

## Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (All Submissions)

**0348**

**U3** | Beaumaris 2

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Forum theatre: creative solutions and critical debate in higher education

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**Research Domain:** Academic practice ,work, careers and cultures (AP)

**Abstract:** Under what conformities does teaching and learning operate within higher education? What are the big dilemmas for higher education now? What creative ways can we use to address these challenges?

This will be an interactive workshop where participants will be invited to join in with discussion, games and short improvisations.

Forum theatre has been used in contexts to stimulate debate about difficult situations, often focusing on power inequalities, oppression and the importance of dialogue. By directly intervening, participants can bring their own knowledge and experience to bear to the scene. We teach with our 'whole selves' and this workshop will introduce playful ways of exploring pressing issues around teaching and learning, and researching teaching and learning, in higher education. For 75 minutes, participants will be invited to forget any preconceptions of what to expect from a conference workshop and co-create some serious play.

**Paper:**

- Under what conformities does teaching and learning operate within higher education?
- What are the big dilemmas for higher education now?
- What creative ways can we use to address these challenges?
- How can higher education address issues around equality and discrimination?

This will be an interactive workshop where participants will be invited to join in with discussion, games and short improvisations. Rather than have prepared panel speakers, this session will involve splitting participants into three groups who are each tasked with creating a short script demonstrating an every day dilemma in higher education. Each group will then present the script in forum theatre style i.e. audience members may intervene and change the script to find a problem. The workshop will end with a discussion arising out of the dilemmas and solutions presented. In forum theatre it is often this discussion which is the most generative and creative part of the session.

Forum theatre was established by Boal (1985) as a way to draw an audience into debates by using short plays as provocations. When audience members see a situation they think could be handled differently, they intervene and change the course of a story. This workshop will explore a series of brief scenarios where educators and educational researchers are faced with problematic situations in higher education. The purpose of the workshop is for participants to work together to explore alternative approaches. Theatre games have a long history of relaxing, focussing and bonding a group of people in preparation for creative work. Sensitive use in a safe space, theatre games can bring together non-actors into a cohesive group where creative ideas, often with much humour, can flow. Playfulness and trust are central to the success of the session. Improvisation can often be part of an educator's repertoire as they respond to changing needs of learners, but theatre-based improvisation which involves literally stepping into the shoes of another is a source of true empathy and understanding of others' position. Debates within the field are often quite polarised with issues of control, measurement and competition challenging collegiality. Issues which could be addressed include:

- The role of metrics in valuing educational research
- The impact of academic development
- Research and teaching vying for prestige over linkage
- Student as customers
- Educational technologies as tools of surveillance
- Graduates as products
- The role of failure in higher education

Forum theatre has been used in contexts to stimulate debate about difficult situations, often focusing on power inequalities, oppression and the importance of dialogue. By directly intervening, participants can bring their own knowledge and experience to bear to the scene. Forum theatre is suitable for complex situations where there is no one solution and the ensuing discussion is often the most generative part of the session. No prior performing experience is necessary.

Teaching is often described as performance. Many performers within theatre would dispute that performance is an act of concealment, but more a process of self-revelation which is predicated on authenticity (Brook, 1996). We teach with our 'whole selves' and this workshop will introduce playful ways of exploring pressing issues around teaching and learning, and researching teaching and learning, in higher education. For 75 minutes, participants will be invited to forget any preconceptions of what to expect from a conference workshop and co-create some serious play.

Time will be given to discuss the potential of theatre techniques such as forum theatre and improvisation as a teaching method to explore controversial topics with students, and as means to challenge established perceptions, group dynamics, and empowerment/disempowerment. Participants will be invited to reflect on their experience of the session, what feelings it provoked and how this relates back to students and their experiences of liminality when learning in an unfamiliar subject (Meyer and Land, 2006).

This will take the form of a theatre workshop involving warm-up exercises and games, script reading and improvisation. A room with a flexible open space is necessary e.g. it can be cleared of furniture to accommodate a performance area.

## Resources & References

Brook, P., (1996), *The empty space: A book about the theatre: Deadly, holy, rough, immediate*. Simon and Schuster.

Boal, A., (1985), *Theatre of the Oppressed*, trans. Charles A. and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1979).

Meyer, J.H.F. and Land, R. (2006) *Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge: Issues of liminality*, in: Meyer, J.H.F. and Land, R. (eds.), *Overcoming Barriers to Student Understanding: threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge*, London and New York: Routledge.