Da maestria artística à maestria em sala de aula: aplicação de técnicas teatrais no ensino

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this article is to make specific recommendations for applying theater techniques in teaching, contributing to engaging learning experiences and effective teaching in higher education.

Scope: We present three case reports, based on our experience of applying theater techniques in teacher development workshops held at universities, business schools and leadership development programs.

Originality: The innovative perspective of this article is that it goes above and beyond just treating the theater elements separately and focuses on the combination of these techniques through which the sum is greater than its parts.

Relevance: Techniques that are commonly used in theater practice can be applied to strengthen and broaden teaching performance and create cognitive-transferable learning experiences.

Keywords: Arts-based methods, creativity, higher education, faculty development, leadership

RESUMO

Objetivo: *O objetivo deste artigo é fazer recomendações específicas para a aplicação de técnicas de teatro no ensino, contribuindo para experiências de aprendizagem envolventes e para um ensino eficaz na educação superior.*

Escopo: *Apresentamos três relatos de casos, baseados em nossa experiência na aplicação de técnicas teatrais em oficinas de desenvolvimento de professores realizadas em universidades, escolas de negócios e programas de desenvolvimento de lideranças.*

Originalidade: *O artigo vai além de apenas tratar os diferentes elementos teatrais separadamente, e foca na combinação dessas técnicas de forma que a soma seja maior que as partes.*

Relevância: *Técnicas usuais da prática teatral podem ser aplicadas para fortalecer e ampliar a atuação docente e criar experiências de aprendizagem transferíveis.*

Palavras-chave: *Métodos baseados na arte, criatividade, ensino superior, desenvolvimento de professores, liderança.*

Unless you are fully present and care about what you are saying, your body, breath, voice, speech and listening abilities won't work together and cannot really impact the world.

Patsy Rodenburg

INTRODUCTION

Creativity in higher education is widely recognized as an application in educational programs. Preparing students for a "complex and quickly changing world, requires rethinking the relationship between formal and informal learning and reimagining education content and delivery" (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2022). Creativity and critical thinking are considered key elements in coping with an uncertain and complex world. Whilst there is some focus in education on enabling students to use their creative abilities, initiatives to facilitate the professional development of faculty from a creative perspective and equip their teaching skillset with creative applications and insights are still insufficient in many countries (Alencar et al., 2017).

This paper addresses applications and insights in teaching and learning, focusing on the professional development of faculty through the arts. We draw on experiences in our leadership development programs in executive education and arts-based case studies, aimed to strengthen, and improve faculty performance to meet the creative and critical thinking needs of their students. We provide creative applications, insights and introduce a learning design framework, the Self-Scene-Stage Art Model (SAM), enabling faculty to apply creativity to strengthen their teaching performance and identify counterproductive teaching behavior.

THEORETICAL GROUNDING

Kolb and Kolb (2005) describe an ongoing and iterative cycle of four stages through which experiential learning occurs. The design of arts-based learning programs frequently follows the process of the entire four-stage experiential learning cycle: concrete experience (CE), reflective observation (RO), abstract conceptualization (AC), and active experimentation (AE). The participants are guided through a unique, creative experience, and are also prompted to carefully reflect on their learnings.

The following three "lessons from the arts" are adapted from the book by Carroll and Flood (2010), to help teachers create their learning design and curate learning material.

Lesson from the arts #1: rhetoric principles

Aristotle, the originator of persuasive rhetoric, discussed many of his principles that he referred to as the art of persuasion. According to Aristotle, three sources of persuasion can be used to persuade an audience. *Logos* refers to persuasion by argument, which involves drawing from real-life examples (inductive persuasion) or demonstrating proof to support an argument (deductive persuasion), followed by a confirming conclusion. *Ethos* refers to persuasion by character and involves the ability to persuade through the use of one's intelligence, good will and virtue, and thereby convince the audience in a trustworthy, credible and competent manner. And finally, *pathos* refers to persuasion by emotion, which involves appealing to the emotions of the audience. A teacher may attempt to engage others by presenting a speech in such a way that it elicits a powerful emotional response.

To truly engage the audience, the speaker needs to engage not only the minds, but also the heart of the audience to achieve acceptance and convince others of their worthiness. Aristotle often said that reasoning may follow an initial emotional response and may only provide a justification for it.

Lesson from the arts #2: the importance of word choice

Effective persuasion is dependent not only on presentation, but also on word choice. The words we choose are as much a reflection of our character as our actions and behavior and must be taken into account when teaching. Planning the message content is critical to engage and convince an audience of a message. Words need to be understandable to the audience to facilitate mutual understanding, and there are some basic principles for planning the delivery of words effectively. A list of these principles is given by Carroll and Flood (2010):

- Consider your tone of speech.

- Incorporate a personal experience.

- Tell an engaging story coupled with evidence-based arguments to appeal to both the emotional and rational sides of the audience.

- Draw upon powerful words and combine them in such a way that evokes a powerful response from the audience.

- The use of figurative metaphors adds elegance to the tone of the message.

- Storytelling holds great persuasive power by making complex technical information more accessible and memorable to an audience.

- Throughout history, storytelling has been used to impart messages, which often transcend the limitations of our own life experiences.

- Principles of playwriting can be useful for the preparation of a presentation or speech. The structure and unity of actions and stories chosen must be deciphered in advance to ensure optimal engagement from the audience.

For a teacher, the ability to use words to evoke emotions is a powerful means to engaging an audience. Whilst poignant language may capture the emotions of the audience, it is important not to distract or confuse the audience from the underlying message of the teacher's address. We see value in both aesthetic and non-aesthetic language (Goodwin & Mucha, 2010). However, striking a balance between both is critical to ensure both clarity and relevance and not to overburden the audience.

Lesson from the arts #3: audience characteristics

A useful starting point for teachers is to investigate the targeted audience's characteristics. Salient audience characteristics have been identified by Carroll and Flood (2010) that include values, intellectual levels, concerns, psychological needs, attitudes, cultural orientations and motivational propensities. Different cultures place different levels of respect on authority figures, class, different generations (Chicca, J., & Shellenbarger, T. (2018) and diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI) (Charania & Patel, 2022) related issues.

A message must be tailored to meet these various characteristics, as well as the current emotional state of the audience would have to be considered. A major point of consideration are the individual differences in learning styles (Kolb & Kolb 2005), and how to accommodate these differences in learning design and material.

In the following parts, we provide a dynamic summary of our experiences and share some of the cases and exercises that have been most productive for our learners. We describe the impact this arts-based work has had on our research and teaching and offer recommendations for future improvements. For doing so, we report three cases in which we have applied arts-based methods in learning programs. The first case is a three-day learning program designed for mid-senior level managers from various organizations, the second is an online program created for faculty members with a duration of five hours in total, divided in two separate sessions, and the final case refers to a full-day in-person workshop designed for faculty members.

Case report #1: Persuasive leadership, conquering corporate politics

This intensive three-day program is designed to teach structural, tactical and psychological dimensions of persuasion. The program creates an experience by using a broad range of unusual but effective approaches and interactions, for the participants to act with greater confidence and tactical mastery within their organizations.

Through artistic experiences, skills can be developed towards making one more present, with a higher degree of subtle awareness and confidence while facing everyday challenges as a leader (De Lima & Flood, 2018; Carroll & Flood, 2010). The flow at our theater-based learning initiatives often starts with a focus on the self, assessing personal impact and building confidence, followed by persuasion of peers, stretching listening capabilities and concluding with persuasion of an audience through an actual creation of a scene applying Stanislavski's system of objectives (Moore, 1984).

The outline of the program consists of four parts, described as follows:

- *Prework: The* pre-work for the participants consists of: (a) readings; (b) creating a vlog in which the participants share on the topics: what they notice about leadership (self – other[s]) in general, what they notice in terms of engaging/influencing, and their assessment of what worked and didn't' work; (c) writing a personal case on their political challenge; and (d) bringing an art object which to them signifies persuasive leadership.

- *Persuade Self:* (Re-)acquaintance with body and voice instrument, through a physical and voice exercise followed by an assessment of personal impact through introductory 1-minute pitches (De Lima & Flood, 2018). Key examples of persuasion tools and lessons from the arts are highlighted, including learning from rhetoric principles, the importance of word choice, and audience characteristics. To act with greater confidence within and outside one's organization we build character (Stanislavski, 1950) by elaborating on the participant's manner of speech and movement, the verbal and non-verbal elements (De Lima & Flood, 2018). Intended lessons and development include higher awareness of the body-voice instrument, more confidence and explicit use of the body-voice instrument.

- *Persuade Peers:* This part is an exercise that entails the 'art of connecting'. Its starts with participants individually selecting an art object that represents what persuasion is to them (De Lima & Flood, 2018). The selection can be done online through their devices (smartphone, laptop) or by a visual or 'prop' provided by the facilitators. Participants work in pairs to conduct interviews with each other on their specific art object. In a plenary form, lessons are distilled through report-out by 'being' the other person and pitching on the 'personal significance' of the art object in front of an audience. Intended takeaways include asking the right questions and actively listening to verbal and non-verbal elements.

- *Persuade Audience:* On the final day, the focus is on transforming the personal cases, through writing and discussion, so as to stage participants' political challenges on stage. Participants are encouraged to write a script with various political challenges combined. They are invited to create a short play based on the script, containing the following elements: a clear objective – what is the purpose of your scene?; the obstacle – what is preventing you from achieving your goal?; and action – what action will you take? (Moore, 1984).

The intended takeaways include collaborating with internal and external stakeholders, persuading oneself and one's peers in a team effort, and creating a clear and persuasive message for the audience. The audience is asked to actively listen to the play. Finally, participants are asked to individually reflect upon their leadership development plan, about what they would do differently, starting immediately.

To maximize the knowledge transfer towards a better understanding of the leadership development process, the focus is placed on the new behaviors that participants need to

demonstrate in order to appear more persuasive/influential. We do so by means of learning by doing, theoretical explanations, ambitious goal setting for demonstrating the new behaviors, workshop discussion, role-playing, and creating a maximum performance situation. Here, participants engage in actively reaching self-awareness, reflect more deeply about their place in relation to those around them, and are more able to see their impact on others.

In addition to the final day, the participants were inspired by the experiences shared by the former Chief of Defense of the Dutch Ministry of Defense. These insights were received as highly inspirational and provided a wider perspective for the participants to review their personal challenges again. The former Chief of Defense's narrative and the strong storytelling skills, combined with his humble presence, were perceived as powerful and inspirational.

This program was offered by the Rotterdam School of Management (RSM) of the Erasmus University (NL) through open enrollment. The group of participants was heterogeneous, including mid-senior managers from different organizations. This program has also been adapted to create customized programs and bespoke learning journeys for leaders and teams in various organizations.

Regarding evaluation of the process, we can list some feedbacks received from Executive MBA and executive students:

- "Loving the Persuasive Leadership program as it brings out the best of my characteristics and abilities for me to face my challenges and obstacles."

- "I loved the combination Art and Science, maneuvering through complex organization […] I have learned a lot! I am reviewing my "final" action plan and reviewing my leadership actions daily."

- "In class, interaction with role playing and negotiation games make it easier to absorb and practice the theoretical frameworks in reality."

- "The role playing games were fun and interactive and a great learning experience."

Case report # 2: The Power of Presence, an online program

Drawing on our insights of applying arts-based techniques in leadership and team development programs, a faculty development program with a similar artistic perspective started to emerge. The program 'The Power of Presence' (De Lima, 2022) was developed and provided for faculty members at FGV EAESP, the São Paulo School of Business Administration of Fundação Getúlio Vargas. Two sessions were offered online, each with a duration of 2,5 hours. Faculty members could enroll for either one or both sessions.

The pre-work for these sessions consisted in creating a vlog in which participants were to elaborate on these questions: (a) what matters to you in your teaching?; (b) describe your teaching challenge(s); (c) formulate one question that you would like to reflect on; and (d) what is your special strength in teaching? During the first session of the program, the focus was more

individual-based, covering theater techniques related to body and voice (Rodenburg, 2009), as well as forms of telling a compelling story, while exploring a broader range of word choice. The second part of the workshop focused on re-visiting rhetoric elements, discovering ways to apply a narrative structure in creating an engaging storyline. Finally, the program invites the participants to reflect on their own personal learning style preferences and how they can align these with the learning style preferences of their students.

Some basic principles of online presence were also discussed, including: camera framing principles, body and voice awareness, word choice, rhetoric elements, storytelling elements, and audience characteristics. The personal vlogs created in the pre-work phase were used to assess how these principles were being applied, and in what way these elements can be improved.

Evaluation feedback received from faculty members from various departments highlighted the strengths of the workshop. It was stated that the program encouraged reflection to improve teaching experiences. Suggestions of improvements included that there should be more than two meetings, and that the workshop would benefit from face-to-face instead of online meetings.

Case report # 3: In the limelight - from ARTistry to classroom mastery, face-to-face program

This one-day face-to-face workshop, called "In the Limelight – from ARTistry to classroom mastery" (De Lima, 2022), is a modification of an existing three-day Executive Education program on Persuasive Leadership (De Lima & Flood, 2018; Carroll & Flood, 2010) and builds upon the online program The Power of Presence.

The program has been piloted at Copenhagen Business School for faculty members. The flow of the workshop starts with a focus on the self, through the lens of an array of artistic techniques, assessing personal impact and building confidence, followed by an exploration of personal teaching cases, which have been submitted beforehand, and during the session these are critically discussed by peers, to be concluded with staging the personal case in front of peers, applying Stanislavski's system of objectives (Moore, 1984). The interactive and interdisciplinary workshop is designed to be attractive and valuable to faculty members at all levels and across various fields.

The participants are asked to prepare a vlog, in a similar way as described in the previous learning program outline, through which reflection on teaching is elicited. The program design consists of three parts: (a) artistic palette; (b) exploring the personal teaching case; and (c) staging the personal teaching case.

Artistic palette: During this part of the session, the focus is on the self. We reflect on the body through drawing exercises (Boal, 2002), and the participants are encouraged to think about questions, such as 'do you feel connected to your body?'. Reflection is extended with a focus on the voice, where the participants are challenged, e.g., on the knowledge of their own voice (Rodenburg, 2009). Additional elements on the artistic palette are, e.g., verbal- and non-verbal artistry, the impact of facial expressions, the power of silence, the power of words and the art of noticing.

Exploring personal the teaching case: The participants have prepared in advance their personal case, where they narrate their teaching challenge(s). This story is part of their vlog assignment. The vlogs are used to assess how the artistic palette is being applied and to discuss the content of the teaching challenges being faced by each member, comparable to the assignment in case report 2. In sharing their assessments on content and form, we notice that the participants have a tendency to cognitively discuss the teaching challenges in a relatively formal way, much like they would on a day-to-day business.

Staging personal the teaching case: In this part of the workshop, the participants are invited to re-visit their challenge(s) and create a combined script applying principles of playwriting and the Stanislavski technique (Moore, 1984). The participants almost immediately become more relaxed, and often humorous perspectives emerge, illustrating relatively more comfort to explore different perspectives on how the challenges need to be staged, providing ways to navigate their seemingly unsolvable challenges (Lewis & Dehler, 2000).

In what refers to its evaluation, the program was received very well with a high satisfaction rate on the course content and delivery. A few examples of comments received follow:

- "So many things I take away, using body/voice, structure, silence, music."
- "The narrative structure, ethos/pathos/logos, the time to share ideas and experiences with colleagues..."
- "Ethos/pathos/logos, narrative structure and their relevance for teaching."
- "The exercises were engaged and putting ourselves out there."
- "The overall structure and content was very good!"
- "Perhaps even more tricks from the world of theatre."

DESIGN FRAMEWORK

Through the experiences of these three cases, we introduce a learning design framework, the SAM Self-Scene-Stage Art Model (Figure 1). It consists of three components:

Self focuses on presence, verbal- and non-verbal artistry, the art of noticing, use of silence, the choice of words, use of metaphors.

Scene consists of working on a personal case. This is part of the pre-work assignment and is discussed amongst peers in the classroom setting. The personal cases can be thematic as is shown in our case report examples, i.e., cases on organizational political challenges or cases on teaching challenges in higher education.

Stage refers to audience engagement, taking different preferred learning styles into account. It involves scripting the personal case by applying the Stanislavski technique, in which the participants are invited to reassess their personal cases in terms of 'Objective-Obstacle-Action', then staging the personal cases, through which the participants are enabled to perform the sum of all art-languages.

Figure 1. SAM – Self-Scene-Stage Art Model
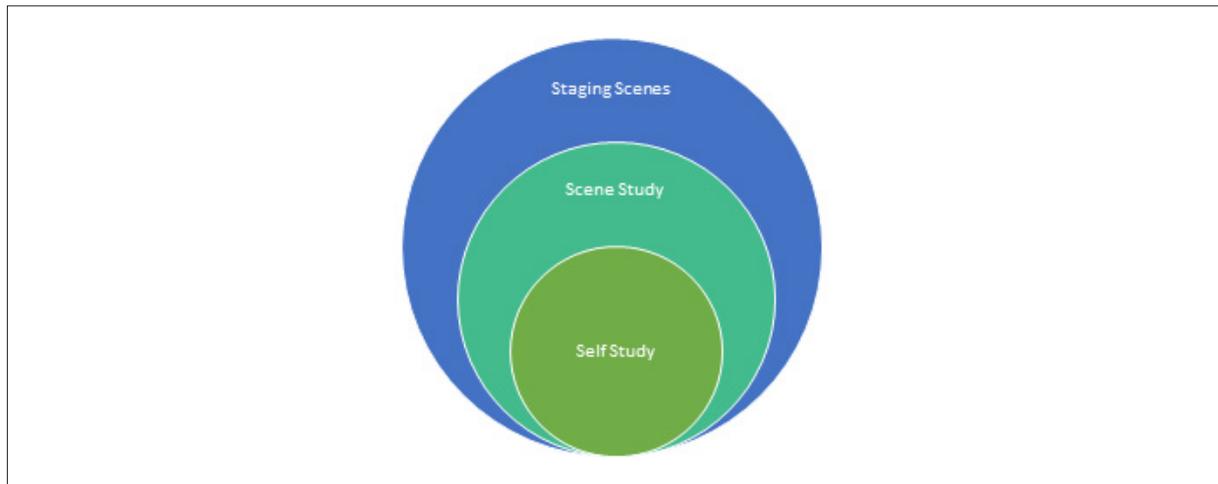
Source: the authors.

IN CLOSING

Through our arts-based techniques in learning programs, we aim to contribute to the professional development of faculty in higher education. SAM provides a framework through which faculty can enhance their performance in their virtual and live classrooms. In a similar way, we can strengthen the performance of leaders in organizations in a creative way. Although the application of arts-based methods in learning programs is flourishing, there are still cultures in higher education and organizations where creative expression in learning programs are still limited (Alencar et al., 2017). With the many challenges to navigate in an uncertain and complex world, it is the faculty who will prepare the students to become future business leaders. Applying arts-based techniques which have proven their impact throughout history can be an excellent way to improve the performance of faculty members.

"Play it again, SAM." (Quote from the film Casablanca, 1942)

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