



Our Theoretical Understanding informs our Policy

The aim of Youth Theatre Facilitation in Crooked House is to support the developmental growth of a young person. This is done by leading them through theatre-making activities.

Drama Facilitation encourages our participants to reflect on, to share, and to edit their public contributions (speech, performance, appearance, etc) in order to make engaging theatre together.

The process involves a sharing of the individual's perspectives and experiences in order to illuminate the social organisation of the world around them.

By exploring the experience of our members' interaction with organised systems, formal and non-formal, we encourage young people to see their actions in a *social context* rather than from a purely *personal perspective*. Organised systems are those such as the education system, the family system, the social welfare system, the system of government, the capital-labour system, the system of socialisation, systems of organising and representing culture, gendering and identification systems, and so on.

We encourage young people, for example, not to internalise failure; to not necessarily blame themselves when outcomes with authority are negative; and to avoid self-destructive behaviour when things go bad for them.

This is part of building up resilience. It requires long-term work of an educational and creative kind, rather than short-term behaviour-fixing work focused exclusively on training.

FACILITATE TO PROVIDE AN AESTHETIC ENGAGEMENT

Theatre practice serves two purposes here: one is to engage the young person fully and *aesthetically* in the collaborative creation of a piece of art. Over time this process becomes less about providing an escape from negativity or stasis, and more about developing key skills for living. An aesthetic engagement is one in which you have to use all of your senses, employ your intellect, be aware of your feelings, use your body, and open your imagination, to whatever is in front of you. You are *fully engaged* in the activity and your brain is producing hormones like adrenaline that help you engage in the activity. An aesthetic engagement is the opposite of an *anaesthetic* engagement, which, as Ken Robinson succinctly outlines (in his 2007 [TED talk](#) on the role of creativity in education) mostly dulls your senses and puts you to sleep. (1)

When young people are engaged in an aesthetic experience they don't have 'room' in their brains to think about self-consciousness, the things that hold them back, or in some cases their depression or anxiety. Their neural pathways are engaged in a kind of



mindfulness, being fully in the moment. They are also producing a cascade of other hormones that include serotonin and oxytocin (often called the feel-good hormone). This is perhaps why there is a strange dichotomy one might observe in a really good youth theatre rehearsal room. While making a theatre piece about serious social and personal issues there is an unexpected amount of joy in the room. The subject matter might be quite ‘deep’ or ‘heavy’ and often emotional, but the mood is nearly always positive, warm, and uplifting. In short, a room with a youth theatre in it is nearly always a machine for generating happiness.

FACILITATE TO ENCOURAGE CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT

The second purpose of youth theatre, in our experience and practice, is to develop critical and analytical skills and modes of enquiry in young people.

Our use of theatre aims to support a young person to develop independent thinking, curiosity, asking questions; and to take independent and voluntary action that is appropriate to the context. Our understanding of ‘appropriate’ is informed by our values (which you can read about on our website).

Our drama facilitation should encourage young people away from a process of internalising systemic failure (blaming themselves for ‘not fitting in’) and towards one of constructive problem-solving (working to change the system so that it becomes flexible enough to meet all needs). In this way the theatre-making process encourages young people to be critical, to see their world sociologically. In time, they discover theories and perspectives (ranging from Karl Marx to Pierre Bourdieu), learn how to critique them, and then formulate their own social lens through which to view of the world.

FACILITATE TO EXPLORE HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

More subtly, we often create material based on experiences that our members had when they ‘gave away’ their power, or when they were ‘seduced’, or persuaded, or bullied or groomed into complying with a situation that they instinctively felt was unjust but about which they were unable to vocalise their feelings. Our ordinary lives are full of such moments. On stage they can act as metaphors for larger social issues where the individual represents a community, or even an entire nation. Much literary theatre employs such an approach, with the Theatre of the Absurd most obviously foregrounding it as a dramatic device (as in the work of playwrights such as Harold Pinter, Eugene Ionesco and Edward Albee). It appeals particularly to our young people in Ireland because their lives are usually scripted for them: they have little control over the social systems with which they engage (school, family, health) and they easily identify with the experience of being strictly ‘shepherded’ into a way of behaving. Making collaborative theatre can be one of the few activities where they have sufficient control to exercise autonomy and explore independent processes of making meaning. This approach to exploring power is the basis for workshops and programmes that we have delivered, and continue to deliver, around Europe. While it is rooted in Theatre of



the Oppressed, it is a refined version of it that has evolved alongside my work with young people over the past two decades.

ROLE OF THE YOUTH THEATRE FACILITATOR

Youth Theatre Facilitators (YTF) carry out a broad range of artistic, welfare and administrative tasks. In Ireland, some Youth Theatre Facilitators are the sole facilitator in their youth theatre, while others are part of a facilitation team involving other regular facilitators, guest practitioners and volunteers.

In Crooked House we have paid, contracted Youth Theatre Facilitators and Volunteer Youth Theatre Facilitators.

The following are some of the duties and responsibilities of a YTF.

- To support the artistic vision of the youth theatre (carry out drama work that adheres to the style and philosophy of the theatre company). In Crooked House, for example, we do not engage in Dramatherapy, so our drama work should aim to be critically engaged with the social, communal, and political, as well as based in the shared personal experience of the participant.
- To help develop an annual plan of youth theatre activities in conjunction with the team and with the Artistic Director
- To plan and facilitate regular youth theatre workshops
- To engage in Youth Theatre Ireland opportunities if desired and appropriate
- To engage with members during workshops to ensure their views are heard and contribute to youth theatre plans
- To review activities with young people and evaluate at the end of each block of sessions
- To supervise / support any volunteer youth leaders working with the youth theatre
- To coordinate and lead a membership drive each year
- To manage day-to-day youth theatre administration (including membership forms, attendance list, incident / accident forms etc.)
- To implement the youth theatre's child protection policy and procedures alongside other staff/volunteers
- To update the youth theatre's social media pages as needed
- To participate in training (including child protection training) where needed and appropriate.

SKILLS OF THE YOUTH THEATRE FACILITATOR

A youth theatre facilitator needs to have the following skills:

- Be able to encourage voluntary participation in workshop activities
- Be able to sequence exercises in a developmental order. That means that one activity lays the foundation for the next one; or that one activity arises from skills participants have developed in the previous.
- Be able to encourage acting and performance skills



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- Be able to critique in a useful and constructive way acting, storytelling and performance efforts
- Be able to offer feedback grounded in knowledge of characterisation, plot options, acting skills, and dialogue or movement
- Be able to support young people's personal confidence building, recognise barriers that get in the way of that. And help young people find the skills to deal with those barriers
- Be able to read a group, understand what the group needs in the present moment, and supply that if possible
- Be able to adapt language, exercises and feedback to appropriate ages and understandings without dumbing down or loosing challenges
- Be able to provide, monitor and support a space where fruitful collaboration can take place
- Know the difference between drama and counselling or therapy and avoid offering the latter
- Know about safeguarding and child protection issues and have read the company's policy on this
- Know how to make a workshop exciting by offering and supporting appropriate challenging activities
- Supporting ambition, risk and failure as useful qualities and outcomes of positive learning

(I) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDZFcDGpL4U>