

The Transformative Potential of Between-Stage Space
for White Teacher Practice at a Mostly-White High School

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Abstract

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The culture and climate of schools dominated by White, privileged students present distinct challenges for educators who wish to equitably serve all students, especially those who have been marginalized due to their social identities. In order for students who attend predominantly White schools to be educated for meaningful participation in a global society, teachers at such schools must adopt a critical pedagogical stance to (a) understand how racism affects marginalized students and (b) disrupt behaviors that uphold White supremacy and other forms of oppression in the school setting. These concerns were the guiding force for this study of the types of transformation that occurred in my practice after teaching a course in Augusto Boal's (2008) Theatre of the Oppressed techniques at a predominantly White high school.

Data from this self-study were collected, analyzed, and presented using a blend of portraiture methodologies that included scripts based on Augusto Boal's (2002) Forum Theatre model. The presentation of the findings in this way is intended to inspire transformative action

from the reality of White Savior teacher practice toward a more liberatory ideal (Boal, 2002), though it must be acknowledged from the outset that White teachers are not in a position to liberate students of color (more on this later). Data generated by this study demonstrated that a White female teacher in a predominantly White school setting can enact what I call White Savior teacher practice even as she strives to reduce harm caused by racism and other forms of oppression. Findings also show that harm-reduction pedagogy can emerge from practicing Theatre of the Oppressed with youth in mostly-White schools.

Data were collected from self-generated documents, student journal writing and drawing, video recordings of course sessions, and semi-structured interviews. The study took place in an urban school district in the Pacific Northwest. The setting of the study was a large predominantly White high school in a prosperous area where White families have historically resorted to litigation to push back against district efforts to integrate its schools. Participants ranged in age from 15 to 18 years old. Half of the participants were White and half were students of color; six were Latinx (from Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Honduras), two were biracial (White and African American), and one was a Pacific Islander whose family hails from Tonga.

I constructed a framework that defines four different types of White teacher practice, with axes delineating a teacher's motivations and attitudes toward the status quo, which I employed to analyze data about my own practice. Data analysis revealed evidence of the White savior paradigm in my teaching, including "White Washed" assimilationist ideology in expectations of academic conduct and participation; White voices (including my own) dominating discourse in the front stage space of classroom instruction and discussions; failure to empower the most marginalized students and engage them in creating their own vision of success and emancipation.

Data analysis also revealed some transformations in the ways I teach and my orientation toward mostly-White educational contexts. During the project, I validated the perspectives of students of color by centering them in course content and professional presentations, positioning them as experts and creating opportunities for student-centered dialogue. I taught about institutional and systemic oppression and explained how personal words and actions can be hurtful even though unintentional. I disrupted oppressive institutional forces of academia and traditional notions of “doing school” by designing collaborative and unifying student experiences.

Data collected after the project with students ended showed that I have learned to name my own positionality as a White person and to explain the privilege that it entails. In my current practice I model this transparency for White students and explicitly encourage White students to monitor their language and behavior in classroom-based interactions. I am exploring the value and limitations of creating backstage space for White students to process their emerging understanding of White privilege and White supremacy (in caucusing spaces, for example) without burdening students of color.

With colleagues and administrators, I am now more skilled and assertive in critiquing the status quo in both front stage and backstage space, specifically drawing attention to colorblindness, deficit thinking, and assumptions rooted in White supremacy.

Despite these findings, I acknowledge that White supremacy is the metaphorical water in which I have been socialized, and thus will always be a lurking influence in my teaching practice. I am committed to being vigilant in recognizing the ways it shows up and engaging in critical reflection toward continued growth and progress.

Findings suggest that TO can facilitate fruitful critical examination of boundary-crossing, mask-wearing, transparency, vulnerability, and trust that can lead to positive transformation in White teacher practice in predominantly White schools. Following the presentation and analysis of my findings, recommendations are presented for future research to further understanding of ways that Theatre of the Oppressed can be practiced with youth in such settings.

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Dedication

For Sharon Cooper, who understood the performative power of teaching.

For my dad, Graves Hewitt, who taught me to learn from my mistakes.

And for Michael, my lifeboat.

Preface

When I first conceived of this research project, I intended to examine relationships among a diverse group of students at the school where I worked as a Language Arts teacher, in the context of an after-school course in which I taught participants how to practice August Boal's Theater of the Oppressed techniques. During the period in which I was analyzing data collected during the course, a situation came to light involving two of my research participants that created a significant barrier to me completing the dissertation as planned.

Independently of the study, one of my adult participants made a series of choices that ultimately caused one of my student participants a great deal of harm. Since these two individuals were conspicuous in most of my data, and since the strongest themes emerging in the research were transparency, trust, and vulnerability among participants, I decided that it was no longer practical to pursue findings related to the transformative potential of my pedagogical strategies on relationships among my participants. This situation compelled me to instead divert the focus of the research so that the transgressive actions of the participant who violated our collective trust would have minimal impact on the outcomes of the study.

After these unfortunate circumstances came to light, I shifted the purpose of this study toward an examination of how using Boal's techniques transformed my own practice. In this way I was able to focus my analyses on my own words and actions in the data. Other participants are still visible in the findings, but their presence serves to illuminate what I did and did not do.

This unusual situation impacted the research in two ways that are important to note here. First, I had to significantly reduce my data set in order to minimize the presence of the two participants in question. Second, I revised the first three chapters – in which I contextualized the

study, reviewed the literature, and explained my methods – to reflect the change in focus. The dissertation is thus written as though the focus on my own practice was always the plan.

Introduction: “Some kids do not belong...”

Dissertation Memo, 11/17/15

Something has come up that resonates with part of the discussion at my exam defense last Friday. A number of the freshman students I teach are getting in trouble a lot. Most of them are students of color, but there are a few White students hanging with them (including one who allegedly brought a gun to school last week). Today an administrator told me that these students “do not belong at Carpenter High School¹.” This is at least the 5th time that an administrator has said something like this to me about these particular freshman students. Not just one administrator – all four of them.

This study evolved from questions that came up for me as I taught in several school communities in two cities over the course of 15 years. In order to understand the types of transformation my practice underwent as a result of this research, I must first delve briefly into the evolution of my practice. I begin by contextualizing my research with a portrait of my professional identity as it evolved during my first decade in teaching. It leads up to and includes my first years teaching at CHS.

I began my teaching career in an under-resourced urban area in the Midwestern region of the U.S., which included one year teaching 5th grade at an all-Black elementary school; two years teaching in a public middle school in a Mexican-American community; and three years at West Side Prep (WSP), a charter high school whose student body was 95% African American. In 2007, I moved to the Pacific Northwest and got a job teaching at Carpenter High School (CHS),

¹ I have disguised references to people and places in this dissertation with pseudonyms, including students, colleagues, the research site, and other schools where I have taught.

a public institution serving approximately 1,800 students, most of whom are White, in a predominantly White community.

The stark contrast of these diverse learning contexts raised many questions for me: Why are public schools still so segregated? Why did students at CHS reject certain pedagogical strategies that were well-received by students at WSP? Why were students and teachers at WSP eager to discuss the concept of race, while that topic was met with indifference or hostility at CHS? What distinguished the few CHS students and teachers who *were* interested in talking about race from those who were indifferent or hostile?

The culture and climate of schools dominated by White, privileged students present distinct challenges for educators who wish to equitably serve all students. Schools of all kinds still grapple with racial segregation in the United States, within districts due to housing patterns and failed or disrupted desegregation policies (Orfield, Kuscera, & Siegel-Hawley, 2012), and within schools due to advanced learning tracks that disproportionately serve privileged White students (Oakes, 2008). Segregation has been shown to contribute to lack of social and academic success among students of all races (Braddock & Mikulyuk, 2012; Mickelson & Nkomo, 2012). Neither students of color nor White students who attend predominantly White schools are receiving the best education toward meaningful participation in a global society if teachers at such schools do not adopt a critical pedagogical stance, understand students' diverse social identities, and help them collaborate toward their own empowerment.

Relational dilemmas encountered by teachers and students in predominantly White schools negatively influence learning outcomes for both White students and students of color, albeit in different ways. Generations of socialization in contexts that favor Whiteness have created entrenched biases, stereotypes, and assumptions, through which students and teachers

view their day-to-day interactions with one another (Clark, Zygmunt, & Howard, 2016; Gay, 2010; Gorski & Swalwell, 2015). White teachers in these settings rarely consider what this schooling experience is like for students who are not White and are rarely encouraged to adapt their frames of reference to support students whose racial and ethnic identities diverge from those of the dominant group.

Robust bodies of research have shown that culturally responsive (Gay, 2010), culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014), and culturally sustaining (Paris & Alim, 2014) pedagogies benefit marginalized students, but there is less research on curricular and pedagogical approaches wherein teachers and students of different cultural identities collaborate to closely examine relational dynamics that influence educational experiences in mostly-White schools.

Embodied pedagogical techniques are well suited to inquiry focused on personal transformation, as shown in numerous studies on drama pedagogies (Brown & Gillespie, 1997; Gay & Hanley, 2010; Hanley, 2011; Osei-Kofi, 2013). More research is needed that exemplifies teacher self-study in the context of arts-based pedagogy, to serve as an example for teachers seeking to transform their own practice through the arts.

In the spring semester of the 2015-2016 school year, I taught an after-school course for high school students centered around Brazilian activist Augusto Boal's (2008) Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) techniques. While TO has been most frequently practiced with mature adults, a number of organizations and individuals have engaged in TO with young adults, adolescent youth and children (Bhukhanwala, 2014; Cahnmann-Taylor & Souto-Manning, 2010; Conrad, 2004; Creel et al, 2000; Duffy et al., 2010; Emert, 2011; Freitag et al, 2011; Green, 2018; Picher, 2007; Shawyer, 2011; Snyder-Young, 2011). Mainly used as a teaching tool in curricular and extracurricular school programs, TO techniques have been used with students to promote anti-

racist attitudes, to disrupt the corrupting influence of capitalism, and to build stronger collaboration. Studies of these programs show that TO has a profound positive effect on student participants, generating social and learning outcomes including empowerment (Brown & Gillespie, 1997; Marin, 2010; Schutzman & Dodge, 2010), deepened understanding of collaborative relationships (Duffy, 2010), heightened self-awareness (Emert, 2011), and activist motivation (Linds & Goulet, 2010).

This pedagogical approach has demonstrated powerful outcomes for student participants. For example, in Linds' and Goulet's (2010) action research in a district-based, anti-racist youth leadership program that employed TO techniques, "most students talked about going through a personal transformation as a result of their involvement [in a TO program]...students gained empathy through the use of theater and got useful ideas for educating others about racism and how they could change their actions when confronted by situations of racism and discrimination" (p. 168). As I learned more about TO in both academic and practical contexts, I grew increasingly interested in its potential to deepen critical analysis of power and oppression in mostly-White schools. I designed a course in which students would learn about issues of power and oppression by using Boal's techniques to share their own experiences with each other and with members of the school community.

After I learned of an incident that compromised data I collected while teaching this course (described in the Preface) I was compelled to reposition the focus of my research. I decided to explore whether or not designing and teaching the course had facilitated transformation in my own teaching practice and how I think about my practice. I shifted the focus of this study toward that guiding question, and retroactively analyzed the data with that focus in mind.

The following research questions guided my study:

- Was my teaching practice as a White teacher in a predominantly White high school transformed by an intervention in which I taught a diverse group of students about issues of power and oppression using Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed techniques?
- If so, what kinds of transformations in my thinking and teaching practice resulted from this intervention and why?

This study contributes to a growing body of research showing that TO can lead to transformative outcomes in schools (Bhukhanwala, 2014; Cahnmann-Taylor & Souto-Manning, 2010; Duffy & Vettraino, 2010). I found no studies addressing how teaching with TO techniques impacts White teachers in predominantly White educational contexts. Despite the value of using TO methods that has been documented in research, there is also evidence to suggest that TO is being used in problematic ways, perpetuating injustice rather than leading to positive transformation. For example, Snyder-Young's (2011, 2013) research on the limitations of TO exposed pitfalls of engaging in the techniques in privileged communities, especially when participants are not aware of their own privilege. She asked, "What does it mean to 'rehearse for revolution' in globalised, late capitalist, democratic societies in which group identities are complex and oppression is slippery? Who gets to decide what 'oppression' means and what 'revolution' looks like in these complex landscapes?" (p. 42).

In the same vein, Augusto Boal's son Julian expressed concerns about capitalist influences on TO practice. He offered this critique of what he perceives as "individualistic" interpretations of TO stemming from capitalism:

A very individualistic perspective [is] that every time the individual speaks, it's good, because the individual doesn't get to speak enough. Well, I think the individual is speaking too much. Nowadays we believe that our inner voice is something absolutely amazing that we should completely trust. But according to me, our inner voice speaks like Fox News. So if we only acknowledge individual expression, we would only, most of the time, be acknowledging how society works right now. (Emert & Friedland, 2011, p. 183)

Julian Boal's comment here draws attention to the "danger of a single story" (Adichie, 2009). His words recognized implicit biases informed by our immersion in a media culture which often glorifies the status quo. When TO practitioners fail to bring this point into discussion while practicing TO with people from dominant groups, they may be reinforcing the misguided assumption that TO is fundamentally about individual (and in this context, privileged) experience. Broader social structures of unconstrained capitalism therefore remain unaddressed. More knowledge about relational mechanisms activated in this pedagogical approach, and how it functions in predominantly White schools, are valuable contributions to scholarship on the use of TO in classrooms.

In sections that follow, I describe the course I taught to explore these questions, my rationale for the research design, some important aspects of my positionality as it relates to my research, and my conceptual framework.

The Project: Theatre of Liberation

In the spring semester of 2016 a group of students and I practiced TO in a semester-long, after-school elective course titled "Theater of Liberation." I structured and conducted the course according to my conception of what it means to be both an academic researcher and a high

school teacher, while at the same time endeavoring to amplify student voices in an action research project.

The course I designed took place at Carpenter High School (CHS), a large, predominantly White public school located in a large metropolitan area of the Pacific Northwest where I had been teaching for 9 years. We engaged in games and techniques designed to facilitate and “difficultate” (Boal, 2008) the conceptual exploration of power and oppression, and wrote and performed plays based on students’ lived experiences in which I often played an antagonist teacher or administrator. I guided students to examine their own and others’ social identities by modeling this task myself. I also guided them to reflect on how Boal’s techniques influenced their relationships with one another and with adults working at the school. In addition to TO methods, the curriculum included lessons about social identity and discussions about racism and other forms of oppression. TO provided the opportunity for participant-researchers to embody these observations and experiences through drama games, images, and narrative scenes in a performative, metacognitive space.

As an insider at the research site, I was well-positioned to conduct action research there. Indeed, this type of reflective inquiry was a key component of my practice long before I became a graduate student. I often included students in my research activities, believing strongly in the value of student voices in informing pedagogy and policy. In 2007, my first year at CHS, I spearheaded student-designed research on attitudes about race and racism at the school through a district-sponsored Student Equity Team and continued this line of inquiry in one form or another in the years leading up to this research.

My insider positionality influenced how participants viewed me and impacted their involvement. Similar to the drama teacher in Snyder-Young’s (2013) research on doing TO at a

northeastern charter school, I was “legitimately a representative of the school’s institutional authority” (p. 49). Most of the students enrolled in the course had been in one of my Language Arts classes at CHS. We also knew each other from traversing our respective orbits around the school, seeing and hearing each other in the hallways, cafeteria, and library. We interacted in adjacent neighborhood properties and businesses, since I live about a mile from the school. Students always greeted me warmly and engaged in conversation whenever we saw each other outside of the classroom; I felt respected and valued by students both as a person and as a teacher. However, as Herr and Anderson (2005) have observed, “[p]ositionality occurs not only in terms of inside/outside, but also in terms of one’s position in the organizational or social hierarchy, and one’s position of power vis-à-vis other stakeholders inside and outside the setting” (p. 41). There is no doubt that students viewed me as an institutional authority figure, albeit a supportive one who did not adhere to all traditional conventions in school.

Among school staff, I felt respected but also seen as someone who unnecessarily questioned the status quo. A drama teacher once asked me to help him navigate issues of race for a production of the musical *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, for which he had cast several White students to play the roles of Chinese characters. One of my first moves was to solicit the opinion of a Chinese exchange student who was in the show’s orchestra. It turned out the student had never seen the production, and when he watched an online version of the musical he was so offended by its portrayal of Chinese culture that he decided to quit the show. Rather than listen to the student’s views, the all-White performing arts department faculty complained to the principal that I had convinced this student to be offended. With the support of his host family, the student wrote a long letter on my behalf explaining his perspective and assuring the principal that I had

not influenced his feelings with my own bias. The student requested that the principal publicly apologize to me. This letter was completely ignored.

I was and remain determined to weather such tensions in the interest of transforming my practice through sustained, lifelong inquiry. As Herr and Anderson (2005) asserted, our obligation as researchers is to interrogate our multiple positionalities in relationship to the question under study...in making explicit the tensions we experience as researchers in our varying roles and statuses, we have the possibility of crafting uniquely complex understandings of the research question. (p. 44)

For the current study, I analyzed qualitative data collected before, during, and after the course I designed. In data analysis and critical reflection I endeavored to identify and describe shifts in my own pedagogical stance and thinking, and how this changed my teaching practice.

My Positionality

The nature and purpose of this study necessitated consideration of relevant aspects of my positionality. I am a White woman who was adopted at birth and grew up in an affluent all-White suburb in New England. I attended private schools where I had very few classmates of color. It was not until attending college that I began to think about racial diversity and its implications for education. My curiosity increased during my 18 years of living in diverse communities in New York City and Chicago and led me to study multicultural education at a public university after I moved to the Pacific Northwest.

From studying the work of renowned scholars in the field of multicultural education, I came to believe deeply in the transformative potential of pedagogy that amplifies the experiences and perspectives of people from marginalized and oppressed groups. While teaching at CHS, I often wondered what it would take to transform oppressive policies and practices at the school,

including my own, so that students of color are better supported and have more equitable access to learning. What would need to change for students of color to feel empowered in a mostly-White learning environment? What would it take to inspire White students to own their privilege, learn to check oppressive behaviors, and develop healthy, collaborative and supportive relationships with peers who are culturally different? While not the focus of this inquiry, these questions were significant contextual sign-posts for the self-transformation I desired.

Mindsets like mine, influenced as they are by generations of White supremacy, create conditions for racial oppression in predominantly White schools. Despite decades of rigorous research on the benefits of multicultural education (Banks & Banks, 2016; Sleeter, 2018) and an increased focus on culturally relevant, culturally responsive, and culturally sustaining pedagogies in teacher preparation programs and professional development (Gay, 2000, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), the practice of many White teachers tends to be strongly informed by the social normalization of their own experiences (DiAngelo, 2006; Feagin, 2013). Rather than prioritize “building relationships of reciprocity and dialog” (Sleeter, 2018, p. 8) with students who are culturally different, White teachers have been shown to demonstrate deficit thinking (Anderson, 2013; Utt & Tochluk, 2016; Zhao, 2016); embrace stereotypes, assumptions, and rigid notions of students’ racial identities as explanations for problems they experience in school (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sharma, 2018); and firmly reject the notion of White privilege (Picower, 2009). These attitudes and related behaviors create toxic environments in predominantly White schools that are barriers to learning and growth.

In recent decades, scholars have demonstrated that colorblindness compounds the problem of oppression in mostly-White contexts (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Delpit, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lassiter, 2006; Lewis, 2003; Tatum, 1997). Knowing that racism is “bad” and not

wanting to be seen as “bad” people, Whites often embrace a colorblind ideology, a mindset that nevertheless ignores and invalidates the lived experiences of people of color and their distinct ethnic and cultural identities (King, 1991). Many public school teachers believe they “treat everyone equally” without realizing how their implicit biases influence their work with students. As Delpit (2007) noted, “to say you don’t see color is to say you don’t see children” (p. 159). “Seeing” students of color means recognizing their distinct cultures; it also means recognizing Whiteness and the distinct cultures of White students.

I learned to reject colorblindness in my early experiences as an educator, but my research helped me to recognize that my instructional practices with students at CHS were influenced by internalized stereotypes and essentializing notions of marginalized racial groups as well as assumptions about White students. Particularly important in the context of this research, my relationships with students were influenced by the notion that students who conform to certain accepted modes of behavior “belong” while students who resist such behaviors do not.

Attempts to ignore race have been well-documented in research situated in mostly-White societies in recent decades, and it surfaced for Boal when he was in exile in Europe. Racially diverse groups with whom he practiced TO often asked whether his method could handle oppressions where there were not clear individual oppressors. As Robinson (2017) explained,

Europeans and Americans aren’t used to thinking in terms of oppressor and oppressed. Boal has noticed that his language does not seem to resonate in the global North. People don’t see themselves as oppressed... Boal believes that today’s societies, such as America, Britain and Brazil, are fundamentally authoritarian. They cause oppression of various kinds. And such oppression profoundly damages people who live in these societies. But the sources of this oppression are invisible. (p. 2)

Many White Americans would surely object to the notion that the U.S. is an authoritarian nation. However, Robinson's statement aligns with the assertion of many scholars (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; DiAngelo, 2006, 2016; Feagin, 2013; Picca & Feagin, 2007): that by rendering themselves blind to race, White people in the United States have allowed racial oppression to persist unchecked.

The figurative nature of Theatre of the Oppressed invites a metaphorical approach to analysis of its practice in the context of teaching. As Zeichner and Liston (2014) have observed, "teachers' understandings, their developed frameworks and practical theories, are often expressed as images and metaphors and through narratives" (p. 43). I have augmented the description of my conceptual framework with a personal narrative that encompasses core concepts of my research. This metaphorical framing provided points of entry for my self-study. It includes an explanation of how this narrative helped me understand and navigate my own positionality in the research context.

Chapter I: Framing the Study

This chapter contextualizes my study. It begins with a portrait of a pond that is close to my heart. It is both a physical place and a spiritual one, full of memories and dreams of family, friends, childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age. My relationship with this pond is infused with beauty, magic, joy, conflict, decay, privilege and pain. It has played a profound part in shaping who I am today, and its lessons continue to inspire me. Like me, the metaphor that I discovered in the pond's glassy surface is not perfect, but it offers points of consideration that I hope will be of value to the readers of this work.

Long Pond as Mirror and Window

When my adoptive mother was nine years old, her father built a cabin by a freshwater pond that was formed by an ancient glacier – the same glacier that deposited the peninsular moraine now called Cape Cod. I spent every summer of my childhood swimming in this body of water and exploring its environs. The pond's surface can be a mirror or window, depending on the weather, one's position in relation to the surface, and one's intentionality of perspective. Considering these attributes of the pond's surface in the context of my research has deepened my understanding of some core concepts in several ways.

Every June, my extended family collaborates on reconstructing a wooden dock that extends from our tiny beach out into the water. As I stand on this dock in the still of the morning, the pond reflects the sky above and vegetation all around the shoreline. The tension on the glassy surface gives the appearance of a solid mirror. This illusion is disrupted as the water reacts and responds to wind or other disturbances, creating dark ripples that discompose the mirror image.

If I look down and focus my eyes on the water's surface, I see a shadowy reflection of my face. With minimal effort I can then adjust my perception to focus on the pale green watery

world below the surface, clearly visible in the shadow of my reflection. What appears to be solid and impenetrable from a distance is actually fluid. I can lower my feet into it; indeed I can immerse my whole self. The surface of the water is a boundary that is easily permeated, both in perception by looking from a certain perspective, and physically, if one is willing to risk getting cold and wet.

This complex permeability serves as a metaphor for the transformative potential of reflective, critical attention to school-based interactions. Physical proximity and contact with people who are culturally different can promote positive intergroup relations (Allport, 1954; Schofield, 2004), but proximity and contact is not enough. Pedagogy and curricular content that foster both introspective mirrors and informative windows create powerful possibilities for helping students and teachers develop stronger relationships that lead to better learning.

Using the metaphor of windows and mirrors, Style (1996) described the “practice of ‘both/and’ thinking as participants [in classrooms] acknowledge the varied experiences of reality which frame individual human perspective” (p. 1). Style further argued that such thinking is necessary for education to reach its fullest potential:

Education needs to enable the student to look through window frames in order to see the realities of others and into mirrors in order to see her/his own reality reflected.

Knowledge of both types of framing is basic to a balanced education which is committed to affirming the essential dialectic between the self and the world. In other words, education engages us in “the great conversation” between various frames of reference.

(p. 1)

The metaphor of the pond adds a dimension to the “both/and” thinking to which Style refers. Its surface is a dynamic boundary that separates the underwater world from the world

above. In relation to this boundary, I can choose to adjust my perspective to understand a dynamic ecosystem that otherwise remains hidden from view. From close up, my reflection offers a point of access to the underwater world. Get closer still, and the boundary gives way to even deeper interaction. Similarly, certain pedagogical approaches and content choices can collectively function as both windows and mirrors to develop critical understanding. This study examined one possible curricular approach. It involved teaching students about issues of power and oppression. It also involved giving students opportunities to explore their own lived experiences with injustice using Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed techniques.

Acknowledging a Flaw in My Metaphorical Framing

I want to talk about the interfaces one crosses when switching between the upper, or external, reality and the underworld, the world of the soul and its images. (Anzaldúa 2009b, p. 103)

When I first wrote it, I thought my description of Long Pond as a metaphor for the way Theatre of the Oppressed functions as both mirror and window was a clever and interesting way to introduce my conceptual framework. As I developed this idea, however, I realized that I was metaphorically relegating the lived experiences of cultural "others" to an underwater world below my own position "above the surface," thus perpetuating norms of White supremacy. Considering the goals of this research, rather than dispense with this metaphor altogether I decided to expose this flaw as evidence of how deeply White supremacy is embedded in my cultural programming. This section re-contextualizes and modifies my metaphor in an effort to disrupt this problem.

My family regards the wooden dock and swimming area surrounding it as our "private property" on Long Pond. The prevailing family attitude toward people who visit the nearby

public swimming area is that they do not belong anywhere near our dock. While such norms are common in areas where weekend tourists spend vacation time in close proximity to seasonal residents, this issue is more complex than it seems.

Long Pond is located in the Cape Cod National Seashore park, a collection of ocean beaches, ponds and woodlands set aside by President Kennedy's administration in 1960. My family is allowed to live within the park's boundaries because my grandfather purchased the land and built a cabin there in 1940, well before the park was established. Nonetheless, the entirety of the pond is public property. Thus the metaphorical subject position on the dock must be conceptualized as public property also. Anyone can look down and see the underwater world in their reflection.

In some ways, the information I have added in this section emphasizes the inherent privilege in my metaphor, since institutional barriers have prevented people of color from doing what my grandfather did to create what is now an idyllic, cherished retreat for my family. By choosing to include this critical reflection on the circumstances of my lived reality, I invite scrutiny of the Whiteness that has shaped my worldview. As my findings will show, this transparent stance is evidence of one kind of transformation in how I think about my practice.

Conceptual Framework: Front Stage, Back Stage, and Between-Stage Space

One of the conceptual frameworks for this study employed Goffman's (1959) "presentation of self" model of "front stage" and "backstage" regions, a metaphor for categorizing how humans behave in different social situations. I argue that these two regions overlap in the metacognitive space created by Boal's (2008) Theatre of the Oppressed techniques, creating a "between-stage" space that has transformative potential. My conceptual

framework positions various players – TO’s “Joker,” subjects, spectators, and “spect-actors” (Boal, 2008) – within regions adapted from Goffman’s (1959) model, also known as dramaturgical analysis (Feldman, 1995).

People (as subjects) encounter, experience and perpetuate oppression in both front and backstage regions. Signs and symbols of racism abound in the front stage, including the explicit words and behaviors of actors with social power. Backstage, one may interpret the meaning of these signs and symbols, and share racist ideas with trusted family members, friends, and colleagues.

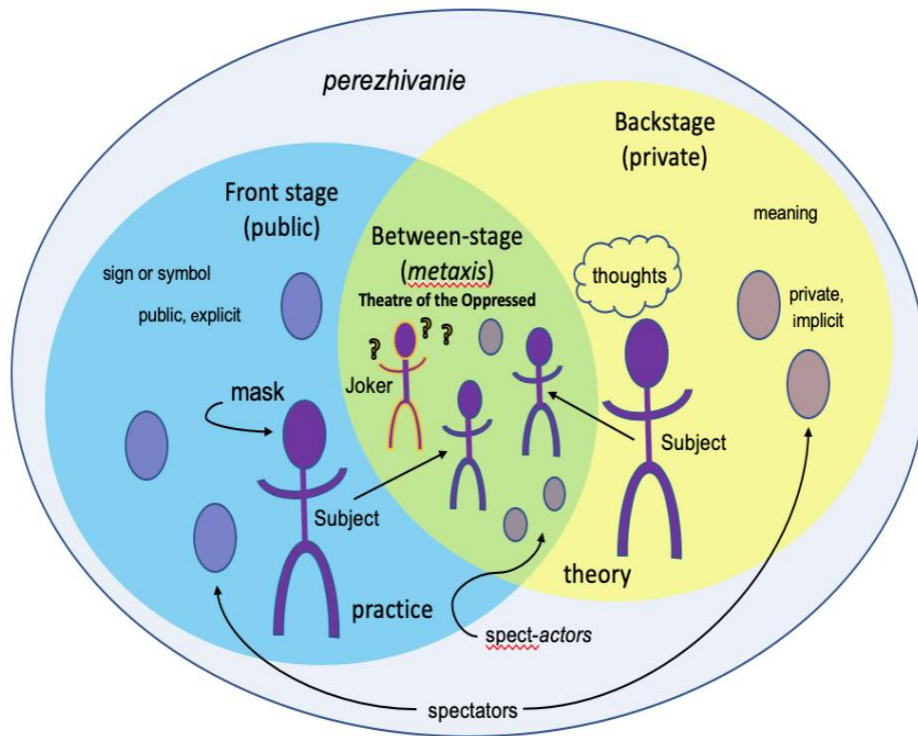
In the front stage, one may be either agent or target of overt or subtle racist behavior. People internalize oppression in backstage space as they process front stage social interactions. For example, the backstage region is where a student of color might privately worry that they will never be successful as they think about a class where the teacher ignores them or constantly criticizes their behavior. A student who feels this way might commiserate with a friend about the situation, and even make a plan for what to do about it.

Critical engagement is necessary to disrupt oppression. Neither region provides sufficient opportunity for critical engagement to transform oppressive attitudes and behaviors. Teacher practice in front stage is too far removed from the backstage theorizing of academia. A middle ground is needed.

In my research I added a third region to Goffman’s framework that I call “between-stage” space. Goffman (1983) alluded to between-stage space in his thoughts on the function of speech in human interactions. According to him, speech has a “special role, allowing matters sited outside the situation to be brought into the collaborative process, and allowing plans to be negotiated regarding matters to be dealt with beyond the current situation” (p. 3). TO discussions

with my students were intended to raise awareness and rehearse for similar situations in the future. The ancient Greek concept of *metaxis*, the confluence of real and imaginary worlds to extend meaning-making (Boal, 1990, 1995; Linds, 2006; Robinson, 2016) typifies between-stage space.

Figure 1.1: Between-stage Space (*metaxis*) in Theatre of the Oppressed, in the Context of Lived Experience (*perezhivanie*)



The middle (green) area of Figure 1.1 represents both mirror and window in the same way that the surface of Long Pond both reflects the world above the surface (lived experience of self) and offers insight into the world below the surface (lived experience of others). It also demonstrates that, by practicing TO, one can perform and examine lived experience of self and others in a way that exposes meaning behind symbolic action, in a space that is at once deeply personal and playfully performative.

Plato used the term *metaxis* to suggest the space in between human existence and divine influence (Linds, 2006). Boal's (2008) initial interpretation of this concept began with the question, "what has the world of perfect ideas to do with the imperfect world of real things?" (p. 9). Boal concluded that "the world of perfection is yearning, a movement which develops matter toward its final form" (2008, p. 10). In other words, the yearning for perfection is what shapes human existence, allowing people to inhabit their imperfect realities and an ideal world at the same time.

According to TO scholars, *metaxis* engages emotion through artistic expression. According to Robinson (2016), artistic expression "allows for things to be in two spaces, through representation. Both signified and signifier are real...This means we can exist in two different worlds at once" (p. 3). I argue that this confluence, particularly the proximity and overlap between theory and practice, creates conditions for teacher transformation to flourish. As Cochran-Smoth and Lytle (1993) observed, "[t]he unique feature of the questions that prompt teacher research is that they emanate from neither theory nor practice alone but from critical reflection on the intersection of the two" (p. 15).

Davis' (2015) conceptualization of the Russian term *perezhivanie* serves as a container for the three regions of my framework (Figure 1.1). Though it has no direct English equivalent, Davis (2015) defined *perezhivanie* as "'lived experience', or an 'emotional lived experience'. It is also used to describe the sense of 'having "lived through" a difficult experience"' (p. 64). Referenced in the education theories of Lev Vygotsky (1934), this contextual component of difficult lived experience is a key factor in TO practice. TO participants used their personal experiences with oppression in creating images or scenes. Davis (2015) argued that *perezhivanie* leads to transformative learning by centering human experiences and emotions

which may externalize [sic] ideas and emotions and extend the scope of the individual's lived experience. These opportunities to explore human ideas and emotions through different forms and means can contribute to individual learning, but also to an individual's personal and social development. (p. 64)

Perezhivanie has implications for both pedagogy and learning. Teachers have a profound influence on student experiences in the classroom. As Davis (2015) noted,

external characteristics of experience have the potential to activate and impact upon students' 'constitutional characteristics' and stimulate certain interpretations, internalisation [sic] processes and meaning making. This highlights the significance of the teacher's or educator's role in shaping the environment and the experience. (p. 68)

Perezhivanie is thus a suitable framing concept for a research project in which students and their teacher shared details of their lived experiences to inform their TO practice and collaborative research.

The *metaxis* created by TO in the context of difficult lived experiences has the potential to cultivate deep awareness and knowledge of social forces that are often disregarded or ignored in privileged school settings. TO involves understanding others through lenses that are simultaneously reflective of one's own experiences and inquisitive about how the experiences of others differ from one's own; it invokes the concurrence of both mirrors and windows in teaching and learning. The intent of the course I designed was to make social boundaries permeable through examination of difficult interpersonal experiences, particularly boundaries between actors and spect-actors; front stage and backstage regions; rational thought and bodily action; and "self" and "others."

Metaxis and *perezhivanie* comprise the conceptual epoxy that binds the three regions of my conceptual framework. The interaction of these regions and concepts provides a context for my findings and encourages further action research toward transformative educational practice.

I analyzed data collected before, during, and after the ToL class for evidence of transformation in my thinking, pedagogy, and relationships with participant-researchers as a result of engaging in TO games, Image Theatre, and other Boal techniques. In addition to seeking evidence of transformation in my thinking and practice, I looked for my level of awareness of the permeability of boundaries as accessed by participants through engagement in between-stage spaces.

Summary

In this chapter, I have introduced the context, purpose, and design of the research and explained how my positionality as a White educator working inside the research context relates to the study. I have also described the conceptual framework of the study.

This study was undertaken to identify what emancipatory transformation looks like in the thoughts and actions of a White female teacher practicing TO with a culturally and ethnically diverse group of students in a predominantly White high school, and to determine the viability of Theatre of the Oppressed as a pedagogical tool for contributing to the construction of more socially just educational and societal practices.

Chapter II summarizes scholarship that informed this study. Chapter III describes the research methods used, including description of the research sites; participants; design; and data collection and analysis procedures. Chapters IV and V present the findings. Finally, in Chapter VI the findings are discussed, and some implications for teaching practice and recommendations for further research are presented.

Chapter II: Review of Selected Research and Scholarship

Scholarship reviewed is organized into four sections. The first section addresses research methodologies, including qualitative research, action research (including Participatory Action Research and Youth Participatory Action Research), teacher self-study, arts-based research, and portraiture. The second section includes selected scholarship on Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, which is considered both a methodology and a philosophy.

In the third section, scholarship about four conceptual orientations is summarized. The first two orientations discussed are Goffman's (1959) "Presentation of Self" framework and Picca's and Feagin's (2007) concept of two-faced racism. The next part of the third section explores scholarship relating to race and oppression in schools, exploring racism, segregation, White teacher practice within predominantly White Institutions, and the White savior paradigm. The last part of this section explores scholarship on transformation in teacher practice.

The final section of this chapter analyzes two studies that helped me think deeply about my identity as a public high school teacher and academic researcher, including tensions inherent in navigating the two identities. These two studies present multiple methodological and theoretical points relevant to my research.

Methodologies

Qualitative research.

Brizuela (2000) explained that qualitative researchers "begin with a question they want to answer, a problem they want to explore, or a situation they choose to change" (p. xviii). Bogdan and Biklen (1998) liken qualitative research to a funnel in which initial unanticipated questions emerge from the research as it is happening. These ideas are congruent with my observation that high school teachers are constantly asking questions, some of which are intended to improve

their practice. As my dissertation process evolved, lines of inquiry I had already been pursuing led to further, more complex questions. Initially, I wanted to understand why students of color in my CHS classes were struggling despite my efforts to be a good teacher for them, and why so many White teachers at CHS were inclined to deny that race was a salient issue at the school. Once I learned about Boal's TO techniques, I became interested in whether using them with students at CHS might transform how White teachers and students approached the topic of race, and if these strategies would improve the performance and sense of belonging of students of color in my predominantly White school. I also wondered what kind of transformative effects (if any) TO would have on my teaching and my thinking about teaching.

Bogdan and Biklan (1998) explained that “[q]ualitative researchers set up strategies and procedures to enable them to consider experiences from the informants’ perspectives. For some, the process of doing qualitative research can be characterized as a dialogue or interplay between researchers and their subjects” (p. 7). This means that methods employed by qualitative researchers should enable them to “walk in someone else’s shoes” (Kamler, 2013, p. 109), foregrounding the importance of interpersonal relationships. However, Bogdan and Biklen also warned that just because a researcher develops personal relationships with research participants doesn’t mean the research will be valid or successful.

Smith (2006) acknowledged that using more than one method in education research is “contested territory” (p. 457) but argued that increasing specialization in recent decades has led to research divisions with distinct methodological frameworks and limited progress in education research. Smith’s description of qualitative research characteristics illuminates complementary features of my work that used a combination of qualitative methods. They included:

- collecting data in a natural setting, and focusing on social processes in a particular case and context;
- using the words and actions of the participants;
- recognizing the significance of context as well as my positionality and the relationships I formed with the participants in shaping their social actions;
- interacting with the data as a whole to make inferences and reach conclusions.

Action research.

Action research as conceived by Lewin (1946) is an iterative process of action, analysis, and further action, grounded in issues of racial discrimination and oppression. Lewin foreshadowed the concept of praxis in Freire's (2000) pedagogy of the oppressed. The methodology evolved through the work of scholars who sought to democratize research by liberating it from academia and making it accessible to practitioners and working class people. Action research "focused on teachers being able to respond to and connect with the lived experiences of the students in their classroom from one day and one class to the next" (Mirra et al, 2016, pp. 20-21). Mirra et al (2016) claimed that "true knowledge could only be developed through interactions between individuals" (pp. 23-24) as they strived to democratize teacher agency within classrooms and to challenge positivist notions of teacher professional development. During this period, action research was "less focused on liberation and critique of systems of oppression" than it is today (Mirra et al, 2016, p. 21).

Many features of action research methodology defined in its earlier forms still resonate today as it continues to evolve. For example, Carr and Kemmis (1986) noted that "the action researcher attempts to see the interplay between so-called 'objective' and so-called 'subjective' constraints on knowledge and action, and to achieve a perspective from which both sets of

factors can be understood in constraining social reality” (p. 184). Objectivity becomes evident when a researcher envisions “how it ought to be” (Rosaldo, 1993, p. 194). In other words, translating subjective knowledge into objective visions is an effort toward transformation. Ethical concerns inherent in this type of exploration motivate teachers to be transparent about their subjective identities as well as tensions inherent in their authority role with students. This strategy is consistent with Snyder-Young’s (2011) observation that teachers are “so deeply embedded in the web of power in which [student] stories exist we cannot pretend to be neutral commentators. We try to negotiate this challenge by operating from a place of transparency, acknowledging how we fit into these systems and naming our own biases” (p. 35).

Extensive recent research has been done on the value of action research (Caro-Bruce, 2007; Caro-Bruce, Klehr, Zeichner, & Sierra-Piedrahita, 2009; Cochran Smyth & Lytle, 1993; Herr & Anderson, 2005; Hinchey, 2016; Noffke & Somekh, 2009; Zeichner, 1993; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). For example, Herr and Anderson (2005) observed that action research encompasses three different “knowledge interests,” which are technical, practical, and emancipatory. According to them,

[a]n *emancipatory* interest orients the researcher toward the release of human potential and the investigation of ideology and power within the organization and society. The ultimate goal of this kind of research is that of the “emancipation of participants from the dictates or compulsions of tradition, precedent, habit, coercion or self-deception” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). These are thought to be subtle and deeply embedded into the belief structure of the organization and, through the process of critical self-reflection, they can be accessed and surfaced for examination ultimately leading to transformation. (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 27)

Thus, emancipatory action research encompasses “critical reflection” and an exploration of “how understandings are constrained or distorted by power relations” (p. 28). These features of action research resonated strongly with my research intentions. They are also compatible with Freire’s (2000) emphasis on problem-posing education and “authentic dialogue between the empowered human subject and the world” (Mirra et al, 2016, p. 22) and Boal’s assertion that “the act of performance should itself be a dialogue with the audience” (Mirra et al, 2016, p. 23).

Participatory action research (PAR).

The perspectives of participants in the ToL project were essential to my research and thus align with Participatory Action Research (PAR), a methodology that encompasses “a research paradigm, epistemology, and method of critical inquiry that engages subordinated groups in the process of collaborative research and knowledge construction in order to enact multi-level transformative change in their lives and communities” (Kohfeldt, 2014, p. 33). PAR was particularly appropriate for this study because it is an example of embodied theory, an epistemology that arose out of liberatory social change efforts instigated by Freire and his contemporaries (McTaggart, as cited in Kohfeldt, 2014). These efforts were also foundational to Boal’s transformative theater work.

PAR is based on the epistemological assumption that “knowledge is constructed socially through a process of dialogue and that the issues studied and ways of studying them should flow from those involved and should promote dialogue within the community of researchers” (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001, p. 306). This conception of PAR aligns with Ladson-Billings’ (1995, 2014) observation that student experiences gain legitimacy through integration into classroom curriculum. Using examples from her study of Language Arts teachers, she noted that

[certain teachers] depend heavily on the experiences of their students to make the literature come alive. They are not writing on blank slates; instead, they are challenging conventional scripts by importing the culture and everyday experiences of the students into the literacy learning. (p. 127)

In their study of practicing Theatre of the Oppressed with youth, Brown and Gillespie (2007) invoked PAR when describing what they called “Liberation pedagogies”:

In privileging students as knowers, the methods of Liberation pedagogy disturb conventional power relationships between teachers and students, centering the students’ experience as the text of learning... Liberation pedagogies aim to “empower” students, that is, to give students the ability to detect misuses of power and to see themselves as capable of responding to these misuses. (pp. 109-110)

It is important to acknowledge here that White teacher practice can hardly be considered “liberatory,” since the idea of a White person “liberating” students of color is itself evidence of White savior mentality.

Still, while many teachers desire to disrupt misuses of power in their schools, far fewer enlist students in the effort. Duffy (2010) noticed that when he practiced TO with youth “[m]any students only have had the opportunity to enact the school’s party line and not to imagine their own” (p. 206). Part of my motivation for studying my own practice was my desire to transform an institution that continues to subordinate certain individuals, especially students of color.

PAR meshes well with the broader directives of qualitative research as envisioned by prominent philosophical scholars. Christians (2008) identified three conditions of qualitative research. They are representing multiple voices, enhancing moral discernment, and promoting social transformation. To resist social values that are divisive and exclusivist, Christians urged

social scientists to conduct qualitative research in which “[p]articipants have a say in how the research should be conducted and a hand in actually conducting it” (p. 201).

This position is echoed by feminist standpoint theory (FST) and critical race theory (CRT), two epistemologies that apply more specifically to U.S. social structures based on race and gender. According to Au’s (2012) explanation, some feminists suggest that all knowledge claims are socially located and that some social locations, especially those at the bottom of social and economic hierarchies, are better than others as starting points for seeking knowledge about particular people. In public education, Au argued, “the unequal distribution of power leads to the unequal distribution of epistemologies, where those with more power can exert stronger influence on our common-sense understandings of the world” (p. 9). My research endeavored to enable those with less power in the school (e.g. students of color) to exert influence on common-sense understandings of school culture. It was my hope that our collective insights would disrupt assumptions created by the unequal distribution of power at CHS.

In his exploration of the validity of PAR, McTaggart (1998) argued that researchers should conceive of “deliberate efforts to change as the key to enhanced understanding as well as enhanced practice” (p. 214). The focus of the research and its reporting must be on “*how things changed*, because of the relationship of participants and their shared work” (p. 221, emphasis in original). This resonates with the focus of my research on types of transformations in my practice.

Situating PAR in the paradigm of critical action research, Hinchey (2016) identified the following challenge and affordance of the methodology:

[T]he researcher leading a [participatory action research] project typically contributes expertise on the action research process and serves as a facilitator. Participant co-

researchers contribute expertise from their life experiences—essential for identifying critical questions, gathering and interpreting data, and devising strategies for change. One notable characteristic of this strand of critical action research is that it requires tolerance for a high level of uncertainty as a project unfolds under the direction of its many participants. Another is that among all forms of action research, PAR perhaps yields the most innovative strategies for sharing findings and pursuing substantive change. (p. 155)

Hinchey's emphasis on uncertainty resonates with my study. TO creates conditions for uncertainty in human interactions through exposure to emotionally intense embodied interactions. I was willing to tolerate a high level of uncertainty as the ToL class unfolded. The TO plays we created and shared with members of the CHS community and the ways I have crafted findings in this report also evoke Hinchey's observations about uncertainty.

I recognize that my research was not as thoroughly critical as it could have been. However, the research pushed my practice toward harm reduction and away from pedagogy that I have come to associate with the White savior paradigm as a result of this study. Daniels (2018) employed the concept of harm reduction in her research as a way to frame the complex issue of the racial demographics of teachers in the United States. While she acknowledged that much of the harm caused by disproportionate Whiteness in the teaching force would not be addressed or eliminated by her research, she asserted that such harm could be reduced by analyzing the influence of Whiteness in the classroom. Further, she noted that harm caused by Whiteness is not monolithic, since many White teachers also help students. Teachers who embrace the White savior mindset can have a positive impact on students' lives even when their sense of self-worth overshadows the well-being of their students of color. I sought to further interrogate this complex dynamic by examining my own White teacher practice with a diverse group of students

while using a specific set of techniques designed to highlight the complexity of human emotions and behaviors.

Youth participatory action research (YPAR).

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) has emerged as an iteration of PAR that deliberately engages youth in the research. In research conducted with females aged 16-22 in New York City, Cahill (2016) generated findings about challenges encountered by young people of color in achieving success. She argued that “[l]istening to youth concerns is...critical to both understanding and participating in social change” (p. 157, emphasis in original). The emphasis on listening to youth disrupted the notion of adults as the sole purveyors of knowledge and truth, and created conditions for students to be researchers. Mirra et al (2016) advocated for this method in light of the disconnect between the perceived purpose of K-12 education (to prepare students for college, career and life) and “the civic purpose of public education and the idea that schools have a role in preparing young people to become citizens and contribute to the creation of an ever more just democratic society” (p. 4). These scholars invoked Freire and Boal in articulating criteria for their own iteration of YPAR, which they used with Los Angeles high school students in research conducted over the course of 15 years:

First, our work must begin with the everyday experiences of the students we work with...Second, this work must be undertaken *with* students, not *for* them. A critical praxis is work in solidarity with youth. We cannot abandon our roles as adult educators, but neither can we do the work for the students. Third, the act of literacy is essential to the struggle. YPAR work must expose students to discourses of power so that they can effectively speak their truth to that power. And fourth, the act of literacy, or youth

research, must be tied to acting upon (or renaming) the world to make it a more just, equitable, and humane place to inhabit. (p. 23)

Teacher self-study.

This research project was a self-study. Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) asserted that “the aim of self-study research is to provoke, challenge and illuminate rather than confirm and settle” (p. 20). My self-study methodology drew on Howard’s (2003) recommendations for critical reflection in culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010), a liberatory paradigm that uses “the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant” (p. 29). Howard highlighted challenges that resonate with my own critical reflection process. He asserted that such self-study

can be an arduous task because it forces the individual to ask challenging questions that pertain to one’s construction of individuals from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. While posing these questions proves difficult, honest answering of such questions becomes the bigger and more difficult hurdle to clear. Yet, the stakes for teachers are too high not to engage in this process. (Howard, 2003, p. 198)

These observations resonate with my process of grappling with difficult questions during my research as I turned my analytical lens on my own practice. Embedded in Howard’s emphasis on engagement over answering questions honestly is the idea that White teachers inevitably have blind spots. Many desire to honestly reflect on their own practice; however, colorblindness and other problematic tendencies are inherent in White teacher practice due to systemic racism. Furthermore, “one never completely arrives at a place of completion with their reflection” (Howard, 2003, p. 200). I will never achieve faultless critical reflection, nor will I accomplish a

complete transformation into a teacher who is one-hundred percent effective in my pedagogy with diverse learners.

In a longitudinal self-study of pedagogical and curricular change through reflective practice and ‘insider’ action research, Casey (2012) found that pedagogical change is more than a personal desire to do something differently. Instead, it is a process of acknowledging expectation – student, teacher, institutional, and subject – and finding ways of working within, around and between these. Furthermore, insider action research is shown as a tool for positioning the practitioner in the ‘betweenness’ of theory and practice. (p. 219)

The “betweenness” to which Casey refers is a salient concept in my conceptual framework. In this context, theory is in the backstage and practice is in the front stage. The performative, metacognitive quality of TO as a social and pedagogical practice creates conditions for theory and practice to overlap. In this between-stage space during the ToL course, students and I applied backstage theoretical ideas to embodied, front stage interactions. After the course I continued to reflect on racism and other forms of oppression in both real and imaginary TO practice. This recursive methodology compressed the distance between academia and the unjust realities that students in mostly-White schools experience. I will elaborate on the relevance of backstage, front stage and between stage space when I summarize Goffman’s (1959) Presentation of Self framework in a subsequent section of this chapter.

Arts-based research.

According to Barone and Eisner (2012), arts-based inquiry is “an approach to research that exploits the capacities of expressive form to capture qualities of life that impact what we know and how we live” (p. 5). This aligns with Davis’ (2015) observations about the unique

quality of art-making, particularly drama. In an essay about *perezhivanie* and the experience of drama, metaxis and meaning making, Davis argued that

through drama it is possible to create different situations and imagined environments that are outside of the experience of everyday life. Through drama, participants can have a ‘real experience’ within an imagined or fictional world. The outcomes of such experience have transformative potential for the participants. (p. 68)

My own interest in theater inspired an arts-based approach to studying racial dynamics at CHS. I often incorporated theatrical texts in my curriculum and theater techniques in my Language Arts teaching practice. As I designed this project, I thought about the performative ways our racial identities are expressed (Chadderton, 2012) and how that influences what is acceptable according to the people around us. Some terminology for non-conforming behaviors suggests a connection to dramatic performance – it is often called “acting out” – *acting*, as in “playing a role”; *out*, as in “outside the norm.” Connecting the idea of acting to teaching, one of Ladson-Billings’ (2009) research participants stated, “You have to be something of an actor to be a good teacher, and sometimes you have to overact. You’re on stage all of the time” (p. 47).

Barone and Eisner (2012) suggested that “the tools we design have an impact on how we become designed by the tools of our own hand” (p. 5). In the context of my research, bodies were tools of expression. Though society demands that people attend to physical appearance, explicit teaching on how our bodies shape our interactions is rarely included in public school curricula. The education system does not value awareness of body language in classrooms beyond rudimentary “speaking and listening” skills (English Language Arts, 2016). This is especially salient for White teachers, whose physical presence unquestionably influences their pedagogy.

In reporting arts-based research findings, Barone and Eisner (2012) noted that the evocative utilization of such data “makes the work expressive and affords individuals who see it or read it with the opportunity to participate empathically in events that would otherwise be beyond their reach” (p. 8). This statement aligns with my intention to provoke deep reflection through dramatic arts in my research.

Portraiture.

TO draws attention to social boundaries. For example, many of Boal’s games highlight boundaries between oppressors and oppressed. Portraiture methods as characterized by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) draw attention to boundaries as well. First, they expose tensions between social science and art, suggesting that portraiture “is a method of qualitative research that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life” (p. xv). Second, they analyze the relationship between an artist and those who partake of the artist’s work, seeking to (a) “reshape the relationship between researcher and audience....broadening the audience [by] communicating beyond the walls of the academy” (p. 9); and (b) address the shortcoming of academic research that rarely invites dialogue between academics and “people in the ‘real world’” (p. 9). This suggestion resonates with Boal’s desire to transcend boundaries between performers on the stage and the audience, and my desire to collaborate with high school students in a graduate-level research project.

Portraiture parallels TO in other ways as well. For example, “there is a crucial dynamic between documenting and creating the narrative, between receiving and shaping, reflecting and imposing, mirroring and improvising” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 12). In “mirroring,” a popular game in Boal’s lexicon, participants individually express an idea with

their bodies, and other participants mirror it back. This rapid-fire, repetitive practice prepares participants for the improvisation in the deeper work. In Forum Theatre, participants mirror what they have seen and experienced in their lives, then improvise a different outcome.

In an essay reflecting on the evolution of portraiture as research method, Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) described certain shifts among contemporary researchers seeking to “redefine the boundaries of social science inquiry and discourse” (p. 8). She identified shifts toward interdisciplinary research that responds to problems in the field rather than gaps in literature; toward participatory methods that emphasize relationships among individuals in a community rather than researchers dispassionately investigating research subjects; and toward research reports that utilize “language that encourages identification, provokes debate, and invites reflection and action” (p. 9). Using portraiture methods to report self-study findings helped me perceive “parts of myself that I would have never noticed or admitted” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 4).

Finally, portraiture inspired me to incorporate elements of paradox into my research. As Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) observed, “paradox, so central to portraiture, needs to be unmasked and made explicit as part of our methodological and aesthetic discipline...the motivations and purposes of portraiture...[hope to] produce both analytic rigor and human connection” (p. 10). Paradoxes in my research include *metaxis*, or being simultaneously in the real world and striving for an ideal world; conducting academic inquiry while forming meaningful relationships with students; centering my voice while amplifying student perspectives; and the disruption of systemic racism, a macro-level social force, through storytelling at a granular level.

Theatre of the Oppressed

This research project was inspired by Boal's (1992, 2006) emphasis on transforming the real world into the ideal world and Freire's (1985, 2000) notion of reading both the word and the world. Freire's contribution to my research is primarily his concept of *conscientization*, a mechanism by which people learn by developing critical consciousness. Dirkx (1998) explains critical consciousness as

a process in which learners develop the ability to analyze, pose questions, and take action on the social, political, cultural, and economic contexts that influence and shape their lives...For Freire, transformative learning is emancipatory and liberating at both a personal and social level. It provides us with a voice, with the ability to name the world and, in so doing, construct for ourselves the meaning of the world. (Dirkx, 1998, p. 3).

"Naming the world" was Freire's way of describing a person's ability to identify and be liberated from oppression. Brown and Gillespie (2007) evoked *perzhivanie* when they explained that the concept of critical consciousness in Freire's (2000) philosophy was

a process in which students recognize and articulate their own problematic experiences. As students examine their experiences in dialogue with others and the teacher, they begin to question their perceptions of the world and to see reality not a static but as dynamic and fluid. (p. 109)

Boal (2008) combined Freire's (2000) conceptualization of critical consciousness with techniques of embodied ways of knowing that he called Theatre of the Oppressed (TO). Conceived and developed over the course of several decades, TO is a theoretical construct surrounding a corpus of dramatic activities. As a practical form of drama pedagogy, it

acknowledges the salience of social identities and provides mechanisms for visualizing and rehearsing human interactions to disrupt oppression. The power of the technique lies in its unique ways of getting participants to consider and *feel* the influence of oppression in daily life. Practicing TO can be simultaneously lighthearted and playful, deeply personal, profoundly impactful, and at times, painful.

Boal had long been producing audacious, interactive theater in local communities in Brazil and elsewhere in South and Central America when he published his first treatise on TO, *Theater of the Oppressed*, in 1979. At the time, his techniques were inspiring working class people to organize and fight against oppressive employers and landlords, and he was continually drawing on his experiences with oppressed communities to develop new ways for people to disrupt oppression through theater games and performance.

Boal's TO philosophy was heavily influenced by Freire, particularly his idea of liberatory education through a reorientation of the traditional teacher/student hierarchy (Freire, 2000). Freire believed that students should be collaborators with teachers in constructing knowledge rather than being inferior or subordinate to them. According to him, collaborative dialogue awakens in students their intellectual potential for critical thinking—a process he called “conscientization” (Freire, 1998). In analyzing the transformative potential of this process, Wallerstein (1987) observed that “critical thinking continues beyond perception—toward the actions and decisions people make to shape and gain control over their lives” (p. 34). This emphasis demonstrates Boal's translation of Freire's liberatory education framework into specific actions and decisions that can be analyzed and discussed in TO exercises.

In TO games, exercises, and performances, the “Joker” (Boal, 1992, p. 21) is the facilitator or, as Boal claimed, the “difficultator” (1995, p. 42) who serves as the exegetic link

between the imagined world and reality. Boal developed the Joker system (2008, p. 144) with the intent “to restore the full freedom of the character-subject within the strict outlines of the social analysis” (p. 156). The Joker narrates and facilitates the performances, illuminating points of tension and urging the audience to act on their ideas. As Duffy et al. (2010) explained, the Joker makes visible “all of the patterns that you see coming out of the dynamics of the situation” (p. 12) and creates space where the audience can discuss the oppression taking place. The Joker can also call foul (for example, “that’s magic!” – Boal 2002, p. 187 – meaning that an oversimplified solution has been presented) and otherwise problematize the thinking of the audience (Sullivan, Burns, & Patterson, 2007, p. 226). Thus, the Joker represents the destruction of traditional barriers between the protagonist and the chorus, cultivating opportunities for meaning-making that are improvised in the moment. The practice of asking questions (and so, modeling inquisitiveness) is perhaps the most important function of Boal’s Joker strategy. For Whites, being inquisitive about another’s experience recognizes that they are not all-knowing.

In exile in Europe after being incarcerated and tortured for activism in Brazil, Boal realized that his techniques were valuable to people with privilege insofar as such people were committed to disrupting oppression. In the Foreword to Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000), Shaul foreshadowed Boal’s notion that people with privilege can benefit from relational reorientation when he declared that Freire’s ideas are highly relevant within middle class communities in the United States, because people with privilege also benefit from disrupting oppression. Shaul implied that all people can contribute to disrupting oppression by summarizing Freire’s stance this way:

Man's ontological vocation (as he calls it) is to be a Subject who acts upon and transforms his world, and in so doing moves toward ever new possibilities of fuller and richer life individually and collectively. (2000, p. 32)

Shaull went on to invoke Freire's vision of the transformative potential of all young people by asserting that the right of the young "to say their own word has been stolen from them, and that few things are more important than the struggle to win it back...they also realize that the educational system today—from kindergarten to university—is their enemy." (2000, p. 34). This observation resonates with scholars who argue that education in the U.S. reproduces systems of oppression based on consumerism and financial capital accumulation (Anyon, 2006).

For further inspiration, Boal turned to the earliest known conception of theater, in which everyone in a given community was invited to participate. He declared, "'Theater' was the people singing freely in the open air; the theatrical performance was created by and for the people" (2008, p. xxiii). In contrast to how theater is often considered now – skilled actors performing for an audience, holding them in thrall – Boal's conceptualization emphasized the importance of participatory action among audience members, whose agency and power have been compromised by the oppressive systems that surround them.

Boal contrasted this theatrical conceptualization to the evolution of theater conceived by Aristotle. Content-area study and training for Language Arts teachers in the U.S. inevitably includes historical analysis of Aristotle and his influence on Western society, presented as somewhat of a monolithic force pervading the literary canon that students are expected to study in high school. Boal acknowledged Aristotle's significant contributions but rejected traditional theatrical forms in which the general population is separated from an elite aristocracy for whom theater is a means of social control.

Boal explained that what he called “Aristotle’s Coercive System of Tragedy” (2008, p. 1) separates people from the real world and obscures solutions to real-world problems. Traditional theatrical characters make choices “in a fictitious, unreal situation, lacking all the density of facts, nuances, and complications that life offers” (Boal, 2008, p. 93). Boal argued that Aristotle’s conceptualization of theater makes it hard for people to learn what to do in real-life situations.

Boal continued to develop his rationale for a departure from traditional theater toward a “theater of liberation” (Agnew, 2001, p. 62) with evidence from various movements in the history of dramatic performance. Citing playwrights such as Machiavelli, Shakespeare, and Ibsen, he concluded that “the dominant art will always be that of the dominant class, since it is the only class that possesses the means to disseminate it” (Boal, 2008, p. 44). He also explained that as theater evolved, dramatic characters gradually changed from being abstract representations of good and evil to more realistic, multidimensional characters like Shakespeare’s Iago. Such character construction signaled a move toward individualism that led to Hegel’s assertions about the agency of the human soul in determining external action. This idea aligned with Aristotle’s proposal that motive forces of actions are derived from “passions turned into habits” (as cited in Boal, 2008, p. 21). According to Boal’s analysis, both Hegel and Aristotle conceived dramatic conflict as generated by internal qualities of characters interacting with each other in their quest for happiness, which “consists of obeying the laws” (2008, p. 21). The problem, as Boal explained, is that this works well for the people who write the laws but not necessarily for those who are subject to them without having a say.

According to Boal, in capitalist society the desire for ever-increasing profit represents “the inflexible determination of social needs” (2008, p. 84). Rather than invoking what Aristotle

termed *catharsis*, Boal likened understanding of the interplay between social forces and human action to enlightenment, and related it the ancient Greek term *dianoia*, alluding to discursive thought. This turn away from idealist poetics fueled Boal's revolutionary approach to theater.

Boal's main objective in "the poetics of the oppressed" was "to change the people — 'spectators,' passive beings in the theatrical phenomenon — into subjects, into actors, transformers of the dramatic action" (2008, p. 97). This transformation from object to subject reflected the influence of Freire, alluding to *praxis*, identified as a transformative force in education. To explain praxis, Freire (2000) wrote that "the act of knowing involves a dialectical movement which goes from action to reflection and from reflection upon action to a new action" (p. 13). According to Linds and Goulet (2010), Freire invoked

a transitive praxis where learner is both subject and object. He addresses the teacher-student relationship by challenging the one-way dynamic to create a critical pedagogy that (among other influences) inspired Boal to rework the monologic structure of traditional theatre and its spect-actor segregation. (p. 162)

Though Boal's re-envisioning of subject relationships in TO has generated transformative results, scholars of the form have raised serious questions about its misuse (Hamel, 2013; Snyder-Young, 2011, 2013). Many of these concerns are related to the influences of privilege, White guilt, and altruism on TO facilitators and teachers. For example, Snyder Young (2013) suggested that

participants who are *not* so aware of their own privilege will mischaracterize conflicts in their own lives as 'oppressions'...[for people who are aware of their privilege,] a desire to avoid guilt also makes it difficult for artists and students to find points of real

connection between the privileges they enjoy and their own covert or unintentional participation in oppressive structures (pp. 25-26)

Snyder-Young (2013) also pointed out that “[a]ltruism, though coming from a place of ‘good intentions’, can reinforce existing balances of power” (p. 27). She asserted that people with privilege who practice TO should identify and explore the relationship between self-interest and the interests of their participants. While such critique “cannot redress systemic inequalities...it can add a helpful degree of clarity to relationships fraught with imbalanced power dynamics” (p. 27). This idea contributed to my method for data analysis, in which I defined categories of White teacher practice around x and y axes that delineate teacher motivations. This model is discussed in Chapter III.

Four Conceptual Orientations

Presentation of self.

A back region or backstage may be defined as a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course. There are of course many characteristic functions of such places. It is here that the capacity of a performance to express something beyond itself maybe painstakingly fabricated; it is here that illusions and impressions are openly constructed... Here the performer can relax; he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character. (Goffman, 1959, p. 112)

My interest in the performative ways that people express their social identities led me to employ Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical analysis model for discovering types of transformations resulting from my intervention. Goffman and others (Feldman, 1995; Picca & Feagin, 2007;

Shulman, 2017) have conceptualized the act of living as a dramatic performance, consisting of “front stage” (public) and “backstage” (private) regions. According to Shulman (2017), these regions refer to “situations where people anticipate meaningful social judgments to be ongoing about expected performances” (p. 21). Front stage is where performances occur and audiences are expected to judge them, and backstage is where those performances are prepared. Shulman (2017) maintained that both front and back stage spaces are variable and fluid because the regions are context specific, depending on physical space, the individuals who are present, and the topic being discussed. In their research on *Two-Faced Racism*, Picca and Feagin (2007) noted that backstage in particular “is rather fuzzy and fluid in its boundaries” (p. 143). Julian Boal’s (2019) conceptualization of the relationship between art and political expression evokes this fluidity. He stated that

We very often forget that what makes art political is not that it addresses certain themes or uses certain procedures, but, rather, how certain forms, themes and modes of production of art relate with certain social, political, and economic conjuncture, as well as a certain conjuncture of feelings, and this occurs within history and is constantly changing. (p. 290)

Oppression occurs in both front stage and backstage regions because people in superordinate groups consider their own cultural frames of reference as “normal.” In his presidential address to the American Sociological Association, Goffman (1983) took issue with “the traditional sociological view that individuals unthinkingly take for granted rules they nonetheless feel are intrinsically just,” and noted that “[w]hat is desirable order from the perspective of some can be sensed as exclusion and repression from the point of view of others” (p. 5). I argue that in mostly-White classrooms, Whites take for granted that what is normal for

them is the “desirable order.” Goffman (1983) went on to assert that “there are categories of persons—in our own society very broad ones—whose members constantly pay a very considerable price for their interactional existence” (p. 6). Without explicitly naming racism and other forms of oppression, Goffman identified the invalidation some people feel when the dominant group constantly normalizes their own cultural values and performances.

Many researchers have used Goffman’s analysis model to study specific sites where people interact. For example, Shulman (2017) argued that Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis can be used to understand workplaces if they are perceived as operating like theaters. Thus schools as workplaces can be considered “theaters.” A number of education scholars have suggested that schools are set up primarily to prepare students to enter the workforce (Anyon, 2006; Au, 2018; Spring, 2008). Goffman’s theory helps researchers make sense of complex environments like schools, and Shulman (2017) argues that “*individuals become more self-aware by thinking through the lens [dramaturgical analysis] offers...people can think about themselves when they act and also reflect on who they seem to be in the eyes of other people*” (emphasis in original, p. 8). TO opens a portal to an in-between stage where this metacognitive analysis is the expectation.

My research is particularly concerned with racism in mostly-White schools. As Lewis (2001) found in her study of a predominantly White elementary school, racism is “both explicit and hidden” (p. 781). Picca and Feagin (2007) corroborated her findings in their research. Applying Goffman’s (1959) “presentation of self” framework to thousands of journal entries written by White undergraduate students, these scholars noticed that White racial discourse was different in spaces that would typically be considered backstage (a car trip, for example) if people of color were present, leading the researchers to characterize such interactions as front-

stage, and therefore performative. I theorized that TO would create “between-stage” space where dramatic play would create a sort of buffer zone, making the topic of racism more deliberately accessible and less taboo.

Boal’s concept of the Joker is a key component of between-stage space. The Joker enables participants to engage as both actors and “spect-actors” (Boal’s term for audience members), bringing backstage thoughts and experiences into front stage actions through dialogue, improvisation, and embodied creative expression. In its perpetual mode of removing the imaginary “fourth wall – in theatrical terms the symbolic barrier between stage and audience” (Vittoria, 2019, p. 61), TO and the Joker system create a synthesis of front and backstage regions, exposing oppression to rigorous examination and disruption. In Boal’s (2002) Forum Theatre method, for example, the Joker guides participants to rehearse oppressive situations based on lived experiences, with the scene being played out as many times as necessary to explore participants’ ideas toward a more just outcome. I argue that front and backstage spaces intersect and overlap in this recursive process, creating a “between-stage” space for practicing transformation of the social world.

The between-stage space presents opportunities for participants to examine everyday situations with a critical lens that is trained on actions, gestures, facial expressions, and words of the actors who are acting out or representing an oppressive situation. It shares common attributes but is not conceptually the same as Boal’s “aesthetic space” (1995, p. 18) – the “stage” created when a performance occurs. Aesthetic space can be occupied in the mind of a spectator at the same time as that individual is sitting apart from it. It can be occupied by the actor at the same time as that actor is re-living (through enacting) an experience from a different time.

Goffman (1983) alluded to between-stage space in his thoughts on the function of speech in human interactions. According to him, speech has a “special role, allowing matters sited outside the situation to be brought into the collaborative process, and allowing plans to be negotiated regarding matters to be dealt with beyond the current situation” (p. 3). My TO discussions with students were intended to raise awareness about and provide opportunity for participants to rehearse for similar situations in the future. In between-stage space, ToL participants were encouraged to introduce backstage (private) ideas into a metacognitive dialogue about front stage (public) behavior – ideas about the intersectionality of social identities, for instance, or about “masks” (Boal, 2008, p. 146) that people wear in the front stage region – and suggest alternative words, gestures, and actions through improvisation. TO participants thus crossed boundaries between past, present and future; between performer and audience; and between oppressive reality and an ideal world.

Scholarship on Participatory Action Research (PAR) has invoked the concept of between-stage space as it relates to crossing boundaries. Specifically, some researchers have argued that boundaries among disciplines often thought of as distinct become permeable when doing PAR. According to Cammaroto and Fine (2008), “PAR blurs the line between pedagogy, research, and politics...each does not extend from the other in seamless fashion. Each demands specific competencies and skills, both on their own and when taken together. If nothing else, PAR is an invitation to a long-term struggle that forces us to operate in these ‘in between’ spaces” (p. viii). PAR’s potential to disrupt social norms suggests positioning these “in-between spaces” to refute the machine of socialization defined by Shulman (2017):

Agency and autonomy can exist in how people perform their roles, but social conventions already preexist that shape how people are instructed and judged to perform roles

appropriately. These social conventions, in the factory of human conformity called socialization, are akin to how default settings organize the standard operations of machines. Just as machines are built to meet particular performance specifications, people's actions and personas are aimed at meeting preexisting basic, established social conventions in a culture. (p. 9)

In the U.S., this passage implies a “baseline social order” determined by Whiteness. If PAR creates conditions for pedagogy, research, and politics to overlap, dramaturgical analysis creates a lens through which to view the way society influences individual actions and interactions. TO creates opportunities to rehearse those interactions and to magnify and practice disrupting the norms established by colonizing dominant identities.

Goffman's use of dramaturgy as a perspective that may be applied to social interactions in everyday life is a suitable tool for analyzing interactions in the practice of TO. According to Brissett and Edgley (2005), Goffman “touches upon what some dramaturgists feel is the basis of the social bond: the moral obligation of persons to be impressed by the performances of others” (p. 115). By using a dramaturgical lens to analyze my own practice with the intention of transforming my pedagogy, I attempted to fulfill a moral obligation to my students.

Two-faced racism.

Picca and Feagin (2007) employed a framework for their argument that utilizes Goffman's (1959) conceptualization of front stage and back stage to describe how racism is enacted by Whites in contemporary society. They drew on the work of Eliasoph (1999), who found a paradox in her ethnographic study of backstage and frontstage talk among two civic groups in the U.S.: “[White] members who could voice anti-racist sentiments in private, ‘backstage’ settings could not do so in more public, ‘frontstage’ settings” (Eliasoph, 1999, p.

479). In a study of thousands of journal entries written by White college undergraduate students, Picca and Feagin found that Whites “do not generalize from the evidence of racism constantly in front of them, including what they often see or engage in while in the backstage region, to the larger reality of systemic racism...nowhere in our thousands of journal accounts is there even one retelling of whites assertively protesting a case of racial discrimination by white actors and authorities in a front stage setting” (p. 259). Further, these researchers found that “only occasionally in the journal accounts do we even see White's engaging in sustained or assertive verbal dissent to the racist performances of friends, acquaintances, and relatives in the routine backstage settings” (p. 260).

Secondly, Picca and Feagin attempted to discern what influenced Whites who did take anti-racist action to do so. They observed that

those whites who break with a traditional expectations and take some action to counter the racist performances of other whites act thus to protect intimate friends or relatives who are people of color...to protect those close to them from the ravages of other whites' actions. Apparently very few whites take aggressive anti-racist action solely because of a commitment to the egalitarian tradition of protest against racial inequality that erupts periodically in US history – the anti-racist protest that takes seriously the framing of society in terms of "liberty and justice for all.” (p. 260)

This would seem to suggest that Whites who do not regularly interact with people of color beyond casual acquaintance are less likely to perform in anti-racist ways in either front or backstage space.

Picca and Feagin's (2007) study found that while it is relatively rare at this point in U.S. history, there is evidence that Whites

can and do actively dissent, and with good results, against the commonplace racist framing and racist action in society. Indeed, substantial progressive change in US racism might be spurred if more whites...recognize that they too can actively confront racist comments and performances successfully in their everyday lives. (p. 263)

This evidence proves that there is hope and a compelling rationale for Whites who believe in justice and equity to engage in critical self-examination of their participation in upholding White supremacy. Such self-critical analysis, I argue, can be achieved more rigorously with embodied strategies that provide structured opportunities to collaborate with people of color in between-stage space – that is, space where participants may engage in backstage reflection of racist front stage interactions by a) creating images with their bodies that demonstrate those actions and b) practicing interventions in realistic scenes where racism occurs.

Picca and Feagin's (2007) research adds support to this claim; they found that the exercise of writing in a journal about incidents where race and racism were salient "encouraged whites to reflect at least somewhat on their own racist views" (p. 263). The fact that Whites in their study "usually revealed significant confusion or ignorance in regard to what might be done to even begin to deal with the racism in their everyday lives" (p. 263) suggests that an effective approach might be one that engages Whites' "awareness of the body and its mechanisms...[and] the expressivity of the body as emitter and receiver of messages" (Boal, 2002, p. 48). Such an approach provides opportunities to rehearse allyship with people of color, creating conditions for transformation in their behavior, if not their beliefs. This scholarship also reveals how oppression can infiltrate collaborative work between White teachers and their students.

Race and oppression in schools.

Scholarship relating to several types of school-based racial oppression are discussed in this section. These include racism, segregation, White teacher practice in predominantly White schools, and the White savior paradigm.

Racism in schools.

Stephan and Stephan (2004) named seven types of racism, categorized as subtle (symbolic, aversive, ambivalence-amplification) and social structural (realistic group conflict, integrated threat, social dominance, and control). Evidence of each type can be found at every level of U.S. society. All forms of “modern” or “symbolic” racism (Picca & Feagin, 2007, p. ix) have been identified in schools (Avery & Hahn, 2004; Cushner, 2004; Derman-Sparks, 2004; Lewis, 2003; Stephan, Renfro, & Stephan, 2004). Picca and Feagin (2007) defined this “supposedly new racism” as a hybrid of “traditional ideology of individualism” and “views of black Americans as culturally or morally deficient” (p. ix). These scholars assert that, despite arguments to the contrary, “antiblack images, cognitive stereotypes, and emotions remain important in most whites’ consciousnesses” (p. x).

A growing body of research into what students of color experience in mostly-White schools reveals that many feel isolated, marginalized, ignored, and victimized by policies and practices that target them in overt and subtle ways (Andrews, 2012; Carter, 2010; Eldridge & DiFranco, 2013). As Milner (2005) asserted, “[t]he idea that racial discrimination and cultural misunderstandings do not exist in predominantly White settings is a fallacy” (p. 394).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a research paradigm that fosters understanding of how racism operates in schools. It challenges and disrupts the dominant perspective that views racism as “an exceptional occurrence that is willingly enacted by people who are driven by conscious

race hatred” (Gillborn, 2012, p. 1744). CRT emerged out of legal scholarship in the 1970s as a critique of Civil Rights law, institutional racism, and colorblind ideology (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). One of its central propositions is that “the intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social inequity” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 48).

Schools are locations where social and economic structures are internalized by students and teachers alike. By examining curricular content and pedagogy through the lens of CRT, teachers and students can learn to recognize the prevalence of these structures. As Delgado and Stefancic (2001) explained, CRT “not only tries to understand our social situation, but to change it; it sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies, but transform it for the better” (p. 3). Solorzano and Yosso (2002) defined several concepts that comprise the basic perspectives, methodologies, and pedagogies of CRT. These include challenge to dominant ideology; commitment to social justice; and centrality of experiential knowledge. Within the field of education,

critical race theory advances a strategy to foreground and account for the role of race and racism in education and works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of opposing or eliminating other forms of subordination based on gender, class, sexual orientation, language, and national origin. (p. 25)

Much of the research on racism in schools focuses on prejudice reduction (Banks, 2004). Bigler and Hughes (2009) noted that many students have internalized racial prejudice well before entering high school. Bettman and Friedman (2004) suggested that since the learning of prejudice is often passive or unconscious, “the process of ‘unlearning’ must be conscious (active), which often creates internal conflict in participants” (p. 83). Such conflict may be

uncomfortable, arousing cognitive dissonance stemming from invalidation of long-held beliefs. Tollefson, Barr, and Strom (2004) concur that “[a] certain degree of conflict, or ‘disequilibrium,’ between one’s own views, needs, and wishes and those of others is a necessary catalyst for psychosocial and moral growth” (p. 105). However, such growth is not always consistent across different racial groups; in one study, for example, teaching about Whites who have resisted bigotry was effective in reducing prejudice in White students but far less so for students of color (Bettman & Friedman, 2004).

Schofield (2004) synthesized pedagogical research on prejudice reduction into a series of recommendations for educators, including “efforts to heighten a sense of connection to superordinate group identities that include members of the various groups represented in a situation,” and “practices that encourage individuals to participate with out-group members in experiences that help participants come to know each other as individuals” (p. 808). Dovidio, Gaertner, Stewart, Esses, Vergert, and Hodson (2004) echoed Schofield’s recommendations, and added that “enlightenment and contact...can stimulate a number of more basic, underlying processes that have been identified as important *mediators* of reductions in bias” (p. 244). These scholars highlight processes of decategorization and recategorization, which can induce members of different groups “to conceive of themselves as a single, more inclusive superordinate group rather than as two completely separate groups” (Dovidio et al., 2004, p. 251), leading to prejudice reduction.

However, decategorization and recategorization are difficult to achieve in predominantly White schools, where there may be only one or two students of color in a class composed mainly of White students. The significance of this challenge is highlighted in Engles’ and Kory’s (2014) concerns around teaching Walter Dean Myers’ young adult novel *Monster*, a frequent text in 9th

grade syllabi at CHS at the time of this study that centers on a young Black protagonist (Steve) accused of committing a serious crime:

Readers of works aimed at a young adult audience are assumed to have age-related points of connection with a teen narrator. However, the extent to which white people in general can empathize with people of color remains an open question among researchers, scholars, and activists who have addressed the issue, so there is reason to question the result of asking majority-culture readers “to put themselves in Steve’s place.” White attempts to read the literature of racial minorities empathetically can end up as circuitous, narcissistic, and illusory, as readers focus on that which apparently resembles themselves, rather than what marks and makes others different from them. Such striving is also an excessively individualistic orientation, if attention to larger social and institutional forces that affect for good and ill the lives of both people of color and white people are left in a hazy background. (p. 59)

Engles’ and Kory’s observations draw attention to problems inherent in trying to illuminate power imbalances in mostly-White classrooms with texts that offer few opportunities for learners in dominant identity groups to empathize with members of minoritized groups.

Scholars of color who teach in predominantly White higher education settings recognize common themes of resistance to discussions of race and racism among students (Yancy & del Guadalupe Davidson, 2014). These themes resonate with my experience at CHS. Sholé Johnson (2014) summarizes the most prevalent of these themes as follows:

[for many White students] talk of racial injustice is seen as an indictment of whites generally and they themselves personally. Some white students have considerable difficulty accepting a brutal fact of white racism and white racial privilege, and how their

lives are (in)directly implicated in it. And, for students of color, especially blacks, such discussions confirm and validate their beliefs about the ubiquity and all-pervasiveness of racial injustice to which they are subject, directly or indirectly, as a lived reality, and for which they are always demanding some form of rectification. (p. 79)

This scholar acknowledges the legitimate concern of alienating White students and negating, invalidating, or minimizing the experiences of students of color. This tension is amplified when there are few students of color in a classroom. Other risks include spotlighting students of color (Andrews, 2012) and burdening them with the task of educating their White peers.

Segregation and predominantly White institutions (PWIs).

Although my study focused on my own practice, demographics of my research site were salient. Even though many view the United States as a plural and diverse society, research shows that schools today are more racially segregated than they were before the *Brown v. Board* Supreme Court decision (Braddock & Mikulyuk, 2012; Hannah-Jones, 2015). Much research has contributed to understanding the re-segregation of public schools in the United States (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012; Thompson Dorsey, 2013) but it is rarely discussed among educators. This is not surprising; segregation is a complex topic addressed from multiple perspectives, the most effective of which are book-length case studies that cover historical context and nuances of patterns established across a multitude of urban, suburban, and rural locales. As teachers struggle with immediate demands of instruction and management of day-to-day classroom activities, the concept of segregation is an elephant in the room that they may see as tangential to their practice.

In their advocacy of action research in urban contexts, Esposito and Evans-Winters (2016) recognized “cultural mismatch,” asserting that “many schools propagate white middle-

class cultural values” (p. 96). Cultural mismatch is exacerbated exponentially in urban schools where the student body is predominantly White, a phenomenon long recognized by critical race theorists and scholars of color. As hooks (1989) observed three decades ago, “privileged students are often downright unwilling to acknowledge that their minds have been colonized, that they have been learning how to be oppressors, how to dominate, or at least how to passively accept the domination of others” (p. 102). Since most privileged students are White, combining Esposito and Evans-Winters’ observation with hooks’ statement offers a portrait of the atmosphere in predominantly White institutions (PWIs). White students in PWIs learn to feel entitled to an excellent education while at the same time learning to ignore differences in social identity among their peers (Lewis, 2001). The education paradigm to which they are routinely exposed emphasizes individualism over community.

Hodges et al (2015) noted that White students in PWIs often lack “knowledge of and attitudes about the struggles of oppressed populations and the privileges of their own population” (p. 3). This is problematic in that many of these students will grow up to become lawmakers, business owners, corporate executives and teachers in a society where White privilege dominates. Thus, White teachers are likely to have scant knowledge about and personal relationships with people who are racially different.

White teacher practice in PWIs.

This section explores literature on White teacher identity development and practice that contributed to my evolving knowledge of racism and other forms of oppression in schools, and how this knowledge influenced my practice in a PWi. In her research with White teacher candidates, McIntyre (1997) asserted the existence of interdependency “between whiteness and

educational reproduction, between whiteness and control of discourse, and between whiteness and teaching” (p. 125). These interdependencies were embedded in my practice at CHS.

Sleeter (1997) noted that among adults, cross-racial dialogue about racism is challenging to sustain, because it requires Whites

to articulate some analysis of racism and one’s own position in a racist structure, one’s own feelings and experiences, and the choices one has for acting differently. Most white people do not talk about racism, do not recognize the existence of institutional racism, and feel personally threatened by the mention of racism. (p. x)

As a White teacher intent on being anti-racist, I began confronting my resistance to talking about racism many years ago. At CHS, however, I was an outlier. McIntyre (1997) helped me to realize that this positionality actually reinforced my White savior tendencies in some ways. Like one of McIntyre’s White teacher candidates, I often related to students of color at CHS as victims of racism elsewhere in the school. “‘Relating to them’ manifested itself in wanting to ‘save them’ both from their personal lives and from...bad white teachers” (McIntyre, 1997, p. 124).

The discomfort many Whites feel with the topic of race often manifests in shifting focus away from race to socioeconomic class or some other category of difference. It is undeniable that race intersects with other social identity categories. As Hahn Tapper (2013) explained, “[i]ntersectionality posits that oppression in one place is intricately linked to oppression everywhere else. Because oppression primarily exists in terms of structures, and because these structures are linked to social identities (e.g., white, black, gay, straight, and so on) and their relation to power, oppression is the by-product of unequal structures built around power and

identity” (p. 421). However, recognition of intersecting structures of power does not negate the salience of race and racism.

“Far too many prospective teachers believe that they are without culture. They assume their participation in the dominant culture makes them immune to culture” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 109). I argue that the same holds true for White high school students, some of whom will become teachers (Hodges et al, 2015). If it’s true that all students should be taught about social structures that create stereotypes and negative assumptions about different groups, such learning should happen as soon as possible in a student’s trajectory, and will be beneficial for any profession.

The White savior paradigm.

The construct of the White savior in education parallels Cole’s (2012) concept of the “white savior industrial complex.” Cole used this term in reaction to a viral video, Kony2012 (Vandivoort et al, 2012), the brainchild of a 34-year-old White man of privilege who went to Uganda to expose alleged crimes against children in that country and raise money to “save” those children, all without really considering the perspectives of the local people. Calling to mind Daniels’ (2018) concept of harm reduction, Cole explained that

there is much more to doing good work than “making a difference.” There is the principle of first do no harm. There is the idea that those who are being helped ought to be consulted over the matters that concern them (2012, n.p.)

Scholars like Brown (2013) have asserted that the notion of the White savior educator has become a trope in popular culture. This trope is embodied in films such as *Dangerous Minds* (Simpson et al, 1995) and *Freedom Writers* (DeVito et al, 2007). In both films, a White female

teacher single-handedly rescues students of color living in poverty (Waite, 2018). In her autoethnographic study, Aronson (2017) described the construct this way:

In the larger system of white supremacy, we are falsely taught being white is better so it makes sense why we would instill our white values upon students of color. We falsely believe ourselves to be the “chosen ones” who can save these children through our hard work ethic, our creative teaching methods, and our enthusiasm and dedication. (emphasis in original, pp. 50-51)

In describing strategies for disrupting White Supremacy, Okun (2010) said that people living and working in Western culture

often want to move from awareness of a problem to doing something about it without taking the time and care to analyze, vision, and plan first. The result is that we often feel good about doing something but end up doing a pretty poor job of actually addressing the problem. (p. 185)

This scholar accurately described tendencies that lead to the White savior paradigm among White educators. Whites waking up to the realities of racism feel discomfort in their bodies from the idea that they have unknowingly contributed to oppression, and often rush to act with the primary intention of alleviating their distress. White teachers who embody the White savior paradigm may subject their students to harmful actions despite ostensibly positive intentions. Brown (2013) warned of the danger of helping students “to become marketable in an inequitable social and economic system, as opposed to critiquing the system itself, or taking action to eradicate oppressive social relations” (p. 126). White teachers’ positionality as authority figures in bureaucratic, top-down school systems designed mainly to produce laborers for a

capitalist society may result in their using transformative strategies like Theatre of the Oppressed in ways that harm more than help students of color.

Transformation in teacher practice.

Augusto Boal wrote that “theatre is transformation and movement, not just a simple presentation of what exists. It’s about *becoming* and not being” (Boal 1975, as cited in Soeiro & Boal, 2019, p. 67, emphasis in original). Interpreted against the backdrop of my research, this idea means that a teacher with certain pedagogical tendencies may employ TO to set about becoming a different kind of teacher, one whose practice has been transformed.

Freire (2000) envisioned a new paradigm for education in which students and teachers transform their reality. Like most educated in his day, Freire learned in a conventional system wherein “the teacher is the subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects” (p. 54). Conventional education paradigms situate teachers as providers and students as receivers of knowledge (what Freire called “banking” education), separating authority figures from those under their control, who are dehumanized by the relationship. To remedy this, Freire prescribed a “liberatory” education in which teachers and students collaborate to generate new knowledge. Later, Freire and Macedo (1987) proposed teaching students to read both the word—which requires basic knowledge and skills—and the world, which requires students to question assumptions, paradigms, and use of knowledge to make society more just and humane.

Freire’s philosophy became popular and widely influential throughout the world, especially in countries ruled by oppressive regimes. Shaul (2000) observed that Freire’s ideas are highly relevant to United States culture, noting that the middle class is oppressed by bourgeois tendencies which have been internalized. This observation resonates with the work of

scholars who contend that education in the U.S. reproduces a system of oppression based on consumerism and financial capital (Anyon, 2013; Bowles & Gintis, 1976).

As with prejudice reduction, however, enacting Freire's (2000) conscientization strategy in high school classrooms is easier said than done. Shor (1987) observed that older students often resist this paradigmatic shift, and that teachers just beginning to downplay their authority in the classroom in order to teach in a more transformative manner may face management problems that discourage them from continuing the practice. For me the ideal pedagogy incorporates Freire's notion of the teacher as facilitator, thinker, collaborator, and learner, working alongside students – rather than above them or in front of them – to construct knowledge.

I conceived transformation of my own practice as an evolving critical orientation that would enable me to effectively amplify student voices in resistance to the status quo of a mostly-White school. To do this, I also used Solorzano and Bernal's (2001) conceptualization of transformation as informed by Critical Race Theory (CRT). Solorzano's and Bernal's CRT framework "challenges the traditional claims of the educational system to objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity...[because] these traditional paradigms act as a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in U.S. society" (p. 310). An important step in my transformation process was recognizing that I belong to several dominant groups (White, socioeconomically privileged, cis-gender, straight-passing, and raised as Christian, for example).

In the context of a curriculum designed for Latinx high school students in Tuscon, Arizona, Cammarota and Romero (2011) asserted that "knowledge critical for transitioning into a healthy adulthood must be embedded in social justice youth development...that helps young people to sustain positive racial, ethnic, and gender identities, strong commitments to improving

conditions within their communities, and sincere empathy for those beyond their immediate communities who may also suffer from oppression” (p. 494). For these researchers, “The goal of most youth-driven PAR projects is to provide pedagogical strategies that promote transformational resistance” (p. 496) as opposed to self-defeating resistance.

In order to be transformed and to expect transformation in others, it is necessary to accept that people are complex no matter what their social identities. Landsman (2001) advised accepting “the intricacy and complexity in each one of us...to generalize about anyone is unfair and destructive” (p. 21). Boal (1990) considered this idea in the context of constraints imposed by dominant identities – for example, behaviors, policies, and practices associated with systemic and institutional racism:

Each human is infinitely rich, full of psychological and intellectual possibilities...

[however, r]estrictions exist in the name of...an historically determined reality. In a society where a class struggle exists, it is obvious that the dominant classes impose their constraints. (p. 40)

In the same passage, Boal articulates a critical distinction between realization of potential for transformation and one’s personality as revealed in day-to-day action:

If a person realizes her potential, her personality is *the action*. If the person is the “I *can* do it,” the personality is the “I *do* it.” The person is much richer and more varied than the personality, but this is not revealed in daily life. (Boal, 1990, p. 40)

The crucial point revealed in this passage highlights the distinction between *intent* and *impact* (Daniels, 2018; Utt, 2013). Boal maintains that each person is a complex being who has the potential to transform their reality and may indeed intend to do so. However, reality is influenced by history and systems of oppression inherent therein. Boal distinguishes “person”

from “personality” to demonstrate that actions have a discernable impact beyond what someone intends. Since teachers’ actions inevitably impact their students, students should be enlisted to evaluate positive transformation in teacher practice.

Public School Teacher and University Academic

This section addresses tensions I experienced in my roles as a public high school teacher and education researcher. Research on my own teaching practice is something I have always done but it has not always been a *conscious* choice. Rather than turning to academic scholarship to inform my practice-based research, I have more often relied on feedback from my students, advice and modeling from colleagues, and my own instincts. This feature of my research process became a struggle as I pursued this project. I felt pressure from academia to conform to its norms and felt intimidated by everything I did not know. The more I read, the more intimidated and overwhelmed I felt. I began to believe I was not smart enough to do the research required to complete a doctorate degree.

With the guidance of professors, peers, and other scholars in the field, I gradually came to understand that there are many valid ways to conduct dissertation research, and that often much of the acquired knowledge emerges from the process. It would have been expeditious if I had known in the beginning everything I now know about research methods, racism, oppression, and a host of other abstract concepts. However, that is not how teacher research usually works.

Practitioner or teacher research is “systematic and intentional inquiry about teaching, learning, and schooling” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 27) conducted by practicing teachers in their own school and/or classroom. Zeichner and Noffke (2001) observed that some scholars have critiqued teacher research as “an inferior form of research with less rigorous standards than those of academic research” (p. 299). However, this area of inquiry has gained more support

recently. In discussing the trend toward research conducted by teachers as a response to positivist approaches to education research, Kamler (2013) noted that “the re-positioned researcher is able to build ‘tacit knowledge’ through direct experience rather than distanced abstraction” (p. 109).

Although researchers have found that students benefit greatly from academic discourse with teachers who identify as researchers (Ladson-Billings, 2009) there is little regard, encouragement, or incentive for practitioner research in the field of education at large. On the contrary, according to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993), teachers “are expected to learn about their own profession not by studying their own experiences but by studying the findings of those who are not themselves school-based teachers” (p. 1). These scholars suggest that education researchers’ frustration with classroom teachers is misplaced because they tend to conduct their research from the confines of academia and “equate ‘knowledge about teaching’ with the high-status information attained through traditional modes of inquiry. They fault teachers for not reading or not implementing the findings of such research even though teachers often view these findings as irrelevant and counterintuitive” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 1993, p. 10). This observation aligns with what views I have encountered in my work with fellow teachers over two decades of teaching.

Extensive studies of teacher research as a valid form of inquiry refute the criticism and cynicism of academic researchers who fail to see the value of practitioner research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Lampert, 2000; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). In their review of research scholarship on practitioner research, Zeichner and Noffke (2001) found that cooperative research between academics and teachers was “a way to improve the quality of educational research and to bring it closer to the needs of the field because of the important contributions that teachers could make from their perspective within the classroom” (Cutright & Dahl, 1939, as cited in

Zeichner & Noffke, 2001, p. 301). In their research, Zeichner and Noffke (2001) established an irrefutable claim, that “because of their position in the classroom, [teachers] can offer special insights into the knowledge production process that those studying someone else’s practice are unable to provide” (p. 299). Furthermore, “practitioner research is both about changing practice as a result of study and about changing practice to understand it” (p. 306).

Most teachers I have worked with engage in some form of professional inquiry. At the very least, on a daily basis they use both quantitative and qualitative data collected through student assessments and their own observations to improve their practice as well as student outcomes. The main barrier to doing more sustained, sophisticated study is *time*. With a typical caseload of 100-150 students to instruct over a 40-hour work week, the practical, social, and emotional burdens on high school teachers do not allow time for adequate pedagogical inquiry, nor do current structures of public education even acknowledge that such study might be of value. Professionals in higher education as well as those working in districts must advocate for conditions that promote teacher research as an essential component of professional practice. As Zeichner and Noffke (2001) argue,

If classroom teaching in elementary and secondary schools is to come of age as a profession – if the role of the teacher is not to continue to be infantilized – then teachers need to take the adult responsibility of investigating their own practice systematically and critically, by the methods that are appropriate to their practice...time needs to be made available in the school day for teachers to do this. (p. 300)

Some teachers defy these barriers and conduct formal research of their own volition. Two studies conducted by teacher researchers provide useful scholarly context for my research. Klehr (2009) and Tanner (2014) analyzed transformative work with students involving dramatic

production. Both of these individuals deeply understood the positionality of a classroom teacher in relation to academic research, which was a key tension in my process. My research incorporated facets of theirs. While my focus was on my own positionality and practice, Tanner focused on his students, and Klehr focused on another teacher rather than herself.

Klehr (2009) began her career in education as a public school teacher. She went on to pursue a master's degree in theater and a doctorate in education. These academic pursuits gave Klehr the opportunity to explore and understand the tensions inherent in doing qualitative action research in the context of a classroom (Klehr, personal communication, 2018 October 29).

Klehr's doctoral research included a case study of a teacher, Rebecca Jallings, who implemented anti-racist pedagogy in a social-justice drama program called Multico. She explained that Jallings "decided to focus her inquiry work...on investigating what she characterizes as 'the transformative power of the Multico experience' on herself and the students" (p. 114). Although Boal's TO techniques were not a central component of Klehr's research, she did note that Jallings invoked "the Freirean notion of *praxis* – critical perception and transformation – and Boalian *Theater of the Oppressed* techniques by positioning students as critical and reflective beings who together can wonder, doubt, investigate, and search for illumination from themselves and from each other" (p. 115).

Jallings' work with students demonstrated a prerequisite for transformation asserted by Vittoria (2019):

Social transformation requires a type of knowledge which is not simply and purely contemplative, but which instead provokes the practical experience of changing historical circumstances: elements and conditions that can be identified in the philosophy of praxis. Praxis does not only refer to an activity, but rather a sort of reflexive practice for social

transformation. In this sense, the word praxis transcends the word practice and implies the transformational intentionality of social action itself. (p. 58)

Jallings' extensive, ongoing research into her own practice in collaboration with students inspired her efforts to create a learning environment where students spoke openly with each other about "the many differences we have been taught not to acknowledge about each other's race, culture, ethnicity, sexuality, gender" (p. 112). This finding led me to identify transparency as a key theme in my own inquiry.

In Klehr's findings, Jallings acknowledged a tension between academia and public school teaching that I also felt as I drifted away from the public school setting to pursue a doctorate degree. Jallings explained that "[w]riting a paper for somebody else about the things I'm learning and the work I do with kids is not the most useful thing I could be doing for my students. They get a lot more out of my research when I can immediately share it with them in ways that include and engage them" (p. 113). This inclusion and engagement in Jallings' work occurred through creative, performative, and interactively reflective methods similar to those I employed in the course I taught. This type of ongoing engagement was challenging to maintain while writing a dissertation and working as a teacher educator and CHS substitute.

An important contrast between my research and Klehr's is the demographic makeup of each research context. CHS is predominantly White and Jallings' school was relatively racially diverse, resulting in differences in the ways race was present in Klehr's data and in my own. For example, students in my class zeroed in on racial tensions between students and adults in a mostly-White school, whereas Jallings' students were more focused on racial tensions among themselves (Klehr, 2009). The racial composition of CHS was a likely factor in students choosing the topic of racial tension between students and adults in that context. This realization

inspired me to consider how de facto segregation may have impacted my research data.

This study also resembles the research of Tanner (2014). A high school teacher pursuing a doctorate, he worked with students in an arts-based action research project in a mostly-White school. Specifically, he engaged a group of students as collaborators in writing and producing a play exploring the concept of Whiteness. According to DiAngelo (2012) Whiteness is “the specific dimensions of racism that elevate White people over people of color” (p. 119).

In the introduction to his study, Tanner explained that he did not want to simply tell the story without considering the “competing ideologies” of the participants. This led him to write his findings so as to “make room for the messiness that comes in allowing tensions to be made visible. This is particularly true of educational research...Messiness is different than sloppiness. Messiness makes room for competing ideologies to appear congruently” (Tanner, 2014, pp. 5-6). He described his dissertation as an assemblage, and the research method as a necessary part of troubling his own assumptions. As with Klehr’s study, the many points of connection between Tanner’s research and my own led me to consider ways that our projects differed.

Unlike my research, Tanner’s study did not interrogate his positionality explicitly. He focused on his relationships with his students and others in the community, combining vignettes, interviews, and analysis of the play he and his students created together. While there were many different observations about Whiteness and how students were transformed by this process, he did not explore his own transformation. His success at generating positive growth in some of the White students seemed to be a foregone conclusion. By contrast, critical analysis of transformation in my own practice was an essential component of my research.

Tanner explained that he “came to this dissertation as a teacher first and a researcher second. The categories blurred. I taught, theorized, taught, and theorized some more” (2014, p.

2). These observations resonated with me. Tanner and his students did a traditional production, showcasing their own allegorical ideas. They did not engage their own experiences with race in school in a realistic way. They elicited limited feedback from the audience of the play during a talkback session which did not feature prominently in his dissertation. Indeed, the feedback that got the most attention in Tanner's writing (ironically mimicking Tanner's critique of it in his own analysis) came from a shock-jock radio show that stirred up controversy and notoriety about his project.

Tanner's exploration is a flawed and fruitful mess that indirectly showcases the positionality of a White high school teacher in a predominantly White educational context but failed to critique that positionality explicitly. He summarized the complexity of this process in noting that:

I know that the sense-making that I have done here is simply another step in an open-ended journey that is about figuring out a more nuanced pedagogy that creates ethical ways for white people to articulate the nature and implications of an identity that is the byproduct of white supremacy (p. 300)

Tanner wanted Whiteness to be the subject of the inquiry, but by effectively minimizing the three students of color who took part in his project by off-handedly referencing them as a source of strife for his White students, he failed to disrupt White supremacy. He did not center the voices of the students of color.

One of the tensions inherent in doing academic research as a public school teacher is the "imposter phenomenon" (Clance, Imes & Kovacs, 1978; Parkman, 2016) – a "cop in the head" (Boal, 1990) that often influenced how I perceived my own intellectual capacity for doing doctoral inquiry. I struggled with the misguided notion that I was supposed to understand the

complexity of all research methods, impeding my ability to determine which methodological procedures best characterized the research I was doing. Tanner (2014) addressed these tensions, asserting that teacher practice is typically ahead of theorizing about teacher practice because “theorization is a never-ending process that grows more and more complicated the more we try to theorize... [Researchers] are always years behind [classroom teachers]” (p. 2).

Tanner’s claims notwithstanding, anxiety about not doing the research “the right way” persisted throughout my research process. The discomfort of this tension was located in my “Zone of Proximal Teacher Development” (Fani & Ghaemi, 2011, p. 1551), in that it challenged me to engage with my social network to develop confidence in my research decisions. For example, after a professor I respect and admire questioned my decision to write my scholarship review *after* designing my study and collecting data from it, I put considerable thought into defending this choice. Boote and Beile (2005) claim that education scholars “cannot perform significant research without first understanding the literature in the field” (p. 3). This assertion ignores the fact that it would take a long time to understand the vast body of education research. Rather than become paralyzed by the volume of scholarship I felt compelled to digest, I developed a baseline understanding of the field from preliminary study in my doctoral coursework, then continued to collect and review resources that pertained to my research interests as the project unfolded, eventually amassing a reference list that was over 40 pages. Once I had concluded my project, I wrote my review by selecting resources from this collection that I determined to be most relevant to my project.

Summary

The research and scholarship summarized in the first section of this chapter discussed the methodological paradigms used in this study, including qualitative research, teacher research and teacher self-study, action research, arts-based research, and portraiture. Though my research was primarily based in action research and arts-based self-study, components of YPAR and portraiture significantly influenced my methodology.

Key scholars referenced were Boal (1990, 1995, 2002, 2006, 2008) and others who have studied his work to provide an overview of theories relating to Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) in the context of my research. Important themes examined were the influence of Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, a liberatory education framework that encompasses the process of conscientization, or critical consciousness; Boal's conceptualization of metaxis, or the state of being in the real world and an ideal world simultaneously; Boal's Joker system, the exegetic link between the imagined world and reality; the contrast between Boal's conceptualization of theater and that of Aristotle's "coercive system of tragedy"; the role of the "spect-actor" as an active participant in TO performance; and implications of practicing TO in privileged communities in the United States, as well as other limitations of the form. The third section of this chapter included conceptual scholarship related to race and racism in schools; segregation and predominantly White institutions (PWIs); White teacher practice in PWIs; the White savior paradigm; a synthesis of Goffman's (1959) presentation of self; Picca and Feagin's (2007) analysis of Whites in backstage and front stage spaces; and transformation in teacher practice. I concluded this chapter with a section that explained the tension between my identity as a high school teacher and my emerging identity as an academic researcher.

Chapter III: Methodology

To generate findings for this study, I analyzed qualitative data collected during the planning, implementation, and aftermath of a semester-long, after-school social justice drama course that I designed and taught.

Data selected for analysis were bounded by the criterion that they should contain or relate to my thoughts, actions, and interactions with people in the school community in the processes of planning, teaching, and reflecting on this course. Certain documents relevant to my positionality and relationships within the school community were also included. Data were bounded by the timeframe of September 1, 2015 through March 1, 2019. This research is a self-study of my teaching practice within a Youth Participatory Action Research project, examining transformations in my practice during the specified timeframe.

This chapter contains a detailed description of my research methods, including the research site, participants, intervention design, data collection and analysis procedures, and reporting methods. This study involved action research methods. It began with a series of questions and evolved iteratively as I planned curriculum, taught lessons, made observations, adjusted strategies, and tried new approaches. Incidents like the one described at the beginning of Chapter I contributed to the data set and influenced my pedagogy. Teaching high school is for me a continual performance of this type of research and reflects Cochran's and Lytle's (2009) assertion that teacher research is "a larger epistemological stance, or a way of knowing about teaching, learning and schooling that is neither topic- nor project-dependent" (p. 44).

Research conducted by classroom teachers differs in important ways from research conducted in the university setting. I experienced profound tensions as I straddled the boundary between these two worlds, resulting in a "messy" process that was often difficult to navigate.

Cook (2009) suggested that “the purpose of mess is to facilitate a turn towards new constructions of knowing that lead to transformation in practice (an action turn)” (p. 277). Since this statement speaks directly to my research question, I spent a considerable amount of time reflecting on the implications of the untidy quality of my research project.

Cook maintained that omitting descriptions of “mess” renders research incomplete, and that denying its existence might cause researchers who encounter such disarray to feel less confident in their work. She added that research “mess” engages multiple viewpoints in close proximity, similar to the techniques of artists who subscribe to Cubism as a genre. Just as artworks produced by Picasso and Hockney challenge viewers with their disjointed appearance, research that embraces multiple viewpoints – or in my case, vantage points – may challenge those who read such studies to engage more deeply with them.

My research was not neat and orderly. Vantage points evoked throughout the project were full-time classroom teacher, teacher of an after-school class, graduate student, mentor, colleague, and activist. Often I enacted more than one role at the same time. I also considered the vantage points of other participants and collected data that illuminated their views and voices. It mimicked a “kaleidoscopic lens to work with the myriad of ideas that occur in the mess of research” (Cook, 2009, p. 280). While it may be less streamlined than studies conducted by researchers whose methodologies employ fewer vantage points, the value of the naturally messy quality of action research is supported in the literature (Carr & Kemmis, 2009; Cook, 2009; Tanner, 2014) and implied in the work of Paolo Freire. As Cook (2009) asserted, “based on Freire’s (1970) belief that a pedagogy that can help people must be forged *with* them not *for* them, the ‘messy area’ is a milieu for the revealing of tacit or hidden theories, beliefs and realities that frame actions” (p. 287).

The methods used in this study included features common to all action research (Griffiths, 2009): A “spiral” structure of continual action, reflection and re-thinking; collaboration with others in the action; a specific (small-scale) context, employing case-study, narrative, and other qualitative techniques; attention to difference and diversity; and an insider stance characterized by emotional involvement with the context. Phillips and Karr (2014) observed that self-study-based action research creates “uncomfortable spaces of being that move [teachers] away from assumptions and routine thought and into active, revitalized engagement in their educational communities” (p. xii). Such was the case with this project.

More specifically, this study used critical action research methodology to examine how my thinking, practice, and aspects of the social reality in a particular school setting (Hinchey, 2016) were transformed. Components of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) were a part of my project as well, since high school students were positioned as co-researchers. In recent years, scholars have examined untapped knowledge embedded in youth experience and encouraging “young people to explode traditional ideas of knowledge production and use forms of creative expression to share what they know” (Mirra, Garcia & Morrell, 2016, p. 4). Unlike YPAR projects in which student action takes the form of political civic engagement, I used a concept of action informed by dramatic performance, encouraging students to “act out” roles that reflected their everyday lived experiences in school.

I used some elements of portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) in my analysis and in reporting my findings. In portraiture, strands of ethnographic qualitative data are woven together to create a tapestry that illuminates a case from a variety of angles. I analyzed different types of data, including self-generated planning documents, emails, and reflective writing,

participant journal writing, and videos to inform my interpretations and to construct nuanced portraits of how this intervention affected my teaching practices.

The Setting

I taught Language Arts and other classes at Carpenter High School (CHS) from 2007 to 2018. The school is housed in a large contemporary brick and concrete building situated in a prosperous neighborhood in the northwest of a busy metropolitan area. Once a hub of maritime- and timber-related industries, the neighborhood is now rapidly evolving into a bedroom community for young professionals. Housing policies, the lack of city and state income tax, a burgeoning technology industry, and a Supreme Court decision that ended the school district's desegregation approach have contributed to wealth disparity and a homelessness crisis in the region (Tweeddale, 2016).

The student body of CHS grew from 1600 to over 2000 in the last decade, as young, privileged families purchased expensive homes and condominiums in the area. In the late 1990s, forty percent of the student body was comprised of students of color. In 2001 the district terminated a school assignment policy intended to bring racial demographics at each district high school in line with city demographics. Racial demographics for the 2017-2018 school year were as follows: 74.7% White, 9% Hispanic/Latino, 6.7% Asian, 2.7% Black/African American, 0.7% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 0.2% Pacific Islander, and 6.1% two or more races (OSPI, 2019). At the time of data collection, 87% of CHS's faculty was White.

The school employed one principal and three assistant principals. Most administrators in the school's history have been White men, including the three most recent principals and five recent assistant principals. People of color predominated in the security department and custodial

staff, with one or two teachers of color in a few departments. The Language Arts department in which I worked had one African American teacher and thirteen White teachers during the school year when my ToL course took place.

Like many public schools in neighborhoods dominated by economically privileged Whites, CHS's general budget is heavily supplemented by private fundraising. In addition to state funding, the school has its own foundation, a robust PTSA, and Booster Clubs, all generating money for a wide array of curricular and extra-curricular programs. For the last several years, the school's foundation has funded a staff position to support students of color who struggle academically. Two different people of color hired to fill this position transferred to other schools or resigned within three years.

The school building was renovated in 1998. It has two stories, with classrooms in horseshoe-shaped "pods" arranged along either side of a wide central corridor. My classroom was in the southwest pod, with windows facing toward the history pod across a tree-lined exterior walkway. During passing periods and after school, students congregated in the entrance foyers adjacent to my classroom. Navigating a sea of White faces as I walked through the building, I hoped I would be able to work with a diverse group of students in my after-school course.

Participants

I wanted perspectives of students of color to be strongly represented in the course, so I sought to enroll a more diverse group of students than the demographics of CHS. I recruited students with mixed purposeful sampling for triangulation, flexibility, and the multiple interests and needs of my study (Patton, 2002, p. 244).

I posted signs around the school advertising a social-justice-oriented drama course and research project, decorated with hands with different skin tones. I distributed similar fliers to my own students and throughout the school, asking all Language Arts teachers to announce it in their classes. I was co-teaching two “inclusion” 9th grade Language Arts classes (in which approximately 1/3 of students enrolled had documented special needs), one “gen-ed” 9th grade Language Arts class (as opposed to “honors” classes offered at each grade level), and two sections of a college-in-the-high-school composition/comparative literature course for 12th graders. I delivered a brief presentation about the upcoming after-school course to all of my classes. I also spoke briefly, one-on-one, with students of color whom I thought might enjoy and benefit from this opportunity to earn Language Arts credit.

Two students enrolled to make up credit for my first-semester Language Arts course, which they had not passed. Eighteen students signed up for elective credit; two of these dropped the course within two weeks. The final group of students – those who participated from beginning to end – consisted of ten students of color and eight White students. Most were 9th graders, several of them from my 5th period “gen-ed” section, a lively group with a disproportionately high number of students of color.

A few weeks before the course began, an Instructional Assistant at CHS heard me talking about my after-school course and expressed a desire to be more involved. She and I had developed a collegial relationship as she worked with some of the students with Individual Education Plans in my 9th grade classes. After some discussion we agreed that she would attend each course session as an adult participant-researcher. Her role varied depending on the day. Primarily, she participated in activities and discussions. Occasionally she also made video recordings of our work and took notes when I was delivering instruction. Two White colleagues

– Ms. Peony (science teacher) and Ms. Dearborn (Language Arts teacher) – observed and occasionally participated in course sessions. Finally, my daughter, Milly Arias, participated in several sessions and assisted in collecting and organizing the data.

I asked each student who enrolled in the course and each adult participant to provide data about various aspects of their identity, including self-identifying by ethnicity, race, and national origin. Four categories of these data are listed in Table 3.1, which includes all participants.

Table 3.1: Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Race	National Origin	Gender
Brian	15	Latino	Mexico	M
Brittany	15	White	United States	F
Broom	15	Biracial (White & Latino)	United States	M
Carla	49	White	United States	F
CharChar	15	White	United States	Trans M
Claire	18	White	United States	F
Drea	17	Latina	Dominican Republic	F
Edward	16	White	United States	M
Eva	17	White	United States	F
Gracie	15	Latina	Dominican Republic	F
Java	16	White	United States	F
JeBron	15	Pacific Islander	Tonga	M
Kacey	15	Biracial (Black & White)	United States	F
KitKat	16	White	US & Germany	F
Michelle	15	Latina	Mexico	F
Milly	26	Biracial (Black & Latinx)	United States	F
Mulan	33	White	United States	F
Nimue	16	White	United States	Trans M
OTO	16	Latino	Mexico	M
Rico	15	Latino	Honduras	M
Sam	15	Biracial (Black & White)	United States	F
Susan	50	White	United States	F
Sooz	49	White	United States	F

In describing features of YPAR, Cahill (2016) characterized “participation as an approach (as opposed to a method)” to address the problem of broadly applying a term “which often masks tokenism and the illusion of consultation that may, in fact, advance dominant

interests” (p. 158). I considered this concern throughout the project, intending to foreground voices of students from marginalized populations. I agree with Cahill’s assertion that young people’s capacity and potential for what they can contribute to research must be taken seriously. I considered my student research participants as “partners with me in the research, as competent agents and experts in understanding their own lives” (Cahill, 2016, p. 160). Because it was collaborative, I could not “plan and structure the process ahead of schedule, and the research evolved in a slightly messy, organic way” (Cahill, 2016, p. 160).

Research Design: Theater of Liberation (ToL)

“To consciously bring our bodies to learning experiences is both uncommon and even discouraged in the academy...it is an acknowledgement and engagement of the body as a site of knowing” (Osei-Kofi, 2013, p. 146)

Osei-Kofi’s insight was relevant to my research because my conceptual framework acknowledges and engages the body as a site of knowing and of metacognition, wherein we think about what our bodies know. In *This Bridge Called My Body*, Randolph (2014) stated that her own teaching “is an embodied practice that intersects with how I embody other identities such as race, gender and gender identity, and class” (p. 32). This scholar is *Black and I am White*, and her assertion invokes the reality that our bodies know different things about the world because of these salient social identities. When I designed the course it was my intention to teach students knowledge of the body, which is a central feature of TO philosophy (Boal, 2008). Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz (1994) explained Boal’s belief in the body “as one’s most essential tool in transforming physical sensations into a communicable language and altering everyday space into a theatrical arena, or aesthetic space” (p. 21).

Theater of Liberation met on Tuesdays and Thursdays after school, from 3 – 5p.m., in my CHS classroom. As I designed the course, my primary concern was providing opportunities for

participants to perform and examine their own lived experiences (stories about their encounters with racism in front stage spaces at school, for example) through TO games and the Boal techniques called Image Theatre (2002), Cops in the Head (1990, 2002), and Rainbow of Desire (1995). I intended to build students' skills toward the advanced technique of Forum Theatre (Boal, 2002), with participants inviting members of the school community to a performance in which audience members could intervene in a short play showcasing issues of power and oppression based on their lived experiences. I imagined this Forum performance would be the culminating activity of our work together.

I was careful to include discussions about the performance activities, guiding students to become accustomed to exploring embodied actions for deeper possible meanings with a backstage attitude. This involved playing games to build trust so that they would feel more comfortable sharing private (backstage) ideas with others in the group, thus creating in between-stage space. As the course progressed, I taught students to recognize societal cues and patterns in the way we used our bodies in TO games and exercises, evoking meaning in the images we created. I intended for questions I posed during backstage-inspired discussions to deepen participants' understanding of their own identities and positionalities in relation to their own difficult lived experiences (*perezhivanie*). I intended these discussions to activate both their awareness of the world as it is and a desire to strive for a less oppressive educational experience – indicating metaxis, or being simultaneously in the real world while envisioning a more ideal world. I also intended to create opportunities for them to experiment with ideas in embodied practice for making the world as it should be.

For the purposes of this study, the backstage region was defined as any time and circumstances where thoughts and/or actions were expressed privately, either as internal

monologue, in private conversation, or in writing that had a private audience (for example a note to a classmate or journal writing). Student writing that was intended for me to read (e.g. journal entries) could be conceived as front stage performance if there was a low level of trust between the student and myself. I considered this whenever I read student journals. I looked for evidence of trust in their writing and in our interactions.

The front stage region in the context of this study included public spaces in school where prescribed expectations for public behavior prevailed – for example, classes, hallways, the cafeteria, and the library.

The space of the ToL class fluctuated between backstage and front stage depending on the activity and the level of trust felt among participants. Since the liminal region of between-stage space was a focal point of my research, I intentionally created conditions wherein students were encouraged to be vulnerable in expressing backstage ideas about front stage situations. For example, in an activity called Image Theatre, small groups of participants were assigned to create human sculptures (called *tableaus*) based on personal experiences. The tableaus were then performed for the whole class. We discussed what we saw and felt as participants performed and viewed the tableaus. Although a performance is typically the epitome of front stage space, I injected the backstage component inherent in TO by encouraging participants to share backstage thoughts and feelings during the performance.

The course officially began on February 23, 2016, at the beginning of second semester. During the first session I presented an overview of the project – its purpose, a loose outline of its structure (which I told them would evolve as we worked together, encouraging them to make meaningful contributions to the course’s daily activities), and what we might learn that we could then pass on to others in the community. As I had been trained to do in my role as a classroom

teacher, I shared my objectives for the course with participating students: to use embodied techniques invented by Augusto Boal to tell stories about our lived experiences of injustice, in order to illuminate issues of power and oppression at CHS and try to make our school a more just and equitable educational environment.

In the first 10 weeks, we explored identity, social agency, and oppression. We focused primarily on racial identity, but explored other identity categories as well, using Hays’ (1996)

Figure 3.1 Hays’ (1996) ADDRESSING Model

The “ADDRESSING” Model: Nine Cultural Factors, Related Minority Groups, and Forms of Oppression

Cultural Factor	Minority Group	Biases With Power
Age/generational	Older adults	Ageism
Disability	People with disabilities	— ^a
Religion	Religious minorities	— ^b
Ethnicity/race	Ethnic minorities	Racism
Social status	People of lower status	Classism
Sexual orientation	Sexual minorities	Heterosexism
Indigenous heritage	Native peoples	Racism
National origin	Refugees, immigrants, and international students	Racism and colonialism
Gender	Women	Sexism

^aPrejudice and discrimination against people with disabilities. ^bReligious intolerance includes anti-Semitism (i.e., against both Jewish and Muslim people) and oppression of other religious minorities (e.g., Buddhists, Hindus, Mormons).

ADDRESSING model because its mnemonic acronym is easy to remember (Figure 3.1).

I taught a series of lessons intended to provide conceptual vocabulary for productive discussion of TO activities. I assigned students to read “Understanding Oppression” by Nieto and Boyer (2006), a series of three short articles written for

a lay audience and thus more accessible to high school students than academic literature.

I introduced participant-researchers to Nieto et al’s (2010) Target/Agent Skill Sets published in *Beyond Empowerment, Beyond Inclusion*. These authors designed these skill sets to provide a “toolbox” for disrupting oppression. In their framework, the term “Agent” is applied to individuals when considering their dominant social identities in Hays’ categories (for example White people, cis-gender men, and adults). The term “Target” is applied to individuals when

considering marginalized groups (for example people of color, women, non-binary and transgender people, youth). Nieto et al (2010) explained that individuals “likely hold both Agent and Target group memberships” (p. 29) and that Agent group membership bestows unearned advantages while Target group membership incurs the detriment of being undervalued and marginalized. They created Agent and Target skills models as “tools to help people assess their own consciousness and behavior, and that of others, in order to make strategic interventions” (p. 95). In the course we discussed how to apply these concepts to our own social identities, analyzing which aspects make us Targets in society, and which aspects make us Agents.

When we practiced embodied activities, we discussed connections between our experiences in the activities and theoretical ideas we studied in the literature I assigned. These conceptual lessons were interspersed with practice of Boal’s (1992) embodied drama techniques. I explained that in TO there are no spectators who simply watch a performance; rather, all participants are “spect-actors” (Boal, 2008). This was Boal’s way of attempting to restore full capacity for action to all human beings. Boal specified four requisite stages for transforming a spectator into a “spect-actor”: 1) knowing the body, 2) making the body expressive, 3) theater as language, and 4) theater as discourse (p. 102).

We began each session with an “opening circle” that usually involved a mirroring activity or some other circle game. Mirroring is an adaptable set of activities in which each participant offers a small word, sound, and/or gesture to the rest of the group, and everyone else in the circle repeats the offering back to its creator in unison. These warm-ups got everyone focused on our collaborative, reciprocal engagement with each other, while collectively validating each participant in turn. We ended each session with a “closing circle” – an opportunity for participants to share something from the session that was meaningful to them.

In addition to opening and closing circles, we played theater games invented by Boal throughout course sessions to build knowledge of the body, community, and trust. These games encouraged participants to think critically about relationships and social structures through figurative physical play. For example, in a game called “Colombian Hypnosis” (Boal, 1997, p. 51) each member of a pair takes a turn leading their partner around a designated area. The leader uses the palm of their hand to guide the follower around a designated space. The follower is guided by fixing their eyes on the leader’s palm, which is facing them. Both partners work to keep a distance of 12 inches between the leader’s palm and the follower’s face throughout the exercise. The partners trade roles so that each gets a chance to experience leading and following. This game allows participants to focus on the physical sensations of being a leader and a follower, boiling the relationship down to its essence and encouraging them to consider which role they prefer and speculate on the reason for their preference (or lack of it). The game engenders trust because each follower in a pair is guided through space without being able to see where they are going, and the leader must keep them safe.

An important component of TO activities is discussion about images presented or ideas conveyed through embodied play. We always discussed how it felt in our bodies to do the exercises, and possible interpretations of those feelings. Discussion prompts for Colombian Hypnosis included how it feels to lead and to follow, as well as the nature of leadership and what it feels like to trust other people, including leaders and followers. Participants identified actions that strengthened or weakened the trust between themselves and their partners, which helped them connect an embodied experience to the roles of leaders and followers in society generally. These discussions provided opportunities to develop knowledge of the body as a vehicle for expression. I have included a list of TO games we played in Appendix A.

In the fourth week we progressed to Image Theatre (IT), in which participants created human sculptures (*tableaus*) that represented realistic experiences or abstract concepts. As Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman (1994) explained, image theatre techniques “are often instrumental in creating trust and providing visceral cues regarding the themes being investigated.” (p. 21). IT gave students the opportunity to see that difficult feelings such as powerlessness and exclusion are shared by other students. Duffy (2010) observed that

this recognition of self in the experience of others illustrates the commonalities shared by students, forging bonds among them...[it] helps students deconstruct the power relationships inherent in racism and oppression, leading to an examination of how that power is developed and maintained (p. 165).

IT was thus a useful way to illustrate theater as language and discourse (Boal, 2008).

IT encompasses a number of techniques. In our first IT session, participants were divided into small groups, and each group collaborated on creating a moment of oppression by freezing their bodies into a sculpture that represented an oppressive moment. Some groups chose to represent oppression in an abstract manner, and others chose to employ realism. We looked at each of these *tableaus* and discussed them at length.

We spent several class sessions creating human sculptures using different techniques. Sometimes students worked in pairs or small groups; at other times, one student would “sculpt” a *tableau* to tell a story or express an idea, and we would observe and discuss that process.

We practiced IT in a number of sessions, eventually adding the tandem exercises “Cops in the Head” (Boal, 1990, 2002) and “Rainbow of Desire” (Boal, 1995). Boal developed these activities while in exile in Europe from 1976 to 1986, where he realized the depth of pain caused by internal oppressions and their connection to external oppressions, despite the higher standard

of living compared to those living in Central and South America (Boal, 1995; Cohen-Cruz & Schutzman, 2006). With these activities a tableau can be “dynamized” (Boal, 2002, p. 185) to show the myriad internal influences on each character. This is accomplished by adding more spect-actors; volunteers from the audience think of statements representing what each character might be thinking and enter the tableau to voice a statement near the character of their choice. The performance of this activity results in a chorus of voices with the Joker as conductor, with each spect-actor repeating one distinct line over and over, representing one thought of one character. Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman (1994) highlighted the value of using such techniques with students, describing them as a way of expanding the notion of oppression to

include societal values— moral dictates pronounced by parents, peers, teachers, politicians, media, etc.—that obstruct our wills and foster passivity...these persistent and often disembodied voices are physicalized, animated, and addressed as “real” antagonistic forces, in spite of their absence in the literal sense. (p. 23)

After we looked at and discussed tableaus the participants had created, I instructed them to choose a character and vocalize what that character might be thinking. Depending on which activity it was (Cops or Rainbow) the statement would represent either a societal pressure that was likely influencing their chosen character or one of the character’s ideals. A Cops in the Head statement would be vocalized in second person to signify that social pressures are imposed on us from outside influences – akin to what Steele (1997) calls a “threat in the air.” A Rainbow of Desire statement would be vocalized in first person, signifying a character’s intention. For example, in a tableau portraying two students of color being reprimanded by a White administrator, a spect-actor might stand by the administrator’s character and say this Cop in the Head statement: “**You** need to keep the school orderly so students can learn.” Another spect-

actor might stand by one of the student characters and say, “**You** don’t belong here because you can’t do school right.” In a “Rainbows of Desire” exercise for the same tableau, a spect-actor might stand by the administrator’s character and say, “**I** want students to respect me.” Another spect-actor might stand by one of the student characters and say, “**I** want administrators to leave me alone.” Hearing these statements brought backstage ideas into the front stage space of a student-adult scenario that resonates with members of any school community. When each character in the tableau has at least one spect-actor standing by to voice an internal message, the Joker conducts a chorus of the lines, with each spect-actor repeating their line over and over. Initially I performed the role of Joker, but as the course progressed, student participants took on this role as well.

Finally, as an introduction to Boal’s (2002) Forum Theatre method (FT), participants performed a scene based on a story about a Native American writer and lawyer who experienced racist behavior in the front stage space of a Southwest Airlines flight (Ross, 2015). In FT, participants are guided to perform a scene that includes an oppressive moment and ends without the conflict being resolved. Audience members watch the play repeatedly, first as spectators then as spect-actors who are invited by the Joker – Boal’s (2008) term for the on-stage character who facilitates or, in his lexicon, “difficultates” (Boal, 1995, p. 42) the performance – to interrupt the play in order to disrupt the oppression that is taking place. This is called an “intervention” (Boal, 2002, p. 242). The intervening spect-actor takes on the role of one of the characters and improvises action intended to thwart the oppression presented. After each intervention, the Joker engages the spect-actors in a discussion designed to draw connections between the incident depicted onstage and the structural and systemic dimensions of oppression.

After the first performance of a Forum scene, the Joker will typically coach spect-actors in the protocol for signaling an intervention: during a subsequent performance of the scene, when a spect-actor has an idea they feel ready to try, they should say “Stop!” and extend the palm of their hand toward the performance space (Jackson, 2002, p. xxiv).

After performing the scene based on Ross’ story, we discussed the type of oppression that was occurring and what was allowing it to continue. As the Joker, I asked questions to elicit backstage thinking about the situation. This discussion had a backstage quality, but the front stage situation was right there in the midst of us. Each participant had taken on a role in the scene – passenger, flight attendant, or pilot – and arranged chairs in the classroom to resemble seats on an airplane.

One of the participants, Edward, pointed out that the oppression was taking the form of masks worn by a White couple on the flight. In Ross’s story, this couple had pretended that the seat next to them was taken so that Ross wouldn’t sit there, then invited a White passenger who boarded after Ross to take the empty seat. Ross confronted them about it, and the couple wore masks of innocence for him and then for the pilot, who came out of the cockpit when he heard Ross raising his voice in frustration. After this discussion we ran the scene again, and participants experimented with different approaches to disrupting the masks of Ross’s antagonists.

The sequence of foundational readings, games, and Image Theatre and the Forum based on Ross’ story occupied the first ten weeks of the course. After that the class self-divided into three groups. Each group spent the next six weeks creating a short scene based on an experience with oppression in school. We invited select students, administrators, staff, parents and community members to a performance of these scenes. After each scene was performed,

audience members were encouraged to enter a tableau of a key moment in each scene. These audience members shifted from spectators to spect-actors as they vocalized Cops in the Head and Rainbow of Desire statements.

At the time, it seemed that these activities would bridge the gap between 9-11th grade participant-researchers and me, an academic researcher studying educational theory. This gap was fraught with tension, however. Participant-researchers enjoyed the embodied activities more than traditional academic study, but I felt compelled to insist that they learn about concepts like oppression in an academic way. I attribute this tension to the fact that I was entrenched in the academic contexts of CHS and the university I was attending. Messages from both these institutions manifested as cops in my head (“You have to include reading and writing goals into any school-related class;” “You have to teach students academic language”), and I found it difficult to go beyond the compulsion to teach through traditional norms such as reading articles. My instruction on these readings focused on vocabulary terms that I hoped would help students articulate sophisticated ideas about their own stories. When participants told me assigned readings were boring or acted bored in class as we were reading them, I thought, “There’s no other way to teach these complex concepts.”

My work with several participating students continued after the course ended. I included activities that emerged from the course – practicing TO with participant-researchers at education conferences, for example – in the “bounded system” of the intervention (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). A year after the course ended, I resigned from the district and took a teaching assistantship and coaching role in a university secondary teacher education program. Though I was no longer teaching at CHS, I remained involved with high school teachers and youth across the district and stayed in close contact with CHS colleagues and students, especially those who had participated

in the study. Leaving my teaching position led to important shifts in my perspective that influenced the outcomes of this research. My skepticism of the printed word as the best way to teach concepts like oppression, and my intention to use embodied activities to do so in the future, is an example of such a shift.

In both roles as teacher and academic researcher, building positive relationships with students (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014) was at the forefront of my pedagogy. Like Freire's philosophy, my work is "founded on the bedrock premise that human beings become more human through authentic relationships and meaningful work" (Sullivan, Burns & Paterson, 2007, p. 220). Since relationships are a cornerstone of my teaching practice, I considered positive relationships with my students a prerequisite to the kinds of transformation I hoped would emerge.

Data Sources and Collection

I collected several types of data to characterize transformation in my practice (if any) in as much detail as possible. I gathered electronic and hard copies of documents I created for the course, and journal entries written by student participants and me. I recorded and transcribed video recordings of TO games and performances to examine my pedagogy and interactions with students.

Finally, I wrote memos about my current thinking as I wrote up my findings. These "in the moment" memos provided evidence of how I would approach certain pedagogical situations now, after doing this research.

Documents.

In order to view data that related explicitly to my positionality as the teacher of the course, I collected electronic and hard copies of all documents I created in relation to the research project, including planning documents (detailed outlines for the entire course and each course session); my own written reflections on session activities; student-facing handouts, invitations and reminders; and relevant emails.

Between September 2015 and March 2019 I wrote and collected reflective memos about the CHS administration and disciplinary incidents; professional development days; special events; and teacher and student attitudes around race and equity. After the course was over, I wrote memos about certain professional incidents where issues relating to my research were salient. These memos provided evidence of transformation and opportunities to reflect on further actions I could have taken to positively transform my practice.

As Merriam (2009) has observed, “documents give us a snapshot into what the author thinks is important, that is, their personal perspective...personal documents are a reliable source of data concerning a person’s attitudes, beliefs, and view of the world” (pp. 142-143). The documents I collected served as a method for observing what I prioritized in the project, based on my beliefs at the time I was planning it, implementing it, and studying its outcomes.

Participant journal writing & drawing.

In order to get a glimpse of student perspectives on my practice, I collected journal writing and artwork produced by participants during the course. This important data set was triangulated against data sources that were generated by me.

Students used journals to record notes on session content and to complete assigned written activities. I created prompts to gather data about student attitudes toward course content

and my pedagogy as the course progressed. At the end of each session, students responded in their journals to the following prompts:

1. How do you feel about today's session? Specifically, what made you feel this way?
2. Please rate your "realness" in today's session on a scale of 0 – 5, with 0 being "totally real" (i.e. zero instances of "mask-wearing" or "putting up a wall")
3. Please explain your rating for #2 in as much detail as possible. For a rating of 0 or 1, what caused or influenced this level of realness? For a rating of 3 or more, what caused or influenced your inclination to put up a wall or wear a mask? Please be as specific as possible.

The mask-wearing concept came up often in my experiences with students of color at CHS. In an informal hallway conversation with me about a year before this study, for example, I observed an agitated African-American student repeatedly making a hand gesture that mimicked putting a mask on to cover her frustration and angst about an incident that had just occurred in the classroom. I had strong evidence to suggest that this student did not trust me, and I interpreted this gesture to mean that she did not want me to see how angry she was about what had happened. Other students of color at CHS had told me about wearing masks as protective barriers between themselves and White students and teachers. These incidents are evocative of Dunbar's (1922) poem "We Wear the Mask," in which the renowned Black poet describes the mask as a "debt we pay to human guile" (p. 71).

I introduced the metaphor of wearing a mask to students in the first session of the course. In the context of TO, Boal (2008) conceptualized a mask as "a set of mechanised actions and reactions of the character. Each one of us, in real life, exhibits a type of pre-established, mechanised behavior...All our relations in daily life are patterned. These patterns are our

‘masks’” (pp. 145-146). Bearing this in mind, I asked participants if the idea of mask-wearing seemed like a useful way to think about how comfortable they felt being their authentic selves with each other. There was enthusiastic agreement, affirming my feeling that this was an important concept. This is an example of a methodological choice that evolved in collaboration with participant-researchers during the intervention.

The concept of “realness” was established through a similar process. I introduced the term as a potential opposite of mask-wearing, taking it from an unpublished, 2013 study in which I surveyed a group of mentor teachers in an urban teacher residency program about discussing race in classroom contexts. An African American mentor teacher wrote, “I can be real with them about issues of race because of what I’ve experienced” (Ms. H, personal communication, October 2013). The fact that being “real” was invoked by an African American teacher in the context of her lived experience and her relationship with teacher candidates inspired me to look for connections to the concept in my own research.

Videos.

Digital video recordings were created to document embodied activities and discussions that took place during course sessions, so that I could observe my teaching practice in action and in interactions with students. Marshall and Rossman (2016) suggested that video can resemble “truth” yet is often influenced by the positionality of the person behind the camera. Sometimes I recorded activities; sometimes videos were recorded by the Instructional Assistant who attended the sessions, or other visiting adults. I always carefully noted who was behind the camera in order to factor the positionality of that person into my analysis. I showed videos to my student participant-researchers and invited them to share their interpretations of what was happening,

what they were feeling, and the meaning behind interactions “as a form of member validation” (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 186).

Small-group and individual interviews.

I conducted semi-structured discussions with all student participants. This data set was part of the original research design, created when I thought the study was going to focus on student attitudes and relationships. Though this data set was not as useful for my self-study, I looked at it to discern the quality of my interactions with students at various points of time in the course.

Specifically, I conducted four semi-structured discussions midway through the course, after we had been practicing TO together for approximately six weeks. Each participant contributed to one of these hour-long discussions, so that there were four or five students in each group (Table 3.2). Each discussion consisted of prompts from a prepared script, followed by a free-form “volley” of opinions and beliefs (Carter, 2006, p. 311). The complete script I used for these discussions is in Appendix B.

Table 3.2: Focus Groups

Time	April 5, 2016	April 7, 2016
3 – 4pm	Gracie, Michelle, Kaycee, Brittany	CharChar, Nimue, Eva, Claire
4 – 5pm	JaBron, Drea, OTO, Brian, Rico	Kitkat, Sam, Edward, Java, Broom

I also recorded and transcribed informal, unstructured conversations with certain participants during data collection and analysis (Table 3.3). My goal was to capture perspectives on aspects of the project that continued to be meaningful for them after the course ended, so this was my main question. In these conversations I also conducted member checking (Merriam, 2009) by asking these participants to confirm my interpretations of their words and actions. I attempted to interview some other participants as well but was unsuccessful in scheduling a time to talk with them.

Table 3.3: Informal Participant Interviews

Pseudonym	Age	Race	National Origin	Gender	Interview Date(s)
Brian	15	Latino	Mexico	M	July 31, 2018 May 9, 2019
Claire	18	White	US	F	November 24, 2018
Eva	17	White	US	F	November 30, 2018
Gracie	15	Latina	Dominican Republic	F	May 11, 2019
Java	16	White	US	F	July 31, 2018
Nimue	16	White	US	Trans M	May 11, 2019
Rico	15	Latino	Honduras	M	October 18, 2016 December 6, 2016 May 19, 2019

Data Analysis

I began data analysis during the ToL course by wallowing in my data as I collected it (Merriam, 2009). I watched videos and listened to interviews repeatedly within 24 hours of recording them, making notes about prevalent ideas and themes that were emerging. I shared ideas and themes that emerged from the data with participants, and we discussed what we thought about them (Merriam, 2009). For example, participants and I frequently discussed their evolving awareness of social justice issues.

During my initial forays into the data, I considered general questions pertaining to the goals of the research. What interested me about TO and between-stage space, why was it interesting, and how did this influence my pedagogy? What was I saying and doing when students were engaged in TO activities and discussions? How did my participation influence student participation? What teacher moves seemed to inspire students to be “spect-actors” (Boal, 2008) rather than passive observers?

I shifted from this informal coding process to more formal coding the data about a year and a half after the ToL course ended. As I transitioned from high school teacher to graduate

teacher educator (Fall 2018), my continued interaction with participant researchers, staff, and students at CHS affected my data analysis in important ways. My immersion in an academic community gave me ongoing exposure to scholarly perspectives, so that my own theoretical lens continued to evolve over time. Also, I was working in different schools as a content coach in a teacher education program, substitute teaching at CHS, and engaging in activism with youth attending schools all over the district. This kept me in touch with high school communities and added new youth knowledge to my repertoire. Within this liminal, messy, “both/and” space, I continually observed and reflected on my own practice, as a teacher and teacher educator.

I used Atlas.ti software to assist in my data analysis because I wanted to identify “linkages between and among codes” (Merriam, 2009, p. 195) or data segments. I imported documents relating to the course and video recordings of class sessions into Atlas.ti from my electronic files. I transcribed non-text media and imported the transcripts.

I began the formal coding process by organizing data sets chronologically. Given the essential concept of transformation in my research question, I thought this organizational strategy would help me observe evidence of transformation over time. I soon realized that transformation is not a linear process and wondered about ways to categorize different types of White teacher practice in order to demonstrate shifts that occurred.

I used open coding (Merriam, 2009) to analyze all data from the first week of the course, creating a baseline list of codes associated with transformation in my practice. I wrote a reflective memo (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) about this initial phase of the intervention, including my planning process and what happened in the first two sessions. My rationale for this was to create a detailed sketch of my pedagogical approaches at the outset of the project, as a baseline for discerning transformation that resulted from the intervention as the project progressed. After

constructing this baseline, I coded the rest of the data and made a list of emerging themes, presented in Table 3.4.

My intention in the design of the course was to increase understanding of power relationships, encourage reflection on new understanding, and promote action toward social transformation. As I analyzed data collected during the course I focused on the formation and qualities of between-stage space – where participants and I built trust characteristic of backstage space and then turned our backstage lenses on front stage situations.

Awareness of SJ Issues
Boundaries
Colorblindness
Cultural Flexibility
Deficit Thinking
Marginalized Perspectives
Masks
Risk-Taking
Transparency
Trust
Vulnerability
Whiteness, White Privilege
Youth empowerment

Table 3.4: Emerging Themes

I identified video data segments that were situated in the between-stage region, in which a synthesis or overlap of Goffman’s (1959) front and backstage regions was apparent. These typically included activities in which any participant-researchers (including me) were engaged in critical, metacognitive examination of a front-stage action (something that happened or could happen in a classroom, for example) in the backstage mode facilitated by TO.

Evidence of trust among participants was an essential indicator of between-stage space. I paid close attention to participant journal responses about “realness” and “mask-wearing” as trust-level indicators and noted that trust levels would be a key point during member checking (Merriam, 2009). My data analysis focused on determining “what meaning is being portrayed to an audience and how the elements that make up the performance contribute to the meaning” (Feldman, 1995, p. 42), while acknowledging that “a performance may have many audiences and the meaning may be different for each” (Feldman, 1995, p. 43). In the final phase of my analysis,

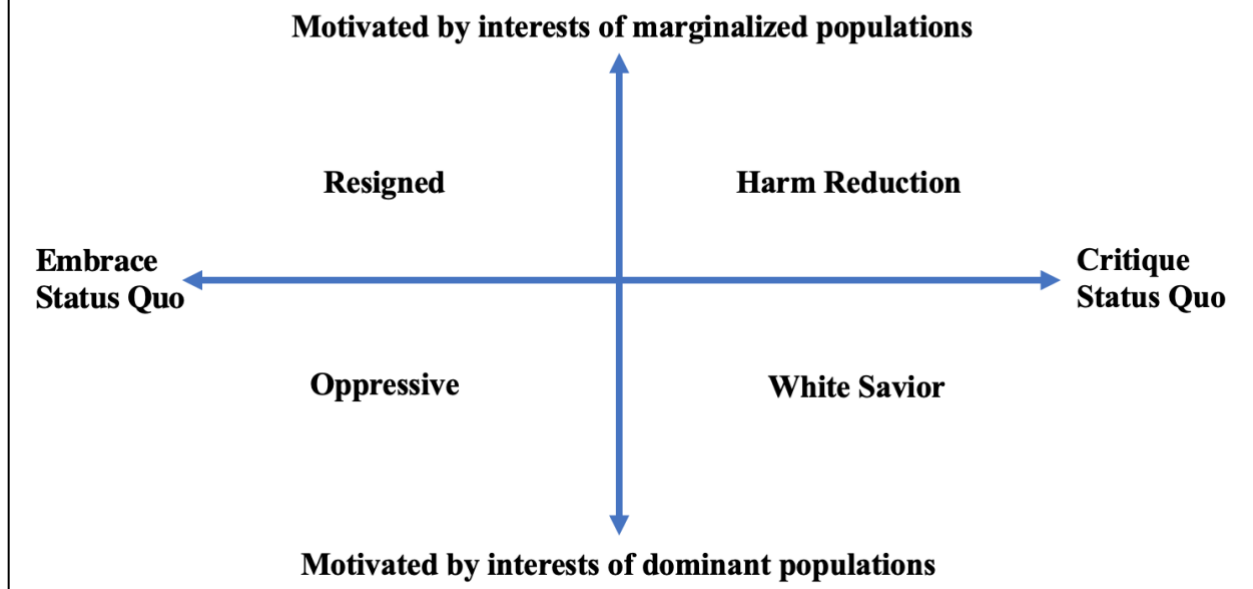
I created a model in which I defined distinct categories of White teacher practice. It enabled me to show transformation in my practice from one category to another.

Categories of White teacher practice in PWIs.

I sorted my initial round of codes into categories of White teacher practice exemplified in the data. I constructed a model inspired by Solorzano's and Bernal's (2001) theoretical construct of transformational resistance, which in turn was inspired by Giroux's (1983) intersecting dimensions of resistance, where one dimension is a critique of social oppression, and the other is motivational interest in social justice (as cited in Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Working from themes that were emerging in the data, I defined four types of White teacher practice – **Oppressive, White Savior, Resigned, and Harm Reduction** – arranged around the intersection of two axes: (x) **teacher motivation** and (y) **teacher orientation toward the status quo**. I conceptualized Oppressive, White Savior, and Resigned teacher practice as anti-models, and Harm Reduction teacher practice as an “ideal” (Boal, 2002, p. 294) toward which I strived in seeking transformation of my pedagogy. This model is shown in Figure 3.2.

The **status quo** is an institutional force that I found to be embedded in three themes from my data – colorblindness, deficit thinking, and White privilege, all of which enable Whites to maintain a privileged status in society. As Solorzano and Bernal (2001) explained, “though some social change is possible through conformist resistance, without a critique of the social, cultural, or economic forms of oppression, it does not offer the greatest possibility for social justice” (p. 319). The “x” axis of my model delineates a White teacher's attitudes toward the status quo, with embracing the status quo at one end of this axis and a critical approach toward the status quo at the other end.

Figure 3.2: Four Categories of White Teacher Practice in Predominantly White Schools



In the model, I assigned a White teacher’s orientation toward students from different identity groups to a continuum along the “y” axis. A White teacher’s desire to prioritize the interests of marginalized populations (e.g. people of color) is located at the upper end of this axis. The upper half of the model contains **Resigned** and **Harm Reduction** categories of White teacher practice. I placed the tendency to prioritize the interests of dominant social identities (e.g. White people) at the lower end of the “y” axis, where **White Savior** and **Oppressive** categories of White teacher practice are located.

Embracing the status quo leads to **oppressive** teacher practice when White teachers favor the interests of students from dominant populations. This anti-model might manifest as deficit thinking about students of color, claiming that race does not matter and thus dismissing and/or invalidating students’ identities, or discounting the impact of White supremacist norms embedded in society. As Anderson (2013) explained, in the deficit model “individual students (as well as their families and communities) become targeted and blamed for academic under-

performance, all the while letting the systemic inequities that inform student outcomes off the hook” (p. 32). In my conceptualization of oppressive teacher practice, backstage space between teacher and students is minimal or non-existent, and front stage space is dominated by problematic content and pedagogy. The status quo is often trusted unequivocally; failing that, the authority of oppressive institutional influences is never questioned or challenged in front stage space. White perspectives dominate discourse in Oppressive teacher practice.

The upper left quadrant symbolizes teachers who care about marginalized populations but see the status quo as the requisite norm. These teachers find themselves frustrated and become resigned – similar to “resigned” students with privilege in Swalwell’s (2013) research who understand that oppression exists but see little point in trying to solve it. In both anti-models this frustration may occur because the status quo seems too entrenched to overcome. Resigned teachers might critique the status quo in backstage space with colleagues and/or students but will not challenge it in front stage due to confusion, cynicism, fatigue, fear, frustration, non-activist identity, or White-guilt paralysis.

The **White Savior** category designates White teachers who prioritize their own sense of self-worth over the needs of students from marginalized populations. This anti-model resonates with Snyder-Young’s (2013) observations of a key limitation of TO practice: that “though coming from a place of ‘good intentions,’ [altruism] can reinforce existing imbalances of power” (p. 27). Teachers in this category usually recognize the oppression caused by the status quo but their critique of the status quo is performative, influenced by dominant narratives and implicit bias. The White savior paradigm is dominated by Whiteness, oppressive institutional forces, colorblindness, an assimilationist or “White Washed” approach, and deficit thinking in both front

and back stage space. While teachers with a White savior attitude may have good intentions, their actions do not maximize harm reduction.

Finally, I situated **Harm Reduction** in the upper right quadrant of my diagram, derived from Daniels' (2018) research on the concept as practiced by White teachers. Daniels argued that harm reduction – a phrase used in the 1980s as a way to characterize responses to the AIDS epidemic and other public health crises – “is about finding ways to reduce harm to individuals, families, or communities, without necessarily addressing or eliminating the root causes of that harm” (p. 42). Daniels asserted that Whiteness causes harm in classrooms because it often perpetuates racism beyond the conscious control of White teachers, who cannot step outside the historical constructions of their White identities. For example, she invoked W. E. B. Du Bois's (1995) concept of “double consciousness” to illuminate how students of color

must constantly imagine themselves through the eyes of their White teachers because those White teachers wield significant power and police narrow ways of being.

Regardless of a White teacher's desires, actions, or intentions there is no way to erase the harm of double consciousness. (p. 49)

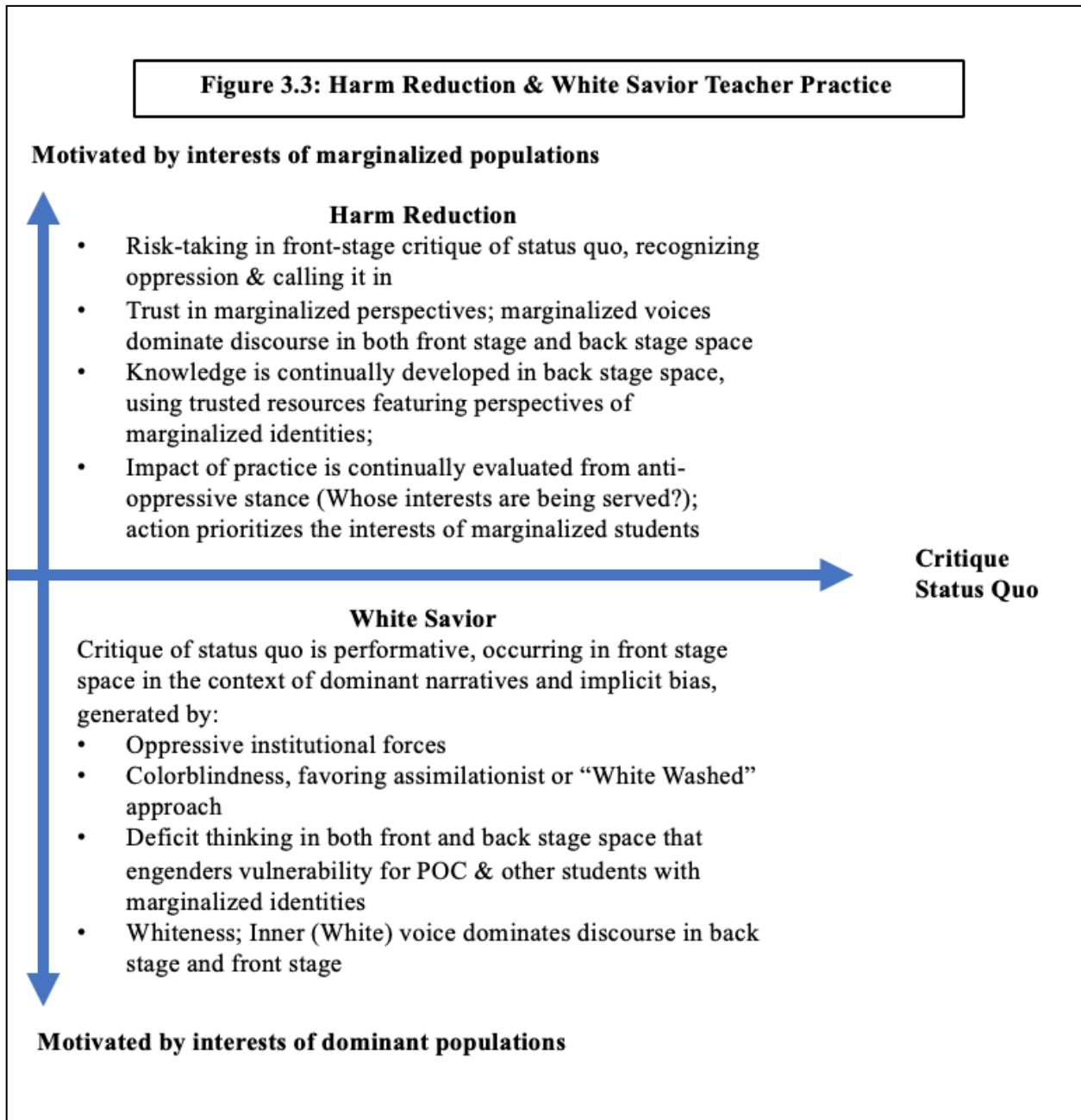
I focused on harm reduction to recognize that, as a White teacher, I was incapable of achieving liberatory outcomes with my pedagogy, despite my best intentions. Believing that a White teacher can “liberate” students of color is characteristic of the White savior paradigm. Racism continues to be a systemic force that causes harm with a White teacher as the vehicle, because White teachers are socialized to reproduce racism. This does not mean that White teacher practice is always inherently harmful. Harm Reduction as the ideal objective in my framework thus acknowledges

the ways that help and harm are not mutually exclusive and that it is possible to acknowledge the reality of both at the same time: White teachers can do “good” – can help students of Color to get much of what they might need and want out of schooling experiences – even as they also do “harm.” (Daniels, 2018, p. 51)

A prerequisite of progress toward harm-reduction is challenging the status quo, because it is only by doing so that inequities caused by the status quo are illuminated for the community to scrutinize and act upon. As such, Harm Reduction Oriented teacher practice is situated in proximity to the end of the “x” axis designated for critique of the status quo, in the quadrant symbolizing White teachers who are concerned about marginalized populations. Harm reduction in White teacher practice is characterized by risk-taking in front-stage and backstage critique of status quo, recognizing oppression & calling it out/in (Ross, 2019). Marginalized perspectives are trusted and voices of color dominate discourse in both front stage and backstage space. Knowledge is continually developed in backstage space and cultivated in front stage space, where resources authored by and featuring perspectives of color are given priority as sources of knowledge. The impact of Harm Reduction practice is continually, critically evaluated from anti-oppressive stance (*Whose interests are being served?*).

My analysis focused on the right side of the diagram to explore evidence of transformation from White Savior teacher practice toward Harm Reduction. This strategy enabled me to concentrate on Boal’s concept of transformation from the “real world” to the “ideal world” (2002; 2008). I speculated that evidence of all four categories from this model appear in my practice on any given day. Since the prevailing category revealed in the data for this research was White Savior teacher practice (my reality), and since my ideal vision of my

practice is harm reduction (White teacher practice that is closer to ideal), I decided to focus on these two quadrants of this model for the purposes of this study (Figure 3.3).



I did a second round of coding in which I identified features of these two categories in the data. I looked for evidence of shifts in my practice from the White Savior category of my

framework toward the Harm Reduction category. I wrote reflective memos about these shifts, endeavoring to remain skeptical of my own apparent transformation as I analyzed the data.

Reporting the Findings: Portraiture & Theatre of the Oppressed

“the rigorously self-examining attitude of the researcher and a caring personal investment in the life of the subjects demand new reporting conventions”
(Canagarajah, 2016, p. 217)

“Practitioners tend to use narrative and story as a way to communicate professional knowledge, which makes it particularly appropriate for action research” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 34)

To report my findings, I combined elements of portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) and written adaptations of Boal’s embodied techniques, including Forum Theatre (2002), Cops in the Head (1990) and Rainbow of Desire (1995).

Portraiture.

I used Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis’s (1997) portraiture techniques to create portraits of my practice at various points in the research, weaving together strands of analysis to demonstrate types of transformation. In their book *The Art and Science of Portraiture* (1997), these authors discussed pitfalls of positivist research to magnify what’s wrong and “neglecting evidence of promise and potential” (p. 9). TO activities such as Rainbow of Desire (1995), in which characters articulate the ideal outcome of anti-oppressive transformation, maintain a dynamic tension between “what’s wrong” and “what could be, in an ideal world,” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 11). These presentation techniques encourage participants to engage fully with the promise and potential of social reality. When a TO exercise or performance is rendered as a Forum Theatre (FT) script, the result may be “provocative work that can disturb the natural rhythms of social reality and encounter” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 11) in ways that

cannot be conveyed in traditional academic writing. I wanted to depict the influence of transformative, interactive theater on my teaching practice to preserve the aesthetic “between-stage” experience of this intervention; extend it beyond the moments of instruction, play and performance; and expand the potential of this experience to reach beyond participants who were present at the time.

Using Lawrence-Lightfoot’s and Davis’s portraiture conventions as a model, I used pieces from different data sets to create narratives that capture the essence of transformations that occurred in my practice.

Forum theatre scripts and interventions.

In an article on the value of autoethnography, Gingrich-Philbrook (2005) highlighted the conceptual boundary between an experiment and the published interpretation of that experiment. He said that “composition and rehearsal correspond to experimentation whereas performances for audiences correspond to publication” (p. 304). Boal’s methodology problematizes this assumption by combining the concepts of rehearsal and performance; in Boal’s work, performance is a “rehearsal for action in real life” (2006, p. 6) – in other words, experimentation for transforming actions. When I designed the ToL course it was my intention to guide students in creating and performing Forum plays for our school community. Though I was not able to fully realize Forum Theatre (FT) in the ToL class, I created a facsimile of between-stage space by employing the Forum process in reporting my findings. I composed my findings as scripts of imagined Forum performances (Boal, 2002), demonstrating my process of rehearsing for future situations in a form that exists on the page.

I began by selecting reflective memos that described incidents where I embodied features of White Savior teacher practice before, during, and after the ToL course. I then constructed a

sequence of two Forum scripts based on each memo. The first script hewed to the problematic incident described in the memo, recreating it as a performance. In the second script, my present self intervened for the character based on my former self in the first script. The character of my former self I called Ms. Eldridge – a name I often use when I play an antagonist in a Forum play. The character based on my current self I called Ms. DiFranco, in honor of an anti-racist colleague who has inspired me.

After writing the first version of each script, I used Boal’s (1990) technique of Cops in the Head to articulate oppressive social forces that were influencing my mindset at the time of the incident on which the script is based. Similarly, I used Boal’s (1995) Rainbow of Desire technique to demonstrate what I wanted in the situation. I occasionally imagined social forces and desires of other participants, doing so with their collaboration when possible. This added complexity and nuance to these interactions, though it still shows only a fraction of the internal messaging that each person has.

In the second script, I imagined alternative words and actions for myself that might have disrupted the power dynamics of the incident toward harm reduction. This playwriting exercise helped me discern how my pedagogical thinking has ultimately changed as a result of this research. Table 3.5 summarizes this reporting structure.

Table 3.5: Structure for Reporting Findings

Method	Explanation
Memo analysis	Establishes context for Forum Script with analysis of interaction
Forum Script A	Re-creates the incident in script form (front stage)
Cops in the Head	Applies Boal’s (1990) exercise to articulate internalized (backstage) oppressive social forces influencing my words and actions
Rainbow of Desire	Applies Boal’s (1995) exercise to articulate my internal (backstage) desires in the situation
Forum Script B	Demonstrates a (between-stage) intervention by my current self on my former self

This hybrid method of reporting my findings invokes Lather's (1986) argument for the pursuit of catalytic validity, or "the degree to which the research process re-orient, focuses, and energizes participants in what Freire (2000) terms 'conscientization,' knowing reality in order to better transform it" (p. 67). Lather's premise was based "not only on a recognition of the reality-altering impact of the research process itself, but also on the need to consciously channel this impact so that respondents gain self-understanding and, ideally, self-determination through research participation" (p. 67). Consistent with these assertions, I found that the process of using Boal's techniques in my reporting transformations in my teaching practice was in itself transformative.

Summary

This chapter discussed the research design and methods used to examine my own practice as I taught Theatre of the Oppressed methods in an after-school course in a predominantly White high school setting. The study took place in a prosperous area of a large urban school district in the Pacific Northwest. Eight White students and ten students of color participated in the project. Participants read articles selected for their value in teaching high school students about oppression, and engaged in games, activities and discussions based on Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed techniques. Data were collected in the form of documents, participant journal writing and drawing, videos of course activities, and semi-structured interviews.

Data were coded using a model delineating four types of White teacher practice: Oppressive, Resigned, White Savior, and Harm Reduction. Data were analyzed to gather details for written portraits of specific moments that provided me with opportunities to demonstrate transformation in my teaching practice. The portraits include Forum scripts depicting possible

interventions toward harm reduction. A main reason for designing the project and reporting the findings in this way was to interrogate the utility of Theatre of the Oppressed in pedagogical action research by using one of its primary techniques (Forum Theatre) in the analysis itself.

The findings of my research are laid out in six written portraits (four in Chapter IV and two in Chapter V) that serve as illustrative case studies of moments where two types of White teacher practice from my analysis model – specifically, White Savior and Harm Reduction – were evident. These episodes were selected because they provided opportunities to show how my current self might have acted differently than my former self, or how I might act in the future if a similar situation happened again.

Chapter IV: Confronting the Real, Envisioning the Ideal

This chapter contains four portraits. The first concerns an event that happened just prior to planning and teaching the ToL course (Portrait 1: Meeting with Mr. J). The introduction to Portrait 1 contains detailed analysis of a memo written shortly after I met with one of the Assistant Principals at CHS, intended to establish context for my conceptualization of the meeting as a Forum play. This memo analysis is followed by the first Forum Script sequence, “Some kids don’t belong at Carpenter.” The first script (Forum Script 1A) is an approximation of my meeting with this administrator based on the memo I wrote at the time. The second script (Forum Script 1B) is identical to Script 1A up until a point where I have inserted an “intervention” (Boal, 2002). The character in the second script is based on my current self, intervening for a character based on my identity – as demonstrated in the language of the memo – at the time of the meeting. From the intervention point the script proceeds with a new conversation I imagined might result from the intervening character’s actions.

In between Forum Script 1A and Forum Script 1B is writing in which I applied Boal’s exercises *Cops in the Head* (1990) and *Rainbow of Desire* (1995) to this script. This transition between the two scripts highlights between-stage thinking that informed a shift from White Savior teacher practice toward Harm Reduction teacher practice. This portrait of my teacher identity as it evolved up until the time I initiated this project establishes a baseline for the kinds of transformation this research inspired.

To follow the portrait of my meeting with Mr. J, I wrote three more portraits that exemplify my practice during the ToL course. To create these portraits, I analyzed videos of ToL sessions, student journal writing, and my own planning notes, journal writing, and memos. Portraits 2, 3, and 4 highlight findings about my practice in between-stage space as participants

engaged in the TO activities of Image Theatre and a game called Carnival in Rio. Similar to Portrait 1, these portraits include Forum script sequences with interventions that exemplify shifts in my thinking and practice, as well as Cops in the Head and Rainbow of Desire interludes.

Details about these portraits are summarized in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Chapter IV Portraits

Portrait	Title	Timeframe	Data Sources	Type of Analysis
Portrait 1	Meeting with Mr. J	1/15/15	- Self-generated memo	Portraiture Forum Scripts Cops & Rainbow
Portrait 2	Planning “From Real to Ideal” Tableaus	3/24/16	- Self-generated memos - video recordings - student journals	Portraiture Forum Scripts Cops & Rainbow
Portrait 3	Group 1 Tableau Performance	3/24/16	- Self-generated memos - video recordings - member checks	Portraiture Forum Scripts Cops & Rainbow
Portrait 4	Carnival in Rio	4/19/16	- Self-generated memos - video recordings - member checks	Portraiture Forum Scripts Cops & Rainbow

Portrait 1: Meeting with Mr. J – January 15, 2015

Today an administrator said that these students “do not belong at Carpenter.” (Personal Journal, January 17, 2015)²

My positionality within the culture of CHS is revealed in this private journal entry, composed a little over a year before the Theater of Liberation course was to begin. In this journal writing my obvious disdain for this administrator’s dismissal of errant students was followed by a defeated tone toward the end of the first paragraph:

This is at least the 5th time that an administrator has said something like this to me about these particular freshman students. Not just one administrator – all of them.

The next part of this journal entry is strangely performative.

² All italicized quotes in this section originated in this journal entry.

...with the administrator today I became very frustrated and admit to raising my voice a little. I feel that these students are not being afforded opportunity to turn their behavior around, based on a variety of evidence. I don't see anyone trying to get to the root of their behavior or figure them out. Some supports have been offered but not adequate, obviously.

I “admit” to raising my voice. Looking back, I do not know why I felt the need to use that word. Was I compelled to judge myself for being rude? Probably – I was brought up in a culture where no one raises their voice to someone higher up in the hierarchy.

The writing also reflects the righteous indignation I felt at the time, which was infused with my feelings of responsibility to advocate for students of color in my classes, especially this group of 9th graders who seemed to be in the administration’s crosshairs. I was also apparently aware that I was transgressing an unspoken norm of decorum for meetings with administrators. In my data analysis, I characterized the meeting as front stage space for this reason.

Raising my voice in the meeting with this Assistant Principal was performative toward disrupting the status quo of administrators’ negative attitudes toward students of color. I trusted this AP more than the other two, which is probably why I felt comfortable (and not threatened) raising my voice to him. We are both White, and that likely contributed to my sense of entitlement in that meeting. I did not advocate for my students as much as I could have; I did not call the AP out directly for saying something so problematic. I did not want to embarrass him. I saved my true outrage for my private journal – the backstage space.

I finally said it sounds like admin is saying that a certain type of student is not welcome at Carpenter, and those students are students of color.

I remember that I did not yell this part; I said it quietly in a more backstage, almost conspiratorial tone: “you should be careful, you sound like...” This is classic Whiteness, one White professional hinting an implicit message to another: “Don’t say that because people might think you’re racist.” This is one way to get people to stop being racist, but perhaps not the best way, since it does not hold them accountable for their problematic actions.

This administrator quickly pointed out that at least two of the worst offenders are white.

“But they aren’t acting white,” I thought.

Here I reveal that in the midst of what I thought was an anti-racist move, I maintained my own stereotyping assumptions about behavior of students based on racial identity. I was caught in a “both/and” space somewhere between advocacy and stereotyping/prejudice. What did I mean by “they aren’t acting White”? One of them brought a gun to school. Is that how students of color typically behave?

I don't have time to think about it right now. Grades are due at the end of the week.

These two sentences demonstrate a key feature of teacher culture and my professional identity. Completing an administrative task deemed by society to be an essential component of educating students is prioritized. Everyone involved – parents, administrators, and students – expects teachers to file term grades on time, despite the fact that letter grade reports do not represent the breadth and depth of student skills and knowledge.

My journal writing thus contains ample evidence of White Savior teacher practice. In blurring the lines between White students and students of color by thinking that White students were not “acting White” when they brought weapons to school, I was subscribing to the “White Washed” ideology (Alvarado, 2016) that evokes assimilation as the correct path for students of color. By default, I was also subscribing to deficit thinking about the students of color in this

friend group. Feeling safe in the Whiteness I shared with this supervisor, I adopted a conspiratorial tone in critiquing his assessment of the situation, rather than being more straightforward.

The following writing is a pair of Forum scripts based on this interaction, with Cops in the Head and Rainbow of Desire exercises in between a script that shows the real situation (Forum Script 1A) and a script that shows how it might have concluded differently if I had prompted the administrator to more carefully consider what he was saying (Forum Script 1B).

In the scripts, the character who represents my former self is called Ms. Eldridge, a name I frequently use when I take the role of an antagonist in a Forum Play. A character based on my current self, called Ms. DiFranco, intervenes for Ms. Eldridge in the second script. I maintain this convention throughout the findings.

Forum script 1A: “Some kids just don’t belong at Carpenter.”

MS. ELDRIDGE stands in the doorway to the office of an Assistant Principal, MR. J. They are discussing one of MS. ELDRIDGE’s students.

MS. ELDRIDGE: I’m really concerned about JaBron being suspended again. It seems like that group of freshmen keeps getting suspended, which keeps them out of school. Then they get further behind, and (*raising her voice*) it’s hard for them to catch up when they come back!

MR. J: Calm down, ok? I hear what you’re saying, but JaBron is making bad choices, especially in who he’s choosing to hang out with. Karl, Tom, Rico...some kids just don’t belong at Carpenter.

MS. ELDRIDGE (*quietly*): So, you’re saying that a certain type of student is not welcome at Carpenter, and those students are students of color?

MR. J: That's not what I'm saying.

MS. ELDRIDGE: That's what it sounds like.

MR. J: Karl is White. He's the one who brought a gun to school. Him and his pal John.

MS. ELDRIDGE: Yeah. Well, please keep me posted on when JaBron is coming back.

End scene.

Forum 1: Cops in the Head and Rainbow of Desire.

The following writing imagines ideas that influenced the characters based on my former self (called Ms. Eldridge in the script) and Mr. J during this meeting. This exercise is usually done by creating a tableau – in other words, freezing a moment of the scene. In this play, the frozen moment occurs right after Mr. J says that some kids do not belong at Carpenter.

At that moment, one of the “cops” in the backstage space of Ms. Eldridge’s psyche might be saying, “You better quit being confrontational – you don’t want to embarrass your supervisor,” articulating the social expectations of many professional meetings in educational contexts. A backstage “cop” in Mr. J’s head might be saying, “You have to be confident and assertive when it comes to discipline.” This statement shows the social pressures on school administrators in doing their jobs.

Additionally, both of these characters were likely motivated by desire to help students. A Rainbow of Desire statement for Ms. Eldridge might be, “I want JaBron to be successful in school.” A Rainbow statement for Mr. J might be something like, “I don’t want Carpenter students to get hurt or be distracted from learning.” The statements in this exercise show that Ms.

Eldridge had JaBron's interests at heart and that Mr. J wanted to ensure safety and a positive learning environment at CHS.

Forum script 1B: Intervention.

The following script contains text for what Boal (2008) conceptualized as an "intervention." In it, a character called Ms. DiFranco (based on my current self) stops the action and steps in for the character of Ms. Eldridge. Ms. DiFranco's dialogue in this script shows how I would want to interact with Mr. J if this meeting happened again.

MS. ELDRIDGE: I'm just really concerned about JaBron being suspended again. It seems like that group of freshmen keeps getting suspended, which keeps them out of school. Then they get further behind, and (*raising her voice*) it's hard for them to catch up when they come back!

MR. J: Calm down, ok? I hear you, but JaBron is making bad choices, especially in who he's choosing to hang out with. Karl, Tom, Rico... Some kids just don't belong at Carpenter.

MS. DiFRANCO: Stop!

MS. DiFRANCO intervenes for MS. ELDRIDGE's character.

MS. DiFRANCO: Can you explain what you mean by that?

MR. J: I mean that kids who bring guns to school don't belong here.

MS. DiFRANCO: Did JaBron bring a gun to school?

MR. J: No, but he hangs out with the kids who did.

MS. DiFRANCO: Are you punishing him for his choice of friends?

MR. J: No. He reeked of weed, and we found weed in his bag. That's why he was suspended.

MS. DiFRANCO: I know you have a policy about weed, but personally I'd rather have JaBron in my class high than have him miss my class. Do you suspend every kid who brings weed to school?

MR. J: If we catch them, yes.

MS. DiFRANCO: Do you think there are a lot of kids who bring weed to school who don't get caught?

MR. J (*chuckling*): Definitely!

MS. DiFRANCO: Of the kids who get caught and suspended for weed, are White kids represented in proportion to the demographics of this school?

MR. J (*calculating in his head*): Ahmmmm...probably not.

MS. DiFRANCO: Would you say that kids of color are suspended more often for having weed than White kids, given the disproportionate enrollment?

MR. J (*ruefully*): Maybe.

MS. DiFRANCO: Is that cause for concern?

MR. J (*exasperated*): I don't know. Maybe, ok? Maybe.

End scene.

The conflict is still not resolved when this intervention ends, but the character of Mr. J in this version of the scene has been compelled to think about how inequity is showing up in his job performance. Ms. DiFranco, the intervening spect-actor based on my current self, asked a series of questions that invited Mr. J to interrogate his beliefs and actions regarding a student of color, specifically in relation to White students who engaged in behaviors similar to those that got JaBron in trouble. His imagined responses, while not made concrete in the data I collected,

nevertheless represent reasonable responses to the questions posed. The responses emerged from my own positionality as a White educator who has thought about students of color in ways that are similar to Mr. J's characterizations of these students. In a sense, I interrupted my own flawed thinking about students of color by putting myself in Mr. J's shoes for this exercise.

Mr. J's words and actions in this meeting presented an opportunity for me to disrupt patterns of oppression that are prevalent in PWIs, resonating with McIntyre's (1997) recognition of the influence of Whiteness on educational reproduction and control of discourse. Our meeting focused on JaBron's discourse – the way he expressed himself at CHS – demonstrating one way that his discourse was being controlled by systems of power in this educational setting. Such systems were clearly reproduced in how this White administrator disciplined JaBron. In the actual meeting, I perpetuated this reproduction by failing to question Mr. J's logic. The line of questioning in my intervention exposed the oppressive systems that control the discourse of students of color at CHS.

This portrait functions as the “before” frame of a “before, during, and after” sequence. I included it to show my attitudes about students of color and how I interacted with administrators at CHS in the period directly prior to the beginning of ToL. The following three portraits emerged from the timeframe during which I taught the course.

Portraits 2 & 3: One Month In – March 24, 2016

Data collected approximately one month after ToL began yielded two distinct portraits. On March 24 we invited an extracurricular club called Students and Teachers Against Racism (STAR) to join us for our ToL session. Their activities were designed to raise awareness about racism within the school community, so their interests overlapped with the content of ToL. I had

a strong collaborative relationship with the White teacher who acted as STAR's faculty adviser. I asked ToL students what they thought of the idea of this group joining us for a session, and they agreed it could be interesting.

For this session I planned a sequence of Image Theater exercises. My planning notes called these activities "Sculptures of Power – Small group sculptures that show dynamics of oppression, and transitions to solution." This is evidence of backstage planning toward harm reduction on my part. However, my actions during the activity did not align with these aims. Since the race of participants was salient for analysis of TO activities in ToL, I have indicated the race of each participant in parentheses after their name with the codes of W for White, L for Latinx, B for Biracial, and PI for Pacific Islander.

I divided the class and our guests into four groups. Each group had between two and four ToL participants and at least one STAR guest. Each group was to create two tableaux, the first demonstrating dynamics of oppression and the second demonstrating an equitable solution to the problem presented in the first. I asked students to write some brainstorming notes individually then share their ideas with others in their group. I circulated with a camera as they planned their tableaux, recording their conversations on video. From time to time, I interjected coaching notes based on what I was hearing.

There were multiple opportunities for intervention to disrupt problematic teacher thinking and practice in data from this session. The first (Portrait 2: Planning "From Real to Ideal" Tableaus) consists of two forum script sequences that portray my interactions with two different groups (Forum script 2.1, "Are you White?" and Forum script 2.2, "Uh, you could be a White person"). The third portrait illustrates the performance and subsequent discussion of the tableau created by the first group depicted in Portrait 2.

Portrait 2: Planning “from real to ideal” tableaus – March 24, 2016.

Initially, all participants in the first group in the recording (Group 1) were students of color: JaBron (PI), Gracie (L), Sam (B), and a South Korean STAR guest named Ella.

JaBron’s participation in ToL deserves its own sketch before I move on to other components of this portrait. JaBron was the student of concern I discussed in the “Meeting with Mr. J.” He struggled in school and was frequently disciplined by administrators for his behavior. His habit in both in my regular Language Arts class and in

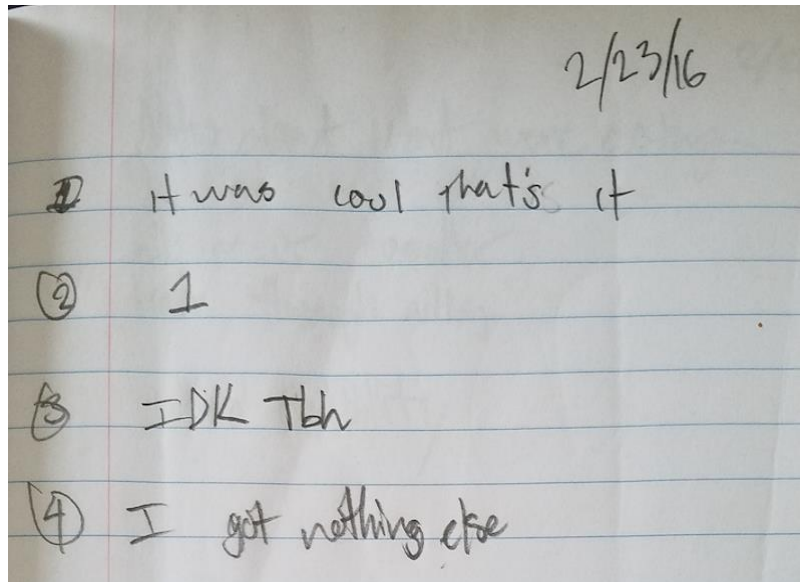


Photo 4.1: JaBron’s Journal, February 25, 2016

ToL was to write terse, abbreviated responses (Photo 4.1). I assumed that writing was difficult for JaBron until one spring afternoon following one of the ToL sessions. In a brief, informal conversation with him I demonstrated White Savior assumptions by suggesting that writing more would be good practice for him. That evening I wrote this memory of our subsequent exchange in my personal journal:

JaBron: I can write fine. I just don’t got much to say.

Me: Well, why don’t you write about why you don’t have much to say? I’d be interested in reading about that.

JaBron: I did write about that.

Me: You did?

JaBron: Yup. (Personal Journal, April 19, 2016).

JaBron flipped through his journal and found the writing he was talking about. It had been written three weeks earlier but I had not seen it before. I flushed with embarrassment when he showed it to me.

Tbh everybody goes through shit it's the way of life I was taught to get over it and just forgive and I feel like most of the time being here in this class is just a waste of time because I can't open myself up to people I can't express my feelings to or in front of others it is just the way I learned things. If I'm disrespectful most of the time I don't know I am so I continue doing what I'm doing and keep on being disrespectful so when I'm being disrespectful it's not my intentions it's just what I do unless I felt disrespected then of course I'm going to be disrespectful to get respect you give respect.

JaBron wrote this journal entry one week after the session in which we planned and performed the “Real to Ideal” tableaux. Contrary to his assertions in this writing, JaBron did open up in many ways. He was far more present, outgoing, and participatory in ToL than he was in my regular Language Arts class, which he often skipped. At the beginning of the March 24 session he seemed more reserved than usual, but was engaged and following all instructions.

The first video recording from this session began with Gracie sharing an idea with her group. She had imagined a situation in which two people, one White and one “colored,” were caught breaking the law by police. She explained that the injustice of the situation was less severe punishment for the White person. I asked if the group could imagine a similar event happening in a school. JaBron suggested a scene where two friends were expelled from school

for tagging.³ Gracie cut JaBron off mid-sentence and asked me if Mulan (a White Instructional Assistant who had been working with the class) could play a White person in their tableau. She then turned to Mulan and asked, “Are you White?”

The video recording shows that I moved on to a different group at this moment. Mulan moved over to sit with Gracie’s group. I glanced at them working together from time to time as I circulated among other groups but did not pay close attention to what they were doing.

Forum script 2.1A: “Are you White?”

MS. ELDRIDGE stands by a group of four students sitting in a circle.

JABRON leans into the circle with his chin in his hand. SAM and ELLA are leaning back in their chairs holding their notes. GRACIE begins sharing her idea.

GRACIE: Ok. Let’s say there was a White person and a colored person who were doing something bad together, but the White cop only arrests the colored person and lets the White guy go? That’s what I thought of.

MS. ELDRIDGE: Can you make it happen so that it’s taking place in a school?

GRACIE looks confused.

JABRON: Uh-huh! Like a colored kid getting expelled...

GRACIE: For what?

JABRON: I don’t know...for like, tagging or so’um like that?

³ According to [urbandictionary.com](https://www.urbandictionary.com), tagging is “[m]uch like, but not to be confused with graffiti; [it] is signing your name or other representation of yourself on anywhere public (walls, bus-stops, alleyways, streets, etc.) Wikipedia notes that tagging is “often the example given when opponents of graffiti refer to any acts of handstyle graffiti writing.” <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Tagging>
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graffiti#Tagging>

GRACIE: Tagging?

JABRON (*equivocating to Gracie's skepticism*): Yeah, I dunno...

MS. ELDRIDGE: Sure!

GRACIE (*turning to MS. ELDRIDGE*): How would we show that's connected to race though?

JABRON (*using hand gestures, trying to get Gracie's attention*): Cuz there's a colored person, and then a White person, and they're together, and they're tagging, and they both get in trouble –

GRACIE (to MS. ELDRIDGE, *cutting JaBron off*): Can we have Mulan be in this? because she's Wh- (*turning to Mulan, who is sitting apart from the group*) Hey, are you White?

MS. ELDRIDGE walks away. End scene.

Forum 2.1: Cops in the Head and Rainbow of Desire.

The tableau for this “Cops” exercise depicts the last moment of this scene. Ms. Eldridge stands by as JaBron leans away from the group and gazes out the window. Sam and Ella look at their notes with desultory expressions. Gracie’s face is frozen in expectant hesitation, looking toward Mulan, a participant sitting outside the group.

The Cop in Ms. Eldridge’s head says, “You just got an amazing piece of video data and now you need to move on to the other groups.” A Rainbow of Desire statement that might be influencing Ms. Eldridge in this moment says, “I want to do research that will help students like JaBron do better in school.”

Forum script 2.1B: Intervention.

GRACIE: Ok. Let's say there was a White person and a colored person who were doing something bad together [*pinches fingers of her right hand to show "togetherness"*] but the White cop only arrests the colored person and lets the other White guy go...or? I guess, yeah. That's what I thought of.

MS. DiFRANCO: Stop! [*MS. DiFRANCO replaces MS. ELDRIDGE in the scene.*]

MS. DiFRANCO: Ok, that's definitely an oppressive moment. Gracie, did you know that many people find the term "colored" offensive?

GRACIE: What? No!

MS. DiFRANCO: Yeah. There's some painful history associated with that expression, maybe Google it later if you get a chance. "Person of color" is widely used today when referring to people who aren't White.

GRACIE: Good to know!

MS. DiFRANCO: JaBron, what do you think of Gracie's idea?

JABRON: It's ok.

MS. DiFRANCO: I wonder if a similar story could happen in school?

GRACIE: Oh...huh?

JABRON: Yup. Like a colored kid getting expelled.

MS. DiFRANCO [*encouragingly*]: You mean a student of color getting expelled? That's a compelling story.

GRACIE: Expelled for what?

JABRON: I don't know...for like, tagging or so'um like that?

GRACIE: Tagging?

JABRON: I dunno...

MS. DiFRANCO: That would definitely work.

GRACIE [*to MS. DiFRANCO*]: How would we show that's connected to race though?

MS. DiFRANCO: JaBron, can you explain that?

JABRON: Yeah cuz, there's a colored person, and then a White person, and they're together, and they're tagging, and they both get in trouble but the colored, er I mean student of color gets expelled and the White kid gets sent back to class.

MS. DiFRANCO: It sounds like this story resonates with you, JaBron.

JABRON (*dramatically*): Yup! It's about race because the two kids who are different races get different punishment. One gets expelled, and the other one doesn't.

End scene.

Ironically, my preoccupation with conducting meaningful, impactful research to help JaBron – a desire indicative of White Savior teacher practice – distracted me from fully engaging with JaBron's idea when I visited his group during this session. I was so excited about Gracie asking Mulan if she was White and what it might mean or reveal in my research that JaBron's opportunity to share his story with his group and the rest of the class was thwarted. My intervention script shows how my current self might act to reduce harm to JaBron and other people of color in this situation in three ways: by sharing knowledge about the oppressive nature

of the term “colored,” by abdicating my “teacher” role in the task of creating the story for the tableau, and by making space for and validating JaBron’s contributions.

I hear students and even young teachers utter the term “colored” frequently to describe people who are not White. This ToL session occurred during a time when I was still unpracticed at explaining that *colored* is associated with the oppression of African Americans during the Jim Crow era. Changing the language was an effort spearheaded by Malcolm X as a way for African Americans to shake off negative connotations that inevitably gather on words “like rust or gnats” (McWhorter, 2016). In my intervention script, Ms. DiFranco was quick to provide the historical implications of this term and encouraged Gracie to look into it for herself later on.

Ms. DiFranco’s subsequent actions recognized JaBron as a valued contributor to the group’s work, first validating his idea and then redirecting Gracie to listen to his explanation rather than relying on the teacher’s. Doing this before I walked away might have made JaBron feel more empowered and more trusting of class activities, and thus willing to be more vulnerable and take more risks.

After moving away from the first group I encountered Group 2, arranged in the video recording from left to right as follows: Eva (W), Rico (L), a STAR guest called Tracy (W), and Michelle (L). Tracy was sharing her idea when I approached the group.

Forum script 2.2A: “Uh, you could be a White person...?”

Four students, TRACY, EVA, RICO, and MICHELLE, sit at a table planning a scene for a group assignment.

TRACY:...and then the other one would be kind of like cultural appropriation, like let’s say...someone of color selling something? And

people are like, ignoring it, and then a White person sells the product and people are like “Wow great!”

EVA: Yeah, I have one concern though. How would we be able to differentiate the White person from the person of color?

TRACY: Well there would be someone like not really selling, and then the White person would be [*pointing to her own face, laughing nervously*] someone White, and people would be like, “Wow, I wanna wait in line for that!”

EVA: But like, how would the people looking at the tableau know that the person with more business is White and the person with less business is a person of color?

TRACY (*points at EVA, laughing*): Uh, you could be a White person...?

MS. ELDRIDGE walks away from the group.

End scene.

Forum 2.2: Cops in the Head and Rainbow of Desire.

The tableau I imagined for this interlude depicts the moment when Eva has just finished asking, “How would the people looking at the tableau know that the person with more business is White and the person with less business is a person of color?” Ms. Eldridge looks at the group from a standing position. Everyone including Ms. Eldridge is facing Tracy, who wears an expression of mild surprise.

A social message that influenced my former self in this situation might be saying, “If you insert yourself into this conversation it might make students feel awkward.” A Rainbow

statement expressing my desire in this moment might have produced this interior monologue: “I want my study to enable to me to get better at talking about racism with youth.”

Forum script 2.2B: Intervention.

EVA: I have one concern though. How would we be able to differentiate the White person from the person of color?

TRACY (*holding an empty food service container close to her with both hands*): Well there would be someone like not really selling, and then the White person would be [*pointing to her own face, laughing nervously*] someone White, and people would be like, “Wow, I wanna wait in line for that!”

EVA: But like, how would the people looking at the tableau know that the person with more business is White and the person with less business is a person of color?

MS. DiFRANCO: Stop! [*MS. DiFRANCO intervenes for MS. ELDRIDGE at this point.*]

MS. DiFRANCO: That’s an interesting question. Rico and Michelle, your input might be valuable here. Do you have any thoughts?

RICO (*bordering on sarcasm*): Yeah. When we’re making the tableau the White people in our group could play White people, and the people of color could play people of color.

EVA (*grinning*): Ok, I feel stupid.

MS. DiFRANCO: Rather than feeling stupid, can you see this as an opportunity to learn? What do you think happened just now, and why?

EVA: I don't know. It's just weird to think of saying to someone, "You're a White person so you're gonna play a White person."

MS. DiFRANCO: Why is that weird?

EVA: It just feels weird, that's all.

MS. DiFRANCO: I think I know the feeling you're talking about. That feeling is sometimes called *cognitive dissonance*. It's when something we've always taken for granted is called into question by a new perspective. In this case, Rico is suggesting it's not that weird to talk about White people being White, even though it feels weird to White people because we're not used to doing it.

EVA: So I'm wrong.

MS. DiFRANCO: That sounds pretty judgmental and rigid. Maybe it's just that your thinking is being challenged to change. You get to decide if you want it to change or not. It's up to you.

EVA: If it's wrong, I want to change it!

MS. DiFRANCO: Sounds good! In the meantime, remember to listen to your classmates' experiences. Their knowledge is really valuable.

End scene.

I had a three main goals for this Forum intervention: checking Eva's dominance, guiding her to be more critical of her own thought process around race, and centering perspectives of the Latinx students in the group. Ms. DiFranco solicited thoughts from Rico (L) and Michelle (L) to open up space for their perspectives in a group being dominated by White voices.

Though I had been leading discussions about race and racism in my regular classes for many years, I still felt pangs of discomfort and sometimes chose to retreat from such discussions if I had a choice. At the same time, I was aware of a certain amount of ineptitude and wanted to get better. Specifically, I wanted to gain more proficiency in modeling transparency and vulnerability, and engaging in race conversations in ways that would invite students to participate.

When I analyzed this clip, I coded my retreat from this exchange as White Savior practice and noted its relationship to the themes of vulnerability and Whiteness/White privilege. Not wanting to risk embarrassing Eva, I did nothing to encourage critical examination of her assumptions. Rather than waiting to see what the two students of color thought about Tracy's idea, I moved on, evidence of the fact that Whiteness was dominating my consciousness in that moment. If I were in this situation again, a better response would be asking questions designed to center the perspectives of the students of color in the group, including a question about the implications of Eva's line of questioning. Forum script 2.2B imagines me taking this approach. I improvised Eva's and Rico's reactions based on my familiarity with these two students, both of whom I interviewed for this research.

In a recent conversation, Rico confirmed that he would likely have called out Eva's ignorance with regard to the issue of depicting White characters in a tableau (Rico, personal communication, May 19, 2019). Interactions like this happened at other times when Rico and Eva were doing ToL work together – for example, when we took a trip out of state to present at an education conference, Rico responded to a comment she made by saying, “That sounds like White savior talk” (Rico, personal communication, May 5, 2017). Moments like these reinforced my conviction that ToL was helping students of color find their voice and helping White students

realize the implications of Whiteness. It was not until looking back on them later that I realized their implications for my teaching practice. I was not fully aware of how influential Rico's insights were to understanding my own Whiteness, for example.

In the intervention script, Eva reacted to Rico's comment with a self-deprecating remark, in line with her personality. Rather than dwell on her fragility (DiAngelo, 2018), Ms. DiFranco asked questions intended to push her toward critical engagement with her positionality in the group. I ended the scene by having Ms. DiFranco remind Eva to listen to her Latinx classmates, validating and prioritizing their contributions to the group's process.

The two intervention scripts in this portrait demonstrate a shift in my teaching practice away from being motivated by Whiteness, and toward being motivated by justice for students of color. The actions of Ms. DiFranco reflect my desire to confront the vestiges of White hegemony, recognize the value of underrepresented perspectives, and to disrupt the status quo of White students and teachers dominating discourse in the classroom.

Portrait 3: Group 1 Tableau Performance – March 24, 2016

This portrait begins with selected stills from videos and written descriptions of what took place during Group 1's tableau performance, followed by two Forum scripts (the second one with an intervention), separated by an interlude of *Cops in the Head* and *Rainbow of Desire*.

Group 1's two-part tableau sequence ended up having nothing to do with either JaBron's or Gracie's story (see Portrait 2). Instead, their first tableau showed students arranged in a row across the performance area – Mulan (W), Ella (A), Sam (B), Gracie (L), and JaBron (PI) – all facing the audience and each one holding a number of heavy dictionaries. JaBron, far right in the frame, held the highest number – six. Gracie held three, Sam held two, Ella held one, and Mulan

was not holding any books. In Photo 4.2, JaBron's body language indicates separation between him and others in his group as he stood apart and leaned away from them. With her arms crossed over her chest, Mulan's body language looks relaxed, proud, and perhaps defiant. The students look burdened.

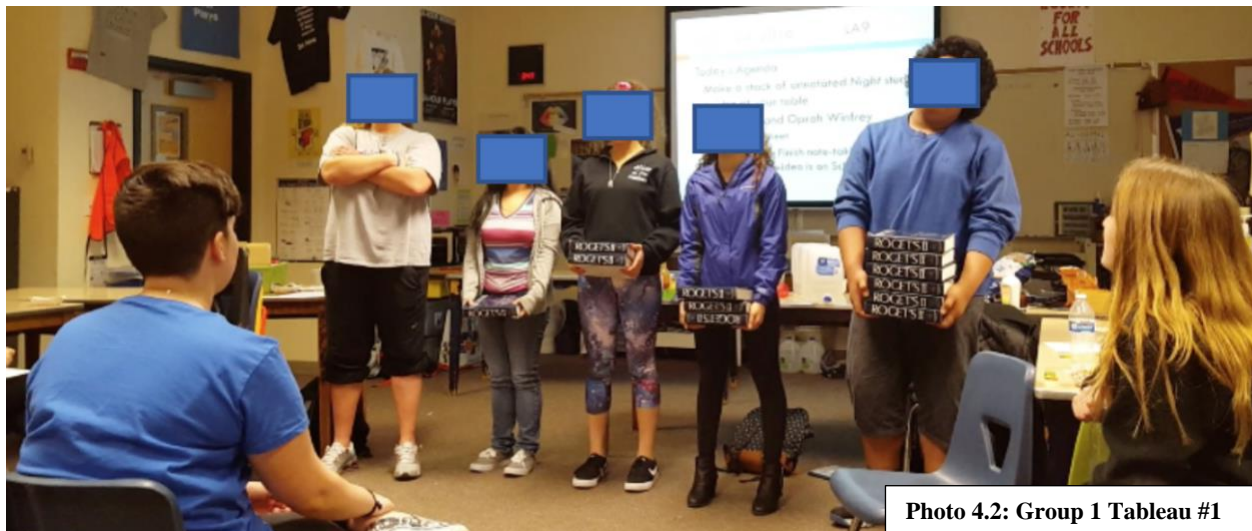


Photo 4.2: Group 1 Tableau #1

Group 1's second tableau showed an image in which Mulan was providing each student with a chair to stand on. The image implied that she started by giving a chair to Ella and then worked her way down the line. The moment they chose to represent in the tableau showed Ella and Sam standing on chairs, Gracie about to get up on a chair, and Mulan on the floor, pushing a chair toward JaBron (Photo 4.3).

At the beginning of this video clip, Mulan grabbed chairs from a stack to the side of the performance area and arranged one chair in front of each student. The students looked as though they did not really understand what she was doing, and the quality of their interactions made me wonder how much agency they had in planning this tableau after Mulan joined them. It looked like the students were taking direction from Mulan, as though this tableau might even have been her idea and not theirs.

When the group appeared ready to perform, I counted down from three and said “freeze” to cue the group for their frozen performance. Everyone in the group froze except for JaBron, who swayed back and forth nervously on his feet. After they held the pose for a few moments, he glanced at me and made a subtle gesture with his left hand as though to say, “We’re done. Please

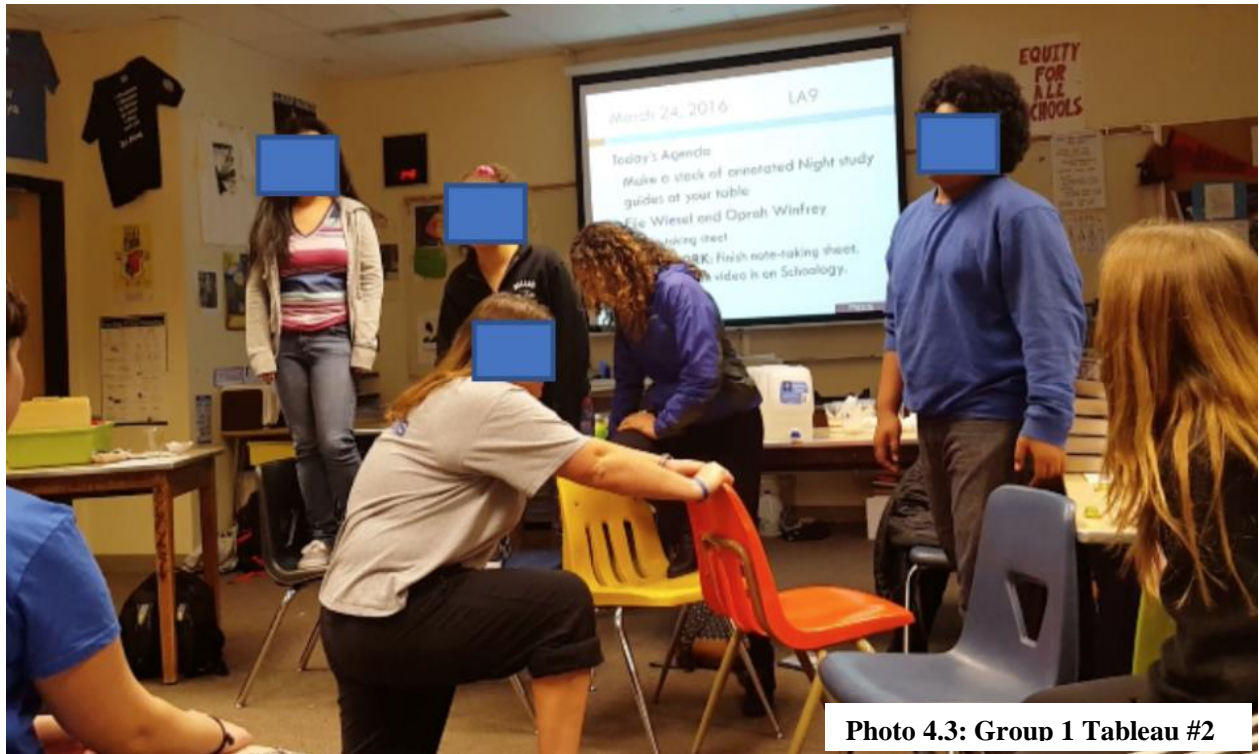


Photo 4.3: Group 1 Tableau #2

make it stop.” Photo 4.3 again shows JaBron separated from the group, this time not only from the other performers but from the entire gathering, the barrier being a chair held in front of him by a White adult.

In the discussion about Group 1’s tableau sequence, several students demonstrated vulnerability by admitting that they didn’t understand the message of the two tableaux. Drea explained the first one by saying, “Whoever is darker has to carry more books, a.k.a. like, do more work” to which Kacey responded with an exaggerated “Ohhhhhhhhh” and participants laughed. Kacey turned toward the camera and waved, raising her eyebrows, a self-deprecating gesture meaning something like, “Yeah that’s right, I didn’t get it before but now I do. It’s a little

embarrassing but ok.” In another example of vulnerability, Eva expressed that she was confused before she saw the second tableau. She thought the first one was about class instead of race, and that JaBron having more books represented him having more resources. This idea was apparently rooted in her understanding of the wealth gap between White populations and Black and Brown ethnic groups. Other students expressed confusion, demonstrating vulnerability similar to Kacey’s and Eva’s.

Michelle, who tended to be shy in classroom discussions, finally offered her tentative thoughts.

Michelle: For the solution, um, so, [Mulan] helped everyone out, and then she was on her way to helping, like, a...person of color...and um, I mean, that’s, that’s what it looked to me, the way she was on her knee, pushing the chair towards [JaBron]...so basically she realized, she said “Oh I’m gonna help out” and...she was helping [JaBron] out...

(Group 1 Tableau Discussion, April 23, 2016)⁴

Drea asked, “What I didn’t get was like, what the chairs had anything to do with...? I was confused...”

Gracie said, “It’s like, umm, like a metaphor sorta like, like we’re all gonna be on the same level now. I mean, not height but like, level. You know?”

Kacey, off camera, still sounded confused as she said, “Buuut...”

Gracie straightened up and exclaimed, “It makes sense, if we’re all on the chairs!”

Kacey relented and said, “No it’s...it makes sense.”

A few moments later Mulan said, “I was trying to raise everybody up so that we could all be together, and up...” She glanced toward Kacey, whose face was morphing into another

⁴ All italicized quotes in this section originated in this transcript.

epiphany expression. “Man,” she said. “[Kacey]’s havin’ some epiphanies today!” Everyone laughed, and Kacey said, “I. get. it. Ok that, that was good! That was good.”

However, some participants still weren’t satisfied with the explanation. An Asian STAR guest named Jasmine asked Mulan, “So, what level are you on? You were the same level as them but you are helping them get to your level?”

This was an important point. Mulan was actually kneeling on the floor, despite saying that she was trying to “raise everybody up so we could all be together.” In the tableau, she chose to put herself on a lower level than the people of color. During data analysis, I realized why Jasmine found this confusing in the context of Mulan’s comment. At the time, I remember being preoccupied with worry that we wouldn’t get to see all the tableaus performed. Mulan’s response to Jasmine’s query went like this:

Mulan: Soooo, what color’s my skin?

Jasmine: White.

Mulan: So I’m the one with the White privilege? And so I was trying to rectify injustice and take the advantages that I get and use them to lift everybody else up.

There were some nods among the participants watching.

Jasmine: Okay. That makes sense.

Indeed, Mulan’s words make sense in the context of White Savior teacher practice, a paradigm that is familiar to students of color. More importantly, it was so prominent in my own practice that it made perfect sense to me as well. I moved on, missing the White savior quality of this group’s tableau entirely.

Confusion about Group 1’s tableau was compounded because they chose to represent their idea metaphorically rather than choosing a realistic scenario on which to base their images.

Perhaps if I had taken the actions shown in my intervention in Forum Script 2B they would have decided to use JaBron's idea, resulting in a more transformative performance and discussion.

Forum script 3A: The cost of moving on.

MS. ELDRIDGE: So let's discuss this. What do we see?

DREA: Whoever is darker has to carry more books, aka like do more work."

KACEY: Ohhhh!!!

Laughter.

EVA (*to performers*): Before you did the second one though, I thought the issue was social class. I thought the books were like your money, and he (*pointing to JaBron*) had the most money. And I was like, wait that doesn't make sense, cuz like (*pointing to MULAN*) you're White.

MS. ELDRIDGE: So what about the solution they presented?

EDWARD: That was confusing for me.

JASMINE: Me too.

MICHELLE: I get it. For the solution Mulan helped everyone out, and she was on her way to helping a person of color. I mean, that's what it looked like to me, the way she was on her knee, pushing the chair towards JaBron.

DREA: What I didn't get was like, how the chairs had anything to do with it...? I was confused about that.

GRACIE: It's a metaphor, like we're all gonna be on the same level now. I mean, not height (*she demonstrates "height" with her hand*) but like, level. You know?

KACEY (*still confused*): But...

MS. ELDRIDGE: Alright, let's...

MULAN: To me it felt like I was trying to raise everybody up so that we could all be together.

MS. ELDRIDGE: Ok, should we move on? (*noticing JASMINE's raised hand*) Oh wait, did you want to add something Jasmine?

JASMINE (*addressing Mulan*): So, what level were you on? You were the same level as them but you were helping them get to your level?

MULAN: So, what color's my skin?

JASMINE: White.

MULAN: I'm the one with the White privilege right? So I was trying to rectify injustice and take the advantages that I get and use them to lift everybody else up.

JASMINE: Okay. I guess that makes sense.

MS. ELDRIDGE: Should we see the next one?

End scene.

Forum 3: Cops in the Head & Rainbow of Desire.

The moment I chose for the Cops and Rainbow sequence of this scene is right after Mulan's last comment.

Practicing TO has influenced me to conceive of *time* as the ultimate antagonist. Time is the enemy of justice. It plagues us in schools with bells and deadlines, moving at a snail's pace when the lesson is boring and accelerating when we are engaged in an interesting project. Time convinces us that we can't linger on complex, nuanced issues.

The cop in my head during this discussion was, "If you don't hurry up and move on, some groups won't get to perform." While this might have been true, this preoccupation distracted me from questions I might have used to guide the discussion toward a critique of Group 1's tableau sequence.

A desire running through my head in this moment was, "I want our guests to feel respected." Since the STAR club members were only there for one day, I didn't want them to feel like they'd done all that work for nothing.

When TO practitioners do a Forum, the intervener is usually asked where in the action they would like the scene to begin. Ms. DiFranco rolled the scene back to one of Mulan's last lines.

Forum script 3B: Intervention.

MULAN: To me it felt like I was trying to raise everybody up so that we could all be together.

MS. ELDRIDGE: Ok, let's see the next – oh! (*noticing JASMINE's raised hand*) Jasmine, did you want to add something?

JASMINE (*addressing Mulan*): I'm just wondering what level you are on? You were the same level as them but you are helping them get to your level?

MULAN: So, what color's my skin?

JASMINE: White.

MULAN: So I'm the one with the White privilege right? I was trying to rectify injustice and take the advantages that I get and use them to lift everybody else up.

JASMINE: Okay. I guess that makes sense.

MS. DiFRANCO: Stop!

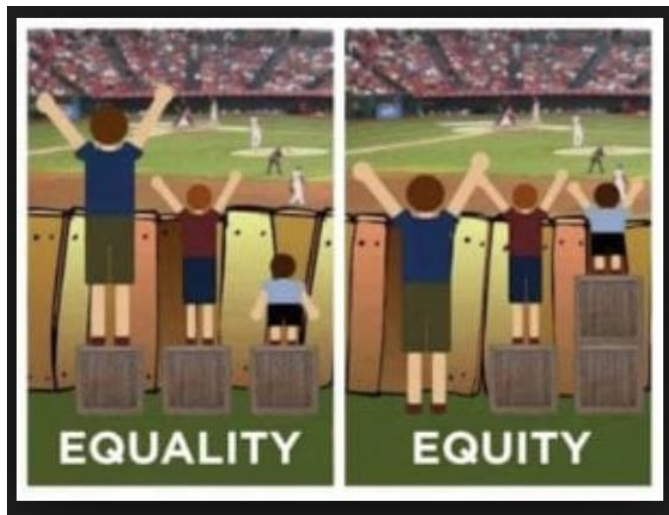
[MS. DiFRANCO intervenes for MS. ELDRIDGE.]

MS. DiFRANCO: This tableau reminds me of that equity vs equality meme, the one about the three people watching a baseball game. Has anyone seen that? Here, let's take a breather and look at this image for a second. I will work with Ms. T to find a day that our STAR guests can come back to complete the performances if we run out of time today.

MS. DiFRANCO jumps up and does a quick Google search on the presentation-station computer. She projects an image on the screen

(Figure 4.1):

Figure 4.1: Equality vs. Equity Graphic



Some of the participants show that they recognize this image.

MS. DiFRANCO: Do any of y'all remember when we looked at this image in Language Arts class?

BRIAN, GRACIE, SAM, KACEY and RICO all nod and/or vocally affirm this. JABRON leans over the back of his chair and looks at the floor.

RICO: That's the one that has all those versions online.

MS. DiFRANCO: Right. We looked at a bunch of them. What were some of the things we noticed? Do you remember, JaBron?

JABRON glances up and recognizes the image on the screen.

JABRON: Oh yup! The fence. And then there's that one where they bust the fence.

MS. DiFRANCO: Thanks for reminding us of that one! We'll look at it in a minute. What can you tell me about this one?

JABRON: It's hella stupid.

EVA (*to JaBron*): What do you mean? We looked at this in our class too, a couple years ago, right Ms. DiFranco? I thought this was supposed to show how equity works. You told us that!

MS. DiFRANCO: I sure did, Eva. And since then I've learned to look at this image more critically. JaBron's observation is on point – this image is telling a certain story that might seem good but it has some problems too.

What do we notice when we look at this image with a critical lens?

End scene.

I began this intervention by disrupting the oppression of *time*; I allowed our discussion to take an unexpected but important turn and planned to invite our guests back to complete the performances on another day. I have learned that it is often not worthwhile to cut a TO discussion short, even if it means pushing things back. Now I try to build in plenty of time for discussion when I plan TO lessons.

My other intention in my intervention was to scaffold a critique of Group 1's tableau sequence with the critique of the image in Figure 4.1, which has similar issues. The image I used as a visual aid in my intervention came into the popular culture of social justice activism and education in 2013 (United Way, 2013). The meme has been widely used in classrooms and equity trainings to show that giving everyone the

same amount of resources does not lead to justice, because people have different needs. Dozens of individuals and organizations have critiqued the image since it first appeared, mainly for its Whiteness and for the symbolic barrier of the fence that separates the figures in the foreground from the game. The image has been adapted and revised to show more equitable solutions; one called the 4th Box Toolkit is shown in Figure 4.2

(Barriner & Coates-Connor, 2016). This image invites the viewer to create their own version. When I use this meme in my classes now, I focus on the evolution of this image to get students thinking about the progress of popular consciousness around issues of equity.

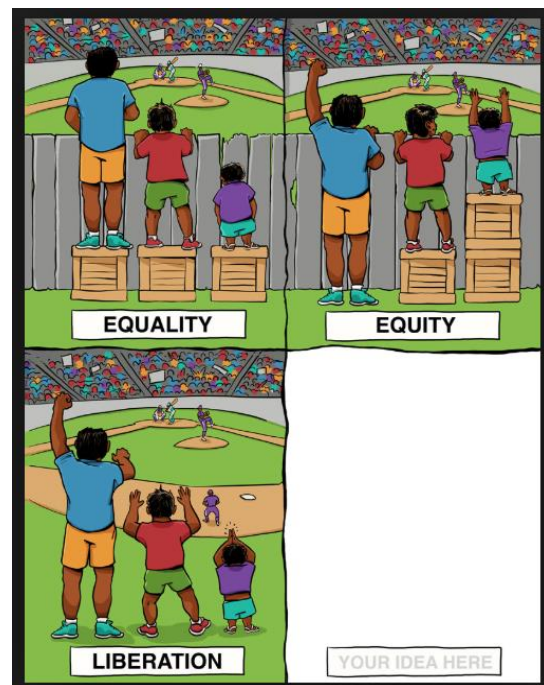


Figure 4.2: The 4th Box Toolkit

Portrait 4: Carnival in Rio – April 19, 2016

In mid-April I took the ToL class outside to play a TO game called Carnival in Rio (Boal, 2002, p. 104). Rather than referring to Boal's written instructions, I relied on my understanding of the game from having played it in a workshop led by a professional TO trainer. As it was taught to me, the goal of this game is to get everyone doing exactly the same repetitive sound/gesture in unison. Both Oppressive and White Savior teacher practice were evident in the data from this session.

In a move typical of Whiteness-centering White Savior teacher practice, I ignored the words of the Brazilian master who created this game when I taught it to my students. Instead I relied on my memory of playing it one time in a group led by a White male who kept repeating the line from an infamous episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, "Resistance is futile! You will be assimilated!" (Roddenberry, 1991).

Boal's instructions do not state the goal of synchronization, nor do they mention resistance or assimilation. They are as follows:

Several groups of three actors, the individuals in each group numbered one, two and three. The workshop leader says 'Number one' and all the number ones start moving around the room with a rhythm of sound and movement of their own invention (a different rhythm each). The other two members of each trio must imitate their leader. The workshop leader shouts 'Number two' and all number twos must initiate a different repetitive sound and movement, which the other members of their group must imitate exactly. Then, 'Number three'. When all three have invented their rhythmic sounds and movements, the workshop leader says 'Back to your original movements' and each person returns to their original movement. So the small groups of three are travelling

around the space together, but each member of the group is doing their own thing. After a bit, the workshop leader says 'Unify!' and, without stopping, each group of three must unify their sounds and movements; as soon as one member of each trio decides to copy another, then the third person must follow the majority, so that all three end up doing the same sound and movement. Thus the movement they end up with is either one of the three original movements or a new movement composed out of elements of the originals.

From time to time, the workshop leader says 'You may change groups'. Those who are happy in the group they're in, stay put – those who want to change join on to another group, swelling its size; but while they are choosing whether to leave or not, they must not stop their rhythmic sound and action, otherwise the exercise will grind to a halt. If one person is left alone (because the other members of his group have both left), he must abandon his rhythm and join one of the remaining groups. (Boal, 2002, pp. 104-105)

Drawing only on my own memory and notes about how to play the game as it was taught to me, I instructed ToL participants to form groups of three and then play as follows:

1. Within each group of three, each participant should create a distinct, repetitive sound/gesture combination to perform during the game. Each player will demonstrate their sound/movement for the other two players in their group.
2. Players will then begin performing their repetitive movement and sound in their group of three, with the goal of getting the others to assimilate until everyone in the small group is performing in unison.
3. Once a group has achieved unison, they should move toward other groups, continuing to perform their own group's sound/gesture. They should try to get other groups to conform.

The difference between Boal's (2002) instructions and mine are subtle but profound. My instructions were goal-oriented, implying proactive confrontation with an emphasis on getting others to assimilate. Boal's instructions are process-oriented, emphasizing choice, freedom of movement, and individual agency among players.

This section begins with a description of how the game was played, followed by an analysis of the debrief transcript. Mulan (W) recorded this game and the subsequent discussion on a cell phone. The first recording began as individuals within self-selected groups of three were creating their moves and starting to perform them.

One group was composed of Java (W), Nimue (W), and Eva (W). This group broke the rules almost immediately and began to migrate toward other groups before they had achieved synchronized performance. In a different group, Claire (W) switched from her own sound/gesture to mimic the students of color in her group, Kacey (B) and Michelle (L) as the camera circulated past them and moved toward the other groups: JaBron (PI), OTO (L) and Rico (L) and Drea (L), Gracie (L), and Brittany (W). Photo 4.4a shows the beginning of the game in our ToL session.



Photo 4.4a: Carnival in Rio

Within three minutes most participants merged into one or the other of two large clusters: Sam (B), Nimue (W), Kitkat (W), Java (W), and Eva (W) were in one cluster, performing a chant

similar to the Oompa Loompa song from the all-White film, *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* (Margulies & Wolper, 1971). Michelle (L), Kacey (B), and Claire (W) slapped their upper thighs to create a rapid rhythm for a high-pitched chant of the syllable “Hoo!” while OTO (L), Rico (L), and JaBron (PI) confronted them, trying to sway them into adopting a “Dab” move – a gesture of dropping the head into the bent crook of a slanted, upwardly angled arm while raising the other arm out straight at a parallel angle (Ducey, 2015). The Dab was JaBron’s idea, and he performed it assertively, often on his own. His two friends seemed less enthusiastic about sticking with it.

I remember laughing along with Mulan but feeling increasingly anxious in my body as we watched the game evolve. The noise made by participants’ collective, dissonant voices was disorienting. It got louder as each group struggled for dominance, and the louder it got the more anxious I felt.

Photo 4.4b: Carnival in Rio



Suddenly I can be seen running across the frame to join the mostly-White group (Photo 4.4b). I do not remember consciously deciding to do this. Observing the game was making me anxious; abdicating my Joker role might have been my attempt to ease my anxiety. I performed in sync with the White group’s Oompa-Loompa move for a few seconds, at which point the two clusters slowly began to physically merge. There were still three distinct performances happening – Oompa Loompa, Dab, and high-pitched “Hoo!” This alliance with White

participants was unconscious on my part, evidence of implicit bias that typifies White Savior teacher practice. After participating for about 10 seconds I switched to the move being performed by Michelle (L), Kacey (B), and Claire (W).

Eventually I dropped out of the game and students formed a large group with scant synchronicity in their sounds and gestures. I yelled, “You have to be doing exactly the same thing” but this was barely audible over the cacophony of student participants shouting in each others’ faces. I circled to the other side of the group and was joined first by Nimue (W) and then by Eva (W), who had stopped playing as well. I finally circled back to Mulan and asked her to get the group’s attention with a loud whistle. Everyone stopped playing, and the recording ended. We gathered on the grass to debrief.

Carnival in Rio debrief transcript analysis – April 19, 2016.

In the video of the Carnival in Rio debriefing session, White participants sat on the grass near me. Participants of color sat across from us. Of everyone, the boys of color sat the farthest away from me, with OTO and JaBron, the darkest-skinned of the participants, at the outermost edge of the participant group (Photo 4.5).

Photo 4.5: Carnival in Rio Debrief



At the beginning of the video, Gracie was describing a moment of the game from her perspective. She spoke quickly, her voice brimming with energy.

Gracie: My sister would not convert, and everyone else was like “Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!” So she was like, “I like theirs better!” and so she went over there...I felt like everyone was going “Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!” so we were all so annoyed, we started going “Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!” together.

Brittany: Ooo that’s symbolism, if your friends like wanna do it then maybe - cuz like we both decided that...

Gracie (pointing to Brittany): Oo, oo! Smart!

(Video Recording of Carnival in Rio Debrief, April 19, 2016)⁵

In my journal writing from this date I celebrated Brittany’s discovery about peer pressure and assimilation in the game. In this moment of the video, however, I appeared tired and annoyed. The camera panned to Eva, who had her hand raised, but before calling on her I sternly spoke to Rico and JaBron, who were both reclining on the concrete walkway. They sat up dutifully but still looked less engaged than the rest of the group. I turned back to Eva and asked for her comment, which is transcribed verbatim in Forum script 4A. Eva’s experience of the game was similar to mine in that she did not enjoy the noise level and chaos. She said that to her the game sounded like screaming monkeys, and then exclaimed, “This is what being a target feels like, and it sucks!”

While playing Carnival in Rio, Eva had an experience that Nieto (2010) might characterize as evidence of the “awareness” agent skill set (p. 121). According to Nieto, agent awareness

starts to reframe anger and conflict. Instead of defending...I can say to the target group member’s anger, “bring it on, show me what it’s like.” From this conversation I begin to

⁵ All italicized quotes in this section are from the same transcript.

get a sense for the Target group member's daily experience. There's Liberation in that. It allows me to decenter my own experience and really hear another. And I learned that listening to that anger might be uncomfortable, but it's not life-threatening. This opens up new possibilities. (p. 123)

However, in speaking her truth while trying to empathize and express solidarity with individuals from target groups, Eva did not consider that she was sitting in the midst of a number of people with target identities and that she was essentially comparing them to monkeys. At the time I remember feeling pleased that she was being transparent about her own privilege and agency. As I analyzed the video, however, I coded this moment as Oppressive because I did not editorialize her comment with an explanation of how it could be interpreted as highly offensive. Gracie later reported that she did not think anyone took it that way (Gracie, personal communication, May 11, 2019) but that does not excuse my lack of awareness of the issue and my favorable perspective of Eva's remarks at the time.

I referred to one of Eva's earlier journal entries when triangulating data for this portrait. It began, "Whoa. I feel guilty for snapping at [JaBron] and [Rico] for talking" (Eva Journal Entry, March 31, 2016). This comment demonstrates tension that I sensed between the boys of color and Eva throughout the course, but did nothing to address.

I spoke next in the debrief session, taking up space with a lengthy story rather than tapping into the experiences of OTO, Rico and JaBron – students of color who were literally sitting in the margins of the group. I believe this reflected my desire to expel the anxiety this game had given me (my intent) but it took precedence over the interests of students of color. It reflected Oppressive teacher practice because it reified the status quo of Whiteness being prioritized in a situation where experiences of students of color were salient.

Kacey, a biracial student, countered our stories of stress in the debrief with her own positive experience in the game. Eva promptly responded by pivoting back to her own (White) perspective, barely acknowledging that Kacey's experience was different than hers:

Kacey: Having my group with me... I was like, "oh yeah, this is good, I like it." It was empowering.

Eva: It was empowering until we came over to you...I was like, "Why isn't everyone doing the Oompa Loompity song?" It started as singing but then we were screaming, and it wasn't fun.

In response to Kacey's comment, Eva thought only of her own lack of empowerment. It wasn't fun for Eva when it turned into a screaming match between the two groups. Kacey pointed out that, empowerment notwithstanding, the moves of her group began to take on qualities of the other (mostly-White) group's moves.

A running joke had been established early on in the course about Mulan hating the dab gesture that JaBron, Rico and OTO used in this game. This joke surfaced in this debrief session, the group erupted in laughter, and JaBron suddenly sat up and took interest in the discussion. Kacey and Michelle mimicked what the boys had been doing in the game, lovingly poking fun at them and stretching out their enjoyment of this memory. This was an excellent opportunity to make space for JaBron to tell his story, to find out what he was trying to do in the game and why. Rather than capitalize on this opportunity, I ignored him and brought everyone's attention back to Eva's comment.

Me: Do other people see the same similarities that have been pointed out about if you're a target in an environment with mostly agents, do you ever feel that in your life? That you're being pressured to act like all the other people around?

I then spoke directly to Rico.

Me: Like would it be different in 5th period if you didn't have [JaBron] and [OTO] with you in class? Would you feel more pressure to conform?

Rico: I would be more bored...I mean, not like bored but, I'd be more quiet.

Retracting a comment suggesting that my class was boring for him, I believe that Rico was being courteous, trying not to offend me. A few minutes later I noticed that Rico and JaBron had started to recline again. After Eva made another lengthy comment I said without warning, "What do you think about that Rico?" I assumed Rico wasn't paying attention, and I called him out. This is an Oppressive teacher move, centering the interests of the White teacher over the student of color and upholding a status quo that expects all students to be ready with a response whenever they are called on. Rico smiled sheepishly and sat up.

Me: Just encouraging you to bring it back in. Did you hear my question?

Rico: About masks?

Me: Do you think it's possible for a person to be their authentic self 100% of the time?

JaBron, who had been lying down when I started talking to Rico, sat up as I asked this. Rico said simply, "No."

We continued discussing the masks we wear in different situations. I remember becoming increasingly annoyed that JaBron had laid down again and closed his eyes. Finally, I addressed him.

"[JaBron], what do you think?"

He sat up and said, "What?"

I ignored him and instead asked the rest of the group if they thought it was time to go inside and do some journal writing.

I created Forum scripts from two different parts of the debrief transcript. I was selective in adapting the transcript to focus on parts where I saw opportunities for interventions by my current self.

Forum script 4A: “I mean, not like bored but, I’d be more quiet.”

White students (except for Brittany, who stands next to Gracie) sit near MS. ELDRIDGE on a patch of grass. Students of color sit across from them on the concrete, with boys of color at the outermost edge of the participant group. When the scene begins, GRACIE is describing her experience in the Carnival in Rio game.

GRACIE: I felt like everyone was going “Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!” so we started going “Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!” together.

BRITTANY: Ooo that’s symbolism! If your friends like wanna do the same thing as you...

GRACIE: Oo, oo! Smart!

EVA and KACEY are raising their hands to comment. MS. ELDRIDGE notices that RICO and JABRON are lying down.

MS. ELDRIDGE (*in an annoyed tone*): You guys? It’s really important that we’re all part of the discussion, so stay focused and listen to each other.

RICO and JABRON sit up but still looked unengaged.

MS. ELDRIDGE: Eva, you wanted to say something?

EVA: I felt like super like...I felt like a target. Cuz the majority of people were going “Oo! Oo! Oo!” like monkeys, and my legs were tired from

doing my move over and over again. I was like screaming, trying to get them to do what I was doing, but it made my throat hurt and I was like, “I don’t want to do this anymore, this is hard. It would be easier if I just did the monkey thing” and then I was like “Oh! This is what being a target feels like, and it sucks!”

KACEY: I don’t know. Having my group with me... I was like, “oh yeah, this is good, I like it.” It was empowering.

EVA: It was empowering until we came over to you. I was like, “Why isn’t everyone doing the Oompa Loompity song?” It started as singing but then we were screaming, and it wasn’t fun.

KACEY: The tone kinda developed with theirs though. Hearing theirs, we kind of got into it.

DREA: The “hoo-hoo-hoo” came out of the “Oompa Loompa”

EVA: Yeah, we stopped singing and started screaming like monkeys, so...

MS. ELDRIDGE: Do other people see the same similarities that Eva pointed out? Do you ever feel like you’re being pressured to act like all the other people around? Rico, would you act differently in 5th period if you didn’t have JaBron and OTO with you? Would you feel more pressure to conform?

RICO: I would be more bored...I mean, not like bored but, I’d be more quiet.

MS. ELDRIDGE: JaBron, what do you think?

JABRON: What?

MS. ELDRIDGE: Ok everyone, don't you think it's time to go inside and do some writing?

End scene.

Forum 4: Cops in the Head and Rainbow of Desire.

For this script I created two tableaux as visual aids for imagining some of the social messages (Cops in the Head) and desires (Rainbow of Desire) that might have been influencing me during the discussion.

The first tableau is taken from the moment when Rico and JaBron sit up after I ask them to listen to their classmates. A cop in Ms. Eldridge's head at this moment might be saying, "You should make those two boys conform to your norms for group discussion." One of her desires might be manifested in the statement, "I want this group to be cohesive."

Recently Rico and I discussed what happened the day we played Carnival in Rio in ToL back in 2016. After this discussion, I asked him to supply a Cops in the Head statement for this moment. He said a social message in his head at that time would have been, "You have to follow the teacher's instructions" (Rico, personal communication, May 19, 2019). As for a desire, he said he had been tired and wanted to relax.

The second tableau is taken from the last moment of this scene, right after Rico says, "I mean, not like bored but, I'd be more quiet." In this moment, a cop in Ms. Eldridge's head might be saying, "Your ability to teach an interesting class is being called into question" and one of her desires might be expressed as, "I want to teach in a way that is not boring." In our recent conversation, Rico suggested the following statements – a cop in his head and a desire – for the character based on him: "You should not offend your teacher" and "I want [Eva] to stop talking and make space for others to talk" (Rico, personal communication, May 19, 2019).

Forum script 4B: Interventions.

For my interventions in this scene, I chose the rewind the play to Eva's line right before Kacey talks about her empowering experience. Since this scene has many problematic moments, I considered one of Boal's variations on Forum Theatre, which allows for multiple possible interventions. The technique is called Lightning Forum, in which "spect-actors come into the scene more rapidly and frequently than in full Forum Theatre, and interventions may play out more quickly" (Emert & Friedland, 2011, p. 50). In Boal's version, several different spect-actors might offer interventions for the same problematic moment. In my version, Ms. DiFranco intervenes in a number of ways.

EVA: Yeah, I felt like an animal.

KACEY: I don't know. Having my group with me... I was like, "oh yeah, this is good, I like it." It was empowering.

EVA: It was empowering until we came over to you. I was like, "Why isn't everyone doing the Oompa Loompity song?" It started as singing but then we were screaming, and it wasn't fun.

MS. DiFRANCO: Stop!

MS. DiFRANCO intervenes for MS. ELDRIDGE.

MS. DiFRANCO: Kacey, can you say more about why it was empowering for you?

KACEY: Sure! It made me feel powerful, like I had allies and I could make change. The tone kinda developed with theirs though. Hearing theirs, we kind of got into it.

DREA: The "hoo-hoo-hoo" came out of the "Oompa Loompa"

EVA: Yeah, we stopped singing and started screaming like monkeys, so...

MS. DiFRANCO: Eva, I'm going to check you right now. Ready?

EVA: Um. Okay, sure, I guess?

MS. DiFRANCO: Why do you think I'm checking you?

EVA: Cuz I'm talking a lot?

MS. DiFRANCO: That's one reason. Can you think of anything else, maybe in the context of what we learned about being an ally?

EVA: Well...I guess I shouldn't focus so much on how it was for me.

MS. DiFRANCO: Right! Also, it's not cool to be comparing people of color to monkeys.

JABRON: For real.

EVA: Oh wow, I'm really sorry.

MS. DiFRANCO: Yup. You're probably going to feel that for a little bit, and that's ok. While you're processing that though, let's hear from some other folks. How was the game for you, JaBron?

OTO: He's salty right now.

JABRON: Hell nah! Our move didn't work because *you two* gave up!

(pointing to RICO and OTO)

MS. DiFRANCO: I enjoyed your dab move. I wish I could get in a time machine and go back to the game and dab.

Laughter.

JABRON *(laughing and shaking his head)*: Ms. DiFranco, that would not be good.

MS. DiFRANCO: Fair enough!

End scene.

Ms. DiFranco's first intervention in this scene directs the attention of the group to a comment from a student of color (Kaycey) who had just shared her experience. When a White student (Eva) responded in a problematic way – dismissing Kaycey's claim of empowerment and comparing the students of color to monkeys – Ms. DiFranco confronted her directly. In the interest of harm reduction, the teacher provided opportunities for Eva to take responsibility for talking too much and for reinforcing a racist stereotype. Saying this in front of the whole group was risky; in the imagined scenario, I tried to mitigate Eva's vulnerable feelings by having Ms. DiFranco warn her that something was coming that might challenge her emotionally, and by validating those feelings. Rather than dwelling on the feelings of the White student (DiAngelo, 2018) Ms. DiFranco followed this interaction by asking a student of color, JaBron, to share his experience.

In Klehr's (2009) study, students of color “stood, both figuratively and literally, on the periphery of the group (Jallings, 1996a)” (p. 102). She noticed that “the white students in these moments, presumably under the guise of polite manners and good intentions, rarely disagreed openly with their black classmates, but had covert ways of ignoring or marginalizing them, most notably by continually directing their conversations and physical gestures back toward each other.” (Klehr, 2009, p. 102). With my Lightning Forum interventions, I attempted to disrupt similar dynamics in this Forum script by eliciting comments from participants of color situated, both physically and metaphorically, in the margins of our group.

Summary

In these four portraits I have showed how my thinking and practice evolved in relation to my White positionality and presented examples of Oppressive and White Savior practice in my words, actions, and lack of action. I highlighted White Savior features of my practice in a professional interaction with an administrator, in the first two sessions of the ToL course, and in two separate course sessions during which I guided participants in TO activities. There is evidence that I frequently centered White voices and perspectives, including my own, during TO activities. Data show that I also failed to recognize situations in which students of color were dismissed and marginalized during these activities.

In these portraits I created Forum script sequences depicting scenes based on events in the course. The first script in each sequence showed the scene as it happened, with dialogue taken directly from video transcripts or memos. I then explored some likely social messages and desires that were influencing my actions (and sometimes the thoughts of others) in these situations. This exercise pushed me to reflect on my front stage actions depicted in the scene. I used this backstage reflection to imagine different actions, which I used to create “interventions” in a second script of the scenario. These interventions demonstrate potential for shifts toward Harm Reduction in my practice.

Chapter V: Post-Intervention Evidence of Transformation

Portraits 5 & 6: Colleagues, February 2017 – March 2019

This chapter takes up two examples of my professional interventions with former CHS colleagues that took place after the course ended. These incidents provide evidence of transformation in my professional thinking and practice. Examined in juxtaposition to each other, they reveal important findings about vulnerability in front stage and backstage space. Details from these portraits are summarized in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Chapter V Portraits

Portrait	Title	Timeframe	Data Sources	Type of Analysis
Portrait 5	Ms. S's Substitute	February 2017	- Self-generated memos - CHS emails - Member checks	Portraiture Forum Scripts Cops & Rainbow
Portrait 6	Mr. G & the Slavery Role Play	March 2019	- Self-generated memo - Community emails - Member checks	Portraiture Forum Scripts Cops & Rainbow

Portrait 5: Ms. S's Substitute – February 2017

Email to a White female Science Department colleague, Ms. S:

Hi [Melinda]!

I was in your classroom recently when you were absent, maybe Mon 2/13?

I went to your room to tell [Rico] something about our upcoming trip to [an education conference]. After giving me permission to talk to Rico, the sub continued facilitating a class discussion by saying that a girl sitting in the second row looked like "maybe an immigrant." He then said no one else in the class looked like an immigrant. Rico raised his hand and told the sub he's from Honduras. The sub seemed pleasantly surprised, and asked Rico if he wanted to tell everyone how he feels about the travel ban & immigration executive orders. Rico said no. I'm pretty sure he was intending to help

the sub see that he was being ignorant. The sub went on to say that south end schools are more interesting than [CHS] because they're more diverse.

I think his intentions were good, but the way he went about it was not. It's not ok to spotlight students of color in a mostly White classroom. Talking about the ban & immigration with respect to specific students in such a cavalier manner could've easily threatened student safety in today's political climate.

I've copied [the principal] here. This story might be worth sharing with [the school-based racial equity committee] as well, though I didn't want to do that without sharing it with you first. I think it's a good example of what can go wrong in a 15 minute discussion.⁶

I also think it should be addressed with the sub (who I later learned went around to classrooms after school distributing his card) but not sure of the best way to do that. Anyway, I hope we can discuss this further in the building.

(S. Stahl, personal communication, February 21, 2017)

This email to Ms. S constituted a real-life intervention in this situation, seeking to disrupt what I now identify as Oppressive teacher practice by a substitute teacher who was using his White voice to objectify immigrant students in the context of a blatantly discriminatory government policy that had recently been enacted (McCarthy, 2017).

Ms. S was a member of the school-based racial equity team referenced in this email. She responded via email that she thought it was a great idea to bring this incident to that committee. She offered to talk to the substitute personally about “the impact it had on some students” and

⁶ In the 2016-2017 school year, CHS instituted a school-wide “diversity” curriculum. This series of equity-themed mini-lessons was designed and implemented one day per week by the school's racial equity committee, with support from administration. The lessons were intended to be taught in all classes simultaneously during a 15-minute period that was tacked onto the end of one period in the school day.

then said, “He is a good science sub and I don’t want to lose him!” (Ms. S, personal communication, February 24, 2017). Earlier in the email she had briefly described how students in her other sections received his teaching, reporting that reactions were mixed.

Ms. S’s email revealed an institutional cop in her head: “You have to put up with racist behavior from people who help you do your job.” Teachers often have difficulty finding substitutes they like, and her statement about not wanting to lose him indicated her concern that confronting him about his problematic behavior might jeopardize her access to his services. Her message also clearly contained desires: She wanted to validate the substitute’s pedagogy with evidence of student voice, and to hold him accountable for his actions.

There is no evidence that my email to Ms. S reduced harm to students of color. The principal’s response was that the incident certainly required “some type of follow up” (Mr. K, personal communication, February 24, 2017). A subsequent email from Ms. S reported that she spoke to the substitute on the phone:

I shared with him your observations and how that impacts students (a.k.a. macroaggression). He was receptive and asked what the students’ feedback was on him (which I was appreciative of). I believe he will avoid such comments in the future. Would either of you like me to take any future action? I felt his response was appropriate but I want to honor your thoughts/feelings on this.

(Ms. S, personal communication, February 27, 2017)

I replied that I thought it was enough and asked the principal if he agreed, which he did. But it was not enough. The principal, Ms. S, and I are White. Though sending the email was a move toward harm reduction which I would probably not have risked before teaching the course, it would have been better still to solicit specific feedback from the students who were the objects

of the substitute's problematic talk. Also, an intervention in the moment of the classroom interaction was warranted.

Forum script 5A: "You look like maybe an immigrant."

MS. ELDRIDGE visits MS. S's classroom to deliver a message to RICO about an upcoming field trip. MS. S's substitute, MR. W, is delivering instruction to the entire class as she enters. After asking for MR. W's permission to talk to one of the students for a brief moment, MS.

ELDRIDGE walks toward the back of the classroom where RICO is sitting.

MR. W continues the lesson.

MR. W: Y'know at this school it probably doesn't affect anyone, I mean no one in here – well maybe you (*pointing to a student*), you look like maybe an immigrant, but no one else in here looks like they are.

RICO raises his hand.

MR. W (*pointing to RICO*): Yes...?

RICO: I'm from Honduras.

MR. W (*brightening*): Oh! Well maybe you'd like to talk about how the immigration ban is affecting you?

RICO: No.

MR. W: Ok, that's fine. Anyone else?

End scene.

Forum 5: Cops in the Head and Rainbow of Desire.

The tableau for this script occurs right after Mr. W points out the Asian student sitting in the front row. Ms. Eldridge is on one side of the classroom, halfway to her destination (Rico's

desk). A cop in Ms. Eldridge's head says, "That was incredibly problematic, but you can't say anything about it right now. You don't want to embarrass the sub in front of the class."

Ms. Eldridge's vocalized internal desire says, "I want to act as an ally for students of color in this classroom."

Forum script 5B: Intervention.

MR. W: Y'know at this school it probably doesn't affect anyone, I mean no one in here – well maybe you (*pointing to a student*), you look like maybe an immigrant, but no one else in here looks like they are.

RICO raises his hand.

MS. DiFRANCO: Stop!

MS. DiFRANCO intervenes for MS. ELDRIDGE. Standing in MS.

ELDRIDGE's place next to the rows of student desks, MS. DiFRANCO raises her hand emphatically, drawing attention to herself. All eyes turn toward her dramatic gesture.

MS. DiFRANCO: Can I ask a question?

MR. W (*surprised*): Sure!

MS. DiFRANCO: This is a question for the students. What do you think is a good way to help students from other countries feel welcome at this school?

End scene.

If I had actually taken this action, I have no idea who would have responded to this question or how. In that sense there is an element of risk inherent in this action; it might have caused feelings of awkwardness, for example, or made the substitute feel discomfort because

another teacher was diverting the discussion. Such risk-taking is a key component of harm reduction, because these effects are less harmful for students of color than making them feel like outsiders and threatening to reveal their citizenship status.

In an actual Forum performance, it would be up to the people playing the roles of students and substitute to improvise their responses. My thinking is that this action would have relieved the Asian student from the harmful spotlight the substitute had just trained on her and perhaps would have diverted Rico from an unwanted spotlight moment as well. The fact that Rico shared his immigrant status with the class and then declined to talk about the travel ban indicates that he may have wanted to confront Mr. W in any case. Regardless, Ms. DiFranco's action would have given him the option of doing so with an assertive White ally to back him up. This is reflective of Ms. Eldridge's desire to be an ally, and also provided space for White student "activist allies" (Swalwell, 2013) who might have wanted to speak on the topic of making immigrant students feel welcome, a much more positive focus for the conversation. If no activist allies were present the ensuing discussion might have proceeded any number of ways.

This portrait demonstrates potential shifts in my thinking toward harm reduction because it imagines a specific, risk-taking action that would have disrupted the status quo.

Portrait 6: Mr. G & the Slavery Role Play, January – March, 2019

In January 2019 a Southeast Asian-American CHS parent, Ms. M, contacted me wondering if I would like to meet with her 11th grade daughter, Diya, to learn about some things Diya had observed in her classes that might contribute to my research. I was interested, naturally, in any thoughts a student of color had about the racial climate at CHS. Ms. M introduced the two of us via email, and I agreed to meet Diya at a café near the school.

Diya told me about a troubling incident that happened in an Advanced Placement US History class. To fulfill a class assignment, some White male students performed a skit in which they took on the roles of slave masters and slaves. At one point a student playing a slave master pantomimed whipping the students playing slaves. The presenting students were laughing throughout this display and some students in the class who were watching the presentation laughed along with them.

Diya and a White friend of hers in the class were both deeply offended by this presentation. They reported their concerns to an assistant principal. A few days later the two students spoke with Mr. G, the history teacher in charge of the class. Diya came away from the two meetings with the impression that neither of these adults was interested in taking any action to educate students in the class about the harm caused by a group of White students making a light of slavery and mocking enslaved people in a class presentation.

I know Mr. G fairly well, having developed a warm collegial relationship with him during my tenure at CHS. I sometimes sat with him at staff meetings, saw him occasionally at informal social gatherings at a local pub, and he always greeted me with a smile. He was well-liked by many students and had a reputation as a kind teacher who gave “an easy A.” After I stopped working at CHS, Mr. G and I remained on friendly terms and would often chat when we saw each other. I told Diya I would visit the school to talk to him about this presentation, to see if I could persuade him to take some kind of action.

Before I had a chance to talk to Mr. G, I received an email from Diya’s mother, Ms. M. She had met with the principal about the incident and was upset by his response, especially the fact that “both [the principal] and the assistant principal said it was too late to talk to the kids about it” (Ms. M, personal communication, February 21, 2019).

The principal's lack of responsiveness was not new to me. A young woman of color who I had coached in my role as a teacher educator, Ms. T, had told me that White boys in her class were making jokes about slavery, then being rudely dismissive when she told them to stop. I sent an email to the principal after hearing this and told him he was at risk of losing an excellent teacher of color who needed stronger support around these issues. His response deflected attention away from the racism she was encountering.

I know that [Ms. T's] experience has not been as positive as I would like. I appreciate that she is starting to give us feedback on some of this.

Obviously all of this is a work in progress and the portables present another challenge to her experience. She has some great neighbor teachers, but there aren't any other LA teachers out there. Also, our LA team is not very collaborative right now.

(Mr. K, personal communication, December 19, 2018)

I took several other actions to try and amplify stories I was hearing from students and a teacher of color at CHS. I told Ms. T's story to a district-wide student advocacy group. One of their White members, a CHS student, shared it in a testimony at a district school board meeting on the same day of the principal's email response to me. I contacted the district superintendent and the school board about this pattern of incidents. I invited Ms. T to be a guest speaker in an education course I was teaching at a nearby university, where she shared her story with undergraduate students.

I also scheduled a meeting with Mr. G after school on a weekday in early March. I had trepidations about the meeting, worried he would be caught off guard, perhaps angry and defensive. I practiced some different approaches at home before meeting with him.

Before raising this potentially stressful topic, I wanted to set a caring tone with Mr. G. I began by asking how things were going in his classes, and whether or not a recent snow storm had caused a lot of disruption. He asked about my dissertation, and I told him about how my throat felt tight constantly, like I was being choked, and we laughed about that. I then admired the decorations on the bulletin board behind his desk. Though I did not say anything about it, I noticed that the only photo on the bulletin board showed Mr. G standing with a group of six or seven White male teenagers, their arms draped around him and each other. I wondered who those boys were, and guessed they were a friend group in one of his classes who had bonded with him.

Once I told Mr. G why I was there, he started laughing. He said he could not believe that this incident was still having repercussions after so much time had passed.

Forum script 6A: “They were just goofing around!”

MR. G enters his history classroom to find MS. ELDRIDGE sitting on top of a student desk by his teacher desk. He greets her warmly.

MR. G: Hiya! How’s it going?

MS. ELDRIDGE: Good! How are you?

MR. G: Oh, fine. You know. *(He laughs good-naturedly..)*

MS. ELDRIDGE: Thanks so much for agreeing to meet with me.

MR. G: No problem. What can I do for you?

MS. ELDRIDGE: Well, it’s not for me actually. I heard about a presentation in your class that upset one of your students of color.

MR. G bursts into laughter.

MR. G *(mirthful)*: I just can’t believe the traction of that little presentation!

MS. ELDRIDGE: Really? Well, I wanted to hear your perspective.

MR. G (*smiling, sheepish*): I don't know! It was so long ago, it's hard to even remember! Kids were doing presentations and this group got up and did one about the book *Uncle Tom's Cabin*...

MS. ELDRIDGE: Uh-huh.

MR. G: It was not a beautifully planned performance, you know what I mean? They had these labels with their character names (*he holds a piece of notebook paper up to his chest to demonstrate*), and I think maybe one or two of them were supposed to be slaves, and one was the master, and at one point there was some whipping, or something. I don't know. It was so long ago!

MS. ELDRIDGE: Were they all White?

MR. G: Hm? Oh yeah, they were White, yes.

MS. ELDRIDGE opens her mouth to speak, and MR. G continues talking.

MR. G: But you know, they didn't mean anything by it. They were just goofing around.

MS. ELDRIDGE: Do you think—

MR. G: I mean, look, these boys are, you know, they goof around a lot in class. They don't do assignments. You know the type, right? So when one of them told me he actually read some of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* over the weekend before the presentation was due, I was excited that he was reading a book! (*laughs*)

MS. ELDRIDGE: Hm. I wonder if—

MR. G (*getting agitated in the memory*): And the next thing I know Diya is here with the Assistant Principal! She went to admin about it!

MS. ELDRIDGE: Maybe she felt—

MR. G: I mean, it was hard to have an AP come in here to talk to me about that. Those boys didn't mean any harm.

MS. ELDRIDGE: I just wonder how it feels to students of color to hear a bunch of White kids laughing about slavery.

MR. G: But who knows what they were laughing at? I mean, they were probably laughing because their presentation wasn't that great, you know? They were probably embarrassed!

MS. ELDRIDGE: True. But regardless of why they were laughing, I still wonder about the impact on kids of color. The other thing is, it's not just happening in this class. Do you know Ms. T?

MR. G: Yeah.

MS. ELDRIDGE: Young teacher of color, right? She told me some of her White male students were cracking jokes about slavery, and when she told them to stop they said, "Just because it offends you doesn't mean we can't say stuff like that!"

MR. G: Huh. Jeez.

MS. ELDRIDGE: If it were me, I would want to talk to my students about that presentation that happened in your class. Just to make sure it's clear that you're not okay with making fun of slavery.

MR. G (*laughing nervously*): You know...I'm not gonna do that. I mean, I could, but it would seem odd, you know? It was so long ago!

MS. ELDRIDGE: Yeah, but wouldn't it be worth it if it prevented them from doing that again?

MR. G: Maybe. But I mean, it would put those three boys on the spot. I'd hate to make them feel singled out.

MS. ELDRIDGE: How do you think it feels to be a student of color at this school, though?

MR. G: I just wouldn't know where to begin!

End scene.

Forum 6: Cops in the Head and Rainbow of Desire.

In a tableau depicting the moment at the end of this scene, a cop in Ms. Eldridge's head is saying, "You've done everything you can. If you keep pushing, Mr. G won't like you anymore." However, this character desires transformation for teachers, administrators, and students who perpetuate racism and White supremacy by being complacent. This Rainbow of Desire voice is saying, "I can keep acting on this issue. I will talk to some other people and get more help."

Forum script 6B: Intervention.

MS. ELDRIDGE: I heard about a presentation in your class that upset one of your students of color.

MR. G bursts into laughter.

MR. G (*mirthful*): I just can't believe the traction of that little presentation!

MS. DiFRANCO: Stop!

[MS. DiFRANCO intervenes for MS. ELDRIDGE's character.]

MS. DiFRANCO: Why does that surprise you?

MR. G: It was so long ago! Kids were doing presentations and this group got up and did one about the book *Uncle Tom's Cabin*...

MS. DiFRANCO: You assigned that book?

MR. G: No! A kid picked it up in the library.

MS. DiFRANCO: All White students in the group?

MR. G: Yeah, they were all White. But you know, they didn't mean anything by it. They were just goofing around.

MS. DiFRANCO: Do you think—

MR. G: I mean, look—

MS. DiFRANCO: Hold on, let me finish my question, ok? Do you think it's fine for White students to make fun of slavery?

MR. G: Who said they were making fun of slavery?

MS. DiFRANCO: That's how it felt to Diya.

MR. G: She's a little...you know...

MS. DiFRANCO: What do you mean?

MR. G: She takes things the wrong way. She went to admin about it!

MS. DiFRANCO: When I was her age I didn't have that kind of courage.

MR. G: Courage?

MS. DiFRANCO: Yeah. It takes guts to stand up for justice like that.

Making fun of slavery is harmful, isn't it? I think you should talk to your

students about that presentation. Just to make sure it's clear that you're not okay with making fun of slavery.

MR. G (*laughing nervously*): You know, I'm not—

MS. DiFRANCO: Just think about it, please. Students of color are mobilizing at this school to stop stuff like this from happening. Diya's mother talked about going to the local press. I think they're brave for pushing back. I think we should support them.

MR. G: Well...

MS. DiFRANCO: Listen, I know you've probably got work to do, so I'll leave you to it. Thanks for your time!

End scene.

This portrait contains evidence of actual and potential shifts in my practice toward harm reduction. For one thing, the fact that I approached Mr. G about this situation in the first place is a shift from what I would have done prior to this research. Confronting a colleague, especially one with whom I am on friendly terms, is extremely uncomfortable. My collegial affiliations are an essential component of my professional identity, and similar moves have resulted in harsh confrontations in the past. Such interactions can also result in a loss of credibility and status. However, the racism inherent in such situations is bound to prevail and continue to harm students of color if it is not recognized and acknowledged loudly and clearly. Diya did her part by reporting it to administration, to me, and to the school community in an editorial in the CHS newspaper. Data indicate that Mr. G regarded Diya's status as less influential than mine, so my critique of his lack of action supplemented hers from a perspective that might have greater impact on his future actions.

In my imagined intervention, I ended the meeting with Mr. G abruptly because I did not want to leave him any room to present a counter-argument. I wanted him to think about what I had said, and to sit with the discomfort it had likely caused him to feel. I did not want my suggestion to get lost in the numerous justifications and excuses he was tempted to make on behalf of himself and the White male students who had created the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* presentation. Forum script 6.B thus represents a rehearsal for future shifts in my teaching practice toward harm reduction.

Summary

In these two portraits I showed how my thinking and practice evolved in relation to my work with White colleagues. In the first, I imagined how I might have intervened when a White male substitute insensitively spotlighted two students of color in a classroom full of White students. In the second, I wrote a script based on an intervention that actually happened with a White male colleague, and then a second script to show how the intervention could have been stronger. These two portraits demonstrate my ongoing efforts to reduce harm in classrooms by confronting teachers who exhibit harmful racist behaviors or those who allow White students to behave in ways that are harmful toward students of color. They show my continual backstage thinking about how to reduce harm in front stage space.

Chapter VI: Summary, Discussion, Limitations, and Implications

In a book critiquing contradictory social rules in the southern United States, Lillian Smith (1949, as cited in Okun et al, 2010) described one possible experience of Whiteness:

...we may, as we acquire new knowledge, live through new experiences, examine old memories, gain the strength to tear the frame from us, yet we are stunted and warped and in our lifetime cannot grow straight again any more than can a tree put in a steellike twisting frame when young, grow tall and straight when the frame is torn away at maturity. (p. 29)

The “frame” Smith refers to here aptly symbolizes the social structures that produce Whiteness. The terms “stunted” and “warped” articulate the experience of being shaped into mindsets that reduce and distort Whites’ perception of people of color to negative stereotypes. Freire offered a solution when he said that there “can be no conscientization of the people without a radical denunciation of dehumanizing structures, accompanied by the proclamation of a new reality” (Freire, 1998, p. 471). Freire’s explanation indicates transformation by proclaiming realities that subvert stereotypes of marginalized populations. However, proclaiming is insufficient. While it can influence our thinking, it does not transform reality unless Whites can feel a shift in our bodies that compels us to act to disrupt the status quo. It is only by rehearsing anti-oppressive actions that we can develop the awareness, embodied understanding, and strength to invest in the effort.

This chapter summarizes the study of how my pedagogy as a White teacher in a predominantly White high school was impacted by teaching a diverse group of students about issues of power and oppression through practicing Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) techniques in a course called Theater of Liberation (ToL). It includes discussions about the

value and limitations of this practice for growth and self-discovery for White teachers in predominantly White contexts. It also discusses the significance of the study and its implications for education research, teacher education and professional development.

Research Summary

This study examined how my teaching practice was impacted by teaching a course using Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) methods in a predominantly White high school setting. My conceptual framework shows TO as a mechanism that activates an overlap of Goffman's (1959) front stage and backstage regions of social performance, creating a "between-stage" space wherein participants may practice examining, confronting, and disrupting oppression.

This study mainly drew on qualitative research paradigms of teacher self-study and arts-based research. Elements of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) and portraiture were also influential in my methodology. I gathered documents, participant journal writing, interviews, and video recordings of TO activities in course sessions. I analyzed these data sources to discern transformative shifts in my thinking and practice.

This study took place in a large urban school district in the Pacific Northwest. The school was located in a predominantly White neighborhood of a large city. More than 70% of the student body at the school was White at the time of the study. The sample of student participants, consisting of 18 students in total, was more racially diverse than the student body of the school. Of the 18 students, seven identified as Latinx, two identified as bi-racial (Black and White), one identified as Pacific Islander, and eight identified as White. I was a White participant, and four other adults participated, three White female educators and one Afro-Latinx community member.

I selected data sets from periods occurring at roughly 1-month intervals of the ToL course and data from relevant incidents in my teaching practice that occurred after the course ended. The data collected occurred over nearly four years. The indistinct quality of the boundary between the study as a whole and the ToL course – which occurred from late February through early June 2016 – enhanced my conclusions about the project’s influence on my practice.

I used Goffman’s (1959) “presentation of self” framework to identify front stage and backstage regions in relation to participants’ interactions. I added a third region – which I called “between-stage” – located where front and back stage spaces overlap. After an initial phase of analyzing the data, I found that TO encouraged boundary-crossing, transparency, vulnerability, and trust in between-stage space in my practice. The final phase of data analysis focused exclusively on transformations in my own thinking and practice relating to these factors, aided by a model in which I identified four categories of White teacher practice. I focused on two categories, White Savior and Harm Reduction teacher practice, in this last phase of data analysis.

By analyzing my words and actions in the between-stage space created by TO techniques, I was able to recognize and distinguish between White savior teaching and harm reduction in my pedagogy. These skills grew stronger in the backstage space of this reflective analysis when I replicated between-stage space as part of the analysis process. By creating Forum plays of interactions I had with administrators, colleagues, and ToL students, I continued my “rehearsal for reality” (Jackson, 2002, p. xxiv) in the backstage space of reporting the findings of the study. The findings demonstrated that the dominant social identity of Whiteness imposed constraints on transformation even when I intended to be anti-racist. Additionally, I found that:

a) both White Savior teacher practice and Harm Reduction teacher practice featured in my teaching of the ToL course and subsequent interactions with students and colleagues;

b) I changed in how I think about, process and respond to situations to prioritize the interests of students and colleagues of color and disrupt an oppressive status quo;

c) harm reduction thinking has potential to change my practice, though it does not always result in radical change

d) White Savior teacher practice remains prominent, visible, and impactful in my pedagogy despite my contrary efforts and intentions.

Discussion

There is recognizable inconsistency between my ambitious intentions for this action research project and concrete evidence of its positive impact, especially for students of color. Utt (2013) observed that the intent behind one's actions does not matter if those actions have an oppressive or marginalizing impact, causing harm to one or more individuals. Not knowing the actual impact of the scripts and other TO exercises that comprise this report calls into question the validity of these findings. There are two responses to this question. Firstly, by including alternative responses to problematic actions in my findings and submitting these imagined interventions to be judged by my peers, I am contributing to the exchange of ideas around Theatre of the Oppressed within White teacher pedagogy. Secondly, these scripts constitute rehearsals for future disruptive actions. Though the outcome of any alternative approach is unpredictable, if it is never attempted the outcome will never be known.

It was difficult to teach the ToL course while simultaneously studying academic research and teaching a full-time high school course load. I figured it out as I went, made mistakes, and sometimes got lost. I appreciated Tanner's (2014) claim that "Getting lost is an honest way to describe the practice of teaching. It is an honest way to describe educational research" (p. 7). Ladson-Billings' (2009) claim that her writing "may be seen as methodologically

‘messy’...because it is an opportunity to reinforce the fluidity and connection between the individual and the group in which teachers and students do their work” (p. xvii) also resonated with me. Characterizing this project as a messy practice of critical pedagogy qualifies and contextualizes the potentials and limitations of conducting anti-racist work with Theatre of the Oppressed in mostly-White schools.

In relation to Whiteness and White supremacy, the best outcome any White teacher can ever expect is harm reduction. The fact that I titled the course “Theater of Liberation” is itself evidence of White Savior practice, signaling my intention to “liberate” students when as a White adult – one of a dominant group who had institutional authority over students – the idea of me liberating them detracted from their agency and potential for empowerment.

Further, ToL was not always positively transformative for participants, including myself. Sometimes it generated tensions and conflicts; at other times we seemed to be spinning our wheels. Throughout most of this process, I assumed that the work I was doing was, on the whole, positively transformative, and maintained the hopeful attitude that my professional knowledge and academic aptitude would carry me through completion of the research. The shortcomings of my practice did not become a major focus until the final year of the project. The findings about the limitations of my own practice are among the most valuable conclusions of this research; the most striking evidence of transformation my practice consists of ideas about what I would do differently if I did this again.

During data analysis, when I compared my current teaching practice to my pedagogy before, during, and immediately following the ToL course, I found evidence of harmful and disturbing mindsets situated in behaviors that perpetuated harm for students of color. Firstly, I found that “White Washed” assimilationist ideology permeated my thinking even as I advocated

for students of color in backstage spaces at school prior to the start of the ToL course. This was apparent in my meeting with the administrator, Mr. J, described in my first portrait, when I recorded in a memo my thought that JaBron and other students of color who broke school rules were not “acting White.” It is possible that I was being facetious and wrote that to disparage the administrator. Either way, this backstage comment did not contribute to harm reduction and instead reified negative stereotypes about students of color.

In the first ten weeks of course, I failed to recognize the distinction between the White savior paradigm and anti-oppressive pedagogy toward harm reduction. Rather than creating opportunities for students of color to articulate their visions of success and emancipation, and collaborating with participants in realizing those ideas in TO activities, my actions were too often influenced by my own vision of “liberatory” education that included a White teacher leading the way. My voice dominated discourse in the front stage space of ToL in the form of lecturing and positioning myself as the “expert” rather than centering marginalized knowledges, and I allowed White student voices to dominate class discussions. I also held assimilationist, “White Washed” expectations for student participation that negatively impacted students of color, as when I chastised Rico and JaBron for not appearing engaged in the Carnival in Rio debrief (see Chapter IV).

These problematic behaviors were exacerbated by a blurry and uncritical conceptualization of the boundary between my role as a facilitator and my role as a participant in the research. If I had been practicing Harm Reduction pedagogy, I would have guided student participants of color to define the boundaries of those roles and asked them to tell me when crossing them would best serve their vision of a more empowering educational experience. Rather than simply analyzing which aspects of our identities make us targets in society and

which aspects make us agents (Nieto, 2010), for example, I would have encouraged students to critically examine this framework and decide how TO activities might be used to disrupt social systems that reinforce “target” and “agent” concepts.

Data from my current practice and reflections about it within the last two years yields evidence of the following kinds of transformation toward Harm Reduction teacher practice in my pedagogy and in my orientation toward mostly-White educational contexts.

In backstage space, I strive to continually deepen my knowledge of institutional oppression by studying both academic scholarship and popular media with a critical consciousness, and valuing and amplifying marginalized perspectives in interactions with friends, family members and colleagues. I also disrupt oppressive institutional forces of academia and traditional notions of “doing school” by designing collaborative and unifying student experiences that empower students with marginalized identities. In front stage space, I validate marginalized perspectives by centering them in course content and professional presentations; I teach future educators about institutional and systemic oppression and explain how personal words and actions can be harmful even when harm is unintentional. I also strive to devote the majority of class time to student-centered dialogue, positioning students of color as experts and guiding them to form questions to guide their own learning.

When I begin working with a group of students, I demonstrate trust in the lived experiences of students of color in both backstage and front stage space by validating those experiences. I prioritize relationship-building between myself and each student and among students in the learning group. I name my own positionality as a White person and explain the privilege that entails. I model this transparency for White students and explicitly encourage White students to monitor their language and behavior in classroom-based interactions.

Additionally, I strive for balance in classroom discussions in front stage classroom space. I recognize the need to draw upon student experiences without imposing my assumptions, prioritizing the experiences of students of color in observing and guiding discussion. I continually monitor, assess, and maintain a permeable boundary between my role as “Joker” (facilitator and difficultator) and my role as “spect-actor” (collaborative learner) in learning spaces. My role as collaborator with students takes precedence over my role as leader and “expert.” This reflects my desire to disrupt the status quo of traditional education paradigms.

In backstage and front stage, I am exploring the value and limitations of creating backstage space for White students to process their emerging understanding of White privilege and White supremacy without burdening students of color with the task of educating them (Beitlers et al, 2019). In service of racial equity and promoting anti-racism among educators, I am now more skilled and assertive in critiquing the status quo in both front stage and backstage space, specifically drawing attention to colorblindness, deficit thinking, and assumptions rooted in White supremacy; I encourage White students, colleagues, and administrators to do the same.

Themes

Several compelling, interrelated themes emerged as I explored how my teaching thinking and practice as a White teacher in a predominantly White high school was transformed by teaching a diverse group of students about issues of power and oppression by practicing Augusto Boal’s TO techniques with them. In this section I discuss my efforts to move toward harm reduction through awareness of:

- metaxis
- boundaries and boundary-crossing;
- transparency, mask-wearing, vulnerability, and trust

Metaxis: Transformation from real world to ideal world.

Boal's TO techniques may provide a pathway for understanding how to weaken constraints of White Savior teacher practice, and thus reduce harm for students of color in predominantly White schools. The Forum process I undertook in this dissertation was my attempt at reducing harm in my pedagogy, consisting of actions that disrupt systemic and institutional racism. It was a backstage effort, a rehearsal for reality (Boal, 1995) that took the better part of four years. In addition to conducting this research I have continued to teach, enacting what the ToL course taught me in my ongoing work with students. My practice in my daily teaching life emerges from my personality as actions in the real world (Boal, 1990, 1995). The ideal toward which I strive must emerge from the collective influences that make up who I am as a person. When I privilege the influences of White supremacy (a real-world influence) in my practice, I am, albeit unconsciously, reinforcing how White supremacy wants to world to be. When my actions reflect my desire to privilege the perspectives of students of color while disrupting the status quo, my practice is more likely to reduce harm caused by systemic and institutional racism.

Savin-Baden and Falconer (2016) described metaxis as the condition of in-betweenness that, according to Plato, "is a structural characteristic of the human condition—we humans are suspended on a web of polarities—the one and the many, eternity and time, freedom and fate, instinct and intellect, risk and safety, love and hate, to name but a few" (Whelan, as cited in Savin-Baden and Falconer, 2016, p. 993). For Boal (1995), the concept of metaxis encompassed "the state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different, autonomous worlds: the image of reality and the reality of the image" (p. 43). TO enables metaxis by invoking backstage reflection about issues of power and oppression (subjective interpretation of the image) on front

stage interactions (image of reality). In my research, metaxis created opportunities to reflect on the tension between a) the reality that Whiteness will always be a salient part of my identity, and b) the existence of concrete, practicable strategies for disrupting the influence of White supremacy culture.

In my metaphorical framing, I described how a shift of perspective can change the still surface of a pond from a reflective surface that mirrors its surroundings to a transparent window into the world below the surface. The shift involves greater proximity; it involves approaching in-between space. The closer one gets to the pond's surface, the more clearly one can see, become immersed in, and understand what (and who) is on the other side of that permeable boundary. In a similar way, practicing TO increases proximity to social identity boundaries.

In considering transformation from the reality of White Teacher practice, this project has reinforced my belief that Whiteness will always be an influencing, backstage presence in the front stage actions of Whites. To borrow DiAngelo's (2016, November) analogy, just as fish are unaware of the water in which they swim, many Whites are unaware of the pervasiveness of racism and the fact that its influence in our socialization is unavoidable. This analogy relates to my metaphorical framing of Long Pond as mirror and window, though in my metaphor we are humans, not fish. Entering the cold water can be unpleasant, even alarming, for those who are not accustomed to it.

I acknowledge that for me, the water of Long Pond is clear and inviting while critical reflection about racism is not. However, as this research aims to show, the implications of taking this plunge hold potential for positive transformation for people of color and Whites alike.

DiAngelo says that becoming aware of Whiteness is for Whites a process of "realizing that you

cannot see yourself” (DiAngelo & Terry-Hays, 2017, March). I hope readers of this work will agree that truly seeing oneself is a worthy objective for White educators.

In a semi-structured interview in November 2018, Eva said that she felt like TO opened her eyes to issues she had never noticed before, describing a type of transformation that resonated DiAngelo’s statement, and with me:

It’s made to seem like [ToL and Theatre of the Oppressed] is only helping students of color and like, not the White students, which is very not true. I had no idea that anything [racist] was happening at CHS...that there was so much systemic racism in the world in general...I was just like, very ignorant because we’re not educated on that kind of thing.

(Eva, personal communication, November 30, 2018)

As she reflected on this theme, Eva observed that her thinking during the course was still influenced by White supremacy, implying that the transformation she experienced happened later:

...when I was doing Theater of the Oppressed, I spent so much time thinking about my actions and their effect...racist thoughts that I was having or microaggressions that I was doing that I didn't realize were even happening. But I think I spent like, too much time thinking about that. It was like, more about me than it was about any minority...now I think about that more...but at the time I was just like so afraid of doing something racist.

(Eva, personal communication, November 30, 2018)

Eva’s contribution to this dialogue almost three years after the course ended suggests that, like me, she engaged in critical reflection about her experience in between-stage space that enabled a new level of self-awareness for her about the degree to which White people take up space. She realized that she could not see herself, which inspired her to take a closer look. Eva’s

insights comprise evidence that ToL positively transformed aspects of at least one other White participant.

Boundaries and boundary-crossing.

Anzaldúa's (2009a) concept of *nepantla* resonates with the conceptual framework of this study, particularly with the concept of *metaxis* and between-stage space accessible through TO. She declares that

Art and la frontera intersect in a liminal space where border people, especially artists, live in a state of "nepantla." Nepantla is the Náhuatl word for an in-between state, that uncertain terrain one crosses when moving from one place to another, when changing from one class, race, or sexual position to another, when traveling from the present identity into a new identity. (p. 180)

Ladson-Billings (2009) profiled a teacher who sometimes took on a student identity in front stage space of the classroom, asking her students to become teachers. Ladson-Billings observed that students grew accustomed to this role reversal and became comfortable with it. Though ToL did not fully achieve an inverted structure of students teaching me as reflected in Ladson-Billings' example, the typical high school hierarchy of teachers as all-knowing authority and students as their subordinates was often disrupted in the work students and I did together in ToL.

It is crucial, however, especially in the context of TO, to differentiate between role-reversal of teacher and student and role reversal of social identity categories. In TO practice, there is a convention that spect-actors should only take on characters they can relate to through lived experience; in the context of race, it is inappropriate for someone practicing TO to embody a character with an immutable social identity contrary to the spect-actor's true social identity.

For example, a White spect-actor would violate this principle if they embodied the role of a character of color in a TO activity. This key limitation on actions in between-stage space acknowledges that Whites can never know what it is like to be a person of color in the real world. Creating the illusion that this is possible in TO is inauthentic and problematic, an example of “magical” representation (Boal, 2002, p. 187).

This tension is different than Freire’s desire to disrupt the teacher-student hierarchy; while a White wouldn’t understand clearly enough what it’s like to be person of color to authentically take on such a role, most Whites have experienced being young and in school. To accomplish Freire’s disruption of the hierarchy in the context of racial identity, a White teacher can amplify the voice of the student of color by positioning them as a teacher. In the interest of boundary-crossing, a White teacher can position themselves primarily as a learner to develop deeper understanding of power and oppression. They can learn from the students how to reject the structure of White supremacy.

Trust, vulnerability, and mask-wearing.

In this section I discuss three interrelated themes that emerged as significant concepts in my findings. Though I address each individually, my understanding of these concepts was enhanced by noticing how they interacted with one another in between-stage space.

Trust.

In a conceptual study of trust in Erving Goffman’s social interaction scholarship, Misztal (2001) analyzed the theoretical relationship between normality and trust, vulnerability and risk. In her argument, the predictability that accompanies “normal” situations reduces vulnerability and sense of risk, therefore increasing the likelihood of trust. Misztal explained that sociological scholarship has two modes of conceptualizing “normality.” One definition considers the world as

it is, factually. The other proffers a vision of the world as it should be, an ideal version of reality toward which society must strive. This dualism is evocative of Boal's efforts to inspire rehearsal toward transformation from the real to the ideal through methods like Image Theatre and Forum Theatre.

The analysis of Goffman's conceptualization of normality and trust fails to consider how racial identity influences perception of normality, and therefore trust. Misztal observed that, for Goffman,

social interactions depend not only on routine obeying of rules imposed by society but also on our ability to express and read the intentions behind people's behavior; thus trust is the essential background of everyday interaction, and as such it helps us to simplify information, reduces the complexity of signals, and protects us from the ambiguity and uncertainties of many situations. (2001, p. 323)

This explanation side-steps the complexity of race and other social identity categories. Intersecting social identity categories add layers of complexity that complicate trust and its contributions to interpretation of intent.

In the context of Wilkes' (2011) analysis of the statistical trust gap between White and Black U.S. citizens, the concept of trust can be understood as contextual, and its definition contingent on the speculation of dominant social identity groups about what is "normal" – both in the real sense *and* the ideal sense. In PWI front stage space, Whiteness is normal, real *and* ideal. Disrupting this pattern requires deliberate proximity and attention to non-dominant perspectives. TO practice that foregrounds the lived experience of marginalized participants gives White participants time and space to access the insights of their peers of color. For

example, ToL participants created a Forum play called “Always the Same People.”⁷ This play foregrounded the experience of students of color being chased out of the school building and otherwise policed by administrators. This play showed ToL participants that this experience was the norm for students of color, highlighting a discrepancy between the way administrators treat students of color and White students in comparable situations. The fact that I took on the role of the administrator in this play was an example of Harm Reduction teacher practice because I used my positionality as a White adult to acknowledge a reality that students of color wanted to express.

ToL did not engender greater trust among all participants, however. JaBron resisted vulnerability and did not trust me with his words, especially in writing. I had only fragmentary glimpses into his thinking, elicited because his friends were there and he trusted them. He had no problem playing trust games like Faint by Numbers,⁸ in which participants had to catch a “fainting” player before they hit the floor, even though he was one of the largest members of our group. But as time went on after the course was over, I could sense him pulling further and further away from me whenever I spoke to him.

Mask-wearing.

During the Carnival in Rio debrief session discussed in Chapter Four, I posed a question about mask-wearing to the ToL student group:

Me: You guys have written about mask-wearing, right? Where you do it, and when you do it, and I'm wondering if that concept relates to this game.

Drea: If you willingly change [what you're doing in the game] then I don't think you're wearing a mask. I dunno, I feel like it just depends. It's like you could or you couldn't.

⁷ This script may be found in Appendix C, which contains a collection of Forum Scripts written by ToL students.

⁸ Appendix A contains a list of games played in ToL.

Gracie: If you're changing to be cooler or like the majority of the group just cuz you feel like you're "out" then I think that's kind of a mask but if you're doing it because you're like, annoyed, then I think it's different.

Eva: When you're doing something that everyone else isn't doing you feel like, a lot more vulnerable and exposed, so conforming to them kind of puts a mask on for you because you're part of like, this big group.

(Carnival in Rio debrief transcript, April 19, 2016)

This exchange among ToL participants touched on important ideas about mask wearing. Gracie, a Latinx, asserted a distinction between conforming with a crowd to be “cool” versus putting on a mask because the effort to be one’s authentic self – perhaps for her in a mostly-White setting – is annoying. Being annoyed might also imply awareness of dissatisfaction with the status quo that leads someone to put on a different kind of mask, as Gracie, Drea and Kacey did during this game.

By contrast, Eva’s comment suggested that she felt resistant to the vulnerability of going against a prevailing behavior in a “big group.” This corresponds to Eva’s journal entry from the first ToL session. At the end of that session Eva explained her mask-wearing in terms of her own trust of others in the group:

The first time I wasn't being my authentic self was when I was sharing information about myself that I knew the class would hear. If I was more comfortable and trusting in this environment, than [sic] I would've shared more about my drug addiction. The second time was during the mirroring game. I wanted to scream, but I didn't feel safe.

(Eva’s journal, February 23, 2016)

Seven weeks later in the Carnival in Rio debrief session, Eva's final point about vulnerability was perhaps as much about the mostly-White environment at CHS as it was about her experience of playing Carnival in Rio with her ToL peers. This has implications for classroom dynamics around race in that wearing a mask can help White students and teachers disguise their disagreement with the status quo. For Whites the status quo includes performing racist actions. Putting on a mask – that is, performing tacit approval of racism – is easier than resisting. As Eva discovered in this game, the effort of resistance can be both exhausting and disorienting. The fact that some White students – Eva, Java, and Nimue, for example – stopped playing before the end of the game was declared might have been due to this exhaustion. This is certainly why I stopped playing. This feeling was not reported by ToL participants of color; on the contrary, Kacey was visibly energized afterward and said she felt “empowered” with her Latinx friends, Gracie and Drea, in asserting her identity in the game. Gracie was also brimming with energy in the discussion. The concept of mask-wearing as delineated in this research thus demonstrates a component of White teacher practice that can perpetuate racism.

During this project I have had ample opportunity to reflect on my own sense of vulnerability and my concurrent tendency to put on a mask that disguises my anti-racist values in White spaces rather than being transparent about my views. Contrary to Picca and Feagin's (2007) findings, my tendency to wear a mask is stronger in backstage space with family members and certain friends. In my experience those stakes are higher, the risks greater, than being transparent in front stage space, where I can often claim a measure of anonymity. In the between-stage space created by practicing TO, my authentic, anti-racist self overlapped with the Whiteness that is and always will be an inherent facet of my identity. TO pushed me into the pond, and ToL gave me goggles for seeing more clearly in that environment.

Vulnerability.

Being underwater is a vulnerable position. This vulnerability may be mitigated by breathing apparatus such as a snorkel or SCUBA gear. I had mitigating support in the metaphorical water of this research from scholars who have studied vulnerability in an embodied way. For example, the introduction to Behar's (1996) book on doing ethnography, *The Vulnerable Observer*, contains the following statement:

And so, even though we start by going public, we continue our labor through introspection. And then we go public again, and if the first time we dealt in something that came dangerously close to tragedy, the second time around we are definitely in the theater of farce as our uncertainty and dependency on our subjects in the field is shifted into a position of authority back home when we stand at the podium, reading our ethnographic writing aloud to other stressed-out ethnographers at academic conferences held in Hiltons where the chandeliers dangle by a thread and the air conditioning chills us to the bone. (p. 9)

The tension that Behar invokes in this passage is that of putting on different masks to fit different contexts, a metaphor that resonates with the concept of mask-wearing I discussed with ToL participants. Later in her introduction, Behar describes how her understanding of this tension evolved when she chose to weave bits of personal, creative, vulnerable writing into her conference presentations. "Gradually I realized why I was acting like a truant schoolgirl: my anthropological mask was peeling off" (p. 21).

Behar alludes to her own mask-wearing in two different public spheres. First she references her role as an ethnographer in the field, where she is expected to take notes as a detached observer of her subjects' daily lives. She then pivots to the act of exposing the written

ethnography to the scrutiny of her professional peers in the public space of an academic conference. According to Goffman's (1959) framework of the presentation of self, such spaces qualify as front stage regions in that they involve performance circumscribed by agreed-upon social expectations and norms.

Behar (1996) urged ethnographers to be more vulnerable and transparent, qualities more often embackstage space. She conceived of the locales where she observed her research subjects as more authentic than the professional environs of academia, imbued as they were with personal, private details. To her, the professional world of the ethnographer was at times foreign and undecipherable, like a bad dream. Both publics were mediated by the researcher's shifting subjectivity. In reporting her findings regarding this tension, she endeavored to render the "private" – and often painful – experiences of her research subjects real and whole in the public space of a book whose audience mainly consists of other academic researchers. As though to share this vulnerability with her subjects, she revealed private and painful details of her own personal life in this "public" text – sharing, for example, her regret that she chose to stay at a research site rather than travel home to be with her dying grandfather.

In writing *The Vulnerable Observer*, Behar sought to balance the overlapping priorities of her personal experience, her responsibility to honor and respect those she studied, and the expectation that she meaningfully engage in her professional community. She tried to resolve this dilemma by being vulnerable in all of these contexts; her vulnerability became a touchstone that grounded her.

As a researcher and a TO practitioner, I strongly relate to Behar's work. I have brought my personal identity into every aspect of my role as an educator and as an academic, and put effort into making myself vulnerable. Yet as I have ventured further into education research, I

have become increasingly aware of the power that my privileged perspective holds over vulnerable young adults. I try to remain vigilant to colonizing impact of my privilege by illuminating marginalized perspectives and life experiences and by being transparent about my own positionality and its influence on my thinking.

Trust is considered a feature of the backstage region because that is where, according to Goffman's theory, people plan for action in front stage space. Communication with others in backstage space entails the implication that what goes on in the front stage region will be a performance rather than authentic action. Students trusted me when they decided to take the course; they followed my lead as I guided them in TO activities. I trusted myself; I trusted my years of experience, my training. Most importantly, I trusted and continue to trust the perspectives of people of color in my daily life, in contrast to Whites who know only people of color with social class privilege or the people who clean their homes and tend their yards.

Nonetheless, I learned that my own trust in myself was often misplaced. This leads to reflection on the limitations of this research.

Limitations of the Research

In my discussion, I argued that teacher reflection in between-stage space can aid White teachers in transforming their practice toward a Harm Reduction pedagogy. This is not to say that Whites who use Boal's TO techniques will be transformed in their opinions or beliefs, though this would be an interesting question for further research. In the context of a study of backstage and front stage interactions concerning the topic of racism, Eliasoph (1999) observed that "citizens form and reform their opinions in interaction in civic life" (p. 479). Between-stage interaction using TO techniques has potential to magnify this effect, but it is doubtful that this

practice counters the influence of socialization, which is constantly reinforcing oppressive social norms.

One of the most significant findings in my study is that fact that my White Savior teacher practice was not, and will never be, fully and unequivocally transformed into Harm Reduction teacher practice. No White teacher, no matter how well-intentioned, informed, and trained in anti-racist pedagogy, will ever be able to divorce their practice from the influence of White supremacy. While this is a significant finding, it also constitutes a significant limitation. Without evidence of unequivocal transformation, there is no basis for discerning whether or not practicing TO might lead to such a result.

While many scholars and teachers have observed that young people are more resilient and open when it comes to exploring challenging issues like racism, the fact that youth have had less experience in the world simply by virtue of their age constitutes a limitation of facilitating TO with youth. In research on using theater for social change, Snyder-Young (2013) found that “[p]articipants in TO interventions are limited by their own understandings of conflicts, characters, and context” (pp. 29-30). However, this limitation has an equivocal quality, since context also influences experience. A White middle-aged teacher will never have the embodied knowledge of racism that a Black teenager possesses. This deficit inherent in White teachers is perhaps the most important limitation to recognize.

White teachers should not practice TO with youth without fully understanding both their own privilege and the powerful, provocative nature of TO techniques. “Youth” is a Target identity group, compounding the vulnerability of students with other marginalized social identities. A particularly painful ToL memory for me is the first time we practiced Cops in the Head. I was relatively new to this strategy and only considered how it had felt for me when I

done it in trainings. My experience with it had been a powerful, physical sensation of confusion about the multiplicity of influences on my actions that I likened to Freire's (1998) process of conscientization. I did not consider that its impact could be crushing for a spect-actor embodying the role of a protagonist of color. This is what happened to a biracial ToL student in a tableau about a student of color being bullied by two White students. As with any powerful tool, the risks of practicing TO must be acknowledged.

Duffy (2010) noted that

[r]isks are inherent in discussing what we want to de-normalize. Racism and discrimination are risky subjects, partly because they are not talked about in school and partly because the issues are a complex interweaving of power, identity, attitudes, behaviors, and institutional and cultural structures. (p. 163)

Acknowledging the complexity that Duffy references in this passage is key to practicing TO toward harm reduction. Oppression is often thought of and talked about as a monolithic, general concept, creating the illusion that its eradication is simple. It is precisely the falsehood of this notion that requires TO practitioners to continually challenge their own assumptions and tendencies to oversimplify characters and situations – the “magic” that, according to Boal (2002), must be named out loud:

Jokers must watch out for all ‘magic’ solutions. They can interrupt the spect-actor/protagonist’s action if they consider this action to be magic, not *ruling* that it is magic, but rather asking the audience to decide. (p. 261)

In an ideal world (Boal, 2002), ToL student participants would have collaborated with me on all aspects of data analysis and reporting. Boal would characterize this as magic, however, because high school students are busy people with many competing responsibilities. I was

careful about how much I asked of my participants, especially after the class was over and they were no longer accruing the benefit of course credit. At one point I asked CHS's principal if doing data analysis with me could be considered an independent study for which students could earn an honors designation or additional credit on their transcript. He rejected this suggestion and was unclear about his rationale. This barrier to students contributing to action research reinforced the status quo of White supremacy at CHS, limiting the ways that students could continue to benefit from the work.

I tried to be transparent with ToL students about my process as the research continued, engaging in "conscious and ongoing explication" (Cahill, 2016, p. 161) of my work and enlisting their contribution whenever it seemed possible to balance this burden with a significant, preferably tangible benefit. When they traveled to present with me at conferences, I wrote grants to minimize or eliminate the expense. I reminded them to make note of conference presentations on their resumes and write about them in college applications. Occasionally, I paid them for their time. This was my effort at not exploiting them.

A situation involving two of my participants compelled me to shift the focus of my research away from my original intention to explore the influence of TO on transformation in intergroup relationships among students and to instead study my own practice. This situation forced me to confront an ethical dilemma that is reflected in Behar's (1996) query: "Are there limits—of respect, piety, pathos—that should not be crossed, even to leave a record? But if you can't stop the horror, shouldn't you at least document it?" (p. 2). My dissertation was never going to be exclusively about the relationship of the two individuals involved in this troubling situation. However, my original research questions necessitated examining relationships, so I could not entirely avoid the relational components of the data, including the trusting relationships

that each one of us had with an adult who would go on to break a profound social contract with a vulnerable research participant. Finally, I could not deny the assumptions that clouded my analytical lens once I found out how badly a student I cared about had been harmed.

The research was disrupted by this unexpected modification. However, I believe that the outcomes of this project still contribute valuable findings to scholarship about the utility of TO in predominantly White educational contexts.

Implications

This research was aimed at developing relationships and furthering knowledge toward educational policies and practices that are emancipatory, culturally responsive (Gay, 2010), culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009, 2014), and culturally sustaining (Paris & Alim, 2014). In the course I designed, practicing Boal's techniques enabled participant-researchers to critically examine how we relate to people who inhabit different social identities in a predominantly White educational space, encouraging us to value such differences and the boundaries that circumscribe them. My mindset and practice underwent transformation throughout this process, substantiating Fox and Fine's (2016) claim that "Theater of the Oppressed dramas are designed to simultaneously be productive for transforming real issues of social injustice and as an allegory for the kind of democratic, participatory politic possible in the world outside the performance space" (p. 180). The limitations of the study described in the previous section evoke questions for further research.

In addition to the shift in focus from studying transformation for student participants to studying my own practice, I was compelled by constraints of time and capacity to dispense with other questions that were initially central to my research. One of these was the question of how Carter's (2010) concept of *cultural flexibility* (CF) – the tendency to value and move easily

among various social groups – contributes to understanding transformation in intergroup relationships through TO. Carter applied CF in researching culturally diverse students’ attitudes toward peers in high schools with differing demographic compositions in the U.S. and South Africa. She asserted that globalization requires students to develop skills that will enable them to participate in a society wherein many cultural possibilities are accessible. She cited the benefits of such skill development in studies of bicultural students, who show

consistent results of positive academic, psychological, and social attainment, compared with their relatively monocultural peers...these studies, therefore, suggest that ultimately, culturally flexible students possess the ability to interact in, participate in, and navigate different social and cultural settings, to embrace multiple forms of cultural knowledge and expand their own understanding of self, and to hold inclusive perspectives about others who differ in myriad social aspects or identities. (p. 1530)

Carter called for further research into cultural flexibility, stating that “we must ascertain what those individual and school-level practices are that either encourage or impede students’ movement across social and symbolic boundaries” (p. 1533). Findings of this research suggest that practicing TO with youth has potential to encourage social and symbolic boundary-crossing for teachers and students.

Another important implication of this study is its transformative potential for White students and teachers in redefining the concept of “acting out” – embracing our role as actors willing to deliberately perform outside the norm of Whiteness. Feagin (2013) calls for “acting outside the white frame” (p. 199) and says that:

The good news about human oppressions is that they are not inevitable. What is created by human action can be dismantled by assertive human action where there is the will to

bring significant change. We whites especially must take the responsibility for the centuries-old system of racial hostility and discrimination and work with those long oppressed in developing speedy and innovative ways to bring it down. (p. 225)

Though it was not a central component of this research, an outgrowth of my self-study positioned high school students as experts in teacher education and professional development in secondary education. This aspect of the study constituted an inversion of the instructor-student hierarchy (Freire, 2000). ToL students practiced TO with teacher candidates, lending both their expertise and perspectives to the growth of emerging teachers by helping them rehearse for the reality of challenging classroom interactions.

Zeichner (2007) has taken note of “many improvements in the quality of teacher education programs” (p. 37) resulting from teacher educators conducting self-studies. The outcomes of my research support Zeichner’s finding that

[s]elf-study research contributes to the professionalization of the work of teacher education because it enables teacher educators to take more control over their own continuing development and provides a supportive system of professional development for beginning and experienced teacher educators that result in innovations and concrete improvements in the quality of teacher education practice. (Russell & Korthagen, 1995, as cited in Zeichner, 2007, p. 38)

Lastly, my study has implications for White teachers who want to incorporate TO techniques into their pedagogical toolkit but are concerned that their inexperience with the form might enact more harm than benefit. How do teachers know whether or not they are “ready” to practice TO with students? What are some indicators of this “readiness”? These questions invoke

the concept of epistemic openness explored by Lone (2018) in a study about doing philosophical inquiry with children. She explained that epistemic openness

involves a kind of epistemological modesty – an acknowledgement that all of us are fallible and, therefore, hold views that could end up being mistaken. This entails a comfort with uncertainty, with the possibility that we might not “have all the answers,” and a willingness to change our minds if persuaded to do so...epistemic openness entails a willingness to entertain unfamiliar (and sometimes uncomfortable and perhaps seemingly strange) possibilities. Central to this is the cultivation of a flexibility of mind, in which new ideas are welcome and the potential for changing one's views is understood as part of the enterprise (pp. 57-58)

Lone's description in this passage invokes Carter's (2010) concept of cultural flexibility. In a statement that inspires connection to Boal's (2002) emphasis on transformation from the real world to the ideal world, Lone also states, “epistemic openness requires that we are flexible in our ability to envision possible worlds very different from the way it seems to us that things are” (p. 58). This scholar's description of epistemic openness suggests that this quality might be an indicator of White teachers' readiness to engage critically with the challenges that TO practice entails. Further study of these concepts will contribute useful knowledge about the utility of Theatre of the Oppressed techniques in anti-racist transformation for White teachers in predominantly White schools.

Conclusion

This study emerged from my interest in ways that theater can bring transformative forces to bear on White teacher practice. The research presented offers new ways to consider and approach transformation in White teacher practice toward harm reduction. I caution White

teachers who are enthusiastic about using Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed techniques that in addition to reducing harm, these powerful techniques can cause harm. White teachers leading TO with students of color and students with other target identities may inadvertently re-open emotional wounds caused by racism and other forms of oppression. They may allow White students in the group to dominate, perpetuating White supremacy rather than disrupting it. They may be unaware of ways that White interpretations of TO exercises reify Whiteness.

Returning to the metaphor of Long Pond as mirror and window, it is important to recognize TO as a collective endeavor. Each participant brings their own social identities, desires, fears, and vulnerabilities to the work. While some may be ready to dive right in to the pond, others may need more time to feel safe; they may choose to keep their distance to protect themselves, and only see the surface of the pond. Each participant's frame of reference will be influenced by their emotional proximity to the work, and this will affect both collective and individual experiences. While the rich complexity of TO exercises and games is derived from the collective, the potential impact on individual participants' vulnerabilities should not be taken for granted.

As this self-study came to a close, I reflected on ways TO catalyzed transformation in between-stage space for my own practice. I concluded that between-stage space created by TO activities motivated me to take action rather than being a teacher who is passive when it comes to issues of injustice. A more salient effect was the inspiration to imagine what appropriate action would look like and sound like. These shifts in thinking about my practice hold potential to influence my actions in the future.

Further, this research enhanced my understanding of the distinction between acting on behalf of others for the benefit of one's own ego, and acting in solidarity with others to create a

more just society. Practicing TO with my students triggered reflection and action in various aspects of my practice toward harm reduction. However, most of this transformation occurred after I had finished teaching a course in which my actions were not always geared toward harm reduction for my most vulnerable students. For this reason, I am compelled to recommend that White teachers carefully consider the potential for this pedagogy to reproduce oppressive patterns of behavior before undertaking these activities with students.

During an era when the vast majority of public schools have reverted to segregation patterns that prevailed in the decades directly following the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (Fiel, 2013), this study addresses serious and heretofore under-recognized barriers to harm reduction teacher practice in privileged, predominantly White learning spaces. It is my hope that understandings gleaned through this research will help White educators in such learning environments think deeply about how we approach our students' social identities as we build relationships with and among them in our classes.

This study will be a useful addition to multicultural education literature, which has focused more on racially diverse schools than on predominantly White ones (Milner, 2005). White teachers in predominantly White educational spaces will potentially benefit from a self-study that models critical examination of White teacher practice in such contexts.

My findings demonstrate shifts in my pedagogical thinking and in my teaching practice toward Harm Reduction pedagogy during this research. Some of these shifts were subtle and others were obvious. While evidence of White savior characteristics surfaced in my practice before, during, and after the ToL course (and continue to appear), I am much more aware and assertive about disrupting these tendencies in both front stage and backstage interactions. I am more likely to challenge other White people to recognize the social impact of White supremacy

in both front stage space and backstage space. However, I acknowledge that the White savior paradigm will always be lurking in my teacher identity. The best I can do is remain vigilant to its influence, and focus my actions on disrupting oppressive systems of power.

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Appendices

Appendix A:

Games & Activities Used in the Theater of Liberation Course

From Boal, A (2005) *Games for actors & non-actors*

Accessible online at <https://www.deepfun.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Games-for-actors-and-non-actors...Augusto-Boal.pdf>

Bear of Poitiers, p. 78

Carnival in Rio (see Chapter IV), p. 104

Changing Masks, p. 151

Colombian Hypnosis, p. 51

Complete the Image, p. 139

Fainting at Frejus (also known as Faint by Numbers), p. 158

Follow the Master, p. 148

Image Theatre, pp. 174-215

Tell Your Own Story, p. 144

Two by Three by Bradford, p. 106

Other activities:

Human geography (also known as Sociometry):

Participants are guided to imagine the classroom space metaphorically – for example, as a geographical area somewhere in the world or somewhere along a continuum of ideology, thought or belief. In response to a given prompt (e.g. “Where in this city do you feel most at home?” or “How comfortable do you feel performing a role in front of others?”) participants are instructed to stand in the appropriate place on the “map” or on the spectrum provided, e.g. “extremely comfortable” to “extremely uncomfortable.”

Opening circle:

Participants stand in a circle. One at a time, each participant says a word as they perform a gesture in response to a prompt, for example, “What did you bring with you to this session today?” Everyone else in the circle repeats the turn-taker’s word and gesture in unison.

Appendix B:

Focus Group with Youth Participant Researchers Script

Preamble: As you know, I am doing research at this school. Thank you for being participants in this research!

Among other things, in my study I'm thinking about race as a social construct that has no biological or genetic basis, but rather is ascribed ("put on" people) based on skin color, hair texture and other physical features. Let's pause to read Leticia Nieto's and Margot Boyer's explanation of race and ethnicity. Feel free to ask questions.

[Here, we read aloud page 51 from *Beyond Inclusion, Beyond Empowerment*.]

I'm interested in your perception of attitudes about race and ethnicity at this school. We can also talk about other categories of social identity, since all nine categories we've been studying (age, disability, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, indigenous background, nationality, and gender) contribute to our experience. However, I might bring it back around to race to make sure we cover that topic thoroughly.

I have various open-ended questions, but I'd like you to think about this as a conversation rather than an interview. The questions are for all of you, though you may have different things to say.

I will ask a question and whoever wants to answer first should do so, and others follow or not as you feel comfortable. It's also fine for you to ask questions.

Is it ok if I record this conversation? If at any point you want me to turn the recorder off, just say so and I will. [*Researcher turns on recorder at this point, if there are no objections.*]

1. First of all, in your experience, how would you characterize this school's recognition of racial identity?
 - Where and how is race discussed?
 - Where? How?
 - Do you feel comfortable in these discussions? If not, why not?
2. At this school, what problems or barriers (if any) do you perceive for student interactions across racial boundaries? In other words, are there things that prevent students from interacting with other students who have different racial identities? If so, what are they?
 - What are some possible ways to overcome the particular barrier of _____?
 - What about _____?
3. I'd like you to talk about the concept of race as it relates to learning in classrooms. Can you give me an idea of what this looks like? Examples?
 - How does the racial makeup of a group of students affect the learning environment in classrooms at this school?

What are some variables that might change how this works? Can you give me some examples? Are there particular stories, incidents or events that come to mind?

4. Suppose I'm a new student here. How, when, and where will the racial attitudes in this school become apparent to me?
 - How?
 - When?
 - Where?

Thank you so much for your time!

Appendix C:

Forum Scripts Written by Theater of Liberation Participants

These scripts are based on true accounts told to Theater of Liberation (ToL) participants by at least one person involved in the incident portrayed in the script.

Script #1 was created for the purpose of introducing the forum performance process and practicing interventions in a forum scene.

Scripts #2 and #3 were performed by ToL participants for public audiences.

Script #1. Something that Happened on a Southwest Airlines Flight

In a row of three seats on an airplane, a White couple (WHITE MAN & WHITE WOMAN 1) sit on either side of the middle seat, occupied by some of their belongings. WHITE MAN has a baby in his lap. Most other seats around them are taken. An INDIGENOUS MAN enters and sees the seat in between WHITE MAN and WHITE WOMAN 1.

INDIGENOUS MAN: Is someone sitting there?

WHITE WOMAN 1: Um yeah, I'm waiting for my...er, friend. *(This is clearly a lie.)*

INDIGENOUS MAN: Hm. Ok. I'll wait and see if your "friend" shows up.

INDIGENOUS MAN stands to the side and waits. Another White woman (WHITE WOMAN 2) comes along. WHITE WOMAN 1 grabs her hand.

WHITE WOMAN 1: You want this seat? You can sit here.

WHITE WOMAN 2 sits.

INDIGENOUS MAN, *to WHITE WOMAN 1*: I knew you were lying.

WHITE WOMAN 2 looks around awkwardly and leaves to find another seat.

INDIGENOUS MAN: I'm gonna sit in that seat.

WHITE MAN and baby move to the middle seat, leaving the aisle seat empty. INDIGENOUS MAN sits down.

WHITE WOMAN 1, *quietly to WHITE MAN*: I don't want him to sit there.

INDIGENOUS MAN glares at WHITE WOMAN 1.

WHITE WOMAN 1, *to INDIGENOUS MAN*: Don't look at me!

INDIGENOUS MAN: You don't get to tell me where to sit or where to look.

INDIGENOUS MAN gets headphones out of his bag, preparing to listen to music.

WHITE MAN, *softly, to INDIGENOUS MAN*: You better shut your mouth.

INDIGENOUS MAN, *angrily*: I better shut MY mouth??

WHITE WOMAN 1: You can't sit there.

INDIGENOUS MAN, *shouting in anger*: I'm not moving anyplace so if you don't want to sit by me, I suggest YOU move.

The CAPTAIN comes out of the cockpit. Without hesitation, he speaks directly to INDIGENOUS MAN.

CAPTAIN: Is there a problem?

INDIGENOUS MAN: Well, this lady right here told me that she doesn't want me sitting here for whatever reason and her husband tells me to shut my mo—

CAPTAIN: Well, I only hear YOU. If you want to stay on this flight, you better lower your voice.

End.

Script #2: “It’s Always the Same People”

CHARACTERS & Performers:

MS. SMITH, BRITTA’s mother: Susan

MS. PAUL, a White administrator: Sooz

JENNIFER, a Latinx student: Michelle

BRITTA, a White student: Eva

RICKY, a Latinx student: Brian

JABRON, a Pacific Islander student: JaBron

DANIEL, a Latinx student: OTO

Scene 1

An empty stage with a projection screen forming a backdrop with an image of a school hallway. A bell rings.

BRITTA and DANIEL enter and pause stage left, chatting quietly with each other. JENNIFER, JABRON, and RICKY enter and pause stage right.

JENNIFER: Our third period teacher is giving us so much homework, for real!

JABRON: For real...

The three friends commiserate on this topic for a moment, then RICKY points to BRITTA and DANIEL.

RICKY: I think Britta and Daniel are dating.

JABRON: Bro, for real I think they are too, I heard —

JENNIFER: No, they’re not. She told me she didn’t like him like that — *(the students continue talking)*

MS. PAUL enters, pauses downstage right and surveys the two groups, then talks into her walkie-talkie.

MS. PAUL: I know, I’m checking it out now.

DANIEL and BRITTA join the other student group, and MS. PAUL crosses to stage left, scrutinizing the students.

BRITTA: What are you guys talking about?

JENNIFER: Nothing!

BRITTA (*jeering*): Oh yeah, nothing!

JENNIFER: Ok fine we'll tell you. Are you guys together?

DANIEL & BRITTA: No!

The group starts laughing and teasing each other good naturedly.

MS. PAUL (*shaking her head and raising her voice to be heard above the student voices*): It's always the same people.

The group pauses in their conversation and all look at MS. PAUL, then return their attention to each other.

BRITTA (*to her friends*): Oh my God, Ms. Paul is such a bitch.

The students start telling stories to each other about MS. PAUL, and soon their voices are loud again, with lots of laughter. JABRON and DANIEL start play-wrestling. MS. PAUL moves toward them and inserts herself in between BRITTA and the rest of the group. She faces the students of color so that BRITTA is behind her and suddenly separated from her friends.

MS. PAUL: Ok, you all need to leave.

A bell rings.

Scene 2

The backdrop changes to a split screen. On one side of the backdrop (stage right) is an image of a family room. On the other side (stage left) is a closeup of a door that says "OFFICE OF THE PRINCIPAL."

Stage right, BRITTA sits at a table doing homework while her MS. SMITH stands by, checking on her. Stage left, DANIEL sits in a chair with his head down, and MS. PAUL stands next to him. MS. PAUL picks up the receiver of a desk phone and dials, and MS. SMITH's cell phone rings.

MS. SMITH: Hello?

MS. PAUL: I'm looking for the mother of Britta Smith.

MS. SMITH: This is she.

MS. PAUL: Hi, this is Ms. Paul at the high school. I'm sorry to tell you this but we've gotten some information that your daughter is dating Daniel Rodriguez. He's a student at the school, and he's not going to be a very good influence on your daughter.

MS. SMITH leans toward BRITTA, looking at her closely. BRITTA looks up at her. A bell rings.

End.

Script #3. "You People All Look the Same"

CHARACTERS & Performers:

MAURICIO: Brian

ROMEO: A.A.

HECTOR: Rico

KRISTY: KitKat

MICHELLE: Eva

JOAN: Java

MS. WALSH: Sooz

INSTRUCTIONAL ASSISTANT: Mulan

JOKER: Nimue

Students in MS. WALSH's Art class are working on an assignment, "Draw Your Heart's Desire." MS. WALSH takes attendance, then circulates, surveying the work of each student.

MAURICIO: Hey, Romeo. Look at this. I don't know if I'm doing this right.

ROMEO: It looks good to me.

HECTOR: So Romeo, you just moved here?

ROMEO: Yeah.

MAURICIO: He's friends with my cousin.

HECTOR: Oh, you two know each other?

ROMEO: We went to elementary school together...

BOYS continue talking. After lavishing praise on KRISTY and MICHELLE for their work, MS. WALSH glares over at the boys.

MS. WALSH: Are you getting any work done over there?

BOYS: Yes.

IA (*approaching boys' group*): How's it going here?

BOYS: Good.

IA examines their work, offers praise and encouragement. MS. WALSH keeps helping KRISTY & MICHELLE.

KRISTY: Yours looks really good now!

MICHELLE: So does yours! I'm proud of us!

MS. WALSH: Good work, Ladies!

MS. WALSH wanders over to the boys and examines their work one at a time.

MS. WALSH: Good....good... (*to MAURICIO*) Ok, Romeo, your shadow is in the wrong place.

ROMEO: *I'm* Romeo.

MS. WALSH (*looking toward ROMEO, annoyed*): I beg your pardon?

ROMEO: I'm Romeo, (*pointing to his friend*) that's Mauricio.

MS. WALSH: Oh, sorry. It's understandable though. You people all look the same.

MS. WALSH walks away awkwardly.

End.