Creative processes

I caught the theater bug when I was 17. At school, we started a theater group, got some help, and put together a play that had a lot to do with what was going on at the time (it was summer 1989 and the world was changing). It took us a year and a half to finish and be ready to perform, but those 18 months changed me and helped me process what was happening around me.

It hasn't let go of me since.

Since 2012, I have been a teacher at a Waldorf school, where theater is part of the curriculum in grades 8 and 12, but there is also plenty of room for it if you want to use it.

I took my first steps toward theater work with students at the request of a teacher who had been asked by a few interested young people if there was a possibility for this. That's how I came to my first 8th grade theater class—and to the realization that I still had a lot to learn if I wanted to continue down this path. After a small detour, I heard about the part-time training program at the Chekhov Seminar in Berlin—and signed up.

What I experienced there is difficult to put into words: a feeling of being nourished and fulfilled after every single weekend, a real rush of excitement in the monologue work, a sense of my own creative sources, many things that helped me in my entry into the teaching profession—and at the end of the year, an (imaginary) toolbox with which I began my theater work with young people. In the background, I was accompanied by Dido-Marie's statement: "Theater is the opposite of puberty – in puberty I hide my body, in theater I play with it."

In recent years, there have been various types of projects in theater work. The first—albeit, as I was surprised to discover, the smallest—group consisted of plays that "only" needed to be staged. Here, I was repeatedly aided by composition analysis, the usefulness of which Jörg had clearly conveyed to us. Once this was done, I could refer back to it again and again and was flexible in my rehearsal work because I didn't have to constantly reinvent the wheel. If a new situation arose (and that happens more often than one would sometimes like when working with classes), a glance at the paper was enough and I knew what I could rehearse in the new constellation and what was important. In working with this analysis, I strongly felt that it allows you to "invite" everything you need for your work into the imaginary rehearsal room. If I then managed to maintain this space, to consciously enter and leave it, nothing got mixed up and I was able to rehearse "Parzival" with the 8th grade in the morning and "The Magic Flute" with the volunteer group in the afternoon without confusing everything.

The second group of pieces were those that I had developed and written together with the students. The first class I tried this with was one where I felt very strongly that I couldn't just give them a piece to perform; they had to do it themselves—which they did with enthusiasm. I found a group with whom I developed a play—a crime comedy, just as they had wanted. Here, too, compositional analysis was a very helpful tool, albeit applied "backwards." We pushed many benches together, spread endless rolls of paper on them, and felt our way piece by piece toward the plot, the characters, and the mood of the scenes. The result was the play "Koffer, Kohle, Keller oder Werner Steinharts erster Fall" (Suitcase,

Coal, Cellar, or Werner Steinhart's First Case). Even during the development of the play, initial ideas arose as to how the whole thing could be staged – and in the end, not only the stage was used, but also the courtyard, the foyer, the stairwell, and the hall.

Stefan was very helpful in this endeavor, mentoring the whole thing from behind the scenes and ensuring that I was able to take this risk in the first place, because the phrase "But we've never done it that way before" is often thrown at you when you want to try something new. But the experiment was a success, the young people were on board—and it was THEIR PLAY that they brought to the stage.

In later writing projects, the initiative often came from the students, either because they were passionate about a topic or because they simply wanted to try their hand at writing. The school always required the class to have a selection of plays, so I had to present them with other "finished" plays as part of the decision-making process. But without exception, the students chose THEIR play every time – and that was also the case for those who hadn't contributed to the writing, because they were always involved in the revision process. Here, too, I always had the feeling that the play was, in a sense, drawn from the classroom environment, that themes, characters, and moods already existed in and around the class and "only" had to be picked up and processed by us.

I often had the same feeling when I wrote plays for classes. I often already had a feel for the moods and themes of the classes, so that the material sort of "fell into my lap." This process was particularly impressive to me last year.

The class that "needed" a play had given me a topic before the holidays. I had read the book and racked my brains trying to figure out how to implement it. It was about the process of boys growing up in an all-boys boarding school (where, logically, there were no female teachers, only male teachers) – how was I supposed to work that into a class that had only five boys but nine girls, many of whom definitely didn't want to play "trouser roles"?

After the summer holidays, the class had abandoned this idea, but they didn't have any others either. A few girls brought me a novel that was full of malice and psychological oddities – also not suitable material for an eighth-grade class. When I asked them what they liked so much about this book, they replied that they were interested in the manipulation of dreams. Of course, "Krabat" immediately came to mind, but this play was not feasible given the size and composition of the class. So what to do?

Then I went to Riga for the fall break. From there, we drove to the moor in Kemeri. I had never seen anything like it before. On the way there, we passed a cemetery that stretched beyond the village at the edge of a forest. The path then led directly into the moor. It didn't take much imagination to picture what it might look like here on wet, cold, foggy autumn days at dusk – the idea for "The Orphanage on the Moor" was born. While writing, I had the feeling that the material, characters, and places were "there" in a sense, and I just had to organize them (because sometimes they can be as unruly as eighth graders and make such a racket that you can't hear yourself think...), listen to them, and write down what they said to each other. Incidentally, I've often had this feeling of just watching the "inner movie" and having to write it down while writing.

So what I experienced time and again when writing and directing with classes, but also when acting myself, was confirmation of Jörg's statement: everything is there in the creative

process, the imaginative space is full, you just have to reach out and be alert to the answers you get to your questions – sometimes a little later, but they are there.

"There are sometimes special moments in the course of the world (...) when it happens that all things and beings, up to the most distant stars, interact in a unique way, so that something can happen that would never be possible before or after. Unfortunately, people generally do not know how to take advantage of them, and so these magical moments often pass unnoticed. But when someone recognizes them, great things happen."

How true this sentence from Michael Ende's book "Momo" is, and what happens when you manage to recognize and seize such a moment of glory, I once experienced with an eighth-grade class. They had read "Momo" during the coronavirus lockdown and written some very beautiful essays with some very profound thoughts, which their teacher had shown me. After the lockdown, these 12-year-olds came to me and announced that they wanted to perform "Momo" with me as an eighth-grade theater production. Two years later, the time had come. Because many performance projects had been "put on hold" due to the numerous restrictions, we had special working conditions. We could only rehearse on stage in the afternoons, and the class had to completely change their routine. Some students spent their mornings, which were supposed to be free, entirely in the workshop because they had decided to build a kind of cabinet for the hour flowers, which was to have sliding doors and a complicated mechanism so that a fog machine could be used to create the impression that the flowers inside were frozen.

They kept building until it was exactly how they had imagined it – and it worked. Another group, led by a student who had been dancing ballet for a long time, developed a choreography for Momo's encounter with the hour flowers in her own heart. Others developed musical motifs – for the children, the gray men, and for different moods in the scenes. And they also taught those who didn't actually play an instrument how to play these motifs. But because it was necessary for casting reasons, they practiced until they could do it. In this work, I didn't really have much more to do than pull the strings and coordinate the individual initiatives of the students. These were very special performances for me too – and the idea of ending the school year with a music theater project gained new momentum. No wonder that the "premiere" of this project was realized a year later with the very active participation of this class together with all upper school classes (7-9) and took place for the third time this year.

These are all examples of how creative work with students can function. When I consider all of these and other works from previous years, it occurs to me that every class, every individual, has something like a creative core that needs to be recognized and brought to life.

The methods I learned in the Chekhov courses are very helpful in this work; my "inner treasure chest" is filling up more and more every year. For this, I say THANK YOU from the bottom of my heart!

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