

Forum Theatre for Young Sports Team Captains

Young members of a sports club were given the opportunity to address challenging situations encountered in the role of a team captain through theatre. The Forum Theatre method was successfully piloted in youth sports: the young captains experienced firsthand that it is possible to influence situations.

Forum Theatre is an interactive form of theatre intended to change the lives of its audience by turning spectators into active participants, who propose and enact solutions to the social problems presented in the performance. In the JOY project, the Forum Theatre method was applied in the activities of the TuTo ry multi-sport club's Captain School, which trains young sports team captains to handle the responsibilities of their role.

Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (*Teatro do Oprimido*) is a participatory theatre method developed by the Brazilian theatre director, playwright, and activist. It gives the audience — or, as Boal termed them, *spect-actors* — the chance to take part in performances and change their course. The aim is for the audience to become active agents who can try out different solutions to problems and practice societal change through theatre.

Implementing the Captain School as Part of the Joy Pilots

TuTo ry's Captain School was developed as part of the *JOY – Promoting Equality and Joy in Sports through Arts-Based Methods* project. Its approach is based on the project's "from children to children" tool.

The idea behind the Captain School is partially inspired by the VIP model (or CAC: Caring Atmosphere Circle in English) used at Turku University of Applied Sciences. In this model, first-year students are selected by their peers to act as trusted members of the group. These VIP students serve as contacts for teaching tutors and study counselors in matters related to student wellbeing.

The operational logic of the VIP model is like the Captain School, where the goal is to increase the captains' understanding of their responsibilities and the expectations placed on them, particularly regarding the wellbeing of team members and team spirit.

The Captain School was carried out as part of the JOY project's arts-based methods pilot. The pilot tested how well Forum Theatre could be adapted to train sports club captains. Third-year Drama Instructor students facilitated the method. They were tasked with creating a Forum Theatre performance suitable for the Captain School and working with 12–17-year-old captains on topics relevant to young people.

The students organized a workshop session where they interviewed the participants interactively about their experiences and expectations in the captain's role. Based on the workshop results, the students built a short, episodic performance consisting of three different scenes depicting everyday situations in a sports team.

From the "Horror Version" to Problem-Solving

According to the Forum Theatre method, the first version of the performance — called the "horror version" — shows everything going wrong, with the protagonist experiencing oppression and injustice from multiple directions. After this uninterrupted performance, the play is re-enacted in collaboration with the audience, stopping and modifying situations together to correct them.

At the heart of Forum Theatre are discussion and interaction with the audience, facilitated by a character known as the Joker. The Joker's task is to act as a bridge-builder, host, and guide throughout the event, from arrival at the theatre to departure.

Participants are not left alone to figure out solutions to the problematic situations; the Joker supports, encourages, and helps the audience in addressing the issues raised. A crucial part of the method is the interactive debriefing discussion after the performance, ensuring that spectators leave with the belief that they can influence things and situations. This is especially important when working with children and young people.

In the Captain School pilot's performance, the atmosphere was focused and engaged for both the audience-participants and the students. The performance addressed difficult situations in young people's lives where they found themselves in subordinate positions. Many felt that the situations depicted in the performance were realistic, and even though the first version exaggerated them for effect, they still contained a grain of truth.

For many of the young Captain School participants, this was their first experience with community theatre — and for some, their first time at the theatre altogether. As a pilot project within the JOY initiative, the implementation was an absolute success, with the young captains describing the event as impactful. According to the final evaluation of the Captain School pilot, the participants rated the theatre performance as the most influential session of the entire program.

Learn more about the project at joyinsports.com.