

Chapter 8. The body, the creative arts, and inclusion: a certified program experience “Find your own voice”

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Abstract

The exploration and construction of creative spaces are essential for human beings, and allow for flexible individual and collective encounters in which the value of an individual's experience is not predetermined. The experiences and modes of expression of the participants are appraised in an environment in which the borders and paradigms of what one “should” do or how one “should” act are open. The creation of spaces where difference is valued and validated becomes a privileged pretext for the goal of inclusion, through which all of the participants can find, develop, and express themselves.

This process has been conceived as a certificate program with the purpose of developing spaces of inclusion and encounter by placing the creative, sensitive exploration of the body at the centre. The creative arts allow us to be open to living experience and to the joy of the diversity.

There have been two cohorts in the program, with a total of fifteen students, women, with ages between 20 and 35 years, from different backgrounds such as anthropology, preschool and special education, psychology, social and political studies, and the arts. We use methods such as DanceAbility, Biodanza, dance improvisation, music improvisation with the body, and voice and musical instruments, as well as storytelling and photography.

The participants draw on their learning processes as a different way of understanding inclusion. They become better able to recognize their own creative nature and to apply their experience in their everyday work.

Keywords: pedagogy, presence, inclusion, art, body.

Theoretical background

We started by reflecting on several authors and proposals that we had encountered in different moments of our personal and professional lives. We also took suggestions from participants in the diploma program, with the knowledge that every experience adds something valuable to the path we walk together. We share with authors such as Estanislao Antero, Fernando Barcena the concept of the “pedagogy of the presence,” (2003; s.f), which also takes inspiration from Hanna Arendt. Barcena’s concept questions the way we live and see this world and the capacity we have to transform it “with help from everybody else, or simply some others, through necessary mediations” (Barcena, sf; p.2), and through the possibilities that the arts offer for us to understand, interpret, and transform, and to find our own voices.

We also consider the proposal of Carlos Skliar in which he invites us to think and create a “pedagogy of difference” (Skliar, 2002, 200814), in a continual reflection on how we see ourselves, others, and how we have been seen. From Humberto Maturana, we take meditations on the sense of being human (Maturana, 2002), which allow us to question both that sense and ourselves from a position of otherness, and to challenge the individual forms of being in this world that make diversity a problematic and exclusionary subject, as well as the necessity of transforming the many institutional spaces where this exclusion happens. These transformations can only be possible if they begin with what we are capable of creating ourselves in our daily lives.

We take the body as a foundation, keeping in mind that our bodies are constructed socially, that society is incarnated in the body and that our

bodies reflect the mechanisms of power of the social order we inhabit (Butler, 2001). In considering the agency we have as bodies to transform our exclusionary social environment, we find that it is possible to manifest that agency through our personal explorations and changes as well as through collective action and growth (Pizza, 2005; Butler, 2001).

We believe that inclusion in different social contexts is always permeated by the living experience of bodies. We engage in the exploration and construction of creative spaces as a vital expression of the human being, making that experience a locus of permanent growth and research that approaches Denzin and Lincoln's proposal for the emergence of research-action-critique and of participation in the social sciences, especially those based in the arts. This approach constitutes a new theoretical and methodological genre of qualitative research, with the objective of "[creating] research processes oriented towards actions that are useful inside the local communities where they originate" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2015).

Method / Description of the experience

Our starting point is the fact that all of the people that come to the course have their own backgrounds and experiences, and have an interest in the subject of inclusion, related in most cases to their work performance, their areas of training and in some cases with personal histories. We ask how they can develop that interest through the arts, mediating their experiences through the body. That is to say that each participant enters this field, implicitly or explicitly, because the theme of inclusion occurs in their daily lives and they experience relationships of otherness with those that have

been socially excluded or labeled, such as people with disabilities, people in vulnerable conditions, or others.

The journey begins with the premise of the encounter— all of the participants have the opportunity to have this encounter with themselves and their own questions, with the other participants, and with the teachers. As instructors, we take on the task of unpacking those experiences. We all take part in this journey, and we are there to share what we know, what we believe, and who we are.

We take elements from the methodologies of contemporary dance, in particular DanceAbility (Alessi, 1987), the Biocentric pedagogy, (Cavalcante, 2004) and experiential methodology such as sensory exploration (Rodari, 1983), music workshops, and visual arts tools. We make use of the communicative and interactive possibilities of these forms as well as written and oral communication.

The generative “detonating” experiences emerge from each of our backgrounds, from the proposals we use as source material, and from the professional and life experience of the teachers. The course employs three lines of techniques that correspond to three different embodied paths in the arts: movement and dance, words and visual expression, and sound and voice.

The course is structured around five modules called The Sensitive Body, Feeling, Being in Time, Being in Space, and Creation. This guide concepts are inspired from the principles of improvisation proposed by Alito Alessi in DanceAbility methodology, that help us to understand how is the exclusion made by the parameters that society created to normalize how we

should sense our body, experience our relations, the time and the space. (Alessi, 2010)

In *The Sensitive Body* we interrogate the senses to search and recognize ourselves in who we are, what we do, and what defines our corporality (Wainwright & Turner, 2003). From there we can comprehend and question normality and abnormality, and identify and deconstruct stereotypes and prejudices.

In *The Feeling Body* we explore ways of transforming and being transformed, we recognize the limits that are created and imposed on us (Pinkola, 2000; Pearson, 1992), and find ways to work together to challenge ourselves to affectively put our individual and collective possibilities into action.

In *Being and Time* we take on the task of comprehending the vertiginous nature of modernity, identifying its traps, and exploring its possibilities and the diversity of its temporalities (Kapra, 2000; Ende, 2007).

In *Being in Space* we ask ourselves about the social construction of space, and explore our ways of being in the world and the possibilities of creating and recreating our spaces, as well as the value of the diversity in that process.

The last one is *Creation*. We put the results of our journey on the stage, and take the risk of proposing, exposing, experimenting, rehearsing, living, and encountering each other.

Results

The course is conceived as a living experience process that nourishes during the process and from the embodiment of new learning's that detonate in the participants' creative possibilities to engage the inclusion in each of the daily spaces they work in. The results that are shown tell us about a systematic reflexive process they have during the course and its impact in time through a conversational meeting made with them, one year later.

Participating in this course was like being on a journey. In the words of Jana (All names used correspond to pseudonyms that the participants chose as part of the process of the course), "It was like entering into a trance state". The participants allowed us to lead them through the proposals and the activities in that space.

As a consequence of the experience that we built during the course, some of the students felt the need to rethink the possibilities of what they can do and what they can be.

Some initiated important processes of personal growth, as the course brought us to discover and recognize the presence of memories in our bodies that impact our daily lives. For example, Eliska made an "epithelial self-portrait" in which she used drawings and photographs of segments of her body projected together with some writing to have a long-postponed conversation with her mother. Through her work she was able to reveal who she is and what she wants to do in the world, and how that is different from the person that she felt she had been molded to become, pushed to conform to the desires of others that she didn't share.

Others described the experience as a way of "finding their own voice". It was something that emerged from discussing and reflecting on the

detonating experiences that allowed us to listen to ourselves through our bodies, through music, and through the stories we created together.

For Filovera, finding her own voice meant being in tune with her own being and letting it speak, so that her voice or her intuition could lead her.

Collective exercises allow us to explore our natural instincts: to identify ourselves with animals, establish relations between smells and sensations, dreams and desires, colors and vibrations, music and emotional states, and give us the ability to share our otherness and also our disagreements when we converse. They help us see ourselves through the mirror of the other, sometimes being mirrors for others, sometimes for ourselves.

Jimpu appreciates how we created the encounter through conversation, and wove into it the feminine, the practice of observing and valuing diversity, and the possibility of connecting with the experience of others.

Jana describes it as “...an experience that you miss, that you feel the lack of.”

Discussion

The experience is, at the beginning, destabilizing for the participants' canons about what is expected and pre-conceived in an education program, since it places them in a need to work from an intimate exploration of their own prejudices and real relationships with that that inclusion implies.

The body is usually abandoned in our daily life routines, and recognized it as the axis and place of knowledge and relationship with the world, it is one of the central proposals in the certification, and this is only possible to afford gradually because, in some circumstances, it means to confront itself with the unknown.

The confidence the participants build through the sensible experiences, allowed them to explore those dimensions that sometimes brings up pains and scars from deep past experiences, despite the fact that in the beginning the group feels misplaced, that allowed us to partner and join the process with who evidences it and had decided to transit the confrontation in a creative way.

Conclusions

For us as guides, being able to go through the course, seeing the class as a sensitive space for sharing, where knowledge is constructed and permeated by the living experience of each person, it is a fundamental tool for the pedagogical encounter.

As teachers, this allow us to develop a means of constructing knowledge in which the sensitive and unique humanity of every person is validated, and which, step by step, we can lead by our own example.

We consider that to bet for experiences of education through the arts and bodies, allow us to empower the creativity we all have, to trust in the richness of diversity and explore different ways to be together and push forward in the construction of more inclusive environments.

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