

**FACILITATING ENGAGEMENT WITH THE CHALLENGES FACING FAMILIES IN WHICH THERE  
MAY BE MEMBERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: POSITING A MODEL FOR THEATRICAL  
INTERVENTION**

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## PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of the study is to investigate the manner in which performance can facilitate communication amongst family members in dealing with the challenges facing families in which there is a member with 'special needs'. Special needs range from problems of mental or emotional anguish, care, disability or chronic illnesses. My interest in this study is on how these special needs impact on the functioning of the family and family dynamics.

Theatrical representation and audience participation is at the heart of exploring the empowering role of applied theatre to engage family members in expressing their difficulties and discussing their issues together. I conducted two intervention processes towards examining how theatre would work. In the first workshop series in Norway the participants, who also were the actors, were siblings of children with rare disabilities who were attending a week-long workshop at Frambu, and the audience at the showcase was their parents and remaining siblings. In the second intervention the participants who developed Forum Theatre were drama students from the University of Cape Town, and the audience was other drama students. My role as facilitator of the theatrical interventions comprises part of this study because the facilitator is essential in the theatre devising process and to stimulate audience engagement in the intervention.

The findings from the two interventions gave birth to a hybrid theatrical form that merges Simultaneous Dramaturgy and Forum Theatre into Dramaturgical Forum to maximize audience participation in the active process of future interventions.

### **Keywords**

Special needs, participatory theatre, facilitation, engagement, Dramaturgical Forum

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### Statement of the Problem

This study investigates the manner in which performance can facilitate challenges facing families in which there is a member with special needs. This research is justified by the importance of reaching an understanding of these challenges. The issues range from problems of mental or emotional anguish, care, conflict, isolation and exclusion and how these affect the family. Much research from different disciplines has been conducted around the problems generated by people having special needs (Koch, T. 2001, Patterson, J. 2002, Hess, E. 2004, Shuttleworth, R & Kasnitz, D. 2004, Almgren & Diwan 2009). The theories used to identify and describe these difficulties in my study have been drawn from such disciplines as psychology, education, sociology and theatre studies. An individual with special needs within the family may be considered to be oppressed or even, in certain circumstances, might be considered to be an oppressor in Augusto Boal's (1979) terms and in this study I explore that possibility.

In order to explain how oppression may be associated with special needs, I shall refer to the play, "So You Mean It's My Fault!" about a husband with drinking problems which I discuss further in Chapter Four. At the beginning of the play, the wife comes to her husband, who is watching TV, to talk about her visit to the doctor because of her repeated miscarriages, but her husband is more interested in what he is watching on TV than in what she has to say. Eventually he storms off to drink with his friends. This scenario could be a familiar situation in many families and homes, and is associated with antisocial behaviour such that it attracts the attention of the justice system in certain countries. Special needs present different kinds of challenges to the individual, to spouses, parents, siblings, children and sometimes members of the extended family.

There are many different characteristics which we could call 'special needs', but most of them are not defined as such. However, in my view, what makes them special needs is not necessarily because they share common features, but because they have similar impact on the family, which manifests in many different ways. Some are characterised by antisocial behaviour, or negative social attitudes directed towards the person with special needs and



their families, such as intolerance, stigma and discrimination. Some special needs create certain perceptions in other people that could lead to ostracism, either by the self or certain groups of people, and in extreme cases by society as a whole. For example, people with certain disabilities and their families are stigmatised by other members of their society. People who have left their countries of origin to seek refuge in other countries have a tendency to be ostracised by their host communities, or in some cases they ostracise themselves. Some groups of young people tend to be excluded because of their behaviour or a certain image created by the media.

This study does not seek to judge these attitudes but to use a theatrical intervention which provokes participation and intergroup communication in order to identify and explore the different oppressive natures of special needs and the way in which the oppressed might even turn into the oppressor. My study suggests that participation in drama/theatre might be effective and so this study endeavours to identify theatrical processes which will achieve a helpful intervention. The study finally posits a model for theatrical intervention: I propose that theatre provides a secure framework for families who want to explore the possibilities and challenges of change with regards to their understanding and perception of special needs. Moreover theatre is a social process which enables interaction between people; this theme will be further discussed later in this study.

## The Focus on the Family

I need to explain why I focus so specifically on the family. Families are the foundation and the building blocks of society. Within the social structure, family is the context closest to the individual, and therefore the family plays a vital role in the growth of an individual. What a person considers family can vary depending on many factors including the person's culture, values and experiences. It is in the family that identity and the sense of belonging is being formed. It is in the family that a person learns certain values and beliefs that become part that person's identity. The family is the context which should equip the child with the skills for interacting with the world and developing expectations for the world. Thus the family provides a safe environment for the child to practice and experience interaction with the world. In the family one develops a sense of belonging and the roles one has in that particular family and a sense of who plays what roles.

The family is challenged when there is a member with special needs. Often special needs present different kind of dynamics to the family and these challenges affect the functioning of the family. If the building block (family) is affected, that means the whole structure (society) is also going to be affected. In other words, issues within the family also reflect issues in the wider society. So, one good way to take care of the society is by taking care of the family. The focus of this work is therefore, firstly on those who themselves may have special needs, secondly on the family unit, or maybe on groups of people who share a common problem (or oppression); and finally on all those that are grappling with certain difficulties in the society.

Since I have been working at Frambu (a centre for rare disabilities in Oslo, Norway) I have realised that most attention is given to the persons with disabilities by care-givers and most of the medical service providers. This is demonstrated by the limited literature on siblings of children with disabilities and chronic illnesses, together with the effects that raising a child with disability has on the parents and the rest of the family. In the years that I have worked at Frambu, I have gained a lot of empirical evidence pointing to the fact that siblings of a child with disability feel neglected or side-lined in the family. Moreover, in the midst of this predicament, parents, especially mothers, neglect themselves. In literature and disability discourse there are a number of indicators pointing at the disability having an impact on the dynamics of the family functioning. Therefore my involvement with families who have a member with a disability drew my attention beyond disability to the non-disabled members of the families whose needs deserve attention: hence my use of the term 'special needs'. Such special needs are not only experienced by, for example a child with disability or an adult who has alcoholic tendencies, but these circumstances make it hard for the remaining family members whose needs may not be met.

It is also important to point out that in the MA study there is limited time to do everything. Therefore I had to prioritise and place more focus on disabilities because of the engagement I have with Frambu and Norway where my practice will be based. A further limitation is the way the courses at Frambu are structured; they are planned many months ahead and strict rules of ethics apply when doing research on human subjects especially children and the youth. On the other hand, I am doing my studies in Cape Town, South Africa, in which, in the myriad of challenges of the post-apartheid era, disability is only the tip of the iceberg in

regard to 'special needs'. Many young people fall into the category of 'special needs' because of their low socio-economic background, or biased political structures, alcohol and substance abuse, a violent culture of gangsterism, neighbourhoods affected by social and political conflict, violence against women as well as discrimination against minorities, to mention but a few of the issues. But I am working with severely limited time to test my ideas empirically. So these 'special needs', together with my origin and upbringing in South Africa, form the backdrop of my thinking so that I could not ignore them entirely even though I could not tackle them in depth either. Consequently the amount of test situations I could experience was limited. Now I need to explain why I decided to use Drama or Theatre for this intervention.

### Why is a Drama Intervention possibly helpful?

Theatre engages families in a collaborative process because the processes of drama facilitate communication. Theatre of the Oppressed methods especially, enable families to analyse their personal, familial and social realities. The reasons why theatre and drama may be effective are based upon certain aspects of the art form which I discuss below.

#### *Distancing in Drama*

The space of drama, or dramatic structures such as role play and ritual, allow participants to move fluidly between times, the past and the present, and between real and imaginary time. Drama and theatre have always dealt with the interface between reality and fantasy. In theatre, actors play the roles of both imagined and real people. They have an ability to step into another's shoes. They bring their own experiences in order to interpret those roles through the aesthetic distance of drama (Jennings et al 1994:24). The connection between fantasy and reality is used in dramatherapy to intervene in the way people live (Jones, 1996:11).

Distancing suggests moving away from something in order to be able to deal with and/or confront personal fears, anxieties, and beliefs. In her analysis Jennings identifies three characteristics of drama which relate to distancing. These are firstly a separation of the self from non-self, secondly the ability to operate in different realities and times, and thirdly the ability to move back and forth in two planes – in this case the subjective and the objective –

through the aesthetic distance of drama. Distancing enables the participants to imagine and test different actions and alternative responses (Jennings, et al, 1994:10).

There are different levels of distancing: psychological, physical, emotional and imaginative distance. In drama, these can be utilised to render the experience less disturbing because it is removed from the real everyday experience of the participants. Grainger suggests that in the case of audience and actor relationship, theatre achieves distancing by managing the audience perception of the characters and plot. Participants get an opportunity to look at themselves from the distance (1995). Boal says that in theatre: "man can see himself in the act of seeing, in the act of acting, in the act of feeling, the act of thinking. Feel himself feeling, think himself thinking" (1995:13).

In Brechtian Epic Theatre audiences are constantly reminded that they are watching a play and the actor's gestures are used to present emotions. The emphasis for both performers and audience is on acknowledging that the actor is playing a character as opposed to being him(her)self a character. In this form of theatre, actors therefore distance themselves from the emotions of the characters (Emunah, 1994). Similarly, in Jennings' (1992) use of scenarios in her dramatherapy sessions with groups or families, she makes the participants aware of the theatrical frame in which they are working by always reminding them that they are involved in a dramatic play, to enable participants to maintain the dramatic distance between themselves and the roles/characters they play. Yet paradoxically, her intention is to make her clients get close to their reality by bringing elements of the participants' reality into the imaginary or dramatic realm.

Another approach to distancing was taken in my personal work experience. One of the exercises I used in order to learn about the family situation or dynamics with the siblings, was the activity of drawing the family. Each child or adolescent draws their family and starts telling everyone who the members of the family are. The whole process used to happen on the first day of the arrival of the families at Frambu, as part of participants getting to know each other and to give them voice. The amount they choose to disclose is up to them, consequently giving them more control in the face of a problem than they ordinarily experience in the family.

Identifying, on the other hand, is the opposite experience to distancing. Identification is built on the understanding that when participants are engaged in a dramatic process, they identify (parts) of themselves in the character they are seeing, or playing, on stage. For example, it would be easier for participants to identify with a character that is experiencing similar issues to those in the participant's real life situation. Enacting issues of importance to the participants is at the heart of community theatre, which I shall discuss next

### *Using Community theatre (as a method) to engage siblings in a collaborative process*

Helen Nicholson describes community theatre as "... characterised by the participation of community members in creating a piece of theatre which has special resonance for that community" (2005:10). In this kind of theatre, the participants will therefore have a platform on which to portray their psycho-social situation in their families and/communities, and is built on the understanding that people play themselves by portraying the issues metaphorically. It provides those family members who are affected by the member with disability with a metaphor to support their thinking and reflect about their relationships in the family. In this theatre the performers are positioned as central bearers of their family experiences, and in their contribution to the process they may become the agents of change.

However, it is important to remember that our family issues are not easy to disclose in front of strangers. It is the duty and the responsibility of the facilitator to create an environment that will make it easier for the participants to engage. As echoed by Jennings; the role of the facilitator is to enhance the client's creative and expressive ability using drama structures allowing non-verbal and symbolic expression of emotions (1994). In this way the participants can step out of themselves and step into the roles in order to use the role or the character as a means to address their situation, without having to bear the consequences of their actions.

### *Role-play*

During the process of role-playing, participants play the role of someone else other than themselves; they enter into the imaginary world in which they pretend to be someone else. They improvise and the process enables them to explore personal/family issues. This creative activity allows the participants to distance themselves from the real life experience or certain behaviour and also gain control over a situation. Landy asserts that:

The dramatic world view implies that in everyday life as in drama/theatre, persons or actors take on and play out roles in order to express a sense of who they are and what they want. Role taking is the imaginative process of identifying with the role and internalising several of its qualities (1996:169).

In role-play, the person temporarily steps out of his or her own shoes, suspending attitude and status yet maintaining personal character, in order to explore different ways of being, behaving and responding than might normally be expected in a supposedly safe environment. Heathcote suggests that role-play is the ability to allow participants to take the risk of stepping into someone else's shoes in order to know how it feels to be that person (1984:49). The purpose of taking roles is to enable the participants to identify themselves with the role's experience, attitude or behaviour in order to see things from the perspective of the role, to understand and to experience viewpoints other than their own, and engage with pressing issues which are yet removed from the actualities of their own situations. Landy defines role as the container of all the thoughts and feelings we have about ourselves and others in our social and imaginary worlds (1996:111). Both in theatre and real life, individuals or family members and actors have to fulfil the needs attached to, or associated with, the role, as expected by the society or the audience. The role can be seen as the criterion used to categorise, identify and validate characteristics of a specific persona as expected in a given time and situation. Landy further suggests that in the theatre world the role types (.e.g. hero and villain, victor and victim) are the obvious roots of these expectations. Whereas in real life communities these role expectations are the result of socialisation in which specific appearances, attitudes and behaviours are passed on to ensure stability and continuity of the society (1996:111). Watts has observed that role enables us to do and say things which we would be unable to do or say in real life because the social boundaries have been drawn for us (in Jennings, 1992). According to O'Neill drama has the ability to expand our borders of orientation and frees us from inflexible beliefs and points of view. In role we discover and learn our strengths and weaknesses (1996 145).

## How I arrived at the focus of this study and the methods I have used

Traditionally it has been assumed that there is a clear difference between the world of research and the world of practice. That means they are two different communities. On the

one hand there is a world of research based on explicit, systematic work aimed at the growth of theoretical knowledge (Furlong, J & Oancea, A. 2005). Practice, on the other hand, is seen as taking place in the real world, a world based on different forms of knowledge derived from practice, or doing, and the application of skills that are required to do the work. However, exploiting the existence of the interconnection between theory and practice in order to produce knowledge, offers new possibilities for quality research in drama and theatre. Therefore, practice as a research method has the potential to expand the field of research by combining and drawing on the strengths of the two worlds.

Theories are developed either by testing a hypothesis through applying a certain theory on the subjects under study; or collecting, examining, structuring, distilling, analysing, comparing, and interpreting data from a study in order to formulate guidelines for a certain practice. The importance of theoretical frameworks is that they provide the researcher with the structure of organising a research enquiry. But research always brings with it diverse experiences, giving one outcome in some cases while it may give different outcomes in another case, depending on given circumstances and characteristics during the study. As much as theories can be used to validate certain ideas, this does not mean the researcher will achieve those proven results because the researcher also has limitations.

In 2012 I studied medical and psychology research findings and explored correlations, coincidences and the effects, mainly on siblings of children with disability, which can be linked to disabilities. I then examined the psychological patterns of behaviour together with patterns of anxiety and depression that can be connected with special needs (in this case I focused most on disability). To expand the trajectory of this study, I have studied the common pattern of the effects and adjustments that other family member have to make in order to cope with the internal and external consequences of having a member with special needs in the family.

Towards developing a drama philosophy to underpin a drama approach to engage with the siblings, I studied participatory theatre techniques that enable a collaborative process of empowerment between the participants. I focused specifically on the Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal 1979) a method that enables participants to analyse and communicate their familial and social reality. I designed a theatre intervention workshop to facilitate expressive

skills among the siblings at Frambu in April and June 2013; in which I sought to test my hypothesis, focusing on the family as the context in which special needs can be experienced and observed. With the group of siblings I held the workshops with in April; we managed to have what was supposed to be a forum theatre performance, with parents and other family members as spectators. The sketch presented the issue of caregiving, a predicament that is not an unusual scenario for siblings in studies about families with a disabled child.

After these practical workshops, I proceeded with the analysis and evaluation of the data (observations) that I collected during the practical processes by writing, reflecting and analysing my experiences. I specifically focused on the factors that affected the participants in the workshops, such as the participation; the ability to use imagination and creativity, the use of role, and whether or not the siblings achieved role distancing. During the analysis I also paid attention to the group dynamics and the relationship between the participants and the facilitator (me). I compared the experiences of the two workshops.

My analysis led me to further investigate Theatre of the Oppressed by embarking on a collaborative project with five drama students, which was my second attempt towards a model of intervention. We devised a short play "So You Mean It's My Fault!". "So You Mean It's My Fault!" tells a story about a husband with drinking problems that was used as a reference to explain the association between special needs and oppression. The short play was influenced by the personal narratives of the students who participated in the creation of the short play. When the performance was almost ready I invited my supervisor as the first audience to give us feedback about the project. We used this feedback to change the trajectory of the narrative which focused on disability, a theme that could easily be misinterpreted in our play and give the audience the wrong impression about the message of the narrative. The second time around we worked on the communication (breakdown) theme between the wife and her husband around her problem of repeated miscarriages and the husband avoiding the issue by drinking too much too often. Afterwards, in September 2013, I invited a group of post-graduate drama students at the University of Cape Town, South Africa as the spectators to the forum.

After I compared the theoretical framework of the Theatre of the Oppressed with my actual experience, and after reflecting on the two projects, I could identify the gaps and the



weaknesses of the Theatre of the Oppressed method as well as my own powers as a facilitator. I concluded that an alternative method, combining both Simultaneous Dramaturgy and Forum Theatre, which I term Dramaturgical Forum, is a method that enables the spectator to have the freedom of interfering in two ways. He can comfortably propose suggestions to the actor on stage from his seat and/or go on stage and take the role of the protagonist.

## How the study proceeds

In this, my introduction chapter, I have introduced my enquiry as to whether and how performance can facilitate dealing with the challenges facing families in which there is a member with special needs, and explained my particular focus on the family. I propose the use of theatre, because drama facilitates communication, particularly through the drama techniques of distancing, role-play and community theatre. Finally I have mapped my methodology.

Chapter Two examines the impact of special needs within the context of the family, within which the greatest impact is experienced. The study identifies special needs as a possible source of oppression in such families. The chapter begins by defining what is meant by special needs, and then explores the notion more broadly as well as how special needs can be considered oppression in Boal's terms. In the second part of the chapter I record my first steps in attempting to move towards a drama model; a theatrical intervention with the siblings of children with special needs in Norway.

Chapter Three lays a theoretical foundation for my suggested model proposed in Chapter Four. It begins by exploring the concept of participating in Applied Theatre with the focus on audience participation. It then discusses Theatre of the Oppressed, concentrating on and defining the spect-actor, Simultaneous Dramaturgy and Forum Theatre. I close with the concept of the Joker/Difficultator or the Facilitator; bringing to focus the relationship between the facilitator and the spectator in an intervention.

Chapter Four presents the second case study: "So You Mean it's My Fault!" Then I propose a drama model, 'Dramaturgical Forum' which focusses on achieving participation, using dialogue, and it outlines other key aspects of the model.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **EXAMINING SPECIAL NEEDS AND THE USES OF DRAMA**

Improving communication and the quality of life within families in which there is a member with special needs involves change. The circumstances of the family depend upon many different factors, such as political structures, socio-economics, environment, health and emotional well-being. Neither is change an isolated process: it occurs within a context. In this case the family is the context. Family is a complex organism, not just the social unit of the individuals whose relationship is bonded by blood ties and otherwise. Thus examining individuals within the family, and considering the influence of special needs on all the individuals in the family is important for anyone who is interested in improving the adjustment and quality of life of the family.

The impact of the special needs context is an important consideration for those engaged in improving the living conditions of the family who have a member with special needs. The special needs family status is derived from interaction between the characteristics of the special needs: the family's communication model (for example, family members have open discussions about issues or everyone in the family has to have the same values and everything that could be a source of conflict is avoided), the existing connections (i.e. the closeness or distances of family bonds) and the taboos and unwanted behaviours prevailing within components of the family. Health educational research describes several elements of the context of families which contain a disabled member that can facilitate the work of disabled family improvement efforts. What contextual factors influence disability? Do these factors also influence the success and functioning of the family members? The success and the function of the family depend upon the interplay between living conditions, the internal factors and the external environmental factors.

In this chapter I will try to identify the sources of oppression in the family where there is a member with special needs. Firstly, I want to define what I mean by special needs, then describe both how special needs become oppressive in the family and the contribution each family member makes in the oppressive situation, bearing in mind that the family is an important environment for the development of the parents, children and other members of

the family. Then we will take a closer look at what is going on inside the family where there is a member with special needs. The study will explore the dynamics and the relationships between the family members and the relationships between the family and the society. Further, I will review literature on raising a child with disability.

Secondly, I will explore the notion of special needs more broadly, as pertaining to those individuals and their families who suffer the effects of alcohol and substance abuse; the effects of violence on the family; the effects of antisocial behaviour on the family as being special needs of a kind.

Finally I will explore how special needs can in some instances be considered 'oppression' in Augusto Boal's terms (1979) by reporting on a workshop that I conducted at Frambu in April to June 2013.

### Identifying special needs

To raise, to live with and to care for a person with special needs can have intense effects on everyone in the family; parents, spouses, siblings and even extended family members. These experiences are unique for each and every family and can affect different aspects of family functioning and the dynamics of the family. However, these experiences can have positive effects on the family; they can widen horizons, increase family members' awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, enhance the unity of the family and promote the establishment of a network with social institutions and different services. However, the time families invest, the financial costs, support and care, emotional and physical anxieties; and the administrative challenges related to raising, living with and caring for persons with special needs, can have a negative impact on the family.

The impact of special needs on the family will probably depend on how the individual family members cope with the condition and its stresses, the social, psychological and economic resources available to the family; and how each member of the family relates to the person with special needs. Parents would be affected differently than siblings and other members of the family, if the person is a child. Not only do parents have to provide support, care and attention to both the child with special needs and the other children without special needs, but also deal with the consequences of special needs in the community and subsequently in

the wider society. Most of the time families have to interact with medical professionals, correctional services, social services, other medical service providers, rehabilitation services and other local or national facilities available to help cope or raise a the child. However, in the case of a spouse or siblings, the situation changes the dynamics of the effect of special needs.

The impact of special needs on the family depends on the type of the special needs, its causes, the seriousness of the condition and whether the person is institutionalised or not. On the other hand, the experience of interacting, negotiating or coordination with the different services mentioned above and the interaction with the society bring different sets of dynamics and sometimes impact on how the families perceive specials needs, more than the special needs per se. These effects and experiences of raising, living with and caring for persons with special needs will be discussed below.

Special needs as a phenomenon are very difficult to describe because of their dynamic, complex, multifaceted and problematic nature. In order to identify and/ or understand special needs in the family, one needs to explore the dynamics of the family, the relationships existing among family members and the interaction between them. One needs to investigate how family members behave when they are exposed to risk factors that demand and challenge the functioning of the family unit. One has to explore the effects of stress and other situations that bring tension to the family, and how the family or individual members in the family cope with the situation.

Many family models have been used to investigate the effects of special needs on the family unit. It can be said that the daily experiences, living conditions, internalised emotional patterns, disability, habits and social structures have a significant amount of contribution in relation to special needs and its effects on the family. These factors may be seen as correlated, having a cause and effect relationship with special needs, but they may simply be coincidental. For example, a child growing up in a family troubled with alcohol or drug abuse does not necessarily end up an alcoholic or a drug addict, but the risk of developing that behaviour is higher than those who do not grow up in such a family. In the same way, children whose parent(s) or sibling is born with a genetic disorder may not have the disorder themselves, but they may give birth to children with a similar disorder if the disorder is

hereditary. However, some behaviours, such as criminal or violent behaviour amongst the youth may be associated with disordered, deprived or violent communities, which can be seen as provoked by socioeconomic conditions that are connected as much to social conditions as to the family.

## Challenges facing the siblings

For the sake of this research, I draw upon medical and psychological studies to provide an account of the particular stresses experienced by siblings in families in which one child has a disability. Growing up with a brother or a sister with a disability has an effect on the siblings in particular because of the changes and adjustments in the family necessitated by the condition. Family time is largely consumed by the support and attention, both physical and psychological, needed by the disabled brother or sister as well as by the siblings.

However, it is important to bear in mind that the above statement does acknowledge the family bond between children. Perhaps it is when the siblings feel obliged to be positive, helpful, mature and responsible, that oppression comes into the picture because the siblings do not feel that there is room to accommodate their emotions and feelings about their brother or sister who has a disability.

In other cases when the disabled brother or sister is the older child in the family, the younger, non-disabled sibling has to assume the role of an elder sibling. The dynamics of younger and older siblings' relationship is therefore turned around. This leads to a confusion or conflict of roles. Even though being a sibling to a brother or a sister who is disabled has common elements with other families in the same predicament, the way a particular disability affects the family and/or the siblings is different. In other words, all siblings do not perceive and experience the situation in the same way. In my personal work experience, some siblings sometimes do not, in fact, perceive their brother or sister as disabled.

Siblings in general have different perceptions and experiences about having a disabled brother or sister. At a camp convened for siblings in Frambu, Norway in 2010, participants' narratives indicated that these perceptions and experiences are influenced by different factors that are either positive or negative. The time that the parents spend with the disabled child; the kind of treatment the disabled child gets from the parents; for example, if

the siblings suspect that their parents seem to treat the siblings differently from the disabled child, it usually has negative consequences. If the treatment is almost the same, the results tend to be positive. Jealousy and sometimes hatred may be the result of different treatment that is given to a non-disabled child as opposed to the other. However, it may happen that what a non-disabled sibling perceives as different treatment in favour of the disabled child, may just not be the issue. And in certain situations parents do not have a choice because of the demands of the condition.

When approaching work with the siblings, it is very important to understand the changes in dynamics that disability brings to the family and the subsequent challenges that these boys and girls face because of their family situation. In my work experience, I have found that whatever the situation, growing up with a disabled brother or a sister is not the same as having a brother or a sister without a disability. When a child with a disability is born, the family situation changes, the impact of disability in the family at large depends upon the coping strategies used and the support available to the family (*NICHCY News Digest*, 1988).

Many siblings, with whom I have worked, have told me that their parents give more attention to their disabled brother or sister. Depending on the type of disability and the amount of medical attention it demands, such disability may result in disruption and involuntary adjustment within the family. The siblings' perception is that they are expected to be more responsible, supportive and mature beyond their years. Often they experience intense feelings of sadness, fear, anxiety and anger. At the same time they feel they must understand, stay strong and not express their feelings and emotions. At times, some force themselves to stay positive so that they do not become an extra burden on their parents. Therefore, many of these young people become experts in hiding their feelings from their parents.

Some studies on siblings give the impression that they have little knowledge about the disability of their brother or sister and the consequences of disability to the family dynamics as a whole (Kernodle 1982; McKeever, 1983). In such situations, the siblings often create imaginary information. This may include fanciful ideas about the disability being contagious, possible cures, the death of the disabled child, giving birth themselves to disabled children when they become adults, and the financial changes to which the family has to adjust. In my

view, the siblings should rather be given as much information as possible to avoid the above. "Sibling relationship issues are far more complex, and the adjustment of unaffected siblings is more closely related to sibling perceptions of being treated differently by their parents than to the siblings' relationship with one another" (Fisman et al 2000:374).

Disabilities manifest themselves in many different ways. Disabilities such as ADHD and Klinefelter syndrome, contribute to uncontrolled behaviour. Such disabilities differ from those which affect the physical appearance, which again is different from a disability that affects the person physiologically. It is also not unlikely that some disabilities may affect one person in more than one area. Mostly the difference is in the way each disability manifests itself and the consequential demands. All these issues need to be communicated to the siblings so that they can have an understanding of what is going on.

#### *Implications of parental support for the Disabled Child.*

Although parents must be prepared to offer the necessary support to the child with a disability, (and in my work experience, it is the mother that seems to be the primary caregiver of functionally impaired children), and spend time managing the everyday schedule for the disabled child, at times the consequence of this care-giving and support may result in insufficient attention being paid to the sibling(s) particularly as often parent(s) also need to step in to fill the gaps created by non-interaction with age mates. Giallo (2011) suggests that extensive care giving and attention demands can be associated with parental stress, and Floyd & Gallagher (1997); Tonge et al (2004), report that the behaviour of the disabled child contributes to parental stress and sibling rivalry, thus affecting the sibling. Of interest is that Fuller and Rankin (1994) show that mothers of children with Downs' syndrome experience less stress compared to mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder.

Sometimes children with functional impairment need extensive medical attention that necessitates constant visits to doctors and other care givers. This results in disruption of family time. Sometimes parent(s) have to spend long hours in hospitals during check-ups and operations. These procedures can even disrupt planned family holidays. Some siblings from Frambu have reported feelings of anger and hatred towards their disabled brother or sister because every time they were about to go on holiday, the journey had to be cancelled. In

extreme cases parents have given up planning holiday trips altogether because of the possibility of disruption.

### *Behaviour patterns manifested by siblings*

Studies of siblings who have a brother or a sister with disability report that siblings manifest a number of psychological patterns of behaviour. These patterns of behaviour may be seen as correlations, and the effects of living with a disabled brother or sister, but may also simply be coincidental. However, it could be quite careless to look at these behavioural symptoms only through the lens of cause and effect, because some of them may not be the result of the disability in the family. Perhaps there are other causes of these kinds of behaviours, which are not directly attributable to this situation.

Giallo's (2012) findings suggest that a stressful life in many families have correlations with psychological problems. These potential problems will then be exacerbated by the presence of a disabled child. In some cases there is evidence of potential adjustment that can be observed in some families with a disabled child. Begum & Blacher (2011) suggest two behavioural modifications of growing up with a functionally impaired brother or sister.

1. Internalised behaviour (acting in): Acting in is a behaviour pattern in which persons hold their emotions and feelings within themselves. They have tendencies to regard themselves as the cause of the problem. Most of these people display symptoms of anxiety and depression, and some can be suicidal.
2. Externalised behaviour (acting out): Acting out behaviour patterns are ways through which a person tries to free themselves from emotional feelings by blaming others for their problems. These expressions may take the form of verbal and emotional abuse. Acting out can also be understood as attention seeking. As mentioned above, parents have to give most of their attention to the disabled child, resulting in the sibling seeking attention by any means possible, the unfortunate consequence often being negative attention rather than positive attention.

The findings by Fisman et al. (1996) support the previous reports by suggesting that siblings are at risk of developmental problems, anger, adaptation difficulties and aggressive behaviours. "The unaffected siblings of PDD children will have persistent adjustment difficulties over a 3-year period compared with siblings of DS and control children" (Fisman



et al 2000:370). By the same token, Orsmond & Seltzer (2009) and Sharp & Rossiter (2002) reported social problems.

### Considering special needs where these are not as a result of a child with disability

It is undisputable that disability and minority identities are not one and the same thing. And the term special needs does not try to suggest there are similarities between the two. What leads me to use the term is more the implication and the changes and alterations families have to make in order to accommodate the individual in their daily lives. These adjustments are in order to prevent themselves from the suffering that may be results of the individual's behaviour. In many cases certain individuals may be excluded in certain social arenas to an extent such that certain adjustments must be made for them if they are to participate. Members of families have to pay special attention in the presence or the absence of these individuals. For the purpose of this research I refer to these as people with special needs. People with special needs also include those people who have suffered trauma and abuse, and because of their condition, a certain kind of attention has to be paid to avoid re-traumatisation or trigger the effect of the experience.

Moreover, even 'disability' as a concept has its own ambiguities as to who is, or who is not, disabled. Some disabilities do not manifest themselves in a way that is visible to the eye and therefore certain considerations have to be made in their regard. Special needs have been associated with learning, or if a child is having problems with learning due to certain disabilities. According to O'Mahony, Reiser, & Rieser (2011) Special Educational Needs is a framework provided by authorities to identify and meet any educational needs, minimise the amount of discrimination and close the gap of opportunities between non-disabled and disabled pupils. In other words, this definition is used for legal entitlement to certain benefits or support for educational needs from the government in countries like USA, Norway, France, England and Australia. Unfortunately in the South African context, the framework only exists in the constitution and there is a large gap between the constitution and the practice especially in townships and rural areas. In countries such as Norway, there are three factors that qualify a pupil to benefit from this framework: i) considerably more learning difficulties than the peers; ii) an impairment that inhibits the pupil from using educational facilities that are made available by the authorities for peers for educational

purposes and ;iii) if the pupil is within the age that requires them to be at school and would not be able to do so if no such provision was made for them (O'Mahony C & Reiser R, 2011). However, these categories exclude other disability groups and illnesses that qualify them as disabled, but are not referred to as having special needs in the context of education. On the contrary, not all children with special educational needs are defined as having disability.

There are certain limitations to this model of learning disability or need, because the model works best for those pupils with clear and critical needs who would obviously benefit from this provision (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills- Ofsted, 2010). However, these would mostly be determined by medical judgement. Ofsted elaborates on the fact that outside of critical needs there is always inconsistency with the consideration of special educational needs in local, national and international arenas. (2010)

The study by Barbara Vogt Sorensen (2006a) about populations with special needs focuses far beyond special needs for educational purposes and causes associated with learning disability, and she includes other groups within the definition of special needs which informs this study. Vogt Sorensen argues that emergency management and response fields have different ways of defining a population with special needs. They are differentiated by various features, "medical, cultural, cognitive, racial, physical, or the combination thereof – that differentiate them from other people when it comes to the needs or different kind of consideration." (Vogt Sorensen, 2006a:3) I want to elaborate on that list, which should be even longer when one considers different characteristics in the fields of medicine, social welfare and correctional services in the context of the family. These individuals qualify within the category of special needs because of the adjustments families have to make in the context of family functioning. In some cases families have to pay special attention in their presence or their absence. For example, people with alcohol and substance abuse disorder, victims of abuse and neglect, youth who are involved in crime, gangsterism, theft and other illegal activities, people suffering from post-traumatic stress and other antisocial behaviours, to mention but a few. Other groups are in this category because of the way families and society relates to them and the stigma attached to them. These are: AIDS and HIV patients, convicts and ex-convicts, individuals with different sexual preferences and orientation, certain religious belief and other minorities whose orientation and preferences are opposed by society. My mention of these many groups is because of the consequence these identities

have for the family specifically and the society generally. In other words, the manner in which a specific identity affects the functioning of the person, varies on different levels. Any condition or behaviour that significantly limits an individual or a group of people from participating in social and life activities, such as providing for oneself and/or family, working, walking, speaking, or sexual preference, or because of impairment, discrimination, self and social labelling or otherwise.

I am aware that the choice of putting together disability and other minority identities can be problematic in different discourses because these categories manifest themselves differently and they may not have the same cause or outcome. But, I would argue that there are a number of similarities with regards to the effect these identities have on the functioning of the family. For example in the disability discourse the assumption is that all disabled people are the same, supported by the very term disability, which portrays disabled people as disadvantaged individuals whose impairment cause suffering (Stucki, G, 2007). In fact in some cases there are kin relations between disability and antisocial behaviours, because some of these behaviours are the result, correlate or cause, of disability.

### Towards a model of theatrical intervention: my first attempts in Norway

This section will record my first step in attempting to move towards a drama model to engage with the siblings, parents and other family members; indeed all those who are affected by the person in the family grouping with a disability. The embodiment of the experiences of siblings of children with disability in dramatic or theatrical forms raises their awareness that what is happening to them may well be similar to what is happening to others in the group. Some participants may already be aware of what is happening to them before they get involved in drama. However in most cases, people in a challenging situation may have the perception that the experience only applies to them.

My focus is to develop a model that will enable the family to look beyond the immediate effects of disability and the experiences thereof. I want the family members to be able to see other underlying factors that influence the way they perceive disability and its implications for the family by using a theatre model for the family to examine, analyse and interrogate how other family members contribute to the effect of disability beyond the most obvious

reasons. The community is a place where some special needs and disabilities are constructed and experienced. Personal experience becomes a social experience in relationships with other people. The concept of self is a way of understanding the manner in which people can feel both linked to, and separated from, the community they inhabit. How a community responds to persons who in some sense are seen as different, is considered, using the idea of identity, especially negative identity.

In the first instance I designed workshops that were meant to introduce siblings of children with disabilities to drama techniques, including Boalian Forum Theatre. The workshops focused on introducing and practicing drama techniques, and learning to communicate using non-verbal expression, physical images and learning the skill of interpreting images. On the individual level, the aims for participants were exploring different means of expression, different ways of solving problems and exploring someone else's way of solving or dealing with the problem. Furthermore, the aims of the workshop included developing my skills as a facilitator. Moreover, I was introducing drama as a credible and reliable working method which I hope will be used at Frambu when working with families.

The first stage focused on gaining approval for the project both from Frambu and the Research Board of Ethics in Norway. The application was then followed by the recruitment of the participants and the circulation of a consent letter to the families who were attending Frambu's course 22–26 April and 3–7 June to prepare the siblings for the project and gain permission from the parents.

In the second stage I facilitated two sets of workshops, on 23–25 April and 4–6 June for siblings alone to participate at Frambu. Mr David Barr (a special teacher at Frambu) came twice to the session on behalf of Dr T Vatne (who is a psychologist and my supervisor at Frambu) to observe and evaluate my performance in the process. While the siblings were attending the workshops of 90 minutes each on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, their siblings with disabilities were following the normal daily program at Frambu.

### *Participants*

The boys and girls who participated in the workshops were siblings to children with rare disabilities, who attended family courses which are specifically designed for specific

syndromes or syndromes which share similar characteristics. The first group were siblings to children who have Fragile X syndrome,<sup>1</sup> and the second one was for Klinefelter syndrome.<sup>2</sup> These syndrome or types of disabilities are very different in genetic characteristics, manifestation and they posed different challenges to their family.

The first workshop consisted of six participants and the second of eight. In the first workshop there were two sets of sisters, which I will call A1 and A2, and B1 and B2. B2 joined the group on the second day of the workshop, as she was a year younger than the targeted age group. In spite of this, I suggested to one of the staff members that she should join the group because she looked mature enough to be part of the group. This brought another dynamic to the group. It was quite interesting to see how different the sisters were in their personalities. Both A2 and B2 showed more daring because they were not as self-conscious as their respective elder sisters during improvisation. They also took up the challenge of playing a mature role. A1, on the other hand was quite mature, most sympathetic and always took the role of elder sibling. But where there was hierarchy in roles she wanted others to feel good. Maybe this is how she, as the eldest child in the family, shows sympathy toward her younger siblings, making sure that they feel good in her presence. A2 was quite mature for her age; she took her roles very seriously and was not afraid to do what the role demanded. B1 was a bit shy in the beginning but opened up as we went along. She was also creative. She did not see the point of persuading if things were not going as she expected. B2 however was not shy like her sister; she tried out things as they were suggested. She played the role of the elder sister who has disability in the short play. The fifth girl, C, was relatively good in improvisation and other drama exercises; and I was quite satisfied with her involvement. The boy, D had a short focus span and demanded a lot of attention. This kind of behaviour may have something to do with the fact that most of the attention at home is given to the child with the impairment. He is described as having ADHD syndrome, (a

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<sup>1</sup> Fragile X is a genetic condition that usually involves a number of development difficulties including facial deformation, social anxiety, variations of mental retardation and sometimes self—harm such as hand biting. According to Stevenson et al (2012:89) these are the most recognisable symptoms, and these features and behaviours remain into adulthood.

<sup>2</sup> Klinefelter is a hereditary disorder that affects glands secreting hormones. Individuals with this condition have an extra X chromosome (XXY, instead of the normal XY male chromosome). The condition can be suspected at puberty when the individual begins to develop blown up breasts and a feminine body shape as a result of lessened male sex hormones. Klinefelter syndrome is one of the less identified conditions, but is responsible for most sexual development defects and infertility. Those having this syndrome may also have physical disorders and develop emotional problems, including impulsive behaviour (Wynbrandt and Ludman 2000).

condition in which lack of concentration and short attention span is one of the symptoms). The participants were all aged between 12 and 16 years.

In the second workshop there were three sisters from the same family (E1, E2 and E3), three other girls (F, G and H) and two boys (J and K), aged between 9 and 16 years. E1 was both the eldest in the family and in the whole group.

### *The workshops*

We met three days each week. Each workshop session of approximately 90 minutes had a theme that is connected to the next session, and a performance of a short play was planned to take place on the last day of the workshops. I began each meeting by asking the participants to form a circle. This structure was meant to create some kind of a ritual, something that is not common in a school situation, but I would think that it is not an unusual structure either. The circle also served as a mechanism to differentiate between a drama workshop and a school pattern whereby the teacher is mostly the one standing and giving instructions. So this format enabled the participants to see each other and forged a sense of equality amongst the participants and also between the facilitator (me) and the participants.

The first day focused on participants getting to know each other by using name games in a safe and unthreatening environment, then different techniques of drama; for example, mime, mirroring, role-play and improvisation. The second day focused on the family, using improvisation and role-play, and the third focused on the individual within the family in order to allow the individual voice to be audible within the collective. In many families adult voices tend to dominate younger voices.

Dramatic techniques used in the workshops included mime, which consists of performing actions rather than speaking words to convey a character or a situation. Mime can be realistic, slow or larger than life. Mirroring is an activity in which participants work in pairs, facing each other, one leading the action without words and the other copying the action as closely and precisely as possible. Role-playing is characterised by pretending to be someone else and behaving as they would. The behaviour is influenced by a) status b) profession and c) attitude. Finally, in improvisation, participants (as we have seen in role-play), enact

activities and relationships which tell a story, making the place and circumstances clear. Unlike mime, the participants use spoken language, which they make up themselves. These drama techniques were the tools with which to develop expressive and communicative skills in the aesthetic world of drama.

### *Evaluation*

The question I have is whether the experience of drama brought any changes at all in the lives of the siblings. It is not always easy to give a straight answer because it is even difficult to see what influences and changes drama has made on the participants. How participants perceive the drama experience differs from person to person and in different times. However, I can associate, reflect and draw conclusions through paying attention to the way the participants responded to the workshops.

The participants had different responses to the exercises we did, and some had more challenges than the others. For example, in the first group, two participants were challenged by mirroring. B1 came to a standstill and decided she did not want to continue with the exercise, even though I tried to persuade her to try again with my help. The boy D's challenge was different from the girl's because he was rushing the exercise, so I paired with him and we did things slowly, because the purpose of the exercise is not finishing the exercise but the experience the participant goes through. These responses to a seemingly easy exercise caught me by surprise. I can only assume what the cause of the response could have been but cannot be sure. D's explanation was that usually nobody bothers to correct him because he never gets anything right because of his condition (ADHD). However, this explanation on its own may just be correlated to the condition, as there may have been many other influences that we were not aware of at that moment. So, I spent some time with him and eventually he got things right. He was also proud to be able to achieve something like the others, no matter how easy it seemed to me and others. Through drama he discovered something about himself he did not think he could do.

We also tried Columbian Hypnosis (Boal, 2002:52), in which one participant leads his/her partner by moving his/her finger in all directions and his/her partner must follow their partner's finger faithfully with their entire body, leading from the head. The leader has the power to lead the other wherever s/he wants within the boundaries of safety. There were

giggles and laughter in the room because the participants seemed to be enjoying the exercise. When I asked them what they thought about the exercise, most of them replied that it was good to have that power over somebody because it was not like that at home, which is an interesting association to their everyday lives. However, one participant commented that the interesting thing about the exercise was being able to let go and not having to decide all the time. From this reflection it is not difficult to imagine the constant decision making some of the participants may be subjected to and even the possibility of feeling in control. For her the exercise gave her the relief, because someone else decides and she just had to follow. For me this indicates that through drama this participant has learned an important skill – that of reflection – which has an effect on her attitudes.

Most of the activities were chosen to raise awareness of the communication issues in our lives. Each pair, or group, demonstrated different kinds of reactions to the proposal in the action of the drama. When the participants explored scenarios in role in the third workshop, they actively explored the experience and pressures presented by the scenario, involving a parent and child.

#### “I Want My Own Room”

Characters: A Mother and two children are at home after school. The daughter is busy shouting at a sibling who is pestering her to play because the sibling at home is lonely. The mother interrupts the fight between the two children and addresses the child who is shouting:

Mother: I’m not going to say it again; I won’t have you talking to your sister like that.

Son/Daughter: I never have privacy! She comes into my room and messes with my things all the time...

Mother: Everybody needs friends sometimes. Why can’t you just be friendly for a while with your sister?

Son/Daughter: I just want to be alone in my room!

Mother: Aren’t you being a bit selfish?

In this exercise the participants switch roles as one becomes the mother and the other becomes the child. Then the roles are reversed when the participant who played the mother



plays the role of the child, so all the participants are enabled to enact, as well as to perceive the reaction of the parent in a given situation. The participants were given the opportunity to step into parents' or adults' shoes. This scenario enabled some of the participants to reflect on their own situation. The participants, especially in the first group, could relate to these situations very easily because some of them have daily experience of similar situations because of the nature of the disability of their disabled siblings.

### *Trying Forum Theatre*

For the first workshop on Thursday evening 25 April we managed to present a short performance by the siblings for their families in the gym. The performance was an official marking of the end of the workshops for the siblings and was intended to include the audience in the performance in the form of forum theatre (which is fully discussed in Chapter's Three and Four).<sup>3</sup> In classical Forum Theatre, usually the group chooses a situation that illustrates a lived experience of the entire group which is dramatised by a small portion of the same group and observed by the others. Then the spectators have a right to stop the action of the drama whenever they feel they have an idea of a solution to a certain problem in the drama. They can also step onto the stage and try to change the behaviour of the protagonist in the drama, by so doing they become spect-actors. In our case, the workshop participants and I prepared the play in advance to perform for the parents and other siblings and Frambu staff.

In our short play the mother asks her young daughter to look after the daughter with disability, who is the elder sister to the girl, while she is going shopping with her friend. The girl has been promised a reward for doing the job, but at the last moment she changes her mind and tells the mother that she cannot do it because of her previous experience when she looked after her elder sister. Things became complicated for her either because the mother took a longer time than they agreed upon or because of the manifestation of the disability. Whatever the cause may have been, the result was that the older sister became uncontrollable for the younger sister to manage and on top of it all the mother did not pick

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<sup>3</sup> Due to the issues of time we did not manage to have a performance with the second group.

up the phone when she called. At this moment the elder sister gets angry about this conversation, knocks over a glass filled with water and sits on the floor in protest. The mother begins by trying to reason with the disabled girl, and tells her that that is not a good way to behave. Then the younger sibling asks the mother how she is supposed to deal with her elder sister? When she behaves like that in the presence of her mother there is no way she is going to improve when her mother is gone. Then the mother gets angry and commands the disabled girl to go to her room and be ashamed. Now she suggests to the younger daughter that she will receive more money than they agreed upon. In the end the girl tells her mother that she has decided that she is not looking after her elder sister. Her mother responds by putting pressure on the girl, making herself a victim of the situation, by saying that she, as parent, does not have a chance to do anything: she is always at home looking after her daughters. As family the younger sister should understand and help every now and then. In the meantime a friend who was going shopping with the mother comes in to fetch her for the trip. She is told that the youngest daughter has changed her mind, the mother asks for a little time to talk to the girl. The short play ends when the girl totally refuses to look after her older sister.

In the play A1 played mother, A2 mother's friend, C younger sister, B2 disabled sister and D the friend's boyfriend who only enters briefly at the end. B1 was not comfortable with the idea of performing in front of the audience.

During the rehearsal I encouraged them to use their own words so that they are not confined to the script. The script was there to give suggestion as to how the characters are expected to conduct themselves. In other words there was a collaborative process in concept of roles, in that to a certain extent I initiated role creation and the siblings took the roles and played the roles. They took part in the creation of the dramatic world by embodying the roles. The short play is a representation of a situation in a family where there is a member with disability, which may resemble a situation of the participants yet it is not derived from an actual narrative of the participants in the workshops. However, in the literature around the effects of disability in the family and specifically siblings, there is evidence of caregiving as one of the challenges faced by siblings – especially girls. At the same time some of the siblings did mention the issues of looking after their younger siblings with disability both at home or at school. In the reports by siblings there was evidence of

personal choice and the expectations by others, or they feel no one cares for the sibling with disability so they feel obliged to do so.

Theatre can be used to raise awareness of why things are happening the way they are. For example, sometimes it is easier to understand why things happen when the situation is enacted and experienced in a play form rather than being given an explanation. In theatre the experience is re-lived during enactment and becomes fresh both in the body and mind. This is different from telling or talking about that experience, because some of the detail of the experience has become just a memory. This does not suggest that the oral narrative is of no importance, but in theatre the participants have a possibility to explore many different angles and understandings of the situation.

So with the short play performance I was attempting to raise awareness and I was also trying to instigate a discussion with the parents. I wanted them to experience the scenario as a representation of a worst case so that they could negotiate to a better situation on stage through active participation. On the other hand I wanted a situation in which argument against the scenario, bringing different perspectives, would be an advice to others who have similar situations in real life: in other words the dramatic activity affecting the real life situation.

Unfortunately I did not receive the response I was looking for. Instead one audience member came on stage and rearranged the situation so that there would be a quick solution by changing the scene. She sent away the disabled sister before discussing the issue about care giving with the young sister and deciding to ask for somebody else or cancel the shopping tour. Quick solutions do not address the problem per se but only deal with the mechanics of performance. Such solutions can be used as censorship to avoid dealing with the problem. Another woman in the audience, who I guessed was a grandmother, came on stage and said that the situation should be discussed between adults and not in the presence of children (who were presenting the performance and watching from the audience as well). In my perception she was also doing the same thing as the first one, but in a different way.

However after everything was over, another woman from the audience came on stage and asked me about the ages at which children can use this form of drama, because she saw the potential in using the drama with boys who lack concentration at her school. My reply was

that drama is for all ages but it is easier for people who have a deeper knowledge of drama and theatre to facilitate such work.

In all the improvisation or role-play activities I encouraged participants to use their own words so that they could feel the ownership of the work and be the agents of their stories. I encouraged them to have their own voices by telling in their own way. I did not feel I was always successful with that because in most cases the participants used the text I provided. However it is hard to tell for sure because in other improvisation exercises they managed to use their own words. The reason could be that they were not ready at that moment.

### *The Second Frambu Workshop*

The second workshop in June was conducted with a group who were siblings of children with Klinefelter Syndrome: a sex chromosomal disorder that occurs in males who have extra X chromosomes in most of their cells. The syndrome is characterised by varying degrees of cognitive, social, behavioural and learning disabilities (Akslaede et. al 2013). Most of the siblings in this group expressed different feelings and emotions about their identity. Some expressed the negative ways in which their societies relate to them, situations that result in them having to fight and defend their siblings with the conditions. Some of the younger ones expressed their fearful experiences with their brothers, when their brothers are violent and uncontrollable. However most of them do understand that what their brothers are doing is a result of the condition. Some of these narratives came to the surface after an exercise in which the participants were instructed to study pictures and try to embody individual figures in the pictures. One such picture appears below.



**Image used to stimulate improvisation and discussion**

I asked one of the girls, just as I did everyone, to identify the figures in the picture and what was going on in that moment. In her narrative the image represented an experience she goes through quite often at home in which the brother would torment her by saying things and making grimaces to hurt her. On the other hand the mother would try to stop the situation trying by all means to talk to the boy and end up giving up because the boy would not stop.

This exercise was the reverse of the tableaux, in which the participants use their own bodies to capture a moment. In retrospect the choice of this exercise raised some ethical questions, for me. I became uncertain as to the effects of the experience of doing the exercise and what these effects may have been to this little girl. After the exercise I checked if everyone was comfortable and fortunately they said they were. Nevertheless this girl managed to take me through a journey in her life from my position as an observer of the drama activity. For her the picture reminded her of her brother when he is saying unpleasant things to her, and that he laughs at her when she gets frustrated and is crying. It seemed like she has given up because of the fact that the boy has a condition in which some of the symptoms affect his behaviour. On the other hand their mother would do exactly as the woman in the picture because she does not know what to do with the boy.

What is interesting about this group is that I was a little bit nervous because they were young for workshop exercises that I had judged would be good for adolescents, but they surprised me very positively. Mostly the younger girls (E2, E3, F, G and H) were full of fantasy. Almost all the abstract, (non-realistic exercises) they understood very well and they were easily able to get into role. Their engagement fitted what I was expecting from the first group. The first group on the other hand responded better on more realistic improvisation, whereas in the second workshop E3, G and H always waited to see what the older girls were doing when we were doing realistic improvisation. In retrospect I think I had high expectations for the older siblings in the first group so that I was not acknowledging what they were doing because I had a certain kind of participation and involvement in my mind.

Sometimes it is possible that levels of engagement by the participants is misunderstood because the facilitator has certain qualities he is looking for in order to feel that he has done his duty. There are five aspects by which I evaluate participants' engagement in this project,

which are taken from Morgan and Saxton's Taxonomy of Personal Engagement (1989:27–30). These are: 1) Interest, 2) Involvement, 3) Commitment, 4) Internalisation and 5) Understanding. In my opinion, interest is characterised by the attendance of the participants in the workshop. Then the attention they demonstrate to what is going to happen in the moment, as well as their responses to what is being proposed, or their responses to the tasks given; in other words the curiosity they show to the exercises and games. Involvement is determined by the amount of engagement and the willingness to try different roles and scenarios – the ability to let go and allow yourself to be in the moment and experience the dramatic situation. Commitment is vital for the success of any activity. By this I mean adhering to the rules of the game so that the participants are emotionally and physically involved in the activities. When committed, it is easier for the participants to learn from the activities and this increases the chances of attitude or behaviour change. Internalisation is a process in which the participants incorporate what they have learnt from the dramatic experience with what they know from before. This happens when the participants associate the dramatic experience with their everyday life experience, in other words, the moment of reflection. Lastly, understanding happens during the process of interpretation. In this process one has to listen and observe in order to have points of view, thought, opinions and even feeling about a certain situation.

In the evaluation from the first group, parents expressed the importance of having a focus on the siblings and the importance, for the parents, of knowing what kind of challenges their children are facing. The parents expressed their satisfaction about the project and hoped that there would be more projects of this nature that catered for the siblings. One parent apologised about the clashes in time for the project preventing full participation of her children in the second workshop series. However, she wrote that her girls were quite satisfied with the project and reiterated the importance of the fact that siblings should be given room in the planning of the courses.

In my endeavour to create a theatrical participatory method that allows family members of people with special needs to pay attention to the dynamics and the implications of special needs (in this case disability) I designed drama workshops including Boalian Forum Theatre to introduce to siblings of children with disabilities. These drama techniques focused on communication, using different means of expression and presenting drama as a reliable and

effective method that could be used at Frambu when working with families. I planned exercises which I hoped would interest the siblings and be useful to them in real life. By actively participating I expected the participants to learn different ways of addressing their challenges. Despite the challenges experienced during the project, it has provided an indication of how siblings experience their relationships with the family and how their context forms their personality. Their engagement also demonstrated the different dynamics involved in living with a member with disability. On the other hand the project helped me to reflect on my facilitating skills and to reflect on how my expectations influence the outcomes of the intervention.



## CHAPTER THREE

### DRAWING ON THE TRADITIONS OF APPLIED THEATRE

Drawing on the available literature on Applied Theatre and Theatre of the Oppressed, this chapter lays the theoretical foundation for my second case study of Forum Theatre and my proposals for Dramaturgical Forum discussed in Chapter Four. This chapter studies theatrical forms in which the spect-actor interacts with the actors and intervenes within the action. It also takes a closer look at the rules pertaining to the passiveness of the audience. The discussion begins with an exploration of the concept of participatory theatre, or applied theatre activities, according to the principles of facilitation. Then the core aspects of Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed are discussed and examined.

#### Participating in Applied Theatre

According to Prendegast & Saxton (2009:6), Applied Theatre is a collective label that covers any drama or theatrical practices employed to bring positive change in human lives. Those who participate in this type of theatre may or may not have theatre craft. The audience of this theatre will benefit from the themes dealt with in the performance which usually deals with issues that concern them as individuals, families, minority identities or a whole community. Mda (1993:9) elaborates by arguing that "... people should have an active role in the creation of the theatre and the aims to use theatre as applicable method of adult education". Nicholson's study quotes Littlewood: "narrative displaying the ability of drama to influence social and personal transformation" (2005:1). Nicholson's definition of applied drama/theatre points at the specific intentions in using drama for the improvement of the individual and the creation of a better society. Participatory theatre is mostly concerned about the process of making theatre rather than with the finished product (2005:5). Jennings describes Dramatherapy as one of the arts therapies that uses theatre for clients and patients to deal with disorders and problems. She describes the frames which theatre uses, such as plays, rituals or myths, to enable participants to confront oppressive circumstances and connect their inner and outer realities (1992).

Taylor (2003:3) points out the social element of participatory theatre, as a space where people ... “connect and support each other and, where participant get the opportunity to articulate their identity and aspirations”. He elaborates that theatre is a vehicle to channel different viewpoints and may get us to explanations as to why things/event/disasters happen the way they do. Prendegast & Saxton see the art form as “central to the narrative, therapy, pedagogy, development and other functions that facilitate negotiation and dialogue about different identities and help us come to terms with our reality” (2009:191.) However, Schinina (2004) in her work in places disturbed by conflict and unrest, argues that theatre should not be utilised to reinforce what unites humans but focus on the differences and theatre’s ability to develop links between them.

In order to understand participatory or applied theatre, one has to examine the role of theatre in the society. At the beginning of the twentieth century, according to Schinina, of the many roles theatre had in society, there were three distinct roles: the social, emotional release, and entertainment (2004:17–31). Ever since, there has been a change in the way people perceive theatre and an expansion of the role of theatre in society. Among other things, theatre has been found not only to be cathartic but it can also be used as a tool in achieving long lasting emotional reparational results. In therapy the healing element of drama and theatre has been recognised. In education, drama and theatre has proved to be a didactic tool through which teaching and learning occurs. In politics, social activists have discovered the dialectic element in drama/theatre by which they can engage in political discourse and marginalised minorities have found a voice to express their concerns about their world and identities. In development, drama/theatre has been proven to be very beneficial in the fostering of cultures, identities, histories and the beliefs of different societies. Drama/theatre has been recognised to be an effective medium in communication which is necessary for personal and social development (Mda 1993)

What can be understood from what is mentioned above is that drama and theatre are important cultural elements that reflect human behaviour, the interaction between humans and their environment; the intra-action between humans as well as the conflict and obstacles which are the outcomes of that interaction. These interactions can result in the exclusion of certain individuals or groups and limit the participation in, or benefit from, different avenues of society. The interactions may displace individuals and societies,

resulting in the dominance or oppression of individuals or societies by others which result in inequality, poverty and distortion of culture by political structures as well as psychological and emotional instability and behavioural problems.

Participatory or Applied Theatre can be seen as a general term for theatre and drama activities produced to exploit the above mentioned capacities of theatre for the purpose of bringing about change in human lives that allows active involvement of the audience in the process.

### *Audience participation*

Participatory theatre is based on the idea that the audience or spect-actors are expected to participate in the theatre event. Jackson argues that a certain amount of participation has always been at the centre of all types of theatre that allege to have a pedagogic or interfering role. He goes on to argue that "... all theatre is participatory, to a certain level" (2007:235–240). However, what differentiates audience participation in participatory theatre from the mainstream theatre is the participation of the audience in the performance. Prendegast & Saxton further suggest that participation all the way through the phases of the theatre event is the basic component of participatory theatre. (2009:187) These theatre practices have flexible borders separating the audience from the actors. Jackson extends this idea by pointing out that the focus in this regard is the "theatrical activity" that violates the "boundary lines" separating the stage and the auditorium in order to create a clear and to the point type of commitment in all forms of participation (2007:235–240).

Audience participation is an aesthetic way of searching for new ways of expression, exploring and learning. In the mainstream theatre, audiences are socialised to be passive and surrender to the rules of theatre. In fact these rules determine when the audience should come into the theatre, talk, or renounce other activities and focus their attention on the actors on stage. I would argue that this passiveness of the audience is a result of a non-verbal but understood agreement between the actors and the audience, because mainstream theatre depends on the audience for the performance to take place. If one had to dig into the archives of history that connect theatre to ritual, it would be possible to discover that in ritual performances there is no demarcated line between the performers

and the spectators. Even today in most traditional cultural performances there is no clear divide between performers and spectators because at a certain stage in the performance some of the spectators will end up performing. However, in such performances there are areas which are designated for those for whom the ritual is intended, yet the spectators' involvement in the ritual is very important. This explanation is an attempt to highlight that the roots of audience passiveness is not just a choice but a mutual contract between the actor and spectator. For the sake of this study I draw attention to Theatre of the Oppressed, because most of my research and theory will be based therein since it emphasises breaking the wall between actors and the audience.

## The Theatre of the Oppressed

Augusto Boal is a Brazilian theatre philosopher and practitioner, whose theatrical interest as a spectator began in the 1950s. His political sympathy may have been influenced by his experience of black people in Brazil. He used to feel pity for black people, he felt sorry for black labourers who worked hard and earned very little (Boal, 2001:112). After he became friends with Abdias, a black actor, his pity turned to admiration when he realised the excellence of black people in theatre even when surrounded by a lot of prejudice.

In the theatre, for instance, a black character was either a slave or a servant, and even then it would often be a white actor blacked up. The idea of using a dark-skinned person for the role of Othello would have been unthinkable! Any pigment in the skin was a stigma! After Abdias, my characters became less maudlin and resigned, and more rebellious and affirmative. I began to like subversives, heroic characters, fighters. Down with melancholy! (2001:112).

The above statements show some traces of the formation of Theatre of the Oppressed, and perhaps his dedication to the liberation of the peasants and labourers. It is therefore not surprising that when he started his career as a director, he wanted to use theatre to articulate his vision.

According to Boal the purpose of the Theatre of the Oppressed was to change the dynamics of the popular theatre and to suggest different methods of achieving political freedom, using theatre as a method to examine and explore social issues and problems. Boal's theatre has had a huge influence on the field of community performance. As a method, theatre of the oppressed techniques have been used all over the world in health, therapy, welfare, prisons,

politics, community development and in research. Boal focuses his theatre on examining oppression in society and the individual. He began creating participatory theatre in the 1950s and 1960s in Rio de Janeiro while he was Artistic Director for Arena Theatre, and also a Worker's Party activist. Boal was forced to leave Brazil for political reasons and went to live in other countries in Latin America where he developed a series of theatre techniques under the umbrella: Theatre of the Oppressed.

Boal was greatly influenced by education activist Paulo Freire's "critical pedagogy" and Bertolt Brecht's theatrical dramaturgy of social realism.

Paulo Freire was a pedagogue who worked in Brazil. For political reasons (he was imprisoned in 1964), he spent time in other countries including a period in Geneva where he worked as an educational advisor for the World Council of Churches (Arnett, 2002). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was written while he was in Chile. In 1986 he returned to Brazil and became involved with the socialist political party and eventually became a secretary of education for Sao Paulo city.

Freire's analysis of the social situation is based on the Marxist ideas of dialectical materialism, in which the oppressor oppresses the oppressed. Freire's main concern is with the state of consciousness of the oppressed. The historical fate of the oppressed is to stand up against the oppressor and demand their humanity which the oppressor denies them (Freire, 1981). True as this statement might be, it does not quite cover at least one of the contexts from which this study was developed. Although in some countries or rural communities the socio-economic-political issues may be the structural and material conditions that shape special needs, in the case of disability the causes tend to be physiological. Nevertheless, in the case of disability, many families do end up with issues of oppressors and oppressed, so I stick by my choice of Boal as my theoretical guide, in spite of practical differences in the situation of the work itself.

For Freire, conscientisation is basic to any democratic educational process and it involves recognising and evaluating the structure of power, for example the teacher/student relationship, in which the subject (teacher) is conventionally deemed to be the one who possesses knowledge; and the recipient object (student) is taken to be an empty vessel that needs to be filled with knowledge (Freire, 1981). Conscientisation is a different phenomenon

from “consciousness raising” in that the former transforms. According to Mda, in the process of development, conscientisation happens when the target community takes part actively in the naming of their problems reflecting on the reasons for their existence, and becomes involved in the decision making on the specific actions to take in order to solve the problems. Mda argues that naming and reflection must not be limited to the experiences on the ground, but they should also include the structural causes (historical, economic and political factors) of the problem, which must also be examined in all levels (1993:164).

Boal was also influenced by the social aesthetics of Brecht. Bertolt Brecht was a director, playwright, manager, theorist and poet. Born in Germany, he played a crucial role in the development of political theatre theories and practices around the world. He challenged Aristotelian poetics that delegate the spectator’s power to the dramatic character so that the latter may think and feel on behalf of the spectator. Rather Brecht proposes a poetics in which the spectator delegates power to the character that acts on behalf of the spectator, whilst the spectator reserves the right to think for himself, often in opposition to the character (Willet, 1959:170). Like Boal, Brecht developed theories that proposed that spectators could be consciously critical observers and active participants in the making of meaning (Martin & Bial, 2000:1). In Brechtian Epic Theatre audiences are constantly reminded that they are watching a play and the actor’s gestures are used to present emotions. The emphasis for both performers and audience is on acknowledging that the actor is playing a character as opposed to being him (her) self a character. The audiences are challenged to be active in their reception of a theatre performance, but do not themselves actively change the course of the play. Brecht’s Epic Theatre appealed less to the emotions than the reason. His theatre focused more on the narrative than on the plot and each scene could stand on its own in the play. In this form of theatre, actors therefore distance themselves from the emotions of the characters (Emunah, 1994). Similarly, in Jennings’ (1992:15) use of scenarios in her dramatherapy sessions with groups or families, she makes the participants aware of the frame they are working in by always reminding them that they are involved in a dramatic play in order to enable participants to maintain distance between themselves and the roles/characters they play. Yet paradoxically, her intention is to make her clients get close to their reality by bringing elements of the participants’ reality into the imaginary or dramatic realm. Brecht on the other end wanted his theatre to make people

think about the world they are living in, and he paid less attention to the emotions of the audience. However, he did not reject the fact that theatre can be emotional (Willet 1959:170). On the contrary, Boal's goals were to change the dynamics of the conventional theatre into popular theatre in which the audience could participate. In the Theatre of the Oppressed, the audience is activated; moving from a passive spectator to a spectator who actively intervenes with the action on stage. His vision was that the spectator analyses and claims the responsibility to transform the reality they are living in. Thus, he developed an interactive theatre that breaks the wall that separates actor from the audience.

It is due to the flexibility of these techniques that I envisage using them with families of people with special needs. Because Theatre of the Oppressed is about oppression, I want to use these techniques for addressing the needs of the parents and the siblings. The Theatre of the Oppressed offers a space for the siblings to explore and project their oppression (challenges they face due to their brother or sister with special needs) and a method to propose or find solutions. The siblings prepare a scene that the parents together with the siblings with disability can watch once, as in the Forum Theatre. Then they could play the scene the second time in which the audience has the possibility to interfere in what is happening on stage, and offer suggestions, either by getting on stage to play the suggestion, or for those who have an idea, but are scared to stand in front of many people, they can suggest an idea – just as in Simultaneous Dramaturgy. Therefore the kind of theatre I am proposing is a cross section between Forum Theatre and Simultaneous Dramaturgical Forum.

### *Spect-actor*

From the beginning when Boal and his troupe used to travel to perform for peasants and workers, the spectators were allowed to propose different ideas about the trajectory of the action to the actors on stage, in what is called Simultaneous Dramaturgy. The actors would improvise and enacted every suggested idea and always refer to the spectators to hear if they were satisfied with the action. This continued until one day a woman who was not satisfied with the way the actors were portraying her suggestion stepped onto the stage and showed them how she wanted the action to be. Boal suggested that that was the first spect-actor (1979). So, he realised that this is a better way of doing his theatre. In fact, this and

other incidents made him adjust his theatre so that it allowed audience members to engage actively with the performance. Audiences suggest courses of action to the actors on stage. Seemingly his techniques are not developed only because of the oppression experienced by the powerless, but also through the response to challenges from the dissatisfaction of his audiences.

Unlike conventional forms of theatre where the spectator observes what the actors are doing on stage, in the Theatre of the Oppressed there is a thin line between the actor and the spectator, because he is expected to take part in the action, to interfere and intervene. He is called a Spect-actor. In fact the actor and the spectator are one, hence the spect-actor. The code of non-interference and non-intervention is destroyed. In the Theatre of the Oppressed, anyone who feels like they have something to contribute in the action is allowed to. However, no one is forced to bring any proposition to the action if they do not want to. Boal underlines the importance of the spectators' presence even when they are not physically participating in the action, the probability of engagement.

### *Simultaneous Dramaturgy*

The primary goal of the Theatre of the Oppressed is to use theatre to encourage dialogue about social issues, and to encourage the interaction by bridging the gap between the performer and the spectator. To achieve these goals, Boal and his collaborators devised a technique called Simultaneous Dramaturgy in which the members of the audience are invited to intervene and contribute to the findings or influence the action towards solving the dramatic conflict. In Simultaneous Dramaturgy the audience members are invited for the first time to contribute to what is happening on stage without necessitating a physical presence on stage. Here it is the question of performing a short scene of ten to twenty minutes, proposed by a local resident, one who lives in the *barrio*. Helen Nicholson concurs that this kind of theatre is characterised by the participation of community members in creating a piece of theatre that has special resonance for that community. Moreover she links this technique to radical people's theatre (2005:10). In Simultaneous Dramaturgy, the fourth wall that divides the spectator and the actor is dissolved and it enables the audience members to become co-creators of the theatrical event. At the same time they are contributing towards meaningful dialogue about alternative solutions to real human conflict.



Simultaneous Dramaturgy technique involves actors staging a scene/performance that depicts an oppressive situation that has relevance to some people or group of people who are part of the audience. The actor maybe improvise a scene by using a text which has already been written or the scene can be improvised directly (Boal, 1979:113). The scene might, for example, centre on excessive care giving in which siblings feel an obligation to step up for their parents, yet they have to hide their feelings when they do not want to. Community theatre inclines to emphasise the dramatic potential of the local or personal stories (Nicholson, 2005). This is a way of relating the theatrical work to what is really happening in real life. The actors start the scene and play until the main problem gets to the climax; a point where something has to be done. At this point the action is stopped and the audience is asked to give suggestions as to how the scene should continue. Therefore, the spectators are sort of taking the role of the playwright and writing while the actors are doing the action simultaneously. In this way the actors are helping by interpreting physically what the audience members are thinking. The spectators retain their right to intervene, to correct the actions and words of the actors, who are completely obliged to comply strictly with the instruction of the audience. Although the spectator may have been excluded in the process of creating the scene, this technique presents a good opportunity for the spectator to be involved in the rewriting of the scene (Mda, 1993:119). The spectators' thoughts are discussed theatrically on stage with the help of the actors. It is not always expected that the dialogue will take place by only exchanging words; preferably the use of dramatic aesthetics and other metaphoric representation is allowed, which do not simply take the form of words but all the other elements of theatrical expression as well. After the scene has been performed once, it is restaged and during the second performance the audience members are invited to stop the action and suggest alternative action for the oppressed character – the protagonist. According to Chipatiso (2009), the spectators have a tendency to sympathise with the protagonist and take his side because they feel he is a victim of the behaviour of the antagonist. However, in a situation like the one mentioned above, there is a thin line between the antagonist and the protagonist. By giving suggestions to the protagonists, the spectator gains a much more influential status. The important thing is that as many suggestions as possible are allowed so that the spectators come to an imagined satisfactory solution. Audience contribution is thus incorporated into an improvised revision

of the scene. Thus, the spectators have direct input in shaping the outcomes of the re-imagined scene.

There are similarities between Simultaneous Dramaturgy and Helen Nicholson's applied drama projects in which the participants create a collective narrative. In applied drama the participants bring their own narratives that illustrate their personal identities and in the process of improvisation these narratives are deconstructed and influenced by other participants' narratives. In the end a collective narrative is constructed, just as in Simultaneous Dramaturgy, which Nicholson calls "a moment of making connections between life as it is and life as it might be" (Nicholson, 2005:64). Nicholson makes use of *A Woman's Place* as an example of the works she has seen created by actors who did not know each other before working together. It involved the autobiographic narratives of two women who were immigrants in London. She also explores how the theatricality of this play protected the performers by creating an aesthetic distance between them as people, and their autobiographical stories transformed into theatre (2005:96). "Conceptualised and practiced this way, drama becomes a place to explore the ethical gap between description and prescription, hypothesis and factuality" (Nicholson, 2005:64).

However, in some cases the actors may not be able to improvise and articulate the ideas suggested by the audience to their satisfaction, because the actors have not really embodied the experience of the audience. Or the audience struggles to articulate a lived experience to the actors and maybe does not have the verbal vocabulary to express a suggestion from a lived experience.

### *Forum Theatre*

According to Boal, Simultaneous Dramaturgy encountered obstacles when an audience member was dissatisfied with the way actors acted her suggestion. She went on stage to perform her idea herself. That is how Forum Theatre was born. So, in this kind of theatre the spectator is no longer a passive audience that is waiting to receive answers from the actor. She is an active spect-actor who brings her experience and suggestions to the question. The forum is a gathering of people who believe in the value of the performed sketch for a particular moment, and at the next gathering may not have the same belief. It is therefore relative to time and space. As much as this technique was developed by Boal, his belief is

that theatre should be adjusted to the people using it, not vice-versa. Moreover, Theatre of the Oppressed is not a rule book that needs to be followed slavishly. Boal argues that the starting point of every technique is improvisation aimed at change by practising for change in real life. The sketch is cast and directed by its real-life protagonist playing himself or herself. In other words Forum Theatre is used as a springboard for investigation of real life issues.

In the process, the theatricality takes its course: the audience and the protagonist play around with the images of the event developed by the theatrical event, giving it a new life. Anything is possible, and the results of the process are not pre-determined and every suggestion is tested out, provided it is clearly defined. Both objective and subjective comments are invited. At the end of the improvisation the suggestion/solutions are always given back to the protagonist. It is up to the protagonist to do what s/he wishes about them. Sometimes, what becomes a solution may come about without even looking for a specific answer.

One of the essential concepts of the Theatre of the Oppressed is that even though the starting point is the representation of the lived experience of an individual, the next step is to analyse the main cause of the situation. Then, the images are improvised and reflected upon so that the situation is changed. It becomes new images that are applicable to the larger group than the original individual images. This ensures the distancing of the protagonist from his narrative. Jennings asserts that the protagonist(s) bring their experiences into drama therapy, in order to interpret the roles through the aesthetic of drama (1994).

### The Joker/Difficultator or the Facilitator

In the 1960s Boal and the Arena Theatre of Sao Paulo developed a joker system as a particular technique in the Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 1979:180–90). According to Cohen-Cruz & Schutzman (2006), the joker system is not as popular as the other creations of Boal, however it remains one of the building blocks of the Theatre of the Oppressed. According to Boal, the joker system is an easily adjustable method of adapting plays and other texts as well as generating new works for the Brazilian audience. Boal and the Arena

Theatre used the joker system to “nationalise” some European “classics” to destabilise the trend of the TBC (Teatro Brasileiro de Comedia) which had the “stars interested in showing themselves.” The joker system distinguished itself by breaking down the habit of looking at the reality of the world from one angle by provoking and creating confusion when presenting a dramatic text in order to investigate unconventional ways of interpreting the world. In the joker system the use of “Brechtian” aesthetics is acknowledged, and it depends upon using a few basic techniques. It is achieved by creating a distance between actors and characters through an alienating style of acting designed to reduce dramatic characters; by allowing all actors to play all characters in the play, which means no actor has a fixed role; by the use of combined styles and genres from one scene to another without consideration of the specific style of the overall production; and by the use of music which could stand as an “independent discourse” or independent story either to complete, substitute, undermine or contrast the meaning conveyed in the play or text (Boal, 1979:180–90).

In the Joker system a new figure the ‘joker’ is introduced, whose role ranges from the narrator who has a direct communication with the audience and a “wild card” role that has the possibility to get in and out of whatever role in the play s/he pleases. In Forum Theatre, the joker has a specific function to mediate between the actors and spectators. His duty is to invite and convince the spectator to come on stage. He has a responsibility for encouraging the spectator to turn into a spect-actor and help him/her overcome the fear of talking in public about personal problems. It is the joker’s duty to create an environment which secures participation by making spect-actors understand that they are not the only ones going through the same situation. However, the joker has a responsibility of making the individual feel s/he is taken seriously. There is a thin line between making people feel taken for granted and making people understand that they are not alone by undergoing an experience that someone else has gone through. In other words, the joker should try by all means to be on the side of the audience, rather than on the side of the actors. The participants should feel not only involved in the process, but also ownership of the story.

During the Forum Theatre intervention, the engagement of the audience members is expected. The question is: “how do we get people to accept the idea of going on stage (Boal, 1998:46)?” During the process of exploring solutions, the joker should always have his focus on the audience to make sure that everyone who needs to make a contribution in the

process is given a chance. Of course not everyone is expected to have a say in the Forum Theatre, in fact the presence in the forum is a contribution on its own. The joker should try by all means to refuse ideas that seem to be predetermined. In fact, he should avoid the dramatic situation being trapped in a mechanistic cycle, which I briefly discussed with regard to the showcase at Frambu. The joker handles the Forum Theatre as if it is a court trial in which the contributions of the audience are treated as evidence when solving a case. In such a gathering there may be participants who will always have something to say and it is the duty of the joker to keep balance in the contribution. Sometime the joker should make use of different methods in order to bring the discourse to the focus of the problem or the issue. Where there is a need for an absent character in the scene, the joker is always there to step in, but is always on the side of the audience.

### *The relationship between the facilitator and the spectator in an intervention*

The challenges faced by the joker in achieving participation from an audience are also experienced in participatory and applied theatre more generally. In any applied theatre intervention the participants and the facilitator usually come from different backgrounds and have different interests. According to Nicholson, these differences between participants and the facilitator always escalate curiosity about ethical investigation because their backgrounds and interests may cause confusion about the each other's priorities. In research these differences can be the source of conflict because the researchers perceive individuals or communities as objects of analysis. The latter problems have attracted some investigation as to how the facilitator conducts him/herself and the nature of interaction between the two parties. Mda introduces the concept of "homophily and heterophily" in any interpersonal discourse that involves theatre (1993:84). According to Mda, homophily suggests a certain amount of shared attributes such as beliefs, values and even the status between the participants and the applied theatre practitioner. On the contrary, heterophily implies a difference in these attributes between the participants and the applied theatre practitioner. Mda suggests that, for communication purposes homophily between the parties is more effective because it is in the nature of human beings to prefer to interact with people similar to them (1993:85). A similar situation is usually the case with Boal and his audience who usually share the same language, history and other similarities. However, Boal and his actor are heterophilous when it comes to comparing socio-economic levels with his audience.

According to Mda's this relationship between the theatre practitioner and the participants fits the definition of a "catalyst" in a theatre-for-development setting (1993:85). Furthermore, the theatre practitioner in the case of development project, and the facilitator in the case of forum theatre, both need to have a certain level of empathy with the participants (Boal: 1979; Mda:1993).

Mda emphasises that empathy can be a vital means to overcome the obstacles to productive interaction created by heterophily. These obstacles can be the unclear intentions about the theatre intervention from the side of the practitioner, different interests during the intervention, misconceptions about each other's worlds and the otherness or heterophily of the theatre practitioner – either due to race, social class, education status or coming from a different community even when there may be some common elements between the parties. Other obstacles can be the result of a previous experience with an irresponsible and insensitive researcher, a theatre practitioner or facilitator who has abused power and taken advantage of unstable and sometimes fragile situations in which the participants find themselves. Certain problems may be the result of violation of "trust" the participants gave to the theatre practitioner and the right to intrude in their lives (Nicholson, 2005:16).

Communication in any intervention is one of the most important elements of development. Freire's literacy work with the peasants intended to emphasise the empowerment of peasants to formulate their demands and participate in the development process and determine the outcomes, rather than receiving an already finished product from their oppressors. From the start, the focus on the communication was a dialogical communication process that allowed participation rather than a linear communication which allows one voice to dominate the other. Understanding the dynamics of the relationship between the ATP and the participants, as discussed above, will help the practitioner understand the ever changing context and the on-going process demanded by planning an applied theatre project.

Over the past decades, substantial research interest has been devoted to communicating about conflicts and inequalities between individuals, families and communities; and numerous research projects have applied theories from different disciplines, including

educational drama techniques, in collaboration with Theatre of the Oppressed to address oppressive situations.

## Studies of Projects that have adapted Forum Theatre

Practitioners have tailored and restructured the praxis of Forum theatre - playing around with the significance of the oppressor and the oppressed, for specific needs and contexts. In the process of exploring potential solutions to different oppressions, practitioners combine different elements of the Theatre of the Oppressed. Sometimes they draw from other drama pedagogies (for example Process Drama and hot seating) and even outside the applied theatre sphere (for example Systemic Oppression: a structural marginalisation of one social group by another powerful social group for the benefit of the powerful group.) to address the issues of the target audience or clients. These improvements are aimed at increasing participation of the spectators, engaging with the oppression, and empowering the disempowered. Through the evaluation of successes and failures, practitioners adjust the theory of Forum theatre by subtracting from, or adding to, the theory, just like Boal has done in the development of the Theatre of the Oppressed framework.

I examine three case studies in which drama pedagogies have been used in conjunction with Theatre of the Oppressed specifically to address different problems in different contexts, including theories from different disciplines. I examined: i) "When Theatre of the Oppressed Becomes Theatre of the Oppressor" by Sonia Hamel (2013) in Canada; ii) "Theatre of the Oppressor" by Marc Weinblatt (2011:21-31) in the USA; and iii) "Acting Against Conflict and Bullying" by John O'Toole & Bruce Burton (2005) in Australia. These projects demonstrate a central role played by the Theatre of the Oppressed and the use of Forum Theatre as a method, and how different drama practitioners adapted the praxis of Forum Theatre to suit the context in which they are working. This has relevance to my adaptation -Dramaturgical Forum- which will be discussed later.

Firstly, I will take a closer look at the studies by Hamel and Weinblatt and their move from Theatre of the Oppressed to Theatre of the Oppressor. In her case study, "When Theatre of the Oppressed Becomes Theatre of the Oppressor", Sonia Hamel (2013) discusses when Forum Theatre was used as a means to start a dialogue to tackle conflict between the

“homeless” and other inhabitants who were contesting rightful ownership of communal space in the centre of Montreal. The main objective was to contest the dominant narrative about the homeless in an attempt to repair their respect, and give them a voice in an arena in which they have no voice and are reduced to non- existence. In the dominant narrative the homeless are classified as “the oppressor”, whereas in their original theatre piece developed by the homeless, the general public, supported by police action, were portrayed as the oppressors. Nonetheless, during their intervention in the theatre piece, the spectators disregarded the representation of themselves as “oppressors”. They adopted the status of being the targets – “the oppressed” - of the homeless, thus taking control of meaning in the program and the actual homeless performers backed off in quietness. The imbalance in the power dynamic and unclear demarcation between the oppressor and the oppressed is a perfect example of what Hamel is arguing.

In his work towards social justice, Marc Weinblatt (2011) and his colleagues modify the technique of Theatre of the Oppressed into ‘Theatre of the Oppressor’ by focusing their attention on the narrative of the ‘oppressor’ as a way of exploring possible solutions to the oppression. They do so by exploring identity, power, privilege and empowerment in a social context. According to Weinblatt, the responsibility of removing oppression- ‘social injustice’, is as much the duty of the oppressor as of the oppressed. In this case study Weinblatt examines the significance of (his) identity as the key element. As a result, his recent work has been with ‘white’ people who have the same identity. His colleague Dr Nieto: a scholar of Systemic Oppression theory: argues that one groups’ attitude towards the other influences the other groups’ perception about themselves, because of the dominance of one social group by the other, accompanied by numerous advantages and power. These societal oppressions include bigotry and mistreatment, either conscious or unconscious, and how it unfolds may only be visible to those experiencing it. In Systemic Oppression theory people are categorized in order to deal with the realities of society. However it is difficult for a lot of people to recognise their societal group belonging. Weinblatt observes that liberal societies consistently focus mainly on their “similarities and prevent their differences” (2011:23). He identifies the significance of using an individual who shares identity with a dominant group because it could be appealing for them, even if that individual has never initiated oppression in the past. In his study, Weinblatt affirms that, theoretically, in any kind of oppression every



one of us is liable for oppression and thus we all have an active duty towards the removal of “social injustice- not just the oppressed” (2011:22). When looking at our own stand point we may discover that we have contributed to the problem, both intentionally and unintentionally, and thus hypothetically have an active role in the solution. He explores his identity and social membership in the context of oppression as the oppressor, by having certain advantages and privileges as theatre practitioner, his race, class and American citizenship.

This study confirms that the binaries of the ‘oppressed and the oppressor’ are more complex and diverse in reality than in theory. The oppressed and the oppressor co-exist both on the individual level and on the social level. Even within the group of the oppressed there are those who have certain privileges which may qualify them as oppressors in a different situation, and vice versa.

Some of the differences between the two studies lie in how this shift is interpreted; Hamel’s case being her perceptions about the manner in which the joker conducted the theatre intervention, and Weinblatt emphasising that the focus on the oppressor is a deliberate and necessary choice.

Now I briefly discuss the third study by O’Toole & Burton (2005) whose adaptation extends the Forum Theatre Technique. Two different disciplines: drama and conflict management, have worked jointly in exploring the use of interactive drama in conflict management in schools, focusing on exploring the cultural elements of conflict. According to O’Toole & Burton the study stems from a previous study that was exploring the difference in cultural elements of conflict between Sweden and Malaysia. In the end, four projects cropped up concurrently: in Sweden, Malaysia and two in Brisbane, Australia.

Several attempts at exploring different drama strategies recorded different levels of achievement but showed some gaps when the students and teachers have to use them on their own. According to O’Toole & Burton both students and teachers struggle to deal with Process Drama with those who are not used to the method. The authors assert that even though classical Forum theatre is comprehensible, it is not as effective, because it tackles conflicts casually, an element that may cause more conflicts. As a result, a new drama method was born ‘Enhanced Forum Theatre’ (EFT) (2005:276). Therefore, EFT is a

combination of process drama elements and Forum Theatre elements together with 'peer-teaching' (2005:276).

There are a number of noticeable characteristics of EFT which are different from traditional Forum Theatre. i) Three scenes are developed, as opposed to one, and 'Scene Four' is also offered, in which the audience is encouraged to determine the best time in the conflict to de-escalate, and this should be tested in action. ii) Unlike in classical Forum theatre the spectators are invited to replace any character they assume to have an ability to de-escalate the conflict. iii) Three Process drama methods have been incorporated into EFT: a) Forum hot seating- in which audience or the joker can question any character about their behaviour and/or give them advice; b) Forum thought tracking - in which the joker can freeze a scene so that one or more characters can express their thoughts; c) Forum role circle - in which the actor is asked, in role, questions about the conflict, usually after the second performance. And spectators can ask questions about the scene even if it is not part of the performance. iv) Fourthly, two types of forum performance devising methods were implemented: Type A being a more realistic imaginary conflict, and Type B being a reconstruction of a real life conflict experienced by any of the actor-participants. v) The joker introduces the actors and the scenes at least a couple of times in order to familiarise the audience with the characters and the scenario. The play is frozen at the moment of breakdown. The forum- spectators are requested to deliberate the scene and propose different, but reliable and sincere responses to the nature and the behaviour of the characters, or ways of acting, or reaction, which have been displayed by the actors, in which the actor might have prevented the breakdown or resolved the conflict. At this stage the joker or the spectators can call for the application of any of the three process drama methods in EFT.

In the above examples it is clear that borrowing from other techniques, whether within or outside of the Theatre of the Oppressed, is a way of strengthening and developing the movement of the Theatre of the Oppressed. But for the moment we return to Boal's praxis.

### *Warming up the audience: Readyng the participants for theatre*

Boal suggests that in theatre the means of production lies in the human body (1979:125). Therefore, for anyone to use theatre one must take control of the means of production – the

body – in order to speak the language of the theatre. In other words, the body needs to be tuned to be able to practice theatrical forms. He wants the spectators to free themselves from everyday conditioning and take up the condition of the actor. In the *Theatre of the Oppressed* he arranged the tools and techniques in four systematised stages. The first stage is “knowing the body”, a series of exercises by which one gets to know one’s body, its limitations, social distortions and possibilities, (1979:126). The exercises are designed to “undo” the muscular structure of the participants, to take them apart, to study and analyse them. The second stage is “making the body expressive”: a series of exercises to express oneself through the body rather than just relying on speech which is an habitual form of expression. In the third stage, “theatre as a language,” one begins to practice theatre as a language that is living in present, not as finished product displaying the past. Some of these exercises were practised in the beginning stages of the UCT workshop as were simpler forms of warm up in the Frambu workshops.

Drawing chiefly on the writings of Augusto Boal and Helen Nicholson as well as some other researchers, in this chapter I have developed a theoretical framework for making a model of a theatrical intervention, which I will take forward in Chapter Four.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **TOWARDS A MODEL OF THEATRICAL INTERVENTION**

This chapter is an attempt to develop participatory methods of theatre and performance which can facilitate engagement amongst all the concerned parties in families that face the challenges involved in a member with special needs. It proposes a participatory framework that enables the participants to interact with others, and negotiate ways of living with a person with special needs and of dealing with impairment. The second practical experiment towards this model was undertaken with students at the University of Cape Town with the specific intention of 'practicing my research'. I first report that endeavour and then argue for a model of theatrical intervention which brings together my empirical and theoretical research.

Armed with the research and theorised guidelines dealt with in Chapter Three, as well as my first attempt at a theatrical intervention in Norway, I made another attempt at developing a model for a theatrical intervention in September 2013 at the University of Cape Town with five UCT drama students. The case study discussion which follows, examines how the play was developed, the relationship between the actors and their relationship with the audience. The discussion draws attention to the features of drama and theatre that influence empowerment as much as the limitations.

#### **Case study two: "So You Mean It's My Fault!"**

"So You Mean it's My Fault" was a work shopped research project that took place in September 2013. It involved collaboration between performers, students, Honours students and myself, a Masters student. The students were volunteering to participate in this piece of practice-led research. I wanted to test whether the Forum Theatre project would be received differently by students who have studied drama than the forum I presented at Frambu, and what I might do differently to make it work more effectively as an initial intervention for a community who is experiencing a problem, just as the families at Frambu are dealing with special needs every day.

The students created this play based on their own experience, based on the rules of Applied Theatre in which the inhabitants of a particular community perform their own stories; or if the material is taken from the scripted text, then the narrative should have relevance to the target group. I asked them to speak about an oppressive situation they have either experienced at home or which has happened to someone they know. One student told a story about theft, another about bad behaviour after alcohol consumption from a person who is reserved when sober but shows lack of respect and is violent when drunk. One story told of a family member who seemed to live in his own world, demonstrating strange behaviour in which the person liked to play loud music when everyone else is sleeping. One told a story of a family member with Alzheimer's syndrome. Each of these narratives challenged the other family members in one way or the other. The fifth student told the story about a family in which all the children had a similar kind of disability and the mother of the children was criticised for not being regular in church.

To externalise these stories I used different drama techniques in which the participant tells of the personal experience, and then casts other participants in the major roles in the story. The process enables the teller to gain some understanding of the intricacies of the experience and to try and organise the sequence of events in order to be able to engage with them from an objective perspective. In the next stage, the teller takes the role of the protagonist in the story. In the rehearsal process we managed to have four students have their narratives enacted. During the process I was picking up important points from the different narratives to use when devising the final play. During the process of telling personal stories there was some discomfort shown by the students, especially the male students, about sharing personal information, saying that it is hard to disclose family issues in front of strangers. I told them that they can tell what is comfortable for them to tell, but it has to contain some oppressive situation because that is the purpose of the study: to explore oppressive situations through performance.

If watched with a critical eye, it is possible to see that the short play which we devised is about the multi layered nature of alcoholism, and the interpretation of the story is endless. The play allows the audience to identify the interconnectedness of different issues and causes surrounding alcoholism, and other things that may lead to the condition. What the performance intends to do is to see if the audience can identify the kinds of oppression in

the story: who is the oppressor and who is the oppressed. So, the audience gets the opportunity to see the links between the aesthetic (content, the context and the nature of the play), and real life experience, which hopefully provokes or challenges them to participate in the forum.

### *Synopsis of the play*

From the beginning, we are introduced to a couple, Gift and Bianca, involved in an argument. There is a conflict of interests between Gift, who wants to watch TV, while Bianca is interested in talking about her visit to the doctor. After Bianca has made a couple of attempts to talk to Gift about this important issue that is affecting their lives, Gift gets upset and decides to leave her alone and joins his friends, Alex and Jay, for drinks. The meeting of these men is a usual event on a Friday evening.

The drinking fun takes a turn when the other men start talking about their family obligations and children. Gift goes and buys more beers, encouraging his friends to enjoy the freedom of being alone as men, without their spouses and children. But Alex is excited because his son is going to take part in an important rugby competition – Craven Week, which is one of the top rugby competitions for schools in the country. When Jay asks Gift to come along with his wife to Craven Week, Gift find some excuse for not being able to go. One by one the friends leave and Gift drinks on alone until late. When he gets home he bangs on the door so hard that he wakes the neighbours who get irritated by the noise and threaten to call the police for noise and public disturbance. Eventually Bianca opens the door.

Bianca complains about Gift coming home late smelling of alcohol. Gift escapes the argument by asking for his food. Bianca tells him that she has given his food to his mother, because when he did not come back, she invited his mother to come over. Gift begins to go to the kitchen to find food but is side-tracked by a music system where he turns on loud music. Another argument starts, this time about the music, Gift insists on dancing with her and they wrestle until Bianca gets her hands on the remote control and switches off the stereo.

Then Gift complains that Bianca does not want to dance with him anymore, which affects his sense of his manhood. Bianca tells him that if he was at home earlier maybe they could

dance. However Gift retaliates by saying that if there were children in the house he would come home earlier. After which he suggests they 'make babies' now. Bianca tells him that earlier she was trying to talk to him about another miscarriage she's had, but instead of listening, Gift chose to "go and drink himself into oblivion". So, Gift tells Bianca that he does not have anything to do with her miscarriages. They get into a blame game with each other by both asking this question. "So you mean it's my fault!"

This short play portrays both Bianca and Gift's confusion, lost hopes, and their different ways of dealing with their childless situation. The situation is affecting the couple's communication and Gift's drinking is not making it any easier. I would assume that this situation is shared by other men whose hopes are shattered when they cannot have children. However this is not to say that alcohol abuse is always caused by not having children.

The theatrical narrative devised by the students was then performed in front with other students invited along as an audience. Here my intention was to examine whether the drama students, who have some knowledge about Boal and the Theatre of the Oppressed techniques, would have different responses than those the forum received in the parent's evening performance at Frambu. I had anticipated that it was going to be easier to work with the drama students and for them to communicate about their oppressive experience, because they are used to the metaphoric language of theatre. The introduction to the performance started with warm up exercises so that the audience (and their bodies) are made ready to express verbally and physically (as discussed in Chapter Three above). The next part of the exercise was inviting other drama students who were the spectators to step in and try out different solutions to the problems of the couple. After the first performance I reminded the spectators that when the performance happens the second time, they could stop the performance by shouting "Stop" to make any suggestions about the direction of the play. There was only one spectator who came and replaced one of the supporting actors. His suggestion to Gift was to find another woman who would give him children. According to the rules of Theatre of the Oppressed the antagonist cannot change his desires otherwise that is a magic solution to the problem. This solution does not necessarily address the real problem. It only addresses the problem on stage. His contribution was more to try and change the behaviour of the antagonist in the play. In my definition the woman is the protagonist

because she experiences the oppression of the situation more explicitly than the man. The focus of the play is to highlight the problems (or oppression as Boal calls it) and ends at the climax where some kind of solution is needed to untangle the knot she and her husband find themselves in. According to Forum Theatre technique the rule is not to change the actions and desires of the antagonist, but try and find alternative ways to resolve the dilemma facing the protagonist.

With the student audience there was a lot of participation in the discussion, after the play. Much of what the spectators said in the discussion was around the way the woman in the play should plan to tell the husband about her problem. The suggestions were:

- Bringing the doctor home to talk about different causes of miscarriage,
- Getting her husband to come with her to the doctor,
- Trying to get the views of a therapist about their problem,
- Finding the correct timing when wanting to discuss issues of concern,
- Trying to get him to attend Alcoholics Anonymous, or
- Finding someone who could inform the man about “Foetal Alcohol Syndrome”.

After a long discussion one of the students asked the group “why are we only concentrating on preparing a better situation for the man when the woman has to deal with her pregnancy problem alone?” Unfortunately there was not much discussion about the latter.

Both audiences, at Frambu and in Cape Town, were more inclined to favour talking as a solution. These experiences with the audience contributed to formulating the method I am proposing. Having studied Boal, I realised that within Simultaneous Dramaturgy are the roots of Forum Theatre. The audience is only invited to give suggestions to the actors but not to participate, which ideas the actors then improvise, until they have tried as many ideas as possible, until the audience feel they have a better solution within their own context.

In retrospect, as the facilitator of the event I did not capitalise sufficiently on the audience suggestions and ask the actors to try them out. In my efforts to get the audience to be active spect-actors and contribute by acting in the scenes, when they refused and continued to discuss, I missed an opportunity. Maybe the outcomes of the “So You Mean It’s My Fault?” intervention would have been different if we went back to the Simultaneous Dramaturgy



technique and turned the suggestions into action on stage. However, I now realise that the techniques of Simultaneous Dramaturgy and Forum Theatre can actually go hand in hand by putting them together to get a new hybrid technique called “Dramaturgical Forum” which is elaborated below.

Although I investigated various other participatory methods of Theatre of the Oppressed, I have found Simultaneous Dramaturgy and Forum Theatre the best methods suited to my purpose because of their emphasis on spectators’ intervention in the rewriting of the script and active participation in the making of theatre. In exploring the details of the issues that are discussed, individual voices have a platform and a relatively easy method by which to implement ideas. At the same time I wanted to investigate which aspect of these techniques suit best the participation of the audience.

What I discovered from both experiences, from Frambu and UCT students was that there was some similar behaviour with regards to participation. At Frambu, the teenagers I had workshops with preferred to discuss some of the exercises rather than do the embodiment of the exercise. The same thing happened with the students who were spectators for the alcoholism project, who participated more in the discussion than they were willing to go on stage. When reflecting and evaluating what would be the best way to increase the participation of the spectators, I concluded that it would be better to allow the spectators to have the freedom to contribute in the process from where they feel it suits them. As much as the purpose of participatory theatre is to give voice to the voiceless and empower the audience, from what I have observed with the two events, there is some level of empowerment and security when they are seated in the audience. Perhaps the spectator role ensures the power and control without having to experience it in the body as well as in the mind. There may be many reasons to avoid that experience. At the same time those who have the courage to accept the situation of the protagonist can do so because for them it may be easier to differentiate between the two roles: the spectator and the character roles.

## Dramaturgical Forum

What is the valuable purpose of drama and theatre in society? According to O’Neill, drama as a framework has the ability to stretch boundaries of orientation and frees us from fixed

opinions and perception and thus has a valuable purpose to encourage change (1996:145). Neelands suggests that as a matter of principle the aims of drama should be about promoting change in both the individual and the society instead of happening by chance. The challenge is to identify possible practical ways for this individual and social change through drama in a manner that transcends “advocacy and theory which takes into account the situation in which these changes have to be made (2004:49).

My proposed model, Dramaturgical Forum, creates a platform for different members of a family or community to share the experiences of living with a person with special needs. It provides the participants with a space to challenge common (mis)perceptions, stigmas and prejudices about special needs. Dramaturgical Forum on its own is not or does not offer any solution to family problems, but is a way of stimulating debate, asking questions and provoking enquiry into the dominant perceptions about disability and special needs, both among the participants in the making of the theatre piece and the targeted audience to which the piece will be presented. The method sets the context and the rules for the negotiation between the actors and the audience that may benefit the parties involved.

Because drama is a collective and social endeavour, in the case of a family member (especially a sibling and even a parent) for example, who has certain opinions about how particular special needs affect that member, in theatre they have a platform where they are enabled to express their feelings without fearing to offend the person concerned or look different from the family as a unit.

Dramaturgical Forum is a theatrical method developed to catalyse members of the society. The method provides tools that enable the family and subsequently the society to explore, examine, reflect, and discover how certain things become oppressive to the individual and the family; or how oppression of an individual becomes oppressive to other member of the family. Even though each problem is exclusive to its context or grouping, it usually forms part of the bigger picture and thus the objectives of using Dramaturgical Forum are similar although the contexts may change.

Boal illustrates the way in which morals, authority and the oppression of the society are entrenched in the smallest components of the community, the family and the everyday routines. According to Boal even when one is referring to a single personal case, one is also

referring to the majority of other cases which is the same as reference to the society in which that specific case can happen. In other words, what seems to be the problem of one family is a piece of a bigger society, because no family exists in a vacuum. There is always interplay between the family and the society, the family influences the society and the society influences the family. For example, many social problems that are caused by stressful life in the society, in turn results in influencing the family dynamics and so also affect family structures.

These may include:

- Families who have a member with disabilities or special needs.
- Families which include members who are dealing with issues of alcoholism.
- A minority group, such as gay youth who are experiencing some kind of exclusion in the society.
- Youth groups who are marginalised within their communities because they are not in school and are unemployed.

Since these groups are units of the community and subsequently the units of the bigger society, in an attempt to solve the problems of the society, dealing with the smaller group enables the work practically to handle, on a small scale, that which would be difficult to manage with a larger group.

My interest is in how family members of a person with special needs perceive their experiences about the special need. Dramaturgical Forum can be a way through which the family can reflect on these matters to the society. There is a link between attitude and knowledge, and I presume that negative attitudes and behaviours have a close relation to a lack of knowledge. Dramaturgical Forum can be used to facilitate reflexivity in the family and the effects of external factors, prevalent in society, on and within the family.

### *Achieving participation and the uses of dialogue*

In a way theatre provides a platform on which the participants can enable themselves a 'temporary freedom' to break away from their customary patterns of thinking and ways of making sense of their world. In other words, the theatre space is a place where participants can express themselves in a way they would not be allowed, or allow themselves, to do

under normal circumstances. In a way theatre is a space in which individual opinions are given a chance to stand out from the collective opinion.

According to Eva Österlind the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu studied and theorised about the challenges and the difficulties of bringing about change. By scrutinising traditional upbringing in Algeria, Bourdieu tried to find explanations about the manner in which society is duplicated (Bourdieu, 1990:56 in Österlind). This is a process that happens over time. Children learn from an early age by making their own mental collages by putting together bits and pieces of regulations and expressions – how they believe ‘the world works’. But these beliefs and actions, the way we do things, may prevent or prohibit creativity and thinking out of the box. Sometimes it hinders people from being creative and thinking as individuals to the extent that individual thoughts and feelings, which are in themselves important and not merely part of the group, have no place for expression. Österlind contends that this explains the prescriptions of belief, and when it is done over and over again, it forms the basis of how the child will think and behave (2008). In other words, this explanation suggests that the way human beings behave and think is mostly influenced by their socialisation and their upbringing. Bourdieu has identified that habitus is situated in our way of life and customs, which are then internalised in the brain and engraved in the body; where it influences our movement and the way we conduct ourselves. He argues that habitus is sometimes resistant to change (1990).

Theatre will enable the participants to explore critically an oppressive situation in dramatic form, and possibly identify the real nature of the oppression and how these situations become oppressive; and even what role each participant plays in sustaining or overcoming the oppression. Because theatre creates aesthetic distance from the real life experience, it offers the possibility to criticise, compare, analyse, or challenge certain behaviours in an oppressive situation. It provides room for creativity about possible ways of tackling the situation. And after trying all the possible ideas, a group or individual may be ready to decide what they think would best suit their individual situation in their respective families. Dramaturgical Forum will enable the participants to perceive their reality differently. By critically looking at the reality the participants are able to think about available options which might change the situation and, whenever possible, plan and rehearse the options.

In the case of disabilities, on one hand, it is not always possible for the participants to differentiate between a stressful situation which is brought about by medical routine, and one which is brought about by the individual with the special needs. In the case of antisocial behaviour on the other hand, Dramaturgical Forum may help the participants to identify how socio-political and economic circumstances contribute to the oppression. In other words, how the system, which prevents certain groups of people from obtaining benefits that other groups have, may provoke antisocial reactions in certain individuals who resort to crime, alcohol or substance abuse.

In order for the participants and spectators to achieve insight from the theatrical event, they have to begin to talk about it and share their stories and experiences. This important dialogue starts when the facilitator/catalyst is working with the actors, or participants, whose narratives are going to be used in order to create a piece of theatre for others who are involved in similar difficulties, to watch and experience. It is very important to bear in mind that the participatory theatre process involves the communication between the theatre practitioner and all of the participants. Whether they are participants in the form of audience, or participants in the making of the story that has resonance for the audience, as well as any professional assistants such as actors who are not involved with the problematic situation or the oppression directly: all the parties should always be in dialogue. The process must allow all the voices in the room to bring out their ideas as they wish, as long as this is conducted in a non-violent manner. So the facilitator's voice should not be dominant in the process. As the facilitator, I have to be aware of the power dynamics in the process and try to share the power between the participants and the spectators as well as myself as practitioner. It is the duty of the theatre practitioner to create a safe environment for the participants not only to share their stories, but also to feel comfortable to let the stories be changed through the aesthetics of drama.

At the same time, Dramaturgical Forum not only allows the participants to think critically but also the possibility to feel. As much as Boal's theatre is dialogical and gives voice to the voiceless, I will argue that it has an oppressive element by not allowing the audiences to show their feelings. However, showing feelings is not the sole purpose of Dramaturgical Forum.

### *Aspects of the model*

The participatory theatre techniques hypothesised below are a working process which centrally involves the combination of Forum theatre and Simultaneous Dramaturgy. These forms of theatre provide the participants with opportunities to embody the experience of engaging with the issues: physically, intellectually and emotionally. Using Theatre of the Oppressed technique enables the participants to explore different opinions either through giving suggestions for the actors to improvise or by taking the role of the protagonist on the stage. I propose that the individual with special needs is oppressed by his/her condition. Then when the family experiences interactive problems, emotional stress, spoiled arrangements, endangered safety and financial problems, the condition is oppressive to the family. The situation is further oppressive when it causes family members to blame or take out their burden of special needs on each other and sometimes on the individual with special needs. However, when the attitude or the behaviour of the individual with special needs is abusive and causes harm to other family members, then that individual is oppressive. The interplay between the oppressed and the oppressor is very dynamic, because there is a thin line between the two. The condition oppresses the individual and the individual can oppress other members of the family consciously or unconsciously.

Forum Theatre has particular advantages. During the process of turning the lived experience into theatre, the participants get to know how others are affected by the topic of the play or the scene especially in the case where the actors are the people who are affected by the problem that is going to be addressed. In fact, meeting other people in the same situation is an advantage on its own. Participants get the opportunity to experience and understand what role they play in the oppression. They may gain insight into how it feels to be oppressed and hopefully acquire a better understanding of the situation. The participants also get the opportunity to work together in exploring the issues, look at the issue from different angles and become agents of their situation instead of receiving a recipe – a prescription of how to behave from those who are supposed to know better.

However there are also disadvantages which include the following. Firstly, not everyone has the experience, or likes the experience of doing something that does not feel 'normal' to them, such as performing. It is not easy for audience members to come on stage. Secondly,

the spect-actor may just come on stage in order to give a 'quick fix' to the topic/ situation which does not necessarily solve the problem but sets it aside. Thirdly, the performers who are inexperienced may be disturbed by the spectator taking the role of an actor. Finally, the spect-actor may be self-conscious about the quality of his/her acting skills compared to the actor and therefore negatively affect the play or the scene.

The advantages of Simultaneous Dramaturgy are that the spectators give the suggestion to the actor on stage from the comfort of their seats, and suggest to the actor how to behave or react in finding the solution to the problem that is dealt with on stage. The antagonist maintains his mission in order to get more spectators to come up with more ideas. In the best of situations the spectators are driving the trajectory of the play and interact with the actors in the re-writing of the play

The disadvantages are that the actors may not improvise the idea of a spectator exactly as s/he thought, because the actors only represent the action but not the feeling. There is a possibility that the spectators feels that their story (the real experience) is not taken seriously by the actor. Simultaneous Dramaturgy does not allow the spectator to come on stage, and therefore there is still a divide between the actors and the spectators.

From my empirical experience of leading Forum Theatre workshops both in Norway and South Africa, I have realised that there is a reluctance from the audience to move from their seats and take the role of the actor as suggested in Forum Theatre. However, after the Forum Theatre, the amount of participation increased and more audience member were willing to give their opinions by coming up with the suggestion of what kind of approaches could be used to tackle a certain oppression.

I chose this third stage of Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed when theatre is used as the language because a situation is created in which everyone involved is put on the same wavelength. There is no finished product that will cause some divide between the people, a situation in which there may be a dominant narrative that reinforces the past. The displaying of the past (a lived experience) is the starting point of the process. Then the participants critically analyse the situation, and thus identify the source of the oppression. Through the process of improvisation the roles are fleshed out and in the process one can discover

certain roles one plays in order to create the oppression. The situation is then changed into a new situation through the aesthetics of drama.

Dramaturgical Forum Theatre becomes a framework and a space in which the group or individuals explore different response(s) to a particular oppression. In this process the individual gets a chance to negotiate responses in relation to the group. Everyone is allowed to come up with their suggestions, and every idea that comes is explored. Both Simultaneous Dramaturgy and the Forum Theatre promote a consistent dialogue and this strength is exploited in my model of Dramaturgical Forum. In other word, every voice is represented; different narratives and suggestions are brought forward. Now the people are allowed to explore their different ways of dealing with the situation, rather than expecting someone to bring them magic answers to their problems.

Dramaturgical Forum is a cross section between Simultaneous Dramaturgy and Forum Theatre, which are both based on the understanding that the practice of participation and reflection are fundamental to empowerment and emancipation. The process does not prefer one process over the other; it meanders between the two processes, making it a method that is different from the source method but has the characteristics of both. In the Dramaturgical Forum the two processes are brought together in order to benefit from the double effects of the two preceding processes.

Boal moved from Simultaneous Dramaturgy to Forum Theatre in order to allow the spectator to take the role of the actor and abandon the role of the spectator. In the case of Dramaturgical Forum, I propose that the spectator maintains both roles of the spectator offstage and that of the actor onstage: and be able to use them simultaneously. However, spect-actors can at any given time offer suggestions as to what should happen on stage and when s/he feels confident enough, then s/he can go on stage and take the role of the actor. At the same time those spectators who have ideas about the turning point of the scene can do so from where they are seated. Their participation is still important and can be used by the actors on stage in order to change the direction of the scene.

Dramaturgical Forum should enable participation and stimulate creativity regardless of where the participant is. During the process, a spectator may start off by giving the idea from where she is seated so that the actors on stage improvise. If, however, she feels what



she sees on stage does not really reflect what she had in mind, just like the woman in Boal's account. she can come on stage to replace the actor and play the role exactly as she imagines the actor should be doing. It is in this situation that the idea comes to life and the participants articulate their ideals both physically and emotionally.

Dramaturgical Forum negotiates between the techniques of Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, Forum Theatre and Simultaneous Dramaturgy, which affords me the flexibility that I imagined using when facilitating engagement with the families in which there may be members with special needs. Whereas in Forum Theatre the spectators are expected to come forward and take the role of the protagonist on stage, in Dramaturgical Forum that decision is negotiated. The spectators maintain the power to decide whether to come on stage or not and the facilitator's duty is to persuade and stimulate participation, whether by means of discussion or performance. The function of the facilitator is like the referee in a sports event: making sure that the game is played according to the rules of the game, but always on the side of the spectator.

## Conclusion

Theatre engagement creates possibilities for families who are encountering the tribulations of living with a member with special needs. When they are involved in the collaborative processes of theatre and drama, these help the different family members with communication. In this study I have tried to demonstrate how different drama structures allow families to move in the interface between reality and fantasy. Role play enables the participants to achieve different kinds of distancing. Theatre enables the participants to step into another's shoes. Through engaging in drama processes the participants can identify parts of themselves in the roles they are playing or seeing on stage; a different experience from that of distancing. The methods used in Theatre of the Oppressed, especially Forum Theatre, enable participants to analyse their personal, familial and social realities; and imagine and test different actions and alternative responses to the problems. Using Boal's terms, a person with special needs in the family can be considered to be oppressed or even, in certain circumstances might be considered to be an oppressor. On the other hand, the theories from the social and health science disciplines provide the researcher with tools to identify and describe different types of special needs.

Although it may sound easy to use performance to facilitate communication in families, there is a great deal of work that needs to be done, especially in relation to audience participation. It is assumed that Forum Theatre practice is an effective method for giving the spectators a voice in many cases, in other cases it can prove otherwise. The case study workshops at Frambu and UCT demonstrate that audience participation depends upon different variables. However, this does not dispute Forum Theatre's ability to engage the audience. Instead, it acknowledges that the audiences sometimes prefer to engage in discussion of the themes of the performance rather than take part in the performance, which on its own is another kind of participation. Dramaturgical Forum, therefore seeks to take advantage of the discussions and turn them into performance, which the audience can still give comments about.

In any collaborative theatrical process the participants need some preparation in order to embark. It is the facilitator's duty to guide the participants through dramatic adventures to engage safely through drama in the real life situations. This means that the facilitator has a responsibility to prepare his participants in dramatic creativity by choosing suitable drama structures according to the needs of his participants. Since the outcomes of the drama cannot be guaranteed, the facilitator must know when it is time to stop the drama if the work poses psychological or ethical threats to the participants.

It is important to bear in mind that as promising as a drama and theatre intervention can be, this kind of work is not a substitute for other professional help. Drama/theatre will produce results when it supplements an existing intervention or is part of team work with families. It is the duty of the facilitator to open all his/her sensing to capture any issues that will result from dramatic work. To have somebody else present who may help to see anything that may be overlooked by the facilitator, can be of great help for both the facilitator and the participants. It is also important to be cautious about the applied theatre practitioner's personal opinion of the situation, in the presence of the siblings or during the sessions. Perhaps knowing who the person with special needs is will help in assessing the kind of approach that is needed.

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