

Getting there from here

Paulo Freire, in *Pedagogy of Hope*, writes: "...you never get *there* by starting from *there*, you get *there* by starting from some *here*."¹⁴⁰ In order not to take this sentence out of context, let me explain that Freire is writing about how an "...educator needs to know that his or her 'here' and 'now' are nearly always the educands' 'there' and 'then'." He is explaining that when one enters a community as an educator from the outside, one must begin where the educands¹⁴¹ are, not where the educator wishes they were.

It is not the role of a theatre director or Joker working with a community to teach participants in a workshop about their lives. If the Joker is a 'teacher' in any way, it is about the techniques of the theatre. The participants are the experts when it comes to their lives. Their own exploration in the workshop process is bound to give them insights into their lives and the life of their community. The collective process of theatre creation and community analysis itself provides an educational process, of which the Joker is a facilitator.

When a group of people come together to create theatre through an improvisational process, it is imperative that enough time be taken to try to find the 'here' of the group. This serves both the group and the Joker. Never, in my experience, has a group, even an already coherent working group, had clarity or been in consensus about their 'here' in relation to an issue. The 'here' I am talking about is not an individual 'here'. It is a collective 'here'.

I have witnessed, on numerous occasions, the resistance in a group to investigating 'here'. This resistance, however, makes sense. 'Here' may not be a very comfortable place. (If it were comfortable, it is unlikely we would be making theatre about it for the purpose of stimulating dialogue in the community.) The tendency of groups is to want to get

¹⁴⁰ Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*, p. 58, originally published by Sheed and Ward, Lanham MD 1972; subsequently published by the Continuum Publishing Company, New York 1994.

¹⁴¹ The relationship between teacher and student is similar to the relationship between educator and educand. However, in the former, traditionally the educator is an expert, filling the student with knowledge. In the latter, the educator is a guide, taking the educand, who already has knowledge, on a journey of discovery.

‘there’ very quickly. There are no shortcuts – only assurances that after doing the work to understand ‘here’ in all its complexity, the resulting dialogue-creating theatre event will investigate how the community as a whole can journey to some ‘there’.

I have also witnessed communities who have extreme difficulty imagining ‘there’. They have, perhaps, been so entrenched in ‘here’ that it seems impossible to look up and see any horizon. As with individual people, a community’s health is attached to its capacity to imagine. Following is a community visioning exercise developed to help the living community to imagine, to dream, together.

Your Wildest Dream

In 1997, after encountering the Freire quote above for the first time, I started developing a technique that incorporates Image Theatre and Polaroid photography, to help communities envision a path from ‘here’ to ‘there’. I have used Your Wildest Dream with the Nuxalk Nation in BC, and with a group from the Passamaquoddy Nation in Maine, US, and New Brunswick, Canada.¹⁴² After five *Theatre for Living* workshops in three years, the latter formed a theatre troupe called The Passamaquoddy Players, using theatre to focus on issues of language and culture. People who have attended our *Theatre for Living* training workshops have also taken the exercise into the Regina School District in Saskatchewan, for instance.^{143, 144}

The focus of Your Wildest Dream is not an external issue that may concern the community; the focus is *the community itself*. How can a community work effectively on issues of concern if it is, itself, dysfunctional?

Wildest Dream is best done over two or three days and works best in a community of people who know each other and live/work together; a

¹⁴² The Passamaquoddy ancestral territory spans the boundary that separates Canada and the United States.

¹⁴³ Just before going to print with this book, I got word from Adam Perry, a 2006 *Theatre for Living* training participant who was working with an organization called InterChange. Adam was preparing to conduct Your Wildest Dream workshops with members of the Rwandan Diaspora community in Toronto, Canada.

¹⁴⁴ *Your Wildest Dream* evolved in a workshop in Calgary, Canada and was subsequently updated on July 30, 2007 creating version 1.1 of this book.

community that has geography in common somehow, even if that geography is place of work. Participant numbers have ranged from 15 to 40. This exercise is more difficult, but still possible when the only thing that creates community is that the participants share a common focus; perhaps they are all social justice activists or all teachers. In either case, they will have travelled into the workshop to create the wildest dream of the social justice community, or of the teaching community.

Day 1

I would begin a Wildest Dream process with some of the following games and exercises; they would vary depending on what is happening in the room:¹⁴⁵

Balancing
 Hypnosis
 Lead the Blind
 Blind Cars
 Complete the Image
 Sculpting Partners
 Glass Bottle
 Groups of 4

Wildest Dream: Stage 1

Ask the group if anyone can create *an image of the dysfunction* of the community. What does the dysfunctional community look like? The image can be realistic or symbolic and can contain from two to all of the participants. Someone starts by making an image. Everyone looks at it, walking around it if desired, seeing it from various perspectives. Another, different image is made. See that. No discussion at this point, just seeing, feeling, absorbing. Another. Another. Spend time throwing images of the dysfunction of the community into the space. After six or eight or maybe 10 images have been created, ask if anyone has an image that is really different than the ones that have been seen. Maybe there will be some. Look at them and then move to the next stage.

¹⁴⁵ Games not already explained are in the *Appendix*.

Wildest Dream: Stage 2

Having seen these images of dysfunction of the living community, try to synthesize them and create *the* image – the *one* that encompasses them all. It can be realistic or symbolic, and can include as many people as there are in the room, or as few as two. In this case, the image of dysfunction must contain at least one protagonist and one antagonist.

So now the task is not to create *an* image of the dysfunction, but *the* image of the dysfunction – that is, a representation of *the* core dysfunction of the community.

Someone creates *the* image. The group votes. If a majority of participants do not think this could be *the* image, ask for another image. When a majority of people in the room agrees that this could be *the* image, keep the image, and now only add to, subtract from or slightly alter this image. This process continues until everyone in the room is satisfied, or as close to that as is possible. This can take time. It's important that everyone remembers to breathe.

Take a Polaroid (or if you have the printing equipment, a digital photo) of the image of *the* dysfunction of the living community, and put it on the wall. This can be the end of an emotionally hard day's work. A formal circle in which each individual has the chance to speak and be heard (if they want to) is recommended.

Day 2

I would start this second day with games that were more challenging than the selection on day one. Depending on what was happening I might choose these:

Point and Turn
 Fill the Empty Space
 Blind Busses
 Clap Exchange
 The Intestine

Wildest Dream: Stages 3 and 4

After the group-building work with the games, repeat Stage 1 – but this time, imagine that the dysfunction of the living community does not exist. Dream! First seek *an* image of the dream, to get the collective juices flowing, and then the image of *the wildest dream of the community*. Not *an* image, but *the* image. In the group's wildest dream, what does the healthy, functional community look like?

It is important to differentiate between this 'wildest dream' concept and Boal's "Image of Transition", or "Ideal Image".¹⁴⁶ We are not seeking an image that is a reaction to an image of oppression, or even the image of dysfunction from the previous day. This is one of the reasons I like to separate the work from one day to the next. In Wildest Dream, we are imagining that the dysfunction, struggles, oppression do not exist. In this wild fantasy, what does the community look and feel like?

When everyone in the room is satisfied, or as close to that as is possible, take a photo of the Wildest Dream and place it on the wall, six to 10 feet from the image of dysfunction. Again, this can be the end of an emotional hard day's work. A formal circle is recommended.

Day 3

Again, I would start this third day with games that were more challenging than the selection on previous days. Depending on what was happening, I might choose these:

Fear/Protector
Clap Exchange (different rhythm than previous day)
Effective Hand
The Fall

¹⁴⁶ Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, p. 173.

Wildest Dream: Stage 5

After some group-building and trust work, ask the group to start offering images that exist anywhere between the image of dysfunction and the dream. Someone makes an image. It can be realistic or symbolic, and can contain from one person to everyone in the room. The image can now have only one person, because it does not have to have the tension of antagonist/protagonist in order to physically identify the dysfunction. The group is now seeking images that exist somewhere on the path from the dysfunction to the dream. They can be realistic or symbolic. All images are accepted without question or explanation.

Take a photo of each image as it is created. Ask the group to determine where, in between the two extreme images, the new image should be placed. When there is disagreement in the room, a point in between the two suggested extreme points is found. Images are not frozen in place; they can be moved later if necessary. Slowly, images go up on the wall.

Joker Tip: The voting to place the images is not the same as the voting in the image activation work. Decisions are not based on a majority vote, neither is consensus being sought. The Joker is gauging the consciousness in the room regarding each particular image and where in the continuum of images it is placed. Compromise is the word for the day.

The first half dozen or so image placements are usually relatively easy. After this, more discussion is required to place each image. Maybe two images that the group thought were side by side have to have space opened up between them to accommodate a new image. Maybe the group decides that a new image exists outside the boundary of the extreme images – in other words, this new image has redefined the extremity of the dysfunction (the community's ability to define it's 'here') or the dream (the community's ability to imagine a collective 'there').

Joker Tip: During this process, the images must be placed in a linear way, horizontally, across the wall.

Think of the photos as a symbolic map, like a bus route put on paper. We know busses don't necessarily travel in one straight line. However, in order for passengers to be able to read the map clearly and see which stops follow the other, the transit authority creates the route in a straight line. Holding to this rule creates a structure in which the group must analyze which steps follow which.

As many images go on the wall as possible. I have not seen a group create more than 40 or less than 10 images.

Wildest Dream: Stage 6

Ask that everyone sit and look at the Wildest Dream images. Can any individual in the group volunteer to trace either their own life journey, or their impression of the living community's journey, through the symbolic steps in the map?

It is astounding the varied and complex stories that are told from the same photographs. Individuals come to the map and are able to trace their own journeys, referring to particular events in their lives, getting to a point and moving backwards and going through steps again, most often ending somewhere in the map. "I am here now – I hope someday to move further, to there." The same happens with individual's impressions of the community.

Once the exercise is complete, number the images in sequence. This will facilitate them coming down and going back up in the same order at a later date, if that is useful.

In every instance of doing this exercise in a community setting, I have left the photos with the community. In Nuxalk Territory in central British Columbia, the map remained on the wall for months, with people coming back to refer to it again and again.

In another instance, with the Passamaquoddy, the group realized we had to take a second photo of the dream, because they needed to place the duplicate dream image *before* the image of dysfunction. The community was working back to a state of equilibrium that existed before Europeans invaded their land.