

Gaming Futures: To Experience Scenarios Through *Teatro Del Devenir*

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Abstract

*Theater is a powerful pedagogical tool. As an experiential methodology of Future Studies Teatro del Devenir (which roughly translates to 'Theater of Becoming' or 'Forward Theatre'), allows people to explore scenarios as stories through first-hand activities. It is based on a breathing-body-voice warm-up that helps connect with oneself and experience spiritual insights. Participants get into a simulation, a rehearsal of what they could think, feel and behave in light of future situations in a given subject: theater techniques are utilized towards final stage performances. Under this method, long-term vision, the narrative of futures, storytelling, emotional intelligence and decision making are applied, among other elements. All this becomes meaningful learning: training actors of action (not of acting). The theory becomes transcendent and is a start for students to be prospective, not only to practice Future Studies.**

This methodology, which has been put into practice with young adults, adults and some elders, has allowed them to "get out of the box", connect with their inner-child, integrate, empower their being, stimulate their brain and all their senses in non-conventional ways. Introspection is highly accomplished in a fun way; affection and socialization take place during the learning process. The biggest challenge is oneself.

Keywords: Forward theater, Teatro del devenir, Theater of becoming, Psychoprospective, Futuretherapy, Transformation, Playful teaching, Meaningful learning. "Prospective" is the term used in Latin America when referring to Future Studies.

Introduction

"Life puts us in the way of the experiences we most need for the evolution of our consciousness. How do you know if this is the experience you need? Because it is the experience that you are living right now".

Eckhart Tolle

Educating is a noble but delicate action. To educate, implies raising awareness, in oneself and in others. To educate is to make history. Therefore, your task is to transform. It is a matter of *transform-action*. It is not easy to anticipate and to be really prepared for events that are to come. A good Argentinean colleague, Luis Ragno (in Baena, 2015), plays with the words “transformation” and “action” whose meaning refers thus: “*from unconscious adaptation to conscious anticipation*”. Ragno’s idea complements mine, being able to add a little grain of sand in building futures, willingly and consciously. This is a brief history of the path I have taken to achieve such a task.

Theater has been used as a pedagogical tool for many years. In Futures Studies, many avenues have been used to construct scenarios and as a result, many ways have also been used to teach how to do it. Teatro Devenir (TD) allows trainees to construct scenarios and live them.

Founded in Mexico, in 2013, *Teatro del Devenir*, (*Theater of Becoming / Forward Theater*) is a Futures Studies experiential methodology and in fact, as a new field of theater. Professor Sabina Head from Griffith University, Australia, teaches Forward Theatre. Prior to finding her article “Forward Theatre: an Introduction” (Head, 2011), I was already devising my own unique methodology, trying to integrate my areas of study: Psychology, Foresight, Arts. Henceforth, I became really inspired to settle on something similar. Based on a synergy among Psychodrama, Improvisational Theater, Spontaneity Theater, some other methods and Head’s frame of reference, I got to work. Since Head’s Forward Theater (FT) is similar to *Teatro del Devenir*, one can also use her term *Forward Theatre*, however it is important to note the differences in the approaches.

Teatro del Devenir (TD) has benefited hundreds of adult learners in Future Studies. I tell my students “*Do not be worried, be proactive regarding our futures activities*”

But, what is this all about? *Teatro del Devenir* is composed of three stages:

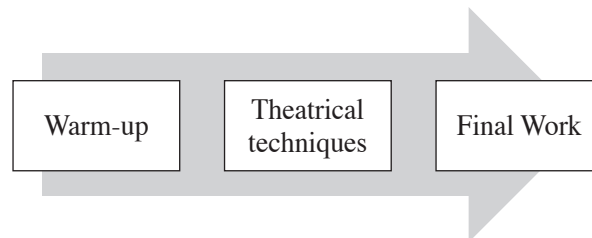


Figure 1. Forward theater composition

Like any discipline, a warm-up is necessary before moving on to the substance of the methodology. In order to really accomplish this work, inner willingness and an open-minded disposition are indispensable requirements. Breathing has given students the ability to be perceptive, not only physically or mentally but also emotionally and spiritually; self-awareness and their energy fields are stimulated in most participants and this prepares them to keep going. To heat engines up, the voice and the body are exercised as the main instruments to be used in the theater. Many people suffer from public speaking panic on stage. Controlled breathing helps to unlock those fears. Exploring their own treble and bass tones becomes a journey, a personal experience. “The voice is the muscle of the soul. The voice is intimately tied to our body and emotions. From the cry of birth to the weeping of death. It is expression, it is communication, outward. Yet, the voice is a key to the interior” (Cerezo, n.d.).

“Cerebral gymnastics” has also proven effective to activate the body. Trying to perform this along with breathing presents great challenges. Given my knowledge of Bioenergetics, derived from my Humanistic Body Psychotherapy Master’s Degree, I sometimes utilize vibratory, grounding exercises, without delving too deeply into them.

Frequently, body awareness is promoted in the processes mentioned above in the form of brief pauses. This is done by asking participants, with their eyes open or closed, about their bodily sensations emanating after each effort.

And now... “Breath, body and voice!” is the cry that puts students on the alert to get ready to synchronize together. This mixture of breath-voice-body exercise produces an inner connection, keeps them alert, awake, among many other benefits. Basically, the group is ready to proceed.

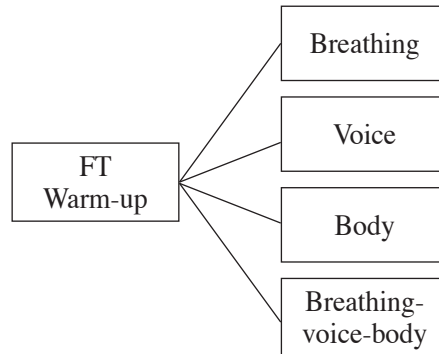


Figure 2. Forward theater warm-up.

Rather than relying on authors, I have re-collected some of my learnings from my theater workshops. After testing the effectiveness of various techniques, I finally refined what I call *the Top Three theatrical techniques in Teatro del Devenir*). Through playing with an imaginary ball, making human photographs and visualizing scenes to carry them out in reality, the results have been amazing. To analyze the prospective elements involved in *the Top Three* is equal to being at the top of a vantage point watching the Futures Studies panorama. The link between feelings, emotions, cognitions, movements, play all deliver meaningful learning.

Some of my students have thus commented:

“Now I get it, we do not see the future, but we can mold it. It can change in size, shape, but as long as everybody is focused and with a common objective, we can make it exist!” excitedly commented a student.

“It is scary to see that our future can be similar to that!” another student said when some classmates developed a human picture of social violence where there was no respect, not even for our elders.

“I thought we were not going to be able to dramatize what all of us imagined, but we did and it was a good activity.”

“If we can do something like this, why can't we build shared futures?” was someone's reflection after performing a little scene with the whole group.

Teatro del Devenir's Top Three theatrical techniques addresses the long-term vision, storytelling, exploration, future narrative, emotional intelligence, decision making and more. Up to this point, you may either make use of some more theatrical techniques or use Futures Studies techniques applied in a playful and dramatic context (e.g. Rip Van Winkle, flashforwards, Daydreaming, etc.)

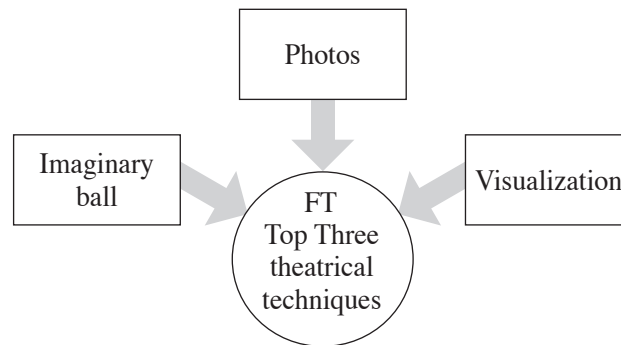


Figure 3. Forward theater warm-up top three of theatrical techniques

It is important to notice that the warm-up and the theatrical techniques can be used separately, if and only if the one applying it knows the exact purpose, the reasons for it, and its focus. Whenever the whole methodology is applied, theatrical techniques should always be preceded by the warm-up. Never perform a final piece of theatrical work without a prior “sensitization”.

Performing a final stage representation allows the participants to perceive and feel the future situation. Each piece of work is a stage performance as storytelling. The whole group is divided in three teams, one for each type of scenario (names are presented in Spanish, since a precise English translation has not been found yet for all the concepts): Utopía, Eutopía and Distopía.

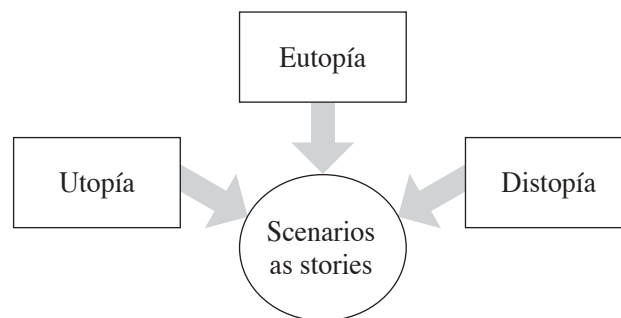


Figure 4. Scenarios as stories (Spanish terms).

These scenarios refer to (Montero, Alethia & Baena, 2014):

- Utopía: an idealized alternative world to the existing world
- Eutopía: described as a good place that does exist, but in contrast to Utopia, its existence is real. It is an approximation of the human fulfillment. (*This term may change in the future, it has been disputed in some discussions due to its original meaning presented above.) But the objective has been to elaborate the trend scenario, the present continuous, the “future-able” unchanged.
- Distopía: is the anti-Utopia. A maligned Utopia in which reality occurs opposite to an ideal society.

Why use storytelling in learning futures? Stories are powerful devices which explore many aspects of human futures in ways not accessible to reason, analysis or conventional futures research techniques. In addition they explore social, technological, environmental aspects and their influences on change. They can also be based on research as well as extrapolation of available data of global trends. As Head (2012, p.43) mentions throughout a storytelling section: “Stories encourage people to relate more closely to the innovation or scenario presented, and create new frames of reference for audiences to experience them imaginatively and emotionally.” Again, in these stories we are

permitted to use other Future Studies techniques. To elaborate these scenarios, scripts are not exactly what are needed; selecting a theme and a time horizon first, is more important.

Trainees receive “Guidelines and Technical specifications”. They already have a previous body of foresight knowledge, so they can reach a scenario through any method, tool, technique. The brain needs order and structure (Montero, 2013) so the STEEP or Verne Wheelwright’s personal domains (Wheelwright, Verne; Montero Alethia; Baena, 2010) indicate the variables to be used. The utilization of theater elements such as make-up, scenery and others elements are also highlighted. With all this, they create a scenario world. Preparation time varies from a day to a month maximum, depending on the context (academic, NGO, community group etc).

By the third call, we begin! Welcome to the future. Look at it face to face. Spectator, your entire being is about to pierce through the mirror of the nonexistent. You are about to take part in an unknown universe under construction. Witness a bit of the possibilities that are to come!

Actor, live your rehearsal of the futures as a first-hand palpable experience!

The fundamentals of the scenarios are reinforced and the main futures-building-skills such as imagination, creativity, lateral or divergent thinking, innovation, problem solving, strategic thinking and teamwork are developed. Most attendees by now are having fun, relaxing and are getting to know more about themselves and their colleagues. This is when it all makes sense. The simulation of a future situation, whether it is Utopía, Eutopía or Distopía, is possible in a very vivid way.

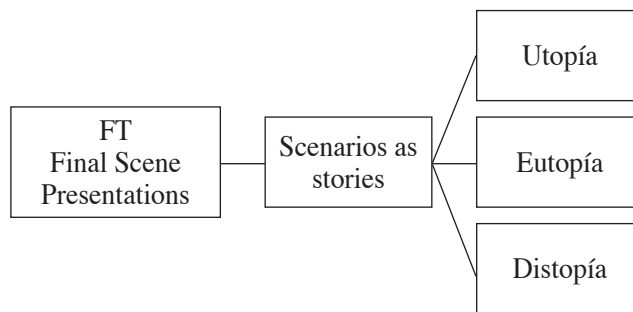


Figure 5. Forward Theater finales.

Teatro del Devenir has been applied in Master's' Degrees, bachelor's, courses, workshops and isolated classes, whether they are foresight based or not. Learning has become significant. In a world where technology is so prevalent, it seems relevant to preserve the human touch in everything we do. The changes, the futures marked by great speed, the complexity, the “info-xication” and more, require from my point of my view, a human-centered humanity. *Teatro del Devenir* raises awareness from various dimensions and is an integrative way of learning. Emotions are set aside in a large part of education. We are very accustomed to cultivate ourselves through the mind. Our general learning originally comes from our senses, from what we perceive around us.. The human body is responsible for this. We should be educating ourselves and others through the mind-body system. As educators who teach Futures topics, we should prepare our students holistically for what is coming, even though many of us were not trained to teach holistically.

Conclusion

As a method of teaching future scenarios, *Teatro del Devenir* has important key educational objectives: a) to enhance the conceptual, technical and human skills to build futures; b) to reinforce human intelligence in various dimensions; c) to encourage learners to get “out of the box”.

Introspection is emphasized in the practice and trainings-- affectivity and socialization are encouraged while studying takes place in a fun way.

Being in touch with all this creativity and imagination connects the participants with their inner child, allows them to integrate and empower their being, stimulate their brain and their senses in unconventional ways.

We are all actors, in our daily lives we play not one but several roles and we do not always represent them in a successful way.

Roles should encompass a total realization as human beings, but that is not the way it is; we are dissatisfied, fragmented beings, wrapped up in a role, representing roles that often we do not want. Some roles are outside our desires, outside our hopes and dreams, until we are given the opportunity to represent them and create them in the future.

Teatro del Devenir is inclusive of diverse foresight techniques; it generates stories where the role-playing is an action, not a performance. The participants have multiple possibilities for integrating psychology, art, foresight, politics, etc. with their respective inner selves.

Therefore, *Teatro del Devenir* becomes an exercise of individual and group action; multidisciplinary responses offer sociological, artistic, psychological, therapeutic possibilities and visions of futures. Created from humans for humans, each individual empowers himself/herself; this could become a therapeutic pedagogical process. Working with spontaneity, imagination, creativity and human reality and experience allows for reflecting on created futures; this becomes a prospective teaching method, an existential way of building futures. The main challenge is oneself. The challenge is within us whether to carry or to remove that which limits us. It is within us whether to allow ourselves to live new experiences. Within us whether to be the architect of constructing our future. And as John Milton said: "The mind is its own place and in itself, can make of heaven a hell and of hell a heaven."

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