

TACTIC LEGISLATIVE THEATRE

Legislative theatre, a tool for proposing and enacting legislative and policy changes at any level of government, takes Augusto Boal's interactive forum theatre exercises from the stage into the real world.

CONTRIBUTED BY

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Based in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, Tracey uses engaging techniques to help groups establish and accomplish goals, build teams, develop leadership skills, and make decisions together. Tracey is also a campaigner, zinester, organizer, and forum theater practitioner, and has developed plays around issues of poverty and social justice.

"THEATRE IS POLITICAL AND POLITICS IS THEATRE."

"Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it."

—Augusto Boal

In 1992, Augusto Boal, the creator of Theatre of the Oppressed, was faced with a dilemma. His theatre work was an international sensation. Centres for the Theatre of the Oppressed were up and running in both France and Brazil, and people all over the world were practicing his ideas. At the same time, he was facing pressure at home in Brazil to run for city council in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Faced with a choice between the two, Boal decided not to choose. Instead, he combined the two possibilities and passions into one — and legislative theatre was born.

To those who say that theatre is nice but has no tangible outcomes, legislative theatre may be the answer.

Legislative theatre is essentially a forum theatre performance — a short play about a particular issue or set of issues that ends in a crisis, which the audience is then invited to help solve by taking the place of one of the characters on stage — but with a key difference. The difference is that the audience interventions are followed by a brainstorm and discussion of policies or laws that could help solve some of the problems that came up in the performance, or that could help bring about some of the solutions "spect-actors" (the engaged audience) had offered during the performance. In some iterations of legislative theatre, a later step involves mock legislatures being created to debate bills drafted based on the laws or policies previously suggested in the theatre exercise.

POTENTIAL RISKS

The version of legislative theatre that Boal developed while he was a city councilor was, understandably, an ideal arrangement that has proven difficult to match since. In his case, the elected official was the main convenor of the process, and was therefore in a position to act on the recommendations that emerged. In other cases, without one or more elected officials directly involved in the project, or without a firm and genuine commitment to the project from elected officials, it may be much harder to achieve such results. Therefore, it is advisable to seek out legislators who are willing to play a role throughout the process, including fighting for the resulting recommendations in the actual legislature.

RELATED TOOLS

Boal's election campaign literature explained his rationale:

"I want to make politics but I don't want to change my profession — I am a man of the theatre! For me, this was always possible and now it is necessary: Theatre is political and politics is theatre."

Boal was one of 42 city councilors elected from a field of 1,000 candidates. Over the next four years, he developed the methods of legislative theatre, forming 19 permanent Theatre of the Oppressed companies in Rio, and from that work, introducing 30 pieces of legislation. In 13 of these 30 cases, as Boal put it, "desire became law" and laws were changed based on the proposals that emerged from the exercises.

LEARN MORE

The Courage to Be Happy: Augusto Boal, Legislative Theatre, and the 7th International Festival of the Theatre of the Oppressed
Paul Heritage, 1994
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1146376>

Augusto Boal, City Councillor: Legislative Theatre and the Chamber in the Streets: An Interview
Richard Schechner, Sudipto Chatterjee, and Augusto Boal, 1998
https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/theatre_s/current/postgraduate/maipr/currentstudents/teaching_1112/warwick/st1_reading/sarkar_m_augusto_boal_city_councillor.pdf

Turning Theatre into Law, and Other Spaces of Politics
Geraldine Pratt and Caleb Johnston, 2007
<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1474474007072821>

Stories

- Replacing Cops with Mimes

Tactics

- Electoral guerrilla theatre
- Forum theatre
- Image theatre
- Storytelling

Principles

- Develop an inside-outside strategy
- Enable, don't command
- Follow the lead of the most impacted
- Give voice to those that can't speak

Theories

- Pedagogy of the Oppressed
- Theatre of the Oppressed

Methodologies

- Artstorm

TAGS

Art, Campaign strategy,
Democracy, Policy