UNIT 2

2. ORIGINAL PLAYWRITING

Original playwriting is a thrilling and inclusive form of creative expression that allows anyone to bring their unique stories and ideas to life on stage. With just a pen and paper, and a willingness to explore the depths of the human experience, anyone can write a play and present it to an audience. In this unit, we will delve deeper into the world of playwriting and explore some of the techniques that can be used to create truly captivating and unforgettable plays.

2.1 Learning outcomes

Upon completing this unit, participants of the training program will:

► improve their ability to formulate ideas for plays

► learn how to create fully dimensional characters

► learn how to write effective dialogue

► understand how to develop storylines, reach climaxes, and develop satisfying conclusions for their plays.

► strengthen their cognitive abilities in areas such as memory and concentration, literacy, communication, creativity and imagination.

2.2 Theoretical background / Approach

Theatre is storytelling. Theatre became formalized, given form and structure, when playwrights entered the process in Ancient Greece around 532 BC.

From that time forward, playwrights start with something they believe needs to be said, whether that is a story to tell, a political or religious point to make, a question to be raised, or a humorous observation about the human condition to be revealed. The playwright creates a blueprint for all aspects of the play - acting, design, ambiance, or any other elements.

One of the major differences between plays and other forms of writing is that most writing is intended for an individual to read alone at their leisure. Plays are meant to be experienced in real time as a communal experience for an audience who has come together specifically for the event.

Playwriting theory has, from its beginning, been concerned with the search for the essential nature of dramatic writing. Early playwriting treatises (poetics) defined the essential aspects of drama as being the plot (creation of sequences of fictional events), the moral character of its heroes, the idea of enactment, or the rhetorical and lyrical qualities of the text. These categories were kept through later treatises with different emphasis being put on each category.

An understanding of drama as a sequence of fictional events (plot) has been central in acting theory.

Modern theories and techniques centred on Stanislavsky's ideas rely heavily on rehearsal methods that carefully establish the sequence of actions of the characters in a play as a result of psychological motivations. This method was described by Stanislavsky in "An Actor's Work on a Role", published in 1938, and is known as the Method of Physical Actions. This thesis reassesses the definition of playwriting as consisting essentially in the creation of a plot populated by suitable characters. Rather than discussing playwriting theory in isolation it attempts a bridge between acting theory and playwriting theory by using the Method of Physical Actions as an equivalent to plot. Acting theory is thus considered as a theoretical justification for the centrality of plot.

2.3 Learning and teaching methods

Below are presented various learning and teaching methods that can be employed to explore the aspects of playwriting techniques, structure, acts, scenes, characters and setting.

Lectures: Facilitators can provide lectures on the different aspects of playwriting, including the techniques, structure and character development. They can also discuss different playwriting styles and showcase examples from different playwrights.

Practical activities: Participants can be involved in writing exercises that involve developing a character or creating a setting. The activity can also include peer reviews to provide feedback and improve writing skills.

Reading and analysis: Reading plays written by different playwrights can help students understand the different techniques and structures used in playwriting. Analysing plays can help students identify the different acts, scenes and characters and understand how they contribute to the overall story.

Writing Assignments: Writing assignments can be given to students to help them develop their own playwriting skills. Assignments can include developing a character or creating a setting.

Collaboration: Collaborative activities can help participants learn from each other and develop their playwriting skills. They can be invited to work in groups to develop a play.

Overall, a combination of these can be employed to explore the different aspects of playwriting and help participants develop their own unique creative process.

2.4 Detailed unit description

The unit's first crucial aspect is terminology, which participants will find in the accompanying handout. It will be necessary to introduce and then deeply explore all the elements listed below:

▶ **Playwriting Techniques**

Playwriting involves a variety of techniques and approaches, as each playwright has their own unique creative process. Some prefer silence and solitude, while others thrive in noisy environments. Some start with an outline and add details along the way, while others write spontaneously and let the story unfold. Playwrights may also choose to retell existing stories or create their own original ones.

▶ **Structure (Plot)**

When the subject, theme, and story are chosen, the playwright must decide on the structure and plot of the play. The plot is like a series of events that occur in a specific order, often chronologically.

▶ **Acts**

Acts are the main structural units of a play, typically featuring a rising line of action that leads to a climactic event at the end of the act that leaves the audience wanting to come back to see what happens next. Most contemporary plays have two acts with an intermission between each. Elizabethan dramas, like Shakespeare's, tend to be written in five acts.

▶ **Scenes**

Within each act, there are scenes that represent different incidents or encounters and are frequently separated by time, locale, or different groups of characters.

▶ **Characters**

Characters are the people who participate in the action of the story, and the playwright must carefully craft them. They need to consider factors such as the characters' background, gender, age, ethnicity, education, family and desires. The playwright must know their characters well enough to determine how they would behave in different situations.

▶ **Setting**

The setting is the environment in which the play takes place. The playwright must decide where the characters live, work, and want to be, as well as the overall atmosphere of the play. Is the play set in a steam bath that turns out to be a way station where the dead wait to be sent to heaven or hell, or is the setting a fine dining restaurant? All of these decisions are crucial to creating a cohesive and engaging play.

In the framework of this unit's activities participants will be guided to create characters, dialogues, contents and conclusion of the play.

One of the main goals will be bringing lifelike characters to the stage. To achieve this, it is important to pay attention to detail and specificity. By writing mini-biographies of the characters, one can know them as well as their closest friends and understand how they would behave in the play's circumstances.

Another key aspect is making character dialogue sound natural, as dialogue is the primary component of playwriting. Every line of dialogue written for a character – whether it reveals their aspirations, frustrations, motivations or intentions — should be crafted to help them achieve their objectives while advancing the play's action.

The next step is developing the content of the play. The opening of the play needs to grab the audience; otherwise the battle is lost before it begins. This involves developing the inciting incident, the protagonist's role, building suspense and providing details of the characters' backstory.

Finally, the unit concludes with a discussion of the play's ending, which should be truthful, plausible and tie up any loose ends. The resolution provides the opportunity for the audience to see the world of the play after the climactic event.

2.5 Unit assessment

Assessment should be tailored to each individual's competencies, experience and expectations, taking in to account the unique challenges they may face. Upon completion of the delivery of this unit, participants should have developed their skills in creating engaging narratives and lifelike characters, as well as understanding the fundamental principles of playwriting, including structure, character development, plot and dialogue. They should be able to apply these skills to produce a well-crafted short play that meets the programme's standards. Additionally, participants should have strengthened their cognitive abilities in areas such as memory, concentration, literacy, communication, social skills, creativity and imagination.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed activities in improving the above-mentioned participants' competencies, questionnaires can be utilized. These questionnaires can allow the participants to express whether they perceive that they have improved their skills in these areas. Additionally, at the end of each session, time should be allocated to discussing these topics to enable participants to share their experiences with their peers.

In the framework of this training programme implementation, it is expected to have a professional familiar with the participants present during the sessions to support the facilitator and to provide objective assessment to ensure that the training is achieving its intended goals.

2.6 Additional resources

▶ Bicat, T. & Baldwin, C. & Barker, C. (2002). *Devised and Collaborative Theatre*: *A Practical Guide*. The Crowood Press Ltd. Ramsbury.

▶ Fraser, G. & Bayley, C. (2015). *Playwriting: a writers' and artists' companion. (Writers' and Artists' Companions)*. Bloomsbury Academic. London.

▶ Graham, S. & Hoggett, S. (2014). *The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre: Book of Devising Theatre*. Routledge. London.

▶ Smiley, S. (2005). *Playwriting: The Structure of Action*. Yale University Press. New Haven.

2.7 References

▶ *Mederos Syssoyeva, K. & Proudfit, S. (2016). Women, Collective Creation, and Devised Performance: The Rise of Women Theatre Artists in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries. Palgrave Macmillan. London*

2.8 Unit activities

2.8.1 Introduction exercises

EXERCISE NAME: INTRODUCTION

Exercise number: 1

Aims of the exercise

- Support the participants get to know each other
- Introduce the unit to the participants
- Introduce health and safety
- Set out the details of the format and structure of the programme

Focus level: Low

Energy requirement: Low

Materials: Flipchart and marker

Duration: 30-45 minutes

Instructions:

At the start of the session, facilitate introductions between participants, clarify the unit's aims and participants' expectations, and establish group and training ground rules. Encourage the group to share their expectations of the workshop, and record them on a flipchart. Checkmark those expectations that the training will attempt to meet based on the workshop aims, and place an 'x' against those that will not be met during the workshop.

Invite the group to suggest ground rules, and write them on the flipchart. Suggestions may include:

▶ Respect everyone's time by starting and ending sessions on time.

▶ Be respectful of other participants and facilitators, including different opinions and perspectives.

▶ Speak loudly enough for all to hear.

▶ Speak one at a time and avoid side conversations.

▶ Avoid judging others and maintain confidentiality for information shared within the workshop.

▶ Encourage everyone to participate equally.

After this introductory phase, the facilitator invites participants to perform 3 warm up exercises

The Name Game

- Choose one person to facilitate this activity.

- Distribute small sheets of paper and ask all participants to write one thing about themselves on their sheet of paper.

- After collecting all the pieces of paper, the facilitator will read each statement aloud.

- After each statement is read, the group will try to guess to whom it applies.

This exercise is an effective method of including each and every participant in the workshop.

Opening the Workshop

- Stand in a circle.

- Each person takes a turn to make a sound and a gesture to show how they are feeling.

- Each person can repeat all the sounds and gestures that came before them.

This is a good exercise to do at the start of the workshop, for everyone to express their feelings.

Call and Response

- All form a circle.

- A volunteer becomes the 'caller', they make a rhythmical sound and movement, for example, 'hah, hah, hah, hah' with a clap on each sound, and the group echoes the sound and movement back to the caller, like an echo.

- The caller repeats the sound and movement, it is echoed back, and this continues until the facilitator calls for a change and someone else starts a new sound and movement.

This exercise warms people up physically and vocally.

2.8.II Core exercises

EXERCISE NAME: IMPROVISATION

Exercise number: 2

Aims of the exercise

- Introduce participants to theatre skills
- Assist participants to understand what improvisation is, how it works and how it can help in playwriting

Focus level: Medium

Energy requirement: Medium

Materials: None

Duration: 30-45 minutes

Instructions:

Part 1

Participants will be introduced to the improvisation technique through this activity that will support them to act out a scene in their own words, following this procedure:

▶ Begin by discussing the action of the scene and deciding what is going to take place, including the beginning, middle and end. Define the storyline, characters, the beforetime (what happens before the scene opens) and the place or places where the scene is set.

▶ Each participant should identify an objective for their character – something that the character wants or needs from another person. Make sure that everyone understands their objectives and how they relate to the scene.

▶ Participants should not rehearse the scene or try to work out dialogue beforehand. Instead, they should spend time in preparation to decide on the plan of action and the objectives for each character, which will provide the dialogue.

▶ If possible, provide props and furniture to help participants create a more realistic scene. The group should also come up with a name for the improvisation.

▶ Participants should take time to focus before starting and begin when they are ready or on an agreed signal from the facilitator.

▶ Encourage participants to project their voices, to relate to and listen to each other, trying to have one voice at a time, to pursue their objectives and to have reasons for exiting the scene.

▶ The group should aim to bring the scene to a natural conclusion, or the facilitator can call time (e.g., 30 seconds).

EXERCISE NAME: IMPROVISATION

Part 2:

▶ Everyone sits in a circle with the facilitator in the middle. The facilitator introduces the following scenario:

Scene One: A cashier working in a large supermarket is called to the manager's office, and the manager accuses them of stealing money from the till. There is some video evidence, but it is not conclusive. The manager says that they have a witness, but they are not yet at liberty to identify the witness. A scene ensues whereby the manager accuses and the worker denies. The objectives are 'to accuse' and 'to deny.'

▶ The facilitator explains the meaning of objective and that each actor must pursue their objective clearly and strongly within the scene and not digress from it. The objective of the manager is to 'accuse' and the objective of the cashier is 'to deny' and both must pursue their objective vigorously and assertively. Each player has to focus fully on the other in order to let go awareness of the audience.

▶ When participants understand the scenario and the function of the objectives, the facilitator then asks for one member of the group to volunteer to perform the role of the cashier. The facilitator plays the role of the manager in order to demonstrate the basic principles of pursuing an objective and focusing on the other actor so as to not be aware of the audience. The improvisation takes place in the centre of the circle.

▶ The improvisation starts with a line spoken by the manager. The line is "Someone saw you take the money". The scene runs for two minutes. The facilitator needs to demonstrate the vigorous pursuit of an objective (no subtlety at this stage) with the manager accusing all the way through (desperately wants the other person to admit they took the money) and the cashier (played by the volunteer from the group) denying regardless of what evidence is presented.

▶ After the scene is run, the facilitator can briefly ask the audience did they see the importance of pursuing the objective and focusing on the other actor/player.

▶ The facilitator then introduces the second scenario.

Scene Two: An elderly person lives alone on a large housing estate. Their only companion is a dog. One day the dog leaves the house and bites a neighbour's child. The child has to be taken to the hospital. The child's parent confronts the elderly person at the door of their house. The parent's objective is to accuse and to get the elderly person to agree to have the dog put down. The elderly person's objective is to defend the dog's behaviour (to deny) on the grounds that the child was tormenting the dog and to not have the dog put down. Introduce the idea of an imaginary door; this is where the improvisation will take place. The parent must try at all costs to get inside the house to get the dog, and the elderly person must keep the parent out (no physical violence). The parent starts the improvisation by saying "I have just come from the hospital. My child has seven stitches because your dog bit them."

EXERCISE NAME: IMPROVISATION

► Again, once participants understand the scenario and the objectives, the facilitator asks for a volunteer from the group to perform the scene together, with the facilitator playing the parent role. The scene runs Next, the facilitator asks the participants to walk around the room randomly, always towards an empty space. When signalled, they pair up with the person nearest to them. The facilitator explains that each pair will now carry out the first scenario, after recapitulating it. Each pair then decides which character they will play, so that one person becomes the manager and one person becomes the worker.

► Simultaneously, each pair performs the scene, facing each other. The participant playing the manager takes three large steps back. The facilitator calls for 'focus', and both actors take a moment to focus, taking two full breaths. The facilitator then calls 'begin', and the actor playing the manager walks vigorously towards the actor playing the worker and states the first line.

► After two minutes, the facilitator calls for 'freeze' and asks the group to walk around the room randomly again. When signalled, they pair up with a different person. The facilitator recaps on the second scenario. Each pair decides which character they will play, so that one person plays the old person and the other plays the parent.

► The participants take two deep breaths to focus, and on the facilitator's signal, they begin, each pair performing the scene simultaneously. The scene runs for two minutes.

EXERCISE NAME: COMPLETE THE IMAGE

Exercise number: 2

Aims of the exercise

- Introduce participants to image work
- Generate a playful environment that encourages creative exploration
- Develop imagination as a source of inspiration, free from the pressure of a performance setting
- Use the body as a means of expression, exploring the connection between body and imagination.
- Enhance the ability to observe and perceive the world around us.

Focus level: Medium

Energy requirement: Medium

Materials: None

Duration: 15-20 minutes

EXERCISE NAME: COMPLETE THE IMAGE

Instructions:

▶ Participants gather in a circle.

▶ The facilitator stands in the centre of the circle and asks for a volunteer. The volunteer stands in front of the facilitator and they shake hands before freezing in mid-action. The facilitator explains that they are frozen and with their bodies they are making a still picture or image. The facilitator then steps out of the image and the participant continues to remain frozen like a statue.

▶ Everyone observes this new image consisting of one person only. A second person now enters the image, "completing the image" by adding themselves in, striking a different pose. They are placing themselves within the image and making a shape with their bodies that complements and gives meaning to the first shape so as to create a two-person tableau. The shape/image can be abstract or representational.

▶ Once the second person has entered and frozen in the image the first person then steps out. Everyone now looks at the new image and a third person now enters, adding themselves to the image by making a shape that complements and gives meaning to the shape or image already there. Again, the image is held for a moment and the second person sits down leaving the third person in a new image to which a fourth person now enters and so on. Continue until everyone in the group has entered at least once.

▶ After everyone has had a turn in creating an image, the facilitator now adds the following: the second person who enters freezes in their shape and then says a sentence to make clear what the tableau is. For example, the first person's shape could be a bent back, with their arms flopping downwards. The second person could complete the tableau by pretending that the first person is carrying something heavy and needs help. The sentence could be "Oh, do you need a hand?" The first person than exits the circle and a third person enters to make a new tableau with the second person's shape and so on. Continue until everyone in the group has entered the image and said a line.

▶ When you reach the last couple, both people stay in the image and the facilitator now asks all the other group members to join in the image one by one to complete a group image.

▶ When everyone is inside the still image, invite each person to reflect on who they might be within the image and what is the story of the image. Invite each person to create a gesture with their body that can be repeated and to think of one word to reflect who they think they are within the image. On a signal, everyone at the same time repeats their gesture three times. On a signal, everyone at the same time says their word, and then one by one, each person says their word with the gesture. To finish, the facilitator asks for thoughts on the final group image.

EXERCISE NAME: I...AGREE/DISAGREE

Exercise number: 3

Aims of the exercise:

- Encourage participants to express themselves
- Promote respect for diversity and differences.
- Generate support for the acceptance of different experiences within the group.
- Encourage open and honest conversation about controversial topics, such as religion, mental health and more, while providing a safe space for individuals to share their perspectives without fear of judgment or backlash.

Focus level: High

Energy requirement: Medium

Materials: Statements for the activity "I...Agree / Disagree"

Duration: 20-30 minutes

Instructions: The facilitator explain that a list of statements is going to read out and instruct participants to move that one side of the room if they agree and the other side if they disagree with these statements.

► The game promotes a peaceful and introspective atmosphere, where participants are expected to work quietly and independently. The focus is on personal reflection, and each individual's perspective is unique and valuable. Therefore, it is important to refrain from suggesting or critiquing others' choices during the game.

► To start the activity, ask participants to gather in the centre of the room and read out the first statement. Then, instruct them to move to the side of the room that represents their agreement or disagreement with the statement - there should be no person remaining in the middle. It is important to acknowledge that this exercise requires participants to make a clear choice and apologize for any discomfort this may cause. Explain that there will be an opportunity for discussion of these choices later on.

► Begin with factual statements such as "I am left-handed" and gradually introduce more subjective statements such as "I am happy". As the game goes on, it can be helpful to incorporate some lighter and more objective statements to alleviate any tension that may arise. Below are some suggested statements to choose from, but be sure to select those that are most appropriate for the group.

► Encourage the group with lots of "there are no right answers", "you are all showing a lot of honesty and bravery in the room today", etc. Ask them to continue to keep silent, discourage any talking or laughing and allow time for each statement to settle and shift until the group have had a chance to acknowledge their choices and are ready to move again. There may be awkwardness but this is part of the activity.

EXERCISE NAME: I...AGREE/DISAGREE

► After all the statements have been read out, a discussion can start. Ask the group if anyone would like to talk about why they choose to agree/disagree with any of the statements. The comments should refer to each person's own choices instead of commenting on other people's choices.

► The facilitator can provide general comments without singling out any individual, such as "I noticed that for the statement 'I am attractive', most of the boys agreed while most of the girls disagreed." Then, ask the group for their thoughts on the observation. Other potential discussion prompts include:

► Did you enjoy the game? Why or why not?

► How did you feel when you were alone or only with one or two others, compared to when you were part of a larger group?

► What was it like to agree or disagree with a large group of people?

Common responses may include "It's difficult to feel different" or "It's good to feel different". Encourage further discussion on these points, as well as on statements like "It's okay to have different opinions", "It's possible to change your mind" and "We are responsible for our attitudes".

► Make sure to end this activity with a group exercise to build bonding. For example, at the end of the discussion ask the participants to stand in a circle. All shake out one arm, then the other, shake out one leg, then the other, and then shake out both arms, then both legs. Finally, shake out the whole body, adding a sound while shaking out. Then, still standing in a circle, each person turns to their left and gives a hug (or a handshake) and says "well done" to the person next to them.

► During the activity, it's important to keep oppositional statements separated by a few statements to avoid overwhelming the group. The facilitator may group similar statements

together during the discussion, such as "I am rich" and "I am privileged" and offer brief explanations for more complex statements like "conflict" and "prejudice." Consider using the statement "I am brave" to offer support and validation to those who shared a particularly sensitive or vulnerable statement. End the activity on a positive and reassuring note, such as "I am hungry" or "I am loved", but be aware that some individuals may disagree with the latter statement, in which case the facilitator can have a gentle word during the break or at the end of the session. Overall, this reflective and emotional exercise can bring a depth of honesty to the group.

Statements for "I…Agree / Disagree"

I am tired	I am open-minded	I am a man
I am kind	I am a girl	I drink alcohol
I am Irish / Greek / Spanish	I am intelligent	I am privileged
I am left-handed	I am proud of myself	I know what I want
I am young	I am from a big family	I am a woman
I am musical	I am rich	I like conflict
I am a boy	I avoid conflict	I am religious
I am happy	I am smart	I smoke
I am a good person	I am prejudiced	I am a bully
I am attractive	I find it difficult to make decisions	I am an honest person
I am brave	I am bullied	I am loved
I enjoy school	I am a good liar	I am hungry

2.8.III Closure exercises

EXERCISE NAME: TAKE A BOW
Exercise number: 1
Aims of the exercise: • Provide an opportunity for participants to share their thoughts and feelings regarding the session and how they experienced it • Plan for the next workshop or series of workshops
Focus level: Low
Energy requirement: Medium
Materials: None
Duration: 10-15 minutes

EXERCISE NAME: TAKE A BOW

Instructions:

► Start by forming a circle with the participants.

► Then, the facilitator should explain that the group will take a bow around the circle like a wave. The first person begins with their bow, and the next person beside them follows suit, and so on. Once a person has bowed, they start clapping and they continue clapping until the end, so that eventually the whole group is clapping together. The facilitator should then congratulate the group on their effort.

► Below is a list of potential questions that the facilitator can ask the participants to prompt discussion and reflection:

  ► What was the most enjoyable aspect of the workshop for you?

  ► What did you learn or gain from the workshop?

  ► Did you find the activity challenging or easy? Why?

  ► How did you feel during the activity? Were you nervous, excited, or something else?

END OF THE UNIT

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