

Teaching as a performative art

Towards an embodied methodology for teacher development

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This paper reports on diagnostic workshops conducted at a teacher training centre in Istanbul focusing on how Applied Theatre methods can support English Language Teacher Education in the areas of self-awareness and self-reflection. The workshops provided 12 participant English Language teachers experience of Applied Theatre methods and techniques to elicit feedback on their pedagogic value and efficacy in teaching. Through dialogue and reflection, participants identified the performative and meta-performative skills they valued from the workshops. While Applied Theatre methods have a proven track record in many contexts, they are rarely utilized in teacher development programmes. Feedback from the workshops revealed that Applied Theatre methods, notably Forum Theatre, provide embodied, participant-led, solution-oriented, multiple voiced opportunities for reflection and dialogue on critical incidents teachers' face. In addition, participants highlighted performative skills pertaining to developing awareness of self, others and setting that are disregarded in current competence-based teacher education programmes. Participants also uncovered meta-performative skills reflecting on why teachers act in the way that they do. The workshops provide an initial template to create teacher development programmes incorporating Forum Theatre and other Applied Theatre techniques.

1 Nurturing facilitation skills in teacher education through Applied Theatre

I work in a training centre in Istanbul training pre-service and in-service teachers from a spectrum of cultures and linguistic backgrounds. The environment demands self-aware, reflective practitioners who are collaborative, demonstrate inter- and intrapersonal qualities, are adaptable, able to embrace diversity and a multi-linguistic/cultural environment while solving problems and adopting a range of roles and in most cases having to perform these tasks in a language which is not their mother tongue. It is my experience that these performative skills are not generally addressed in teacher education where the focus is primarily on a cognitive, instrumental orientation rather than towards a performative-humanistic understanding of "teaching and learning with head, heart, hands, and feet" (Schewe, 2013, p. 7).

With over four decades of experience as a teacher trainer, I have had the privilege of observing countless lessons. What I have noticed is that most lessons adhere to what I term the

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'competence' model of teaching. They are meticulously planned with explicit aims and objectives, placing primary emphasis on content delivery and practice. Rarely do I encounter lessons rooted in what I call the 'performance' model of teaching, where the lesson is learner-centered, open-ended, and built upon learner-generated participation and content. Admittedly, the 'performance' model is a high-risk approach, demanding strong facilitation skills. Most teachers, in my experience, tend to avoid such risks, often lacking the support needed to develop facilitation skills. My aim is not to argue which teaching model is superior; although admittedly, I am drawn to the aspiration of training teachers to be effective facilitators. However, despite this aspiration, I too often find myself standing before rows of teachers in workshops, clicking through PowerPoint slides to transmit content. I have often wondered if other teacher educators face this same role conflict.

These reflections prompted me to explore questions such as: What are facilitation skills, and how can they be cultivated? As Ruitenberg (2007, p. 261) astutely notes, "teaching is performative; it unfolds as embodied and enacted responses, in the moment." In contrast, traditional academic knowledge is usually conveyed through words and numbers, making it disembodied. This propositional knowledge, while valuable, can only take a teacher so far, as true growth requires practice, as emphasized by Nelson (2013).

These observations were brought home to me recently when I had the privilege of being invited to a renowned chain (franchise) school in Istanbul, tasked with presenting on the topic of 'Social and Emotional Learning' to a large audience of primary and secondary school teachers. The workshop appeared to progress well; many participants actively engaged in the activities with enthusiasm. However, a familiar dialogue unfolded after the session:

Me: Did you enjoy the workshop?

Participant: Oh yes, thank you. It was a lot of fun.

Me: Would you consider using any of these activities in your class?

Participant: (looking quizzical) Err... no, I don't think so.

Me: Why not?

The responses to this question typically range from lack of time, heavy curriculum constraints, book adherence, limited experience, concerns about student behavior, mismatched teaching styles, and the fear of potential chaos or parental complaints. This left me pondering why these issues weren't being addressed in their professional development meetings instead of recruiting external teacher educators to conduct workshops on topics not of their choosing.

What became evident was the urgent need for a framework and methodology for participant-led, solution-oriented teacher professional development. One potential solution, in my view, is the development of facilitation skills for teacher educators. Facilitation, as a form of expression, fosters shared decision-making, promotes dialogue, encourages reflection, and

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builds a sense of community. This is what drew me to Applied Theatre, as I embarked on a series of workshops to explore drama games and activities aimed at nurturing facilitation skills among teachers at our training center in Istanbul.

Teaching is performative in that it is based on judgements formed through action (heuristic); it is influenced by contingencies that happen in real time and are unpredictable (improvised); it involves physical and emotional engagement (embodied) and learning is created in the process (emergent). I am lured to Wahl's contention (2011) that draws compelling parallels between teaching and performing suggesting that teachers are taught how to instruct but not how to engage their students emotionally. Audiences, she says, are expecting to 'feel' so what about students? (Wahl, 2011, p. 21).

I refer to Applied Theatre (AT) as an umbrella term to describe all drama games and activities including Forum Theatre which are characterised by participant-led experiences that are fictionalised for learning and educational purposes. This 'living through of experience' Heathcote refers to as a 'no penalty' zone (quoted in Johnson & O'Neill, 1984, p. 130), where participants can interrogate solutions in a dramatised setting. Learning through personal lived experience is a component of the theories of the Russian psychologist Vygotsky (1986) who recognises the interrelation of affective and cognitive domains, and the relationship of experience to meaning making.

2 Literature review

In a widely acclaimed TED talk, Sir Ken Robinson (2006) challenged us to perceive teaching as an art, underscoring the vital role of educators in facilitating learning rather than mere knowledge dissemination. This perspective invites a fundamental question: What distinguishes a great teacher? As an experienced teacher trainer, I have observed that truly effective lessons possess a particular 'spark,' an elusive quality residing in the embodied behaviours and interactions between teachers and learners.

To enhance teaching practice, it is imperative that teacher development incorporates identity reflection as a central component. The topic of identity is a frequent preoccupation in the social sciences and humanities (Bendle, 2002) and in the fields of education (Gee, 2000) due to the relationship between identity, beliefs, and behavioural changes. Developing self-awareness and self-identity involves thinking about who you are; why you are a teacher; what kind of teacher you want to be. Price argues, 'discourse is seen as a practice in which both discourse and subject are performatively realised' (Price 1999, p. 582). Teacher identity has evolved beyond mere technical competence to encompass a broader spectrum of social

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personae, reflective of roles, relationships, and community affiliations (Piazzoli, 2013). This identity is a dynamic interplay between personal agency and external influences.

The notion that learning is grounded in action, an idea championed by thinkers like Rousseau and Locke, resounds in the pedagogical philosophies of Progressive Education proponents such as John Dewey and Vygotsky. These visionaries emphasized embodied social interaction and play as integral aspects of the learning process.

While drama in education has a rich historical foundation, contemporary research on performative approaches in Teacher Education remains limited. For instance, Even's teacher training program advocates dynamic, co-constructed learning over static knowledge delivery. Even's (2020) perspective suggests that the art of teaching lies in the teacher's imagination and the willingness to be present and embrace the unpredictability of the learning process. Smith's research (2016) into teaching English to migrants underscores the crucial role of a teacher in creating a meaningful learning environment. Lutzker's (2007) research contends that teacher development should concentrate on the holistic development of the embodied teacher, emphasizing that a teacher's physical attitude is intrinsically tied to their imaginative and emotional being.

In educational and training contexts, there is substantial potential to explore how human experiences and emotions intersect with Teacher Education. Applied Theatre encourages participants to 'feel' and express emotions, not as 'raw' felt emotions, but rather as re-enacted experiences that stimulate learning.

In my quest to establish a framework and methodology for participant-led, solution-oriented teacher professional development, I turned to the work of Augusto Boal, the Brazilian dramatist. At the core of Boal's educational philosophy is the conviction that learning commences with an awareness and analysis of the present context and necessitates reflection and action (praxis) to drive change. Although Boal employs theatre as a medium for this transformation, the underlying sentiment strongly aligns with my vision of teacher development.

A fundamental element of Boal's philosophy is the concept of Forum Theatre. This practice empowers participants to grapple with real-life challenges by intervening in scenes and proposing alternative courses of action. Boal drew inspiration from the pedagogue Paulo Freire, who sought to liberate individuals from the constraints of ignorance and empower them to become agents of change in their own lives. Freire's emphasis on dialogue and critical thinking in the learning process resonates strongly with teacher educators.

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These participatory arts, rooted in Paolo Freire's participatory education model and Boal's Forum Theatre, offer a platform for expression that fosters collaborative decision-making processes, dialogue, self-reflection, and community introspection. Inspired by the principles of Forum Theatre, I have ventured into the utilization of participatory methodologies in teacher professional development through a series of workshops at our teacher training center in Istanbul. These workshops adapt Forum Theatre concepts to unearth authentic teacher experiences, thereby stimulating community discourse and problem-solving. Community Forums serve as a framework to elucidate participants' understanding of their circumstances and provide avenues for generating solutions—a powerful approach for addressing the multifaceted challenges of teacher professional development.

3 Workshop design

Convinced that teaching is an embodied and dynamic process demanding physical presence and emotional engagement, I decided to run a series of workshops to explore how Applied Theatre can inform Teacher Education. The workshops aimed to explore the performativity of teaching and attempt to unpack the skills that allow teachers to create interactive and dynamic learning environments. Specifically, I aimed to stimulate critical reflection and dialogue from participants on their experience and to elicit feedback on the efficacy of the activities for Teacher Education. I hoped that through dialogue and reflection participants would identify specific performative skills that teachers can utilize in their practice. I also wanted the workshops to provide an opportunity for participants to develop facilitation skills so they can run similar workshops. These objectives are summarized in the table below:

Diagnostic	To engage with AT activities and elicit feedback on its efficacy in TE
Methodological	To assess and evaluate the effectiveness of Forum Theatre in TE
Pedagogical	To identify performative skills relevant to TE through reflection and dialogue
Transformational	To equip participants with facilitation skills

We advertised three 3-hour workshops to be held at a private teacher training centre in Istanbul on consecutive Saturday afternoons to increase the chances of working teachers being able to attend. The workshops were described as follows:

Description:

The workshops develop facilitation skills. Facilitation skills are vital in any training or event that involves people interacting and discussing ideas to promote change.

The workshops explore the use of embodied approaches to professional development such as team building, gaining participants' trust, maximizing engagement and fostering collaboration and personal disclosure and other performative skills.

These series of workshops explore approaches to professional development using techniques based on Forum Theatre inspired by the work of Augusto Boal the Brazilian dramatist.

Participants will receive a certificate at the end of the course.

Twelve participants, all practicing English Language teachers, registered for the workshops. Participants were from a variety of backgrounds (United States -3, Britain -2, Iran - 4, Turkey - 2 and Russia - 1), and all but two were female. Prior to the workshops I sent an information email explaining that in addition to experimenting with drama activities and techniques, participants would explore the experiences of an ELT teacher (fears, hopes and dreams) to present our findings of the 'essence' of an ELT teacher in a presentation / discussion to an invited audience after the final workshop. The email also stated that participants would be asked to write their reflections after each workshop and take part in focus group interviews (15 – 20 minutes). I explained that all the workshops would be filmed and invited participants to sign a consent form granting their permission to use data collected from the workshops in any subsequent dissemination of the findings. All participants signed the consent form. The workshops were structured around three main components which will be discussed in the following

3.1 Games and participatory activities¹

I selected theatre games and activities for the workshops based on the criteria of whether they would have potential benefit in terms of a teachers' development. Initially I chose problem solving activities that require collaboration, rapport, and team building; activities that require self-awareness; and activities that build trust and awareness of others. I also chose activities that had some potential to be adapted for use in the participants' classes. I deliberately avoided activities that demanded 'acting a role' as I am aware from experience that some teachers are uncomfortable 'acting' due to a lack of desire or perceived talent. My aim was also to consider how the activities stimulated reflection on their self-identity and not

¹ Film footage and demonstrations of the activities can be viewed from via the following link:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8VoyPEilhE>

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an imaginary creation. The primary sources for activities were Boal's (2022) *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*.

As we experimented with activities it emerged that teachers found the reflection post activity particularly beneficial. This reflection provided them an opportunity to reflect on their behaviour in the activity and their reaction and interaction with others and how it reflects on their identity. A simple game of tag, for example, can facilitate reflections on: Do you prefer to chase someone or be chased? How does it feel to chase someone or be chased? What are you running after in your life now? What are you running from?

3.2 Forum Theatre²

The workshop structure was influenced by Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre (FT). FT emphasizes active participation and draws on participants' personal narratives and experiences. This approach aligns with the notion that sharing personal stories can be a potent catalyst for teacher development. Furthermore, FT encourages critical thinking and self-awareness, supporting a "bottom-up" approach to change—a concept well-supported in the literature on educational innovation and transformation (Fullan, 1982, 1993, 2001; McCabe, 2002).

3.2.1 Workshop 1 - Tilling the soil:

Participants embarked on a journey of self-disclosure by taking their partners on an imaginary tour of their birthplace. We explored the rewards of teaching and shared stories of positive achievement, which served as the basis for re-enacting these stories through image theatre. In the final hour, we repeated the cycle, but this time we brainstormed the challenges, obstacles, difficulties, and concerns faced by ELT teachers. Participants brainstormed challenges and wrote these on Post Its that were put on the whiteboard. After we had 40+ challenges I invited the participants to see if they could categorise the challenges they had come up with. After much discussion the following three categories emerged:

Internal challenges	Contextual challenges	External challenges
Self doubts + Lack of knowledge Lessons going pear shaped	Getting stuck in situations Unrealistic regulations Classes too large Workload +++++ Duty times Low pay Institutional problems+ Working at home	Expectations from others++ Toxic people External criticism Student questions Admin expectations Working with others

² The Forum Theatre was structured over three workshops, and the process can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/CJnw0gR5TTk>

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3.2.2 Workshop 2 - Sowing the seeds

Participants focused on devising material for our Forum theatre scenarios. We employed techniques like 'Step forward if you (have self doubts / feel overloaded with work)' to elicit personal narratives and experiences. This sharing of experiences was appreciated by participants (as stated in their feedback reflections) as it demonstrated to them that many problems are shared and they are not alone. Participants were encouraged to recall moments of stress and challenge, associating them with specific sounds and body postures. These stories were then shared within their respective groups. Groups then chose one story that resonated with all group members and created and practiced re-enacting the story with the original story's protagonist becoming the facilitator. The facilitator did not take part in the re-enactment and acted as a director thereby creating 'distance' from the personal story by having others enact it. (Cohen-Cruz 2006.105) By the end of this workshop, we had six scenarios, each with a designated facilitator/director.

3.2.3 Workshop 3 - Blooming

This session concentrated on developing facilitation skills and rehearsing the forum scenes. Participants re-enacted their scenarios to other groups who were invited by the facilitators/directors to intervene and solve the problems for their respective scenes, honing their facilitation skills. It soon became apparent that the facilitators' role is crucial. One of the dangers was that when inviting audience intervention, the facilitator would feel the need to explain or interpret the scenario and this would lead to 'talking about' what happened as opposed to concentrating on transforming through action. The scenarios were later presented to an audience in the Community Forum, with the aim of stimulating discussion, reflection, and debate among the participants, who were also invited to contribute solutions to the issues presented.

3.3 Reflection and dialogue

There was a reflection stage (sharing in a circle) after each activity and at the end of each workshop. Data collection aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives of the theatre games and the Forum Theatre. We administered written feedback questionnaires and conducted focus group interviews after each workshop and we invited the audience who attended the Forum presentation to complete a reflection form.

These workshops represent a potential framework and methodology for participant-led, solution-oriented teacher professional development. Applied Theatre, due to its participatory approach, offers a means of shared decision-making, fostering dialogue, reflection, and

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community cohesion. The workshops employed techniques designed to both enhance participants' understanding of their situations and facilitate actions to address them. In essence, this methodology served as both the object of research and the means to probe reflection and gather data.



Image 1: Forum Theatre intervention

4 Developing performative skills

The workshops provided a safe space for participants to candidly share the challenges they experience in their lives. The challenges that emerged were multifaceted and divided by the participants into three categories – internal, external and contextual challenges. Using these categories as a framework I analysed the data collected to see if I could find specific skills that participants identify as beneficial in addressing these challenges.

4.1 Internal oppressions: awareness of self

When invited to comment on skills needed to combat internal challenges in their feedback reflections, participants mentioned intrapersonal skills such as active listening, developing self-confidence and esteem, developing a healthy body and letting go of perfection. The word 'fun' appears frequently in the data as well as 'enjoyment' and comments like: 'it was really good to relax'. Several participants comment how the activities developed their self-awareness: 'Moving around and becoming more aware of my body and how I can use it to express emotions/concepts.'. Comments about self-awareness includes sensory awareness (How to listen/trust); and awareness of emotions: (Being able to read emotions in the room as a valuable skill). The concept of being in the present, emptying your mind and being aware

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of your senses was consistently reinforced in the workshops evoking Brook's (1968) notion of the infinite possibilities of emptiness. Lutzker argues that the concept of freeing your mind and heightening your sensory dimensions are 'largely ignored in teacher development despite research demonstrating the decisive importance of sensory / affective experience in affecting behaviour' (Lutzker, 2007, p. 161). One example to illustrate this was a paired activity called 'Blind Trust'. One partner closed their eyes while the other guided them on an imaginary journey around the room. Several participants commented on how they found it difficult to keep their eyes closed. One participant shared a personal struggle, revealing, "I find it very difficult to close my eyes and just do whatever I need to do. I don't think it had to do with a lack of trust in you guys or others... I honestly think it's a big thing for me, to close my eyes." This observation encapsulates the inherent conflicts that drama can provoke. It highlights the internal struggle participants face when they want to perform an action but are hindered by conflicting thoughts. How does one resolve these internal conflicts and gain control over coercive thoughts?

4.2 External challenges: awareness of others

External oppressions consist of pressures exerted by other people including management, 'demanding parents', 'hyperactive' and 'spoiled' learners and 'toxic' colleagues. An activity we used in the workshops that stimulated reflection on external challenges is 'Bomb and Shield'. Standing in a circle, participants in their mind choose someone to represent a bomb (someone to avoid as they may explode) and a different person as their shield (someone who can protect them from the bomb). On the facilitator's instruction participants move around the room avoiding their bomb and hiding behind their shield. Reflection on this activity can include question prompts such as: What could be a bomb for a teacher? Do you have a bomb? What is it? What power does that bomb have over you? What are shields for teachers? Do you have a shield? What is it? How does it protect you? This activity typifies the aim of many participatory drama activities to provide a space for personal disclosure, opportunities for sharing, inspiring, encouraging each other, and for becoming more integrated into a social group. Recognising and enhancing awareness of the needs and presence of others is a valued skill for teachers. Participants appreciated the interaction, collaboration and sharing. 'We should listen to our colleagues for new ideas'. Interpersonal skills mentioned included learning to say 'no', building sympathy and empathy for learners and being able to ask for help.

4.3 Contextual and systemic oppressions: awareness of context

The largest category of challenges identified by the participants was contextual and systemic challenges. Challenges evoked in the workshops include large, mixed level groups,

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inappropriate methodology, intensive curriculums, insufficient breaks, strict rules, communication barriers, low pay and cultural differences. Many participants highlighted the situated nature of teaching: 'I believe they [the activities] were really useful to understand how we need to be aware of our surrounding all the time'. The premise of theatre activities, and Forum Theatre in particular, is to provide a platform for 'neglected' voices to be heard, raising awareness of cultural and social pressure and re-examining the dominant discourse in order to promote change. Most comments in the written reflections referred to how to survive by maintaining a work/life balance, managing time and stress and being able to negotiate diplomatically with institutions. Fels (2004, p. 88) summarises:

A classroom and its emergent curriculum is a complex emergent system of interactions and interrelationships brought forth by teacher and students together within a context and environment. Our students, their lived experiences, desires, and ambitions, their participation, their very presence and / or absence shape and re-shape pedagogical experience.

Further comments refer to the atmosphere and energy in the room: 'I like how these activities change the energy in the room and how there's no right or wrong, just freedom'. Van Manon (1995) suggests:

The ultimate success of teaching actually may rely importantly on 'knowledge' forms that inhere in practical actions, in an embodied thoughtfulness, and in the personal space, mood, and relational atmosphere in which teachers find themselves with their students. (Van Manon, 1995, as quoted in Lutzker, 2007, p. 182)

5 Developing meta-performative skills

The exploration of identity holds a significant place in the realms of social sciences, humanities, and education due to the intricate relationship between one's identity, beliefs, and behavioural patterns. Understanding self-awareness and self-identity entails reflecting on who one is, why one has chosen the path of teaching, and the kind of educator one aspires to become. As Price (1999, p. 582) astutely notes, 'discourse is seen as a practice in which both discourse and subject are performatively realized,' emphasizing that identity is constructed through actions.

In the context of our AT workshops, we observed how the activities facilitated the elicitation of personal narratives, reflections, and insights, shedding light on the nature of participants' identities. Participants were invited to reflect on why they act the way they do, exploring the connections between their actions and their identities. As one participant aptly expressed, "I appreciated the comments that encouraged us to reflect and relate what we did to our lives."

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Another participant found the activities relevant to their life, noting, "The section 'cat and mouse' was impressive for me because I liked the perception behind being chased or chasing; this relates to my current life." These reflective skills, which engage with the performative aspects of one's identity, are what I refer to as 'meta-performative.'

5.1 Identifying meta-performative skills

A recurring theme in the feedback comments revolved around the need for a safe space that also allowed for self-expression. One participant eloquently described this need, saying, "I feel protection from both sides, from myself and also protection from others."

Participants also reflected on their preferences in guided or guiding roles, whether they felt more comfortable being chased or being the chaser. One participant succinctly expressed their preference, "I kind of felt more comfortable being the guide, not being chased, and being the mouse was a bit scarier than being the cat."

5.2 The nature of reflection

In conventional teacher education literature, reflective practice often conjures an image of a solitary ELT practitioner in an attic room, meticulously reflecting on lesson plans, maintaining journals, and drafting action plans. However, this solitary image does not align with the realities of most teachers. The demanding teaching schedules rarely allow for such introspective, solitary reflection.



Image 2: Reflection and disclosure

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Hatton and Smith (1995) question whether reflection should be confined to thought processes about action or be more intertwined with the action itself. Should it be problem-centred, aiming to find practical solutions to classroom challenges? Unlike solitary reflection, our approach to Applied Theatre provides a dynamic space for action and reflection, guided by participants, solution-oriented, and characterized by dialogic interactions, incorporating multiple voices and perspectives.

Participants in our workshops described the highlight of their experience as "reflecting actively and considering connections between my experiences and the group's experiences." This approach was exemplified by one participant's revelation: "I learned that I thrive in courses that emphasize practical and physical movement rather than knowledge-based learning." Another participant shared, "I found myself contemplating my career choices."

6 Forum Theatre as a methodology in teacher education

In our workshops, we explored the use of Forum Theatre (FT) to raise awareness and interrogate the challenges faced by English Language Teaching (ELT) teachers and to seek solutions. This is a summary of some of the principal features drawn from the data collected.

Initially, I was concerned about the authenticity of scenarios presented in FT. However, participant feedback contradicted this concern, highlighting the legitimacy of the challenges:

It shows the challenges of a teacher. It is nice to know you are not alone experiencing these kinds of problems.

It mirrors real situations and presents them visually.

6.1 Dramatic distance

Participants in our workshops noted that dramatizing real situations allowed for reflection. Participants emphasized the benefits of drama in creating 'distance,' as articulated by these examples:

I think they open some doors and give perspective about real-life problems. Watching other people and seeing the problems acted provides a distance from the problem, allowing for better thinking to find a solution.

When participants engaged in dramatizing critical incidents, they found themselves in a liminal space, existing between reality and fiction. This dual state induced both tension and imaginative possibilities, essential elements within a training context. Transformative learning theories (Mezirow, 1997) suggest that genuine learning occurs when participants confront challenges or disruptions, which trigger reflection and critical assessment.

6.2 Participant-led workshops

Delegating content creation to workshop participants shifted the traditional power dynamic and allowed for participant-centred agency. This flexibility in facilitation created a zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1986), where participants sought solutions with the support of the audience (spect-actors). Importantly, this approach provided space for creativity, as one participant observed: "It was lovely watching the things that were crafted by people, from nothing. It's always fun to see drama appear from just a word."

6.3 Change and transformation

As the workshops aims are focussed on teacher development, an essential aspect of our methodology was evaluating the degree of change and transformation experienced by participants. Feedback from the final workshop highlighted the role of Forum Theatre in promoting change, with comments such as: "Creating alternative solutions, scenarios, paths of experience," and "Exploring issues that concern teachers can clarify things and help find solutions." Some participants commented that the FT format increased confidence as "talking about the issues via fictional characters makes people feel better (a bit of therapy)" and "Imagined situations may be perceived as less confrontational". Many participants noted the relationship between challenge and enjoyment, echoing Sawyer's (1999) perspective that "change is always connected to the willingness to take risks in going beyond what is known and familiar."

7 Potential limits

While drama and AT offer valuable insights into motivation, engagement, and social theory in educational contexts (Piazzoli, 2013), some participants expressed reservations about institutional interest in professional development through AT. This scepticism was attributed to institutional interests, with one participant noting, "The institutions are interested in making money and may not prioritize time-intensive and costly theatrical methods." Additionally, the preference for traditional teaching techniques was highlighted: "Sometimes people prefer the old-fashioned techniques (books, homework, and old rules) and may resist new approaches."

However, one audience member recognized the need for a diverse group of stakeholders to genuinely address these issues: "In these workshops, we can actually educate heads of department, principals of schools, managers, and even teacher trainers to create a healthier working environment."

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In conclusion, Forum Theatre offers teacher educators a powerful tool for reflection. The ELT literature envisages reflection as analytical and cyclical (Kolb, 1984) whereas in FT it is holistic, embodied, spontaneous and focussed on transformation and change. FT conforms to Schön's view that reflective practice involves teachers engaging in 'a dialogue of thinking and doing' (Schön, 1983, p.31).

8 Conclusion

Our exploration of AT within the context of Teacher Education has revealed three significant dimensions in which AT methods have the potential to transform the field.

8.1 Facilitation skills and personal development

The workshops serve as a platform for teachers to identify and practice essential facilitation skills. These skills, such as building rapport, fostering trust, facilitating collaboration, and cultivating a positive group dynamic, are vital for effective teaching. The drama games and activities not only equips teachers with these facilitation skills but also contributes to their personal development. Teachers who engage with drama become more self-aware, enhancing their understanding of their roles and building a strong foundation for professional development. Teachers discover commonalities with their peers, become more comfortable in sharing their struggles, and achieve a heightened level of articulation and self-efficacy.

8.2 Reflective practice and self-identity

AT techniques provide a unique reflective tool for teachers to explore their embodied behaviour and professional identities. By actively participating in drama activities, teachers gain valuable insights into their actions, reactions, and communication styles. This heightened self-awareness enables teachers to adapt and improve their teaching methods in alignment with their evolving self-concept. Reflective practice in AT emphasizes the immediacy of experiential learning, encouraging continuous self-improvement and growth. AT serves as a catalyst for teachers to connect their teaching approaches with their evolving self-understanding, thus promoting a transformative learning process.

8.3 Forum theatre for dialogue and action

Forum Theatre functions as a catalyst for discussions and reflections on participant-led dramatizations of challenges. By engaging in Forum Theatre, teachers stimulate open conversations and shared reflections on the complexities of teaching. This approach uniquely encourages participants to propose and enact alternative solutions, fostering innovative

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thinking and collaborative problem-solving. Unlike traditional research methods, Forum Theatre negotiates action from a participant perspective, prioritizing the first-hand experience of educators, and promoting concrete changes and improvements in teaching practices.

Incorporating AT into Teacher Education transcends traditional pedagogy by equipping teachers with the facilitation skills and self-awareness needed for effective teaching. The focus on participant-led discussions and performative skill development redefines the teacher's role as one who engages with students in the "here and now," fostering self-expression and adaptability.

In summary, our AT exploration cultivates "meta-performative" skills, offering a unique form of reflection that extends beyond past event analysis to engage deeply with the performative aspects of one's identity. AT enriches the Teacher Education experience by encouraging participants to explore their inner conflicts, preferences, and insights in a collaborative, solution-oriented manner.

This pilot project underscores the need for greater emphasis on teacher artistry and performative competences in education. We call for a shift in educational practices, recognizing the potential of the arts in transforming teaching and learning. AT workshops are a gateway to a more creative and embodied approach, preparing teachers for the multifaceted challenges of a diverse, multilingual, and multicultural environment, where teaching is an art that engages the head, heart, hands, and feet. Through AT, we invite teachers to embark on a journey of creative, embodied expression, enjoyment, and gratification, enhancing their professional journey and contributing to the evolution of Teacher Education.

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