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Theater of the Oppressed as a Pedagogical Method for
Engagement and *Conscientização* in a Chicana/o Studies Classroom

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Education

by

Michael Gutiérrez

2013

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Theater of the Oppressed as a Pedagogical Method for
Engagement and *Conscientização* in a Chicana/o Studies Classroom

by

Michael Gutiérrez

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Peter McLaren, Chair

This qualitative study explores the potential of Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed as a pedagogical approach to promote student engagement and what Paulo Freire terms *conscientização* (conscientization) within a lower-division Chicana/o Studies university classroom. The Theater of the Oppressed is a set of highly interactive games, exercises, and techniques designed to engage participants in a "problem-posing" dialogue. Despite the Theater of the Oppressed's fundamentally pedagogical nature and its growing popularity in the U.S., it is very rarely used inside non-theater classrooms. In this study, the Theater of the Oppressed exercises were not used to teach about the Theater of the Oppressed but rather were incorporated as part of a larger Freirean classroom approach to provide an opportunity for students to engage with the course material in a variety of ways. The activities were used for a total of two weeks out of the 16 week semester. This study shows the results of that intervention as evidenced

through an online survey, students' writings, and interviews.

The data revealed that students in this environment exhibited a high level of engagement in the course largely due to the pedagogical approach of the professor and relatability of the course overall. Evidence was also found that the course was promoting shifts in conscientization for some students. The data strongly suggests that the Theater of the Oppressed served to broaden the types of engagement and participation already happening in the classroom by providing students with new ways to engage with the content and opportunities for face-to-face interactions. The Theater of the Oppressed promoted critical engagement through enjoyable student-to-student interactions, by highlighting the *relatability* of student experiences, by promoting the exchange and valuing of others' ideas, and by helping students *see* in new ways.

As evidenced by students' comments, this study demonstrated the power of an engaging, relevant, responsive, and critical pedagogy in action. Moreover, it showed the Theater of the Oppressed can be a potentially valuable tool to supplement the pedagogical repertoire of teachers concerned with promoting dialogical encounters which could in turn develop a deepening critical consciousness.

The dissertation of Michael Gutiérrez is approved.

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Irene Vásquez,

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2013

DEDICATION

...this is for *la raza*...

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT OF STUDY

This study examined the benefits of using Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed (1979) as a pedagogical approach in a Chicana/o Studies classroom at a southern California public university. The Theater of the Oppressed (from here on T.O.) is a set of highly interactive games, exercises, and techniques designed to engage participants in a "problem-posing" dialogue. T.O. operates from philosophical and pedagogical premises that are highly sophisticated and which derive, in part, from Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's classic work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) which some scholars and activists have referred to as a "philosophy of praxis" (McLaren, 2007). Despite T.O.'s fundamentally pedagogical nature and its growing popularity in the U.S. over the last two decades, it is very rarely used inside of non-theater classrooms. Moreover, pilot studies I conducted in a similar environment in 2011-2012 have suggested that T.O. can be a powerful tool for engagement in the college (undergraduate) classroom. T.O. could be especially effective when used as part of a larger Freirean approach and within disciplines which emphasize the value of students' individual and collective experiences and that are designed to promote empowerment, critical consciousness, and self-reflexive action (praxis) among students.

This study is primarily concerned with the Theater of Oppressed's tractability as a pedagogical instrument to promote student engagement and what Paulo Freire (1970, 1973, 1998) terms *conscientização* (conscientization) inside a college classroom. The data for this research was collected through a lower division Chicana/o Studies course which I taught during the Fall of 2012 and in which I used the Theater of the Oppressed as a component of the curriculum. Generally, I examined students' perceptions and experiences in my class especially

regarding the Freirean/Boalian approach. Specifically, I explored the possible relationship between these pedagogical approaches, conscientization, and student engagement. In order to analyze these connections I had to find out what the students themselves were saying and thinking about what happened to them as a result of taking this course. Accordingly, the data collection tools consisted of student focus groups, individual interviews, class surveys, and artifacts (student written work) to assess how this particular approach is impacting their engagement and conscientization. Through the data, I looked for evidence of "shifts" in critical consciousness and engagement as well as evidence of how the pedagogy, and Theater of the Oppressed in particular, might be promoting and supporting those types of shifts.

Such a study as this is significant in the context of ongoing developments in educational research, Chicana/o Studies, critical pedagogy, and performance studies among others. Recently, there has been a call for Chicana/o Studies to reinvent and develop its pedagogical repertoire (Acuña, 2009). Although Chicana/o Studies has some overlap with critical pedagogy in terms of desired outcomes for its students, critical pedagogy is largely critiqued for not providing educators with concrete ways of deploying its central tenets (Kanpol, 1998; Wink, 2004). Furthermore, although there has been a surge of interest in T.O in the last 15 years, there are only a small handful of academic studies regarding its use in the classroom. For educational researchers concerned with pedagogy and engagement, the bulk of that research ends in the 12th grade and therefore we are left with a limited understanding of effective approaches for college students. This study will provide benefits to all of the aforementioned areas.

Research Questions

This research empirically explored the relationship between pedagogical practices within the classroom, conscientization, and student engagement. Specifically, I analyzed *how*

Freirean/Boalian approaches could promote the conscientization that both Freire and Boal advocate. To achieve a more focused analysis of this topic I primarily focused on the following research questions:

1. In what ways, if any, does the Theater of the Oppressed promote/support conscientization when used inside an undergraduate Chicana/o Studies college classroom?
2. In what ways, if any, does the application of T.O. in this setting enhance student engagement?
3. What key points do students who are in these classrooms take away from this approach?

My Personal Connection with Freire, Boal, and Chicana/o Studies

I was introduced to Boal and Freire's work when I was still in high school in Omaha, Nebraska. A small group of artists, with the support of the Nebraska Arts Council and University of Nebraska at Omaha, organized and hosted the first Pedagogy of the Oppressed conference in 1995 where I had the opportunity to meet Augusto Boal. That same year I became a founding member of the first Center for the Theater of the Oppressed (CTO) in North America. The following year I had the pleasure of meeting Paulo Freire and see him speak along with Augusto Boal and Peter McLaren at the Pedagogy of the Oppressed conference in Omaha. As a member of CTO-Omaha, I had the great fortune of taking several workshops with Boal and had many personal communications with him until his untimely death in 2009. Since then, I have also had the privilege of conducting scores of Theater of the Oppressed workshops and demonstrations throughout the United States and Canada. I have conducted workshops in juvenile detention centers, state penitentiaries, middle schools, high schools, colleges, new teacher trainings, student retreats, and many more settings. I have yet to encounter an audience that does not eventually become fully engrossed in Boal's activities. Through my work with the

Theater of the Oppressed for the last two decades, I have come to appreciate its value as a teaching tool.

I have also been privileged enough to be able to teach for the last eight years. I taught two years in high school and during the last six years I have been teaching Chicana/o Studies at the college level. Through these experiences, I have further seen the relevance and necessity to reinvent and reintroduce Freire as a central part of pedagogy especially when teaching African American and Latino college students.

Pilot Studies

During my doctoral coursework, I conducted my own research related to the aforementioned topics through two pilot studies. The first, for the EDUC 222 series in 2010-2011, examined the occurrence of *conscientization* (Freire, 1970, 1973) among students in a Chicana/o Studies course which I taught during Spring 2011¹. The study suggested that many students were in fact having shifts in critical social consciousness and ethnic identity. However, it also significantly suggested that the pedagogical approach in the course was very important to the students. It is important to note that I was not looking for the latter element in the students' responses and was initially tempted to disregard it had it not been for the emphasis and frequency in which it came up. When students were prompted to write about the "most meaningful aspects" of the course, their most frequent answer referred to their appreciation of the delivery and attitude of the teacher towards the course material and towards the students.

The second pilot study, for the EDUC 299 series in 2011-2012, examined the value of Augusto Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed* as a tool for student engagement inside the classroom.

The study showed that students were *emotionally engaged* (Handelsman, Briggs, Sullivan, &

¹ The research setting for both studies was the same. I have been teaching a lower division Chicana/o Studies course for six years. The course is titled "Chicano Studies 212: Introduction to Comparative: Ethnic and Global Societies." I conducted the first study in the Spring of 2011 and the second in the Spring of 2012.

Towler, 2005) in the course and that the Theater of the Oppressed exercises served to 1.) develop their interpersonal relationships with each other and 2.) concretize concepts that may have been abstract up until then. Both of these studies have prompted me to further examine the value of using Theater of the Oppressed as a tool for engagement and empowerment as part of a larger Freirean approach in tertiary education and particularly within Chicana/o Studies.

Through the pilot studies, I was able to see the primacy that students place on pedagogy thus reinforcing Acuña's (2009) assertions that pedagogy should be a central concern of Chicana/o Studies. In both studies, the students very clearly stated they appreciate a teaching style where they feel their opinions and experiences are valued². This is consistent with other findings in educational research which articulate that students (in particular Students of Color) respond favorably to pedagogies that validate their experiences and where the teacher develops a relationship with the students that respects the students' voice (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; T. C. Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Steele, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999). Although the students were not using such terms, the kind of educator and pedagogy they said they appreciate is often referred to in education circles as *Freirean* pedagogy and is marked by an educator that values students' experiences and knowledge, presents information for students' consideration -not for their forced consumption, and sees the ultimate purpose of education as liberation not domestication. While some scholars (Acuña, 2009; M. Garcia & Castro, 2011; Solórzano, 1989) point to Freirean approaches as good guiding principles in Chicana/o Studies pedagogy, a similar connection has not readily been made to the work of Augusto Boal. Boal's

² It is important to note that the course where I conducted these studies does not discuss conscientization, pedagogy, classroom engagement, or anything of that nature. It is a course that deals primarily with the histories, worldviews, and current conditions of African Americans, Asians, and Latinos in the United States. When I asked students to reflect on the course and aspects they found meaningful, they stressed that the approach was just as important (if not more important) as the content. Specifically, they mentioned that the seemingly "non-judgmental" and caring nature of the teacher was very important to them. Upon further questioning, the students also stated that those qualities were very rare among the college teachers they had encountered.

Theater of the Oppressed offers an embodiment of Freirean concepts that can be deployed in the classroom in a novel, engaging, and empowering way.

Background and Rationale

Augusto Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed* (1979) offers valuable potential contributions to the field of Chicana/o Studies and critical education studies. These academic fields promote critical consciousness, empowerment, and protagonistic agency of marginalized people through education. The salient Freirean nature of Theater of the Oppressed makes it a natural fit for Chicana/o Studies and critical pedagogy as a pedagogical tool for emancipation. Although Boalian theater and critical pedagogy have been previously, albeit not extensively, linked (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009b; Denzin, 2007; L. A. Howard, 2004; Saldaña, 2005), the same connection has not readily been made between T.O. and Chicana/o Studies. This is an enormous opportunity waiting to be explored. Boal's Theater of the Oppressed would benefit Chicano Studies for the following reasons: a) Chicana/o Studies and T.O. are "theoretically compatible" (i.e. their core principles are in line), b) Chicana/o Studies needs to reinvent its pedagogical approaches, and c) T.O. has valuable potential contributions to make in terms of student learning and engagement especially within a Freirean framework. Incorporating T.O. as an exemplar of critical pedagogy/Freirean pedagogy³ into Chicana/o Studies would mutually strengthen all three of those traditions.

³ For purposes of this study only, I am using critical pedagogy and Freirean pedagogy as fairly synonymous. Through these terms I am referring to philosophies and methods that explicitly seek to enact dialogic student/teacher relationships that are aimed at empowerment, agency, and critical consciousness.

Theater of the Oppressed⁴

Since Theater of the Oppressed will be the centerpiece for this study, it deserves an at-length overview. The Theater of the Oppressed is a broad set of highly interactive games, techniques, and exercises that are designed to increase dialogical forms of interaction and bring about personal and societal transformation (Boal, 1979, 1992, 2006). Augusto Boal began developing early versions of T.O. in the 1950s although those prototypes were more akin to conventional theater with a political message than to what we have come to know today as T.O. He experienced several major turning points in the evolution of T.O. It is worth mentioning one of those events in particular. While in his home country of Brazil, Boal would often develop theater works to be presented to the peasantry throughout the countryside. In one of his plays, Boal and his actors were dressed as rifle-carrying peasants and, through the play, they proposed for the landless peasants to rise in arms against the landed aristocracy. At the end of the play, a few peasants expressed delight that the actors, just like the peasants, were committed to “shed their blood” for land reform (Goodman, 2009). However, when the peasants invited the actors to join them in an upcoming armed confrontation against the landowners, an apologetic Boal had to tell the peasants that he and his troupe were only *acting* as peasants and their rifles were only theater props. Furthermore, none of the actors had any real intentions of shedding *their* blood. Boal claims that after this embarrassing episode he swore he would never again go and dictate solutions to others when he himself was not prepared to take on those risks (Taussig & Schechner, 1994). He also keenly saw that he was not an expert on others’ realities like he thought he was. Through realizations such as these, Boal eventually designed a set of exercises that would allow all people to participate in a collective dialogue to describe and analyze their

⁴ The following descriptions of T.O. are based on Boal’s written works, his 2009 radio interview on "Democracy Now," an interview with Michael Taussig and Richard Schechner, as well as several workshops I attended with him and numerous personal communications I had with him between 1995-2008.

own oppressive realities as well as collectively generate ideas and possibilities on how to best engage with those realities. Best of all, he even designed techniques where the participants could rehearse their interventions through a *Forum Theater* (1979, 1992).

How the Theater of the Oppressed Works

All of the exercises in the “arsenal of the Theater of the Oppressed” (Boal, 1992) are designed with the aim of replacing monologues and creating dialogues among the participants. This is done first by having the participants play games that get them to interact with each other in ways that are out of the ordinary. Boal argues that in order to have open and productive conversations about difficult subjects, we have to think and act in ways in which we normally do not behave; he calls this “demechanizing” (Boal, 1992) the mind and body. The games are also meant to “dynamize” and sharpen the senses by getting us to “see what we look at,” “listen to what we hear” and “feel what we touch” (1992). These exercises are somewhat akin to what are commonly called *ice-breaker* games. They get the participants out of their routine patterns of thinking and moving and start to build bonds of trust. Many of the games also function as metaphors for social issues.

The most popular branch of T.O. worldwide is *Forum Theater* where participants collectively explore different types of interventions to a specific oppression (Boal, 1992). A typical session lasts between 2-6 hours in length and generally consists of a series of games that *demechanize* the participants followed by a few *Image Theater* (Boal, 1992) exercises which promote examining visual representations of oppressions. The participants then break into small groups where they discuss oppressions that resonate with them and subsequently create a short (usually 2-5 minute) skit that shows a protagonist encountering one of those oppressions. The skit is presented to the audience who will intervene by replacing the protagonist in the scene and

try to bring the scene to a new desired ending. This format allows the participants to discuss and analyze the scene as well as “practice” their intervention. See Appendices 3 & 4 for detailed explanations of how T.O. was used in this class.

The Freirean Connection

Key to a Boalian methodology is what Boal terms a “*spectator*” (1992) which means there is not a distinction between actors and spectators; we *all* have the ability to observe critically and act upon our analysis. This term is an embodiment of what Peter McLaren calls “protagonistic agency” (2009) referring to a person who becomes aware of the constraints that mediate their life and through praxis becomes full of possibilities as they *act* upon the world. In a Theater of the Oppressed session, all the attendants are considered *spectators*. As one scholar states it, “Boal asserts that traditional theater oppresses people, since it supports ways of thinking that alienate, immobilize, and mute those not directly attached to lines of power...For Boal, knowing what to do accomplishes little if no one actually ‘does’” (L. A. Howard, 2004, p. 221). The Boalian concept of a *spectator* is very closely related to Paulo Freire’s (1970) concept of *praxis* –the unification of theory and practice. There is clearly a fundamentally Freirean nature to Boal’s work. In fact, it might be helpful to think of T.O. as a theatrical method to implement *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (for which *Theater of the Oppressed* is named after). Another commonality among T.O. and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is the centrality of dialogue. As was previously stated, the ultimate objective of Boalian theater is to transform oppressive monological relationships into humanizing dialogues. This happens within the workshops by, first of all, engaging all the participants in games where they can examine what it means to be in a dialogue and, secondly, by participating in collective strategies and interventions. It is important to note that in T.O. as in Freirean approaches, dialogue does not simply mean “turn-

taking” (McLaren, 2007, p. 32) in a conversation but refers to a *type of relationship* (whether personal or societal) where all parties involved are full participants.

Another notably Freirean concept that arises from T.O., and specifically Forum Theater is that of “generative themes” -topics that participants generate which will be used as the centerpieces of their student-centered curriculum (Freire, 1970, 1973). In other words, the topics to be studied do not get imposed on students but rather are generated *by* the students themselves so they can find more relevance in their curriculum and also become actors *on* the world. In Forum Theater, this happens when the participants are given theatrical tools to generate their own themes. Rather than use written texts or merely talking about an issue, the spectators physically interact and manipulate dramatized representations of the *codified* (Freire, 1973) generative themes. The ensuing *forum* revolves around the presented skits.

Commonalities Among Freire, Chicano Studies, and Boal

Over a century and a half ago, Karl Marx warned us that capitalist social relations inevitably lead to dehumanizing conditions and shallow utilitarian relationships for its participants (Allman, 2007; Brenner, 2007; Marx, 1975, 1976). Paulo Freire developed these ideas further. He proposed using dialogical education as a method to humanize and to help everyone reach their “ontological vocation.” Freire, and in particular his most popular book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), which grew out of the struggle against a fascist coup in Brazil, often get categorized as work about literacy or simply about education. However, Freire's work advocates a much larger social project. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire makes an argument for developing a society which allows the full humanization of every person. This, of course, can only be achieved through genuine dialogical relationships at every level of society. Freire also emphasizes that in order to break through the false consciousness that Marx

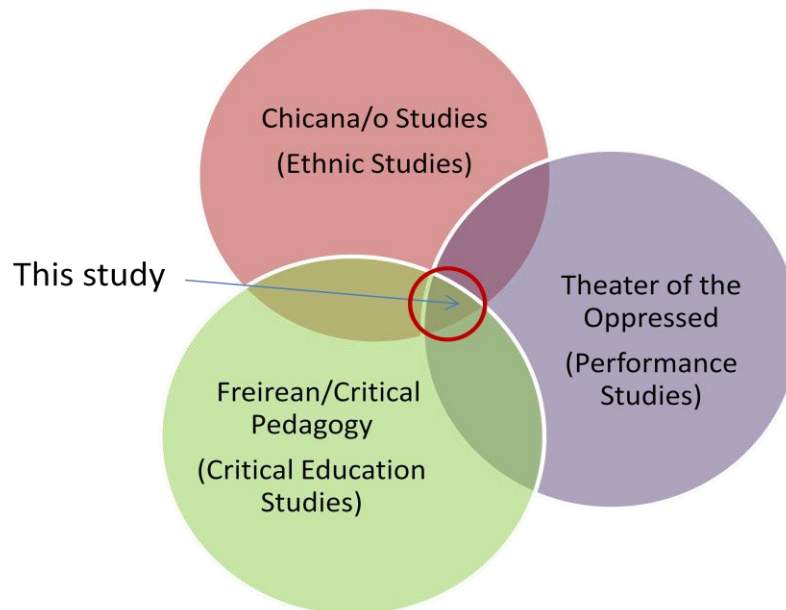
talks about, educators must promote and support the development of a critical social consciousness which he calls *conscientização* (1970, 1973). This new consciousness will be the catalyst that leads people to ultimately create a new type of more equitable society.

Chicana/o Studies, from its inception, has also been devoted to similar endeavors. Namely, the *Plan de Santa Barbara* (Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education, 1969) which is commonly considered the Chicano Master Plan for Higher Education, outlines the objectives and future implementation of Chicana/o Studies programs in universities (Rangel, 2007). The *Plan* heavily emphasizes self-liberation, empowerment, political consciousness, and community building (Acuña, 2011; Gómez-Quñones & Vasquez, Forthcoming; Soldatenko, 2009). According to the *Plan*, the primary function of Chicana/o Studies is to promote these ideas through higher education. In other words, education is not just for education's sake but rather it is to be used as a political instrument for liberation. Although the *Plan* predates the English and Spanish translation of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and the official coining of critical pedagogy, it nonetheless sees the role of education in a very similar way to Freire and other critical pedagogues. Furthermore, some scholars assert that the conscientization that Freire advocates was being promoted and enacted by Chicana/o educators before they even heard of Paulo Freire (Acuña, 2011; M. Garcia, 2011). The emphasis on a critical consciousness on behalf of the *Plan* is not only akin to Freire's *conscientização* but also heavily echoes Marx's emphasis that "class consciousness was the fertilizer of revolution" (Wheen, 2006, p. 14).

Moreover, the Plan de Santa Barbara gave examples of what a Chicano Studies curriculum should look like. The *Plan's* architects very deliberately incorporated the arts into the program. In particular, they promote the use of theater in the curriculum although mostly as a standalone class (Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education, 1969). The framers were

conscious of the power of art as pedagogy. Since then, many Chicano educators have found the use of theater as a valuable tool for pedagogy and transformation (D. G. Garcia, 2008). As Figure 1 shows, this study is located in an intersection that includes Chicana/o Studies, Freirean/critical pedagogy, and the Theater of the Oppressed.

Figure 1: Relevant Frameworks for Research Study



We can see that Boal, Freire, and Chicano Studies are fundamentally adherents of education as liberation. They all place a high value on conscientization, empowerment, agency, and transformation. In Marx's famous words, "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to *change* it" (1975, p. 423). None of the aforementioned traditions are merely interested in interpreting or describing the world; they all very clearly have a progressive social and political agenda to change the world in a manner that allows disenfranchised populations to reengage in the process of *becoming*. However, although these individual traditions offer much in terms of liberatory educational possibilities, they would stand to do so much more if working in tandem. In an age when poor students and Students of Color

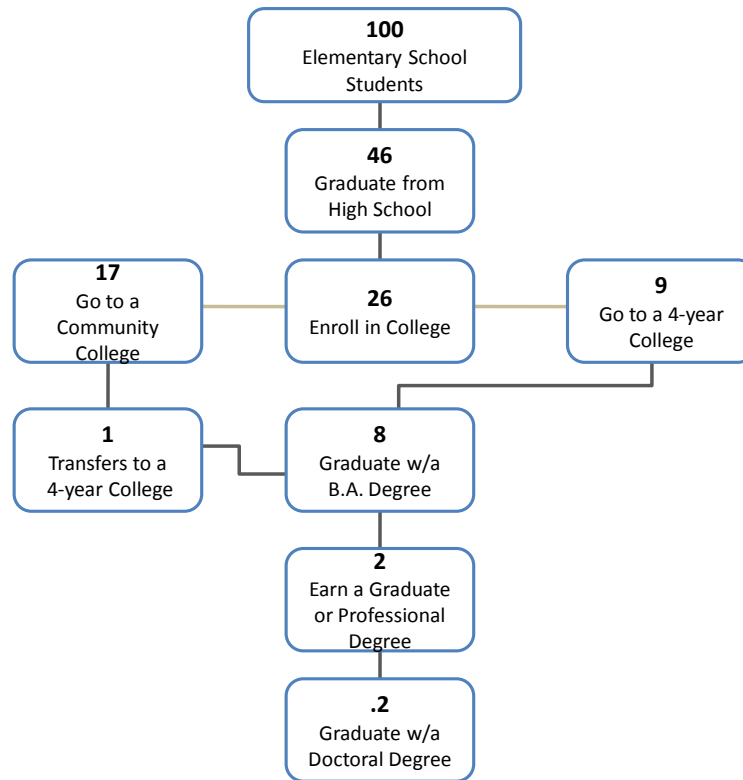
are catastrophically underserved by our current educational system, these traditions have an exigent calling to share ideas and combine forces that could aid these students.

Chicanos⁵ and Education

In their discourses, many U.S. politicians repeatedly emphasize the uniqueness and greatness of American democracy. However, it is hard to tout the democratic nature of this society when entire segments of the population, like working-class Chicanos/Mexicanos as a group, are extremely unlikely to fully enjoy the fruits of the American educational system. In its current form, this system has clearly failed to meet the educational needs of Chicano/Mexicano students. In K-12, these students trail far behind their White counterparts in most academic measures (Valencia, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999). Although Latinos' college enrollment rates continue to rise (at 32% during 2010) they still hold the lowest college graduation rate than any other major ethnic group (Fry, 2011). According to the College Board Policy and Advocacy Center, "In 2009, 19.2 percent of Latino 25- to 34-year-olds had attained an associate degree or higher—less than half the national rate. The national average is 41.1" (Lee et al., 2011, p. 6). These trends are most succinctly represented in the Chicana/o Educational Pipeline (Yosso, 2006; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006) which demonstrates how there are "leaks" among major junctures in the pipeline between elementary school and the doctoral level. Figure 2 demonstrates the numbers along the Chicana/o Educational Pipeline.

⁵ I use Duncan-Andrade's (2005) very practical (albeit simplified) definition of *Chicano*, "for the purposes of this [study], the term Chicano is meant to represent people of Mexican ancestry living in the United States" (p. 579). For this dissertation, I also use the term Mexican/Mexicano as synonymous with *Chicano* simply to honor the voices of Mexicans in the United States who still prefer to use the term "Mexican" as their primary ethnic designation.

Figure 2: The Chicana/o Educational Pipeline



Source: Yosso, T. J., & Solorzano, D. G. (2006). Leaks in the Chicana and Chicano educational pipeline. In C. A. Noriega (Ed.), *Latino policy & issues brief (Vol. 13)*. Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

Although much rhetoric has focused on "college access" for Chicanos, there is not as much meaningful discourse about what happens after Chicano students get into college and how to help them get their degree. For Latino students in general, some of the current approaches to remedy this problem outside the classroom range from revising policy, to securing adequate resources and support, to public information campaigns. However, by merely focusing on degree attainment, the Chicano community faces the possibility that a larger portion of its members will have degrees and yet the community will still not be in a better place socially, economically, or politically. The college education these students receive needs to be one that ultimately raises the critical consciousness of not only the students but their communities as well.

Otherwise, we risk becoming merely "educated servants" (Wilson, 1993). Critical educators, and Chicana/o Studies in particular, need to ensure that Chicano students use their college education to empower their communities.

Inside the classroom, approaches such as culturally relevant (and culturally responsive) teaching (Gay, 2000; T. C. Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009), critical pedagogy (Allman, 2001; Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009a; Giroux, 2009; McLaren, 2007), Critical Race Pedagogy (Lynn, 1999), and decolonizing pedagogies (Grosfoguel, 2008; Tejeda, Espinoza, & Gutierrez, 2003) could potentially help teachers become more effective with all students but could especially help with marginalized students such as working-class Chicanos. Culturally relevant/responsive teaching would be beneficial to Chicanos in college because it emphasizes viewing Students of Color from an assets-based framework and insists on undermining deficit frameworks in all of its embodiments in education (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2010). Critical pedagogy is necessary in educating Chicanos because it emphasizes critical consciousness and agency which means that students must be able to contextualize themselves socially, historically, politically, economically, etc. in order to see how they can become agents for social change (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009; McLaren, 2007). Critical Race Pedagogy (Lynn, 1999) is also valuable to inform educators on the role that race plays for Chicanos especially since this group has long been a *racialized* people in the U.S. Finally, Decolonial/decolonizing pedagogies are necessary to incorporate into Chicano education because of its overtly anti-racist and anti-capitalist approach. Its efforts to decolonize students and teachers is particularly important given that the effects of colonialism are embodied in educational systems through *coloniality* (Grosfoguel, 2008; Quijano, 2000). Grosfoguel (2008) argues that "Coloniality allows us to understand the continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonial

administrations, produced by colonial cultures and structures in the modern/colonial capitalist world-system" (p. 8). This is a valuable tool to understand how current educational structures are still tied to an ongoing colonial project.

Although all of these frameworks have much to offer, they are not explicitly and extensively being explored as part of *college* pedagogies and curriculum even though Chicano students in higher education could benefit from these approaches as much as anybody.

Addressing the Needs of These Traditions

The Need to Reinvent Pedagogy in Chicana/o Studies.

In a recent article, Rudy Acuña (2009), who many consider an important figure of Chicana/o Studies, has stated that the discipline which he helped establish over 40 years ago has all but abandoned pedagogy and generally de-emphasized teaching in order to pursue more alluring academic endeavors like research and publishing. He argues that although the origins of Chicana/o Studies were student-centered and emphasized an accessible pedagogy, the discipline has deviated from its initial values and needs to return to its roots if it is to stay relevant and empowering to Chicana/o students. Although Chicana/o Studies has made valuable contributions to research and the academy overall, a cursory glance through its premier publications will show that there is a notable absence of articles focusing on pedagogy in Chicana/o Studies thus lending credence to Acuña's assertions. Acuña is calling for a reconnection, reinvention, and expansion of Chicana/o Studies' pedagogical repertoire. This study is an answer to that call.

Deploying a Critical Pedagogy

At the same time that Chicana/o Studies is seemingly deemphasizing student-centered pedagogy, educational theorists are reminding us of the high importance and positive benefits of engaging students in higher education (Guenther & Miller, 2011; Kuh, 2003; Pascarella, 2005).

It seems that Chicana/o Studies could greatly benefit from revisiting its pedagogical practices and find new ways of engaging students. In this case, critical pedagogy would have at least part of the answer because it centers many of the principles that Chicana/o Studies values such as conscientization, praxis, counter-hegemonic resistance, agency, and social transformation (Darder, et al., 2009b; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; McLaren, 2007). If Chicana/o Studies wants to rediscover its Freirean roots, it would be wise to consult with the branch that has further developed Freirean pedagogy for the last 30 years. However, a common critique of critical pedagogy is that it can be somewhat abstract and elusive to deploy (Ellsworth, 1989; L. A. Howard, 2004) which is why critical pedagogy would stand to gain tremendously from the development of methods that can tangibly be used as critical pedagogy. Frequently, critical pedagogues will say that critical pedagogy does not offer “blueprints” or cannot be reduced to a simple laundry list (Cole, Hill, McLaren, & Rikowski, 2001; Darder, et al., 2009a; McLaren, 2007). While this is valid reasoning, Theater of the Oppressed offers a concrete method that is in line with the principles of critical pedagogy without becoming a perfunctory formula.

Theater of the Oppressed Undertheorized

Although Theater of the Oppressed practitioners and participants have often claimed that the use of T.O. has a positive affective impact among the participants, at this juncture, these assertions are not well documented in refereed journals. This is a major limitation in providing backing through research for this pedagogical approach. The literature on this topic has grown but mostly through descriptive texts rather than empirical research. Furthermore, Theater of the Oppressed is still somewhat “trapped” in university theater departments. A search as to *where* and *who* is using T.O. would reveal, not surprisingly, that very few non-theater educators actually use it inside the classroom. Despite its popularity and potential as a transformative tool,

T.O. is still a rarity in classroom instruction and even more rare in educational research dealing with pedagogy. Chicano Studies, Ethnic Studies and courses which place a premium on student empowerment offer Theater of the Oppressed an opportunity to enter non-theater classrooms and do what it is designed to do – engage and empower people. Moreover, this move needs to also be paired with research articles on what happens when these two merge since the research on Theater of the Oppressed is limited. This study will partly fill those gaps and build on the existing research to add scope and depth to the Theater of the Oppressed literature.

Creating a Synergy Between These Frameworks

There are very clear opportunities for Theater of the Oppressed, Chicana/o Studies, and critical pedagogy to mutually benefit from each other. At this point, the synergy between the three has not been formally explored. As was stated before, critical pedagogy and T.O. both have valuable potential contributions to Chicana/o Studies given that the field is currently in need of reinventing itself pedagogically. Some Chicana/o Studies practitioners have linked critical pedagogy with Chicana/o Studies although often not in explicit terms. Moreover, the relevance of Freire as an important contributor to pedagogy in Chicana/o Studies has also been established (M. Garcia, 2011; Solórzano, 1989). Chicana/o Studies offers critical pedagogy an opportunity to develop its “culturally relevant” (Ladson-Billings, 2009) aspect while Chicana/o Studies stands to gain from critical pedagogy’s well developed educational philosophy. Although some critical pedagogues have already explicitly made the connection between critical pedagogy and Theater of the Oppressed (Darder, et al., 2009b; Denzin, 2007; L. A. Howard, 2004) this link should be much stronger.

With the growing popularity of the Theater of the Oppressed in the United States today, it is time that T.O. comes of age and introduces itself to other fields as an engaging pedagogical

method. Fields like Chicana/o Studies are perfectly matched with T.O. because they are fundamentally concerned with the same core principles. Furthermore, by deploying T.O. as a Freirean pedagogical approach in the tradition of critical pedagogy all of the frameworks that are brought together stand to benefit. More importantly, the greatest beneficiaries are the students that will be spared the agony of yet *another* lecture-format class. Theater of the Oppressed is a refreshing vehicle in education to promote student and social transformations. Boal, Freire, Chicana/o Studies, and critical pedagogy should all be brought together to create a synergistic educational approach to further the larger social project of building a more equitable society. Albert Einstein once noted that insanity is "doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." With so much at stake for Chicano students and so many opportunities available through these different frameworks, it is high time we try something radically different so we may achieve radically different results.

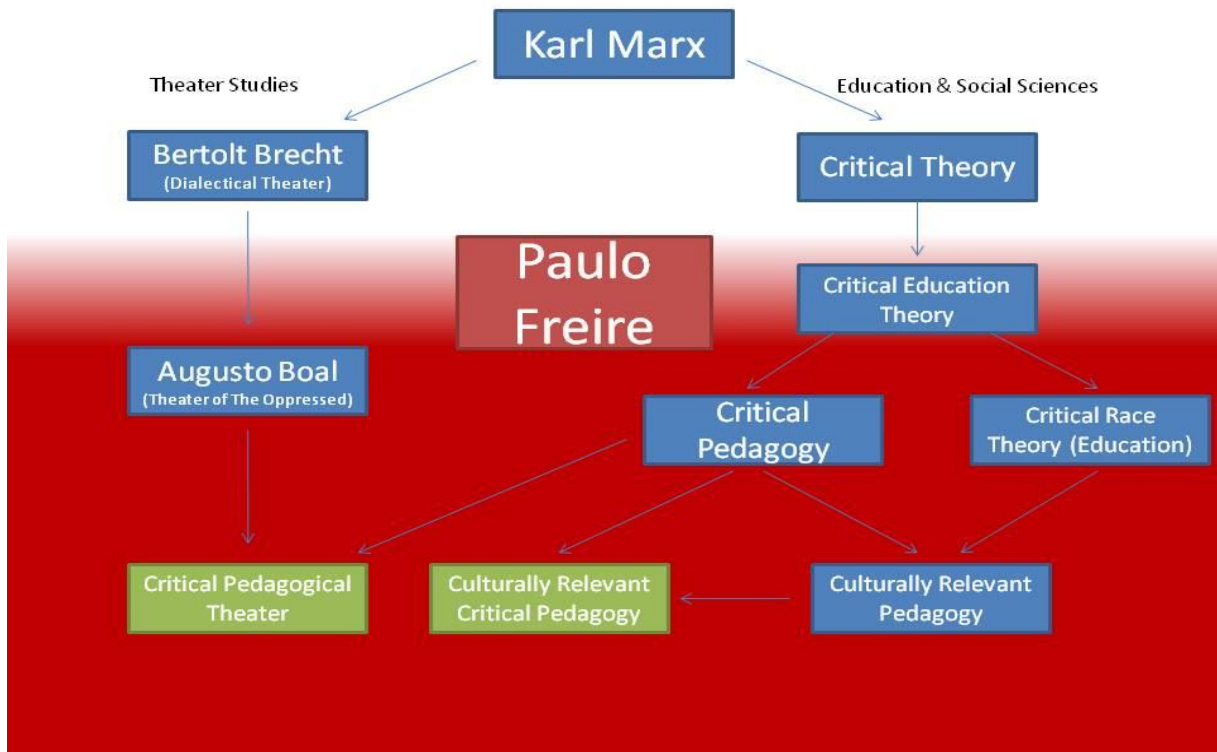
CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES & LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Perspectives

This study is working broadly within the tradition of critical theory in education. Primarily, the study uses the theories of Paulo Freire, Augusto Boal, and critical pedagogy in order to better understand the role of schooling, consciousness, and agency among working-class Chicana/o students in the United States. There is a great deal of consistency among these theories in that they all centralize the importance of conscientization, empowerment, agency, and transformation. It is not surprising that when consulting the literature on these traditions they inevitably will cite Karl Marx because of his landmark contributions to these same concepts. Although these traditions and theorists may not explicitly brand themselves as "Marxist," they nonetheless exhibit the critical and dialectical nature of a Marxist humanist (Allman, 2007; Cole, 2008; McLaren & Jaramillo, 2010) social theory. While most Chicana/o Studies scholars would not place Chicana/o Studies within a Marxist framework, many of the desired educational outcomes mentioned above are also desired by Chicana/o Studies. Figure 3 shows some of the frameworks that could help better contextualize the Theater of the Oppressed and its place within critical traditions and particularly critical education.

Figure 3: Theater of the Oppressed and Relevant Critical Frameworks



It should be clearly noted that the arrows and boxes shown in Figure 3 do not represent a unilinear evolution of any of the traditions mentioned. For example, it would be incomplete and inaccurate to say that Boal got his ideas from Brecht who got them from Marx. I am simply attempting to show how the *critical* traditions in education and theater studies have a certain dialectical *family resemblance* which has not been extensively unified in the academic literature such as is the case with Boalian Theater (influenced by Freire, critical theory, Brecht, etc.) which is widely being used by people in critical performance studies but is largely unknown to their educational counterparts.

Rather than look like a nicely discernible family tree, in actuality, this genealogy should look like an entangled spider's nest with threads connecting all over the place. Furthermore, the arrows are meant to show, only for purposes of this study, how I conceptualize these frameworks

and the lineage of some key ideas. I am fully aware that the arrows often flow in both directions and that influence and exchange of ideas is constantly happening in several directions simultaneously. Such is the case with critical pedagogy, Critical Race Theory in Education, and culturally relevant pedagogy. Lastly, I am not implying that all of these traditions have their origins exclusively in Marxist thought but that they are committed to conscientization, empowerment, agency, and transformation in similar ways that Marx identified in his writings.

One of the important features this chart demonstrates is that critical theater studies and critical educational studies are two branches which, although they have similar ideological underpinnings, are not readily connected through the academic literature. While people like Boal and Brecht saw their theater as pedagogy, it is still a rarity for critical educators to incorporate this type of pedagogy into their non-theater classrooms. This study will partially bridge that gap.

The bottom left corner (green boxes) of the chart represents emerging or combined fields that seem to be the best fit and most fertile ground for this study. While those terms are not widely, if at all, used at this point, they represent combinations of concepts/fields which are the primary concern for this study. Although the phrase "culturally relevant critical pedagogy" is used only in passing in one sentence by Jeff Duncan-Andrade (2005), it nonetheless grabbed my attention because that is where I see this work situated -critical pedagogy that is culturally relevant. Moreover, Theater of the Oppressed as a primary exemplar of "Critical Pedagogical Theater" (Denzin, 2007) or "Critical Performative Pedagogy" (Pineau, 2002) also serves to unify two branches of critical studies that have not widely been joined in the classroom. Lastly, while there is a certain Marxist thread running through all the boxes in the chart, Paulo Freire has also heavily and directly influenced the boxes in the bottom half of the chart (shaded in red).

Literature Review

In my experience as an educator and in my efforts to build a decolonizing pedagogy in the college classroom, I have found it valuable to draw from and combine the traditions of Chicana/o Studies, Theater of the Oppressed, and critical pedagogy. However, a survey of the literature regarding these traditions would reveal, first and foremost, that the three areas have not been readily linked by academics despite their similar objectives and clear ideological congruence. The search would also reveal that all three have major gaps especially when it comes to *empirical research* literature. While critical pedagogy and Chicana/o Studies have established some ties (mostly by practitioners rather than researchers), the Theater of the Oppressed is intimately tied to Freire and critical pedagogy although one would not easily be able to tell merely by consulting the existing literature. Moreover, the Theater of the Oppressed, despite its potential contributions to a "social justice" curriculum and pedagogy has not been *discovered* by Chicana/o Studies. This literature review will show how the Theater of the Oppressed is currently being used in education in order to show its potential contributions for broader use in education and in particular Chicana/o Studies.

Theater of the Oppressed Literature

Although there is an ever increasing growth in the Theater of the Oppressed literature for popular consumption, there are very few research articles dealing with T.O. since "few interactive practitioners have published their experiences, choosing to 'do' rather than to 'speak'" (L. A. Howard, 2004, p. 218). Furthermore, within the T.O. research literature (at least those published in English and Spanish) there are almost no in-depth empirical studies. At this point, it is not possible to speak of substantial research-based findings to support claims of what T.O. can do in the classroom. The bulk of the literature regarding T.O. is descriptive. This

descriptive literature can be split into two groups -Boal's writings and others' writings about Boal's work. First, Boal's (1979, 1992, 1995, 1998, 2006) books are the primary written source of our understandings of T.O.⁶ Through his books, he has outlined the theoretical and philosophical origins of T.O. as well as given us detailed outlines as to how certain aspects of T.O. work. One of his books in particular (1992), is primarily devoted to describing scores of games so the reader can use it as a sort of "recipe book" to *do* the games. His other books mostly explore theory and its applications.

The descriptive material that has been written *about* Boal's work is most often written by practitioners and found on websites which facilitate accessibility for the lay-person or novice. Among the major publications specifically about Theater of the Oppressed, one deserves special mention. *Playing Boal: Theater, Therapy, and Activism* (Schutzman & Cohen-Cruz, 1994) is an important and fairly early (relative to T.O.'s popularity in the U.S.) publication which examines Boalian techniques and processes in different contexts. It is, for the most part, a collection of stories told by T.O. practitioners which can help others better theorize and conceptualize what T.O. is capable of doing. As important as this book has been, it is not a "how-to" book for the new practitioner nor does it particularly enlighten the reader on what the T.O. participants are experiencing during the workshops -certainly not from the average participant's point of view. This is not an empirical study and therefore does not shed light on many of the nuances that researchers are concerned with.

While the small set of research literature on T.O. is growing, it nonetheless has certain notable characteristics which suggest certain opportunities for future development. A cursory glance through T.O. research literature would reveal that it is primarily used in certain types of

⁶ While Boal's books are the primary *written* source about T.O., I am not aware of any practitioners that learned how to do T.O. through books. Most people that have a concrete understanding of T.O. have learned it through live T.O. workshops and demonstrations.

environments. For example, and not surprisingly, a great deal of the articles that I have encountered primarily discuss the use of Theater of the Oppressed in college theater classes and are written by college theater professors or, at the very least, are targeted at a readership interested in theater education (Burgoyne et al., 2003; Burgoyne et al., 2005; Green, 2001; Paterson, 1994; Saldaña, 2005; Taylor, 2002). A great deal of interest in Boal has also been shown in the therapy and medical fields (K. Brown & Gillespie, 1997; Case & Brauner, 2010; Morrison, 1993; Proctor, Perlesz, Moloney, McIlwaine, & O'Neill, 2008; Sajjani, 2009; Wainberg et al., 2007). These fields are primarily attracted to T.O. because of its ability to promote critical self-reflection as well as its centering of agency which helps individuals overcome a sense of hopelessness and aids in their healing, whether physical or psychological. T.O. is also being used in those same fields to train medical workers and prepare them for difficult situations in their field.

More specific to my immediate interests, Education and Boal have been linked up through the literature, albeit not extensively. There is a great excitement among educators that have discovered Boal and have realized the contributions which T.O. can make to education. Unfortunately, T.O. in Education occupies a very narrow niche. Among the existing education literature, T.O. is primarily used in teacher education programs or other pre-service teacher trainings (Bhukhanwala, 2007; Cahnmann-Taylor & Souto-Manning, 2010; Cahnmann, Rymes, & Souto-Manning, 2005; Cockrell, Placier, Burgoyne, Welch, & Cockrell, 2002; Placier et al., 2005; Rymes, Cahnmann-Taylor, & Souto-Manning, 2008). While these studies serve a key function in informing us on T.O. as a pedagogical method, there is relatively little emphasis placed on the experiences of the students themselves especially as in-depth empirical studies.

One notable exception is the book *Teacher's Act Up! Creating Multicultural Learning*

Communities Through Theater (Cahnmann-Taylor & Souto-Manning, 2010) which gives much needed in-depth views into students' impressions of using T.O. in their learning. It provides plenty of vignettes of students' voices and the authors' reflections to help the reader get a better understanding on the learning process by using T.O. The book also provides the reader with detailed explanations of the exercises which students go through as well as background and theoretical considerations on T.O. In-depth studies like this are needed in order to fully realize the pedagogical potential of T.O.

While the aforementioned literature is welcomed for the valuable insights it offers in the use of T.O., it still does not centrally address my specific interests. I am not interested in using T.O. to teach theater or courses *on* the Theater of the Oppressed, nor am I primarily concerned with using it as therapy or in teacher training. Although there is ample research that demonstrates the effectiveness of incorporating drama into classroom pedagogy (Bolton, 1979; Courtney, 1980; Heathcote & Bolton, 1995 ; McCammon, 2007; O'Connor, 2012; O'Toole, 2009; Vine, 1993) these approaches are often devoid of explicit political objectives or social critiques. Although they would be far from being "apolitical," most approaches that use theater in education do not have conscientization as a primary objective.

I am much more interested in the applications of T.O. in teaching undergraduate classes, especially ones that teach about social issues. To date, I have only found three research writings that come close to this purpose - one conference paper and two dissertations (Burlison, 2003; Gómez Albarello, 2007; Vierk, 1997). Gómez Albarello's (2007) conference paper describes his use of T.O. in an undergraduate Political Science classroom as having two primary objectives; to get students to reflect on the concept of *power* and power dynamics, and to combat the *disembodiment* of knowledge, teaching, and learning. Importantly, he also reports on the

student's reflections on each individual exercise he did with them. Vierk (1997), on the other hand, used Theater of the Oppressed to "help students access and expand their creativity" as well as to get them to reflect on issues of oppression all within the context of an English class. An objective of her course was to enlighten students on issues of oppression by assigning readings that dealt with oppression and using T.O. to better conceptualize those issues. Finally, Burleson's (2003) dissertation focuses on her use of T.O. to teach introductory Public Speaking courses. She uses T.O. primarily to get students to reflect on their "selfhood" and on the norms of nonverbal communication especially their own practices. Burleson's use of T.O. does not have an explicit and immediate "social justice" objective.

There is a certain thread that ties most of these readings together. The majority of these studies demonstrate the great potential of using the Theater of the Oppressed as a method to promote self-reflection. More specifically, when T.O. is used, it is frequently for the purpose of getting the participants to reflect on social issues such as oppression, multiculturalism, and power dynamics. Not surprisingly, these objectives very closely match the ideals found in Paulo Freire's work, which as mentioned before, largely informs the perspectives of the Theater of the Oppressed. Furthermore, another common use of T.O., especially Forum Theater, seems to be for *training* purposes. Many organizations have found great value in the opportunity to "rehearse for reality" that Forum Theater provides. This training ranges from health care workers (K. Brown & Gillespie, 1997) to pre-service teachers (Cahnmann-Taylor & Souto-Manning, 2010) to even new police recruits (Telesco, 2001).

We can clearly see that T.O. research tends to be localized within certain areas like theater, health care, community organizing, and teacher education. Surprisingly, although T.O. offers valuable potential in classroom pedagogy it has not readily found its way into the non-

theater pedagogical literature. Furthermore, other countries like England have been using T.O. in Theater in Education (TIE) programs for over 30 years (Vine, 1993). This points to undertheorizing and under-usage of T.O. in education in the United States. On a brighter note, this is a great opportunity for growth and discovery for classroom educators and researchers especially those concerned with critical education.

Through my own use of T.O. in classrooms, pilot studies, personal conversations with other T.O. practitioners, and consulting the existing literature, there seems to be a strong consensus of what T.O. can clearly do inside classrooms. It is potentially a useful tool to: 1) explore particular themes by promoting students' reflections on those themes, 2) teach about Freirean concepts, and 3) positively affect classroom dynamics. T.O. is an excellent tool for students to collectively examine and engage with a specific topic that is relevant to the class. Ideally, the topic would come from the students (generative theme) but many educators have now adapted Boal's techniques to teach about a topic that the *teacher* has chosen (K. Brown & Gillespie, 1997). For example, one could use a Forum Theater assignment to have students come up with short skits about topics which resonate with them and which they would want to collectively explore. In an adaptation of this, one could assign a topic (i.e. racial microaggressions, inequality, alienation, etc) and have students come up with a skit to be explored or as an extension of this (often in the interest of time), one could even have a pre-made skit that could be "brought" to students for them to engage within a Forum Theater format. Although T.O. can accomplish all of the aforementioned things, what remains to be conclusively shown through research is how T.O. can promote conscientization.

Conscientização

Throughout my career as an educator I have been concerned with the process Paulo Freire calls *conscientização* (1970, 1973, 1998) (or in English "conscientization") which is the process of a deepening, self-reflexive, critical social consciousness. When referring to this process, Freire frequently uses the metaphorical words "unveiling" and "emergence." These are appropriate metaphors since the student *unveils* the world and the nature of oppression and consequently their critical consciousness *emerges* from a fog of naive consciousness and "culture of silence" (Freire, 1970). Other writers have used different words for a similar concept. What is most salient in these other terms is that they all emphasize the *process* of becoming. Freire argued that the word *conscientização* should be kept in Portuguese untranslated since it has no real equivalent in English and "conscientization" does not capture the total meaning found in Portuguese. Other languages have comparable words that point to this process. Paraphrasing Beiser (2004), Doug Kellner (2009; 2011) states that the German word *Bildung* "refers to the growth, development, and formation of human beings. *Bildung* aims at autonomous learning/self-formation which concerns the whole individual for the purpose of liberating the self and society" (p. 29). Kellner further states that this is similar to the ancient Greek notion of *Paideia* which "as a concept and historical idea emphasizes the importance of education as a general cultural spirit that strives to expand and enrich humanity's knowledge in a way that promotes growth and rational modes of life" (p. 54). In Mexican Spanish this is often referred to simply as *formación* referring to a person's political "formation" and emergence. Gloria Anzaldúa (2002) also emphasizes the *process* by referring to the "path of conocimiento" as being the core of knowing and consciousness.

Freire also refers to this process as consisting of *critical* discovery, *critical* understanding, and *critical* analysis of reality, etc. In this case, the word *critical* not only refers to a deep understanding of an idea but also points to a Marxist dialectical understanding of internal relations such as what Paula Allman (2007) describes as the contradictions, dichotomies, separation, and alienation which can be seen in society. This Marxist element of Freire's work is best kept alive by revolutionary critical pedagogy (Allman, 2001, 2007; McLaren, 2000, 2007; McLaren & Jaramillo, 2010) which concerns itself with Freire and Marx's vision for political and economic transformation.

While much has been written about this process, I have had the opportunity to observe this process through my own *conscientização* (in which Paulo Freire himself played a key role) and by interviewing and observing people that possess a critical consciousness. For purposes of this study, it is essential that I have a working definition of conscientization so I can have something concrete to look for in students that might be in the process of "emerging" or "unveiling." As a starting point, I will use the following working definition/s.

Conscientization is:

1. a marked change in outlook or attitude of how society functions.
2. the increased realization that there are systems of oppression rather than oppressions happening at random or on just an individual basis.
3. taking on the initiative and analytical attitude (critical curiosity) to find out more about how those oppressions work and how they are connected to "me" or "us."
4. developing individual or collective strategies to combat oppressive forces and enacting those strategies

5. *contextualizing* oneself and figuring out “What are the bigger pictures that I am a part of?”

This working definition is by no means meant to be comprehensive in capturing all the nuances in the process of conscientization nor is it a typology of levels of conscientization. It is simply to provide a guide of *what to look for* in students' comments and behaviors which might signal an emerging critical consciousness.

Although Freire has largely informed my current understandings of conscientization, he is by no means the only one. In fact, many theorists have written about this process whether they speak in Freirean terms or not. For example, William Tierney (1993) (as quoted in Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) described critical theory as “an attempt to understand the oppressive aspects of society in order to generate societal and individual transformation” (p. 311). Although he is referring to critical theory, his definition has obvious parallels with the *unveiling* which Freire refers to and which Tierney sees as a primary purpose of critical theory. Similarly, Patti Lather (1991) gives us a definition of "empowerment" which largely overlaps with my above definition of conscientization. She defines empowerment as "analyzing ideas about the causes of powerlessness, recognizing systemic oppressive forces, and acting both individually and collectively to change the conditions of our lives" (1991, p. 4). This coinciding of definitions is not surprising since *conscientização* is a *type* of empowerment and in particular, the type of empowerment which critical educators concern themselves with.

The only part of my working definition that does not overlap with Lather's is point #5 on *contextualizing* oneself. While this point might initially seem a misfit among the other points, it stands to reason that in order to truly understand oppressive forces and take them seriously, students must personalize how they are connected to those oppressive systems as well as have

particular understandings of *who* they are. Gramsci bolsters this claim by stating that "The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory" (2010, p. 324). This is consistent with critical pedagogy which argues that critical pedagogy must be *relevant* in order to be critical, and it must be critical in order to be transformative (Giroux, 1988; McLaren, 2007). Critical Race Theory in Education also echoes the importance of connecting a social justice curriculum with the lived experiences of students. In fact, the "centrality of experiential knowledge" as one of the central tenets of CRT explicitly states that experiential knowledge among marginalized communities is a strength and is "critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education" (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 314). Similarly, other educational efforts have capitalized on this idea by stressing the importance of educational relevance to the student. Namely, culturally relevant pedagogy (Gay, 2000; T. C. Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009) and socially relevant pedagogy (Cammara, 2007) assert the importance of students being able to locate and see themselves in the curriculum and pedagogical approach. In this way, students' learning is placed in an appropriate cultural or social context. This is not just so students can know about the context in which they are situated but to enable them to "discuss courageously the problems of their context -and to intervene in that context" (Freire, 1973, p. 30). In this case, the cultural/social context *is* the conscientizer.

Furthermore, there is a long tradition among oppressed groups of conscientization through understanding of their own social, political, economic, cultural, and spiritual contexts. Examples of such efforts can clearly be seen among African communities through the works of Franz Fanon (1961), Kwame Ture (Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967), and Amilcar Cabral (1974)

in their search to conscientize their communities through understanding of their own socio-political context. Maulana Karenga (1977, 1993) sought an explicitly cultural contextualization while Amos Wilson (1993) and Steve Biko (1998) were concerned with false consciousness among Black communities and tried to replace this colonial "twisted logic" (Biko, 1998, p. 361) with an empowered "Black Consciousness." It is important to note that while all of the aforementioned names were concerned with critical consciousness, they were not unidimensional in their approaches for the masses to understand just *one* context in which they lived. Rather, there was generally a holistic approach that sought to integrate and make whole that which was dismembered by colonization. Malcolm X was a prime example of this. Although his official role for the Nation of Islam was as a minister, his speeches and work went far beyond just preaching about spirituality (Marable, 2011; X & Haley, 1999). He routinely lectured on economic self-sufficiency, African cultural legacy, political empowerment, and social degradation. In his unofficial role as a popular educator, Malcolm X helped his audiences *contextualize* themselves and in doing so he helped bring about critical consciousness and transformation.

Theater of the Oppressed and Teatro Chicano

Although the use of Theater of the Oppressed within a Chicana/o Studies course is fairly novel, the use of theater in Chicano communities as a form of pedagogy has a long tradition. The foremost example of this is the work of Teatro Campesino which during the 1960s and 1970s worked alongside the United Farm Workers to engage and educate farm workers about the issues of fair working conditions and unionization (Broyles-González, 1994; Huerta, 1989; Valdez, 1990). This very celebrated use of theater during the Chicana/o Movement was not overlooked when the framers of the Plan de Santa Barbara designed a sample Chicana/o Studies

curriculum. In their proposed courses, the arts played a prominent role. Notably, there were two courses focused specifically on theater - "History of Chicano Drama" and "Chicano Dramatic Production" (Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education, 1969, p. 46). The authors of the Plan were well aware of the power of theater as a teaching tool and insisted that it be incorporated into a Chicana/o Studies curriculum. More recently, Chicano theater groups like Culture Clash continue this tradition by exhibiting a deeply critical and educational nature in their work (D. G. Garcia, 2008; Montoya, Salinas, & Sigüenza, 1998).

While I am working within the Chicano tradition of using theater as pedagogy, I must stress that the Theater of the Oppressed is not directly coming out of the Chicano theater tradition. This is an important point especially since I have encountered numerous people who conflate Theater of the Oppressed with Teatro Campesino. The issue seems to become even more confused when Theater of the Oppressed is referred to as just "teatro." Given that Chicanos often refer to all theatrical traditions within the Chicana/o Movement simply as "teatro," one can see how this mis-equating can happen. Furthermore, some audiences that may not even be acquainted with Teatro Campesino or Chicano teatro frequently misunderstand the Theater of the Oppressed as *any* theatrical work that deals with issues of oppression or social justice. This is a total misunderstanding of what Theater of the Oppressed is in actuality. The Theater of the Oppressed must be understood as a proper noun. It is a very specific type of theatrical work with its own set of techniques, philosophies, and ideologies. These sophisticated particularities often get lost or dismissed when T.O. is thought of as merely a skit. The Theater of the Oppressed is *not* a play as many people often think. In fact, there is very little *acting* in the conventional sense.

Given that Theater of the Oppressed is *not* Chicano theater, T.O. still falls in line very well with many of the objectives of Chicano theater. Primarily, it is a theater shaped by democratic ideals of popular participation -it is truly *by* the people and *for* the people. Luis Valdez (2008) argues that "Chicano theatre must be revolutionary in technique as well as content. It must be popular, subject to no other critics except the pueblo itself; but it must also educate the pueblo toward an appreciation of social change, on and off the stage" (p. 7-8). In addition, Jorge Huerta (1989) describes the "actos" in Chicano teatro as "brief sketches designed to educate and entertain, exposing issues and offering possible solutions" (p. 6). These comments describe precisely what Theater of the Oppressed seeks to accomplish.

Furthermore, Theater of the Oppressed is designed to be used by just about anyone and just about anywhere -it is meant to be democratic -accessible to the popular masses. One of the ways it achieves this is by minimizing the importance of formal theater "necessities" like a stage, lights, props, trained actors, etc. Instead, it focuses on being resourceful and adapting to different environments. One good illustration of this is a story Augusto Boal told a small group of us in Omaha, NE. Boal tells that he and his group were doing a presentation for some miners in South America. Unfortunately, by the time the miners would get out of the mines it was already getting dark outside and there would be no way the actors could do their presentation because of low visibility. To remedy this, the miners formed a circle where they were all facing in towards the actors in the center. Then, the miners all turned on their headlamps at the same time as they faced the actors in the center "stage." The result? Instant stage lights! Boal jokes that this was a great way to tell if the audience was engaged because as more and more miners became disinterested and turned away or walked away from the circle, the light on the stage would gradually diminish. This story shows the minimalist nature of T.O. when it comes to

expenses and the resourcefulness that T.O. practitioners exhibit. In Chicano teatro this is often referred to as "rasquachismo" which is "an underdog perspective...an attitude rooted in resourcefulness and adaptability" (Ybarra-Frausto, 1991, p. 156). Boal's story of the miners and their lights would be a great example of rasquachismo much akin to Teatro Campesino's use of flatbed trucks as a stage and potato sacks sewn together as a stage curtain (Broyles-González, 1994). In Chicano communities and in marginalized communities all over the world, resourcefulness is an invaluable trait when dealing with poverty.

In summary, although I am working within the Chicano tradition of using theater as pedagogy, the type of theater I am employing is not traditionally known as Chicano theater nor does it even adhere to the norms of conventional theatrical presentations. I stress this point not to distance this work from the tradition of Chicano teatro but simply so the reader may know that these two traditions are not the same. Even so, Theater of the Oppressed fits well into many of the objectives and sensibilities of teatro Chicano.

Student Engagement

The role of student engagement has long been known to be an important factor in student learning (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). However, the majority of research on student engagement focuses on K-12 students (Handelsman, et al., 2005). This is not surprising since in the past, it has widely been held that things like pedagogy and engagement are of secondary importance in the college classroom since only the individual student is responsible for their own learning. More recent research, however, is shedding light on the great importance of student engagement at the college level (Guenther & Miller, 2011; Handelsman, et al., 2005; Kuh, 2001, 2003; Mandernach, Donnelly-Sallee, & Dailey-Hebert, 2011; Pascarella, 2005; Shulman, 2002).

This literature shows a great deal of consistency in what are considered to be good research-based practices. Table 1 demonstrates how three authors summarize research data on college student learning and engagement:

Table 1 : Research-based practices/benchmarks that support student learning and engagement

"principles for good practice in undergraduate education" (Chickering & Gamson, 1987)	"benchmarks for effective educational practices" (Kuh, 2003)	"educational practices that contribute to student engagement" (Guenther & Miller, 2011)
<p>Good Practice:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Encourages student- faculty contact 2. Encourages cooperation among students 3. Encourages active learning 4. Gives prompt feedback 5. Emphasizes time on task 6. Communicates high expectations 7. Respects diverse talents and ways of learning 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. level of student-faculty interaction 2. active and collaborative learning 3. academic challenge 4. supportive campus environment 5. enriching educational experiences. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. diversity experiences 2. shared-learning opportunities 3. student-faculty interaction 4. active learning, and 5. high expectations.

While learning and engagement are not exactly the same thing, these and other researchers have argued that student engagement is indispensable for learning. As Guenther and Miller (2011) argue, "Research over the past few decades on the effectiveness of educational practice has increasingly emphasized the importance of student engagement for achieving many learning outcomes considered central to post-secondary education" (p. 10). The table clearly shows similarities which these researchers argue are the key factors for student learning and engagement. The overlap is most prevalent where all three authors agree that student-faculty

interactions, collaborative learning, and active learning are paramount considerations for effective learning and engagement at the collegiate level. All three practices are embodied by the Theater of the Oppressed when used inside a college classroom.

While some of the engagement literature focuses on the macro-level of campus engagement where researchers examine how a university student population is engaged as a whole, for this study I am most interested in the micro-level of college classroom engagement. In order to understand how Theater of the Oppressed has impacted classroom engagement, I must also be aware of larger engagement patterns in my classroom as a result of other factors. Handelsman et al (2005) claim that “exploratory factor analysis revealed four dimensions of college student engagement that were distinct and reliable: skills engagement, participation/interaction engagement, emotional engagement, and performance engagement” (p. 184). Most relevant to my interests is the emotional engagement which their study argues is a positive predictor of absolute and relative engagement (p. 188). The authors state that this type of engagement is largely invisible and that “instructors receive only part of the picture if they focus on the obvious signs of engagement, such as raising hands and asking questions” (p. 190). They conclude and agree with other researchers that, “Helping students become emotionally engaged may be an important complement to teaching knowledge and skills (Weinstein et al., 1986) and may include teachers' instilling attitudes or developing a culture of learning, fun, and interaction in the classroom” (p. 190). This is relevant to my study since my pilot studies both showed that my students are exhibiting precisely what the authors describe as emotional engagement. Many students do not speak in class yet the great majority of them readily discuss the course content with their friends and families. Emotional engagement could have a major impact on the way my students engage.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

This chapter includes the overall structure of the study including: a) the research questions, b) research design, c) data sources, d) research setting, e) data analysis strategies, and f) validity and reliability.

Research Questions

The following are the central research questions for this study:

1. In what ways, if any, does the Theater of the Oppressed promote/support conscientization when used inside an undergraduate Chicana/o Studies college classroom?
2. In what ways, if any, does the application of T.O. in this setting enhance student engagement?.
3. What key points do students who are in these classrooms take away from this approach?

Research Design

This is a qualitative study that employs elements from ethnography, case study , and grounded theory. A qualitative approach is the most appropriate for this research given that the research questions are fundamentally concerned with processes that are not quantifiable. These types of questions incite descriptive and explanatory answers which are generally incommensurate with quantitative inquiry. Within qualitative research, ethnography and case study are the best approaches to examine these types of questions in a real life situation (in the field) since context is of paramount importance to the study. Grounded theory, on the other hand, will provide a valuable tool in the analytic stage in order to generate theories that explain the happenings in the classroom. These approaches are particularly important to this study since the central focus is how students perceive the Theater of the Oppressed. In other words, this study is not about what educators or theoreticians say about this approach, it is about finding out

from the students themselves what they experienced. Since their conceptualizations of this pedagogical approach may differ from the established canons, it is important to employ qualitative methods that simultaneously look at the construction of meaning from the students' perspective and for "ground-up" generating of theory. The following segments will further explain and justify the connection between the research questions and the aforementioned research traditions. Table 2 summarizes the key points of this section.

Table 2: Affordances of Three Different Qualitative Approaches

Qualitative approach	Affordances	Literature
Ethnography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -for descriptive and exploratory questions -Ethnographic tools to find out participants' construction of meaning -situated in real life context (in the field) 	(Anderson-Levitt, 2006; Erickson, 1986a, 1986b; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999)
(Single) Case Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -for descriptive and exploratory questions -in-depth examination of single localized "case" -firsthand understanding of people and events -situated in real life context (in the field) 	(Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2006)
Grounded Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -applied to data analysis to build theories from "bottom up" -designed to study a process, action or interaction involving a group of individuals 	(Creswell, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967)

This study, like all qualitative research that is ethnographic in nature, is centrally concerned with culture, meaning-making, and asking the question "What is going on here?" (Anderson-Levitt, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Erickson, 1986a; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In this case, I examined my students' construction of meaning around the Theater of the Oppressed

activities. Accordingly, I employed ethnographic data collecting tools such as interviews and material artifacts in the form of student writings.

In this study, I am researching a pedagogical approach which I deployed in my own classroom. I play dual roles as the researcher and as the instructor inside the class being researched. I am not a typical participant observer in that I did not join this setting for research purposes. Rather, I more closely resemble an *observant participant*⁷ in that I am a *native* of this group and setting and I am conducting research within that space (Erickson, 1986a, 1986b). I am simultaneously seeking the advantages of the insider's intimate understanding and the outsider's distance.

Like ethnography, case study methods are concerned with studying phenomenon *in the field*, that is, in its real life context (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2006). Yin (2006) emphasizes that "Compared to other methods, the strength of the case study method is its ability to examine, in-depth, a 'case' within its 'real-life' context" (p. 111). He also claims that "The case study method is best applied when research addresses descriptive or explanatory questions and aims to produce a firsthand understanding of people and events" (p. 112). For these primary reasons, this study also shows elements of case study methods. This study focuses on attaining in-depth understanding of how implementing Theater of the Oppressed will affect engagement and conscientization. Moreover, the event that is of central concern is very specific and bound by time and place. The study focuses on a group of 34 students participating in a set of activities over the course of two weeks inside a classroom. Because of the specificity of contexts such as

⁷ In a personal conversation, Professor Fred Erickson explained to me the fine distinctions between the terms *participant observer* and *observant participant* and how the play on words suggests a shift in emphasis between an *observer that is participating* as opposed to a *participant that is observing*. In my case, I am a naturally occurring participant (teacher) that has formally taken on the role of keenly observing my natural habitat (my classroom).

these, case study methods and ethnography also share a limitation in that these methods are not generalizable since they only describe a specific and localized 'case' (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2006).

This study also employed aspects of grounded theory. At the initial stages of both data collecting and data analysis, I was primarily concerned with asking broad questions to get a broad sense of how students may have found the course valuable. At that stage, I was not specifically looking for data that would directly answer my research questions. This strategy also served as possible *disconfirming evidence* (Erickson, 1986a) that the Theater of the Oppressed had any significant impact on the students' learning. While the research questions are, of course, the central concern of the study, it is equally important to understand the ecology and deep context in which the Theater of the Oppressed activities are taking place. The T.O. intervention only lasts two weeks out of the 16 week semester so it is important to understand students' experience in the course overall. With this in mind, and consistent with grounded theory, my initial passes at the data were inductive and only concerned with building grounded low-level theoretical frameworks (Creswell, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) that could speak to the meaning and value students found in the course overall. This was done in order to capture important contextual factors that could help elucidate how the Theater of the Oppressed might be impacting engagement and conscientization. Rather than my first question being "How does the data answer my research questions?" I instead asked myself, "What is the data telling me (about the students' overall experience in the class)?" To answer this initial question, I employed grounded theory methods like *open coding* and *constant comparative methods* of data analysis so as to capture emerging themes from the data (Creswell, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Only after generating these initial concepts and categories did I move on to a more deductive approach

of comparing my newly found concepts to established theories of engagement and conscientization.

Research Setting

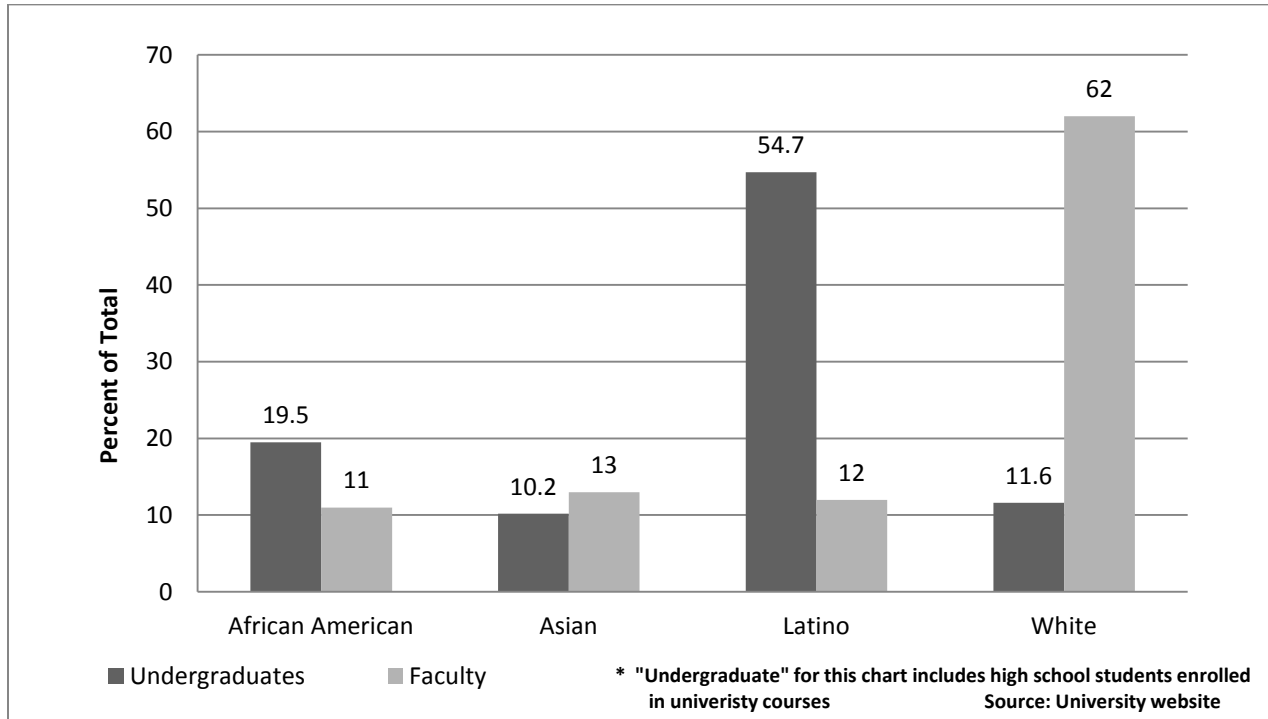
In this study, the research setting has played an important role. In an effort to understand the affordances and limitations of a Freirean/Boalian pedagogical approach in higher education, it must be taken into consideration who exactly the research participants are. Understanding the demographics of the university and my particular class is an important consideration for sampling. That is, the campus and the course have already filtered and selected many of the traits of my participant pool. Since the only criteria that was used to select research participants was that they were enrolled in my course during the Fall of 2012, it is important that we discuss in detail the particulars of the research setting. For this study, the population in question is the students enrolled in the course. The only instance where this population was sampled any further was when five students from the entire class were interviewed.

The Campus

The setting for this research was a lower division Chicana/o Studies class I taught at a public university in southern California during the Fall of 2012. The campus is located within a major metropolis in a part of the city that is predominantly African American and Latino. According to the university's website, the latest (Fall 2012) student demographics show that the university has a total enrollment of 13,933 with 51.1% of those being labeled as Hispanic/Latino and 66.4% women. Because of its high rate of Latino students, this university has been designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) and recently has also been recognized as one of the most important degree-granting institutions for Latinos in the United States (Cooper,

2012). However, these numbers contrast sharply with the faculty demographics as is seen in the graph in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Undergraduate Enrollment and Faculty by Ethnicity -Fall 2012



As the graph demonstrates, there is a dramatic overrepresentation of White faculty members in comparison to the White student body. There is also an equally dramatic underrepresentation of Latino faculty (at 11.6%) in relation to the majority Latino student body which comprise 54.7% of undergraduates as of Fall 2012. Even at a "diverse" campus such as this, Latino students are still relatively unlikely to have Latino professors. This is not surprising given that at a national level, only 1% of the professoriate self-identify as Chicana/o (Villalpando, 2003).

A clear and unfortunate trend at this campus, as with most higher learning institutions, is that as the educational level rises, the number of Latinos plummet. On this campus, Latinos comprise 69.6% of all lower division undergraduates. However, by the time they are considered

upper division undergraduates they have already dropped to 50.1% of that segment of the population. Even more drastic is their 32.6% enrollment in graduate school on this campus. This trend is consistent with national figures regarding Latino & Chicano educational attainment especially in terms of the "leaks"(junctures at which Chicano students do not advance on to the next level) in the Chicano educational pipeline (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). The previously mentioned statistics show us not only that there is a "leak" between undergraduate and graduate education but also that many Latino underclassmen fall victim to these leaks early in their college career.

The Course

The course in which I conducted this research is titled "Chicano Studies 200: Key Themes in Chicano/a Latino/a History." It is a semester-long course (16 week) and meets twice a week for 75 minute sessions. Its official catalog description states that the course, " Explores the history and experiences of Chicanos/as and Latinos/as in the United States in the 19th and 20th Centuries and will explore the following themes: immigration, migration, labor, education, gender roles, and community organizations." This course has been popular in past years mostly due to the fact that it fills part of a General Education requirement for the university. This course is one of seven courses students may take to fulfill the "Global and Historical Perspectives" part of their Social Science requirements. I had taught this course only once before -during the Fall of 2007.

The Students

This semester, there were 35 students officially enrolled in this course although one of those students never attended class yet did not drop the course. Out of the 34 students that were regular attendants, 24 were women and 10 men. This 70/30 ratio is generally consistent in most

courses I have taught. Although it is slightly different than that of the campus' 2/3 ratio, I suspect this may be due to the fact that mostly Latinos take my courses and the gender ratio among Latino students is slightly skewed towards women. Covarrubias (2011) alleges that "Chicanas outperform their Chicano counterparts at all points along the educational pipeline. Chicanos are pushed out of high school at higher rates; earn fewer high school diplomas; and earn fewer associate's, bachelor's, master's, professional, and doctoral degrees" (p. 93). The distribution by academic year and ethnic/racial background is also consistent with previous lower division courses I have taught at this university. The following graphs in Figures 5 & 6 show this course's student profile.

Figure 5: Distribution by Academic Year of Students Enrolled in CHS 200 -Fall 2012

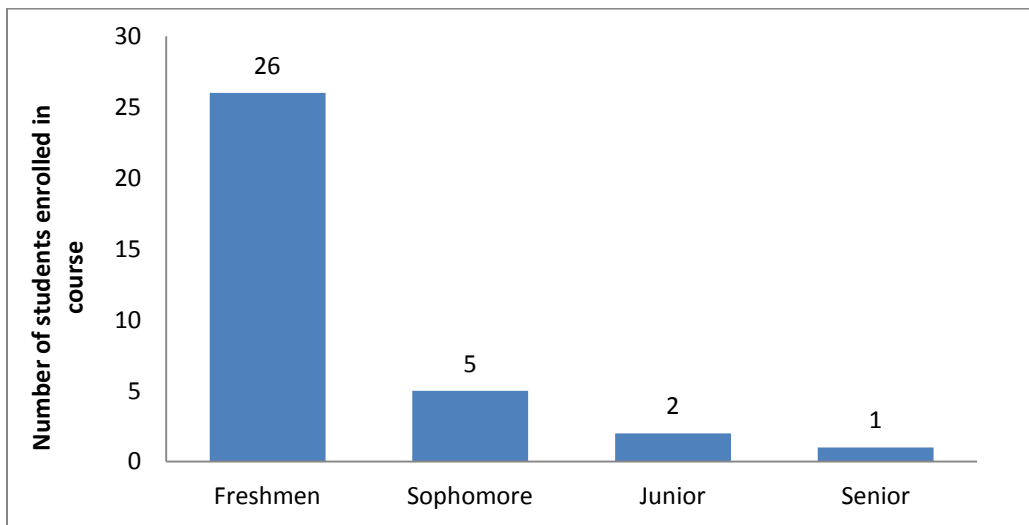
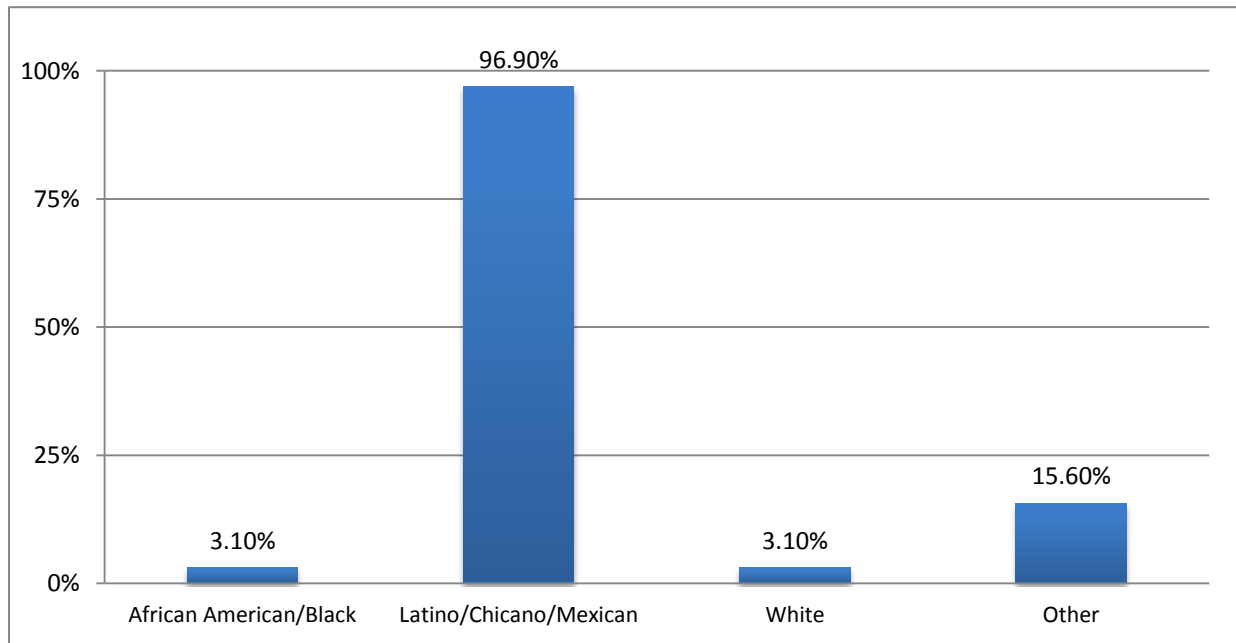


Figure 6: Which best describes your ethnic/racial background (check all that apply)?



As the previous two charts demonstrate, the class has a very particular profile in that the vast majority of the students consider themselves Latinos and are freshmen. In fact, to some extent, all of the students in this class could be categorized, under conventional norms (at least partially), as "Latino"⁸. This fact may have played a significant role in my students' engagement.

Not only are the majority of these students "Latinos" but most of them are also first-generation American-born. Among the "Latino" groups that are represented in this class, Table 3 shows that most are of Mexican heritage and a much smaller percentage of Central American background.

⁸ This chart taken from the survey asks students "which best describes your ethnic/racial background" it also allows the student to "check all that apply" in order to acknowledge students of mixed backgrounds. The numbers do not add up to 100% since students may pick several categories. Notably, two of the five students that chose "other" would normally be included in the Latino category but apparently the label "Latino/Chicano/Mexican" did not resonate with them. They wrote in their answers as "Guatemalan" and "Hondurian [sic]." For the two students that marked "African-American" and "White," they also marked that they were part Latino. Only one student did not mark the Latino category at all -it was the student that marked "other" and said they were "Hondurian."

Table 3: Where were your parents/guardians born?

	United States	Mexico	Central America	South America	Asia	Africa	Europe	I don't know	Total
Mother	15.6% 5	65.6% 21	12.5% 4	0% 0	0% 0	0% 0	6.3% 2	0% 0	100% 32(numerical)
Father	6.3% 2	75% 24	15.6% 5	0% 0	0% 0	3.1% 1	0% 0	0% 0	100% 32(numerical)

Besides the basic student demographics I stated above, the students were also surveyed on questions that could shed light on the "type" of students that were enrolled. These questions asked about their parents' birthplace, educational attainment, and home ownership status. The following graphs in Figures 7, 8, & 9 shows the results of these survey questions.

Figure 7: What is the highest level of education your mother completed?

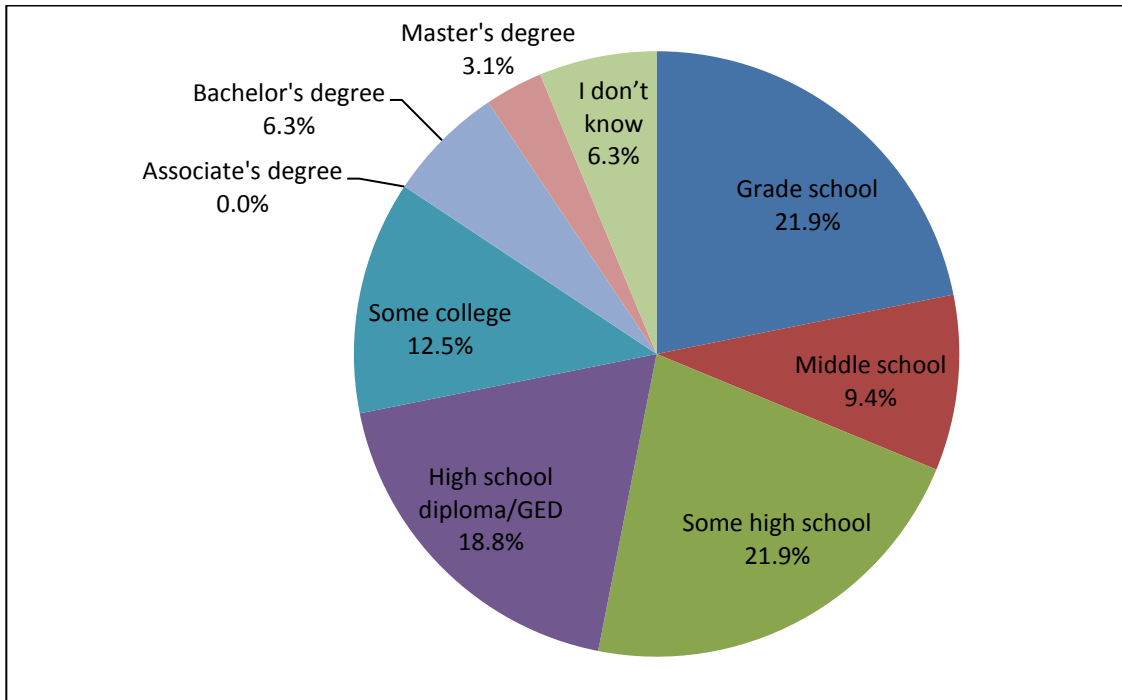


Figure 8: What is the highest level of education your father completed?

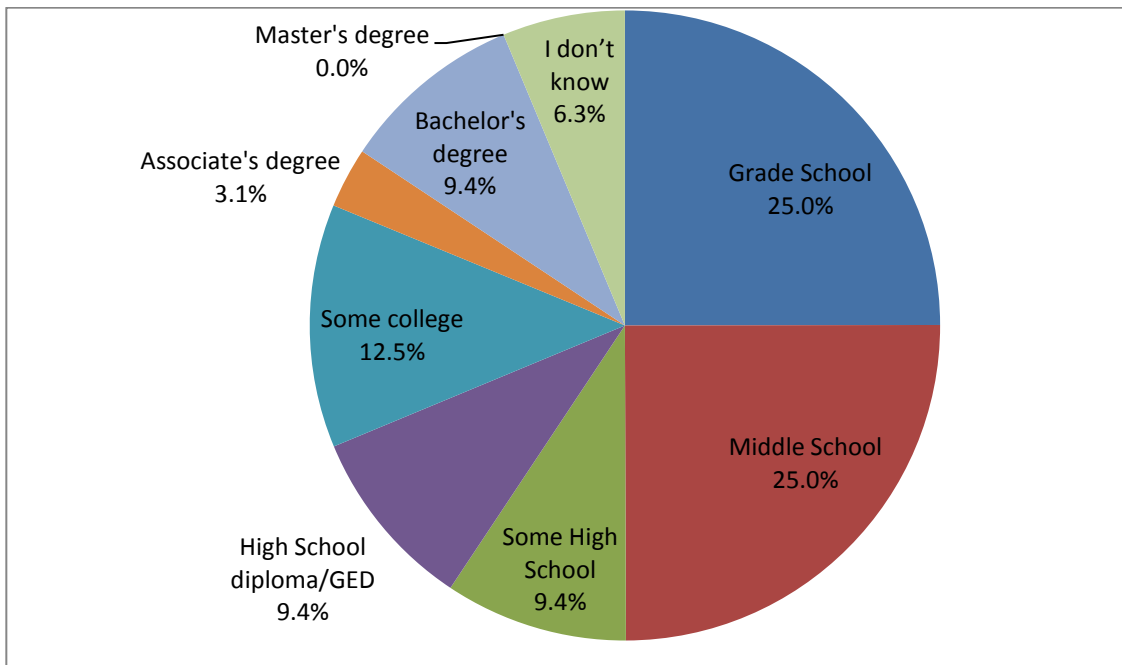
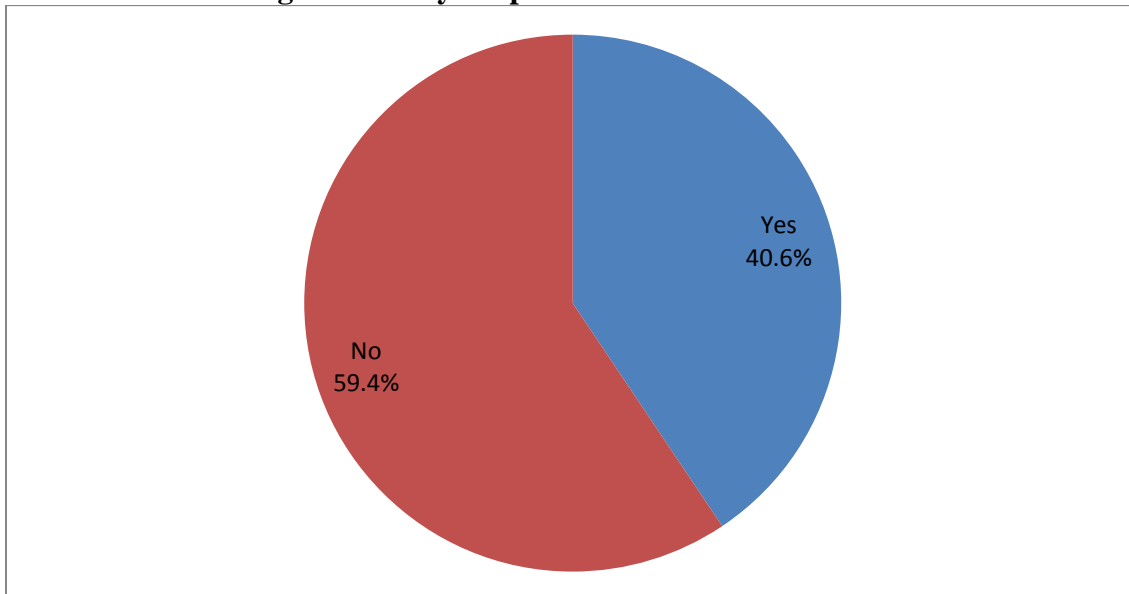


Figure 9: Do your parents own their own home?



Notable among the previous charts is the fact that most of the students' parents are not college graduates. Only 9.4% (3 fathers and 3 mothers) of their fathers and mothers had actually received a bachelor's degree or higher. Also, 59.4% of fathers and 53.2% of mothers did not receive a high school diploma or equivalent. The largest single section of the graph shows that 25% (fathers) and 21.9% (mothers) did not make it beyond elementary school. Along with the previous data on the high number of parents born in Mexico and Central America, this implies that many of the students' parents come from rural or small town working class families since that is the segment of the population that best fits the educational profile shown (van Gameren & Hinojosa, 2004). Their working class status is also suggested by the graph which shows the majority of them are not home-owners.

It is important to also note that the *typical* student in terms of demographic background is very similar to my own background in key areas. Namely, a) I come from a working class family, b) my parents were both born in rural Mexico where neither went beyond elementary school (my father went to 3rd grade and my mother to 2nd grade), c) I am bilingual in English and Spanish, d) I am first generation U.S. born, and e) I am a first generation college student.

Structure and Content of the Course

As the course title and description suggests, this class deals with major themes in Chicano/Latino history. Although, the course is designed to cover from the 19th century onwards, it is very difficult to do that especially since most students have not taken other Chicana/o Studies courses before and have not discussed the Spanish conquest of Mexico and its legacy. I take five weeks to set up what I consider to be necessary background information before we ever discuss the 1800s. In these first five weeks, we discuss historiography (historical

perspectives), pre-contact civilizations, the conquest, colonial Mexico, and the role of imperialism. It is indispensable to critically analyze these topics in order to understand contemporary issues. Table 4 shows a simplified course schedule.

Table 4: Course Topics by Week

Week	Topic
1	Introduction to course
2	Historical perspectives
3	Pre-contact civilizations in Americas
4	Colonization
5	Imperialism
6	U.S. and Mexico
7	Immigration
8	The case of Cuba
9	Labor
10	Politics
11	Gender
12	Education
13	Identity
14	Current issues
15	Presentations
16	Finals

Use of Theater of the Oppressed in the Classroom

I employed T.O. for two weeks during the semester. I initially started using T.O. in the classroom so students would physically interact and familiarize themselves with each other and start to develop a sense of community. This would, in turn, make them feel more at ease with each other and promote a higher level of active discussions in class. The T.O. games in particular are conducive to students interacting in a fun way which helps create an environment where students can feel comfortable enough with each other to have potentially uncomfortable conversations about difficult topics. I also used specific aspects of T.O. such as Forum Theater as a vehicle for students to very concretely bring issues that resonate with them into the classroom and provide us with an innovative forum to discuss those topics. Appendices 3 & 4

outline specific aspects of the use of the Theater of the Oppressed in this setting and give detailed accounts of how it was carried out.

Data Collection

In order to examine and triangulate the impact that Freirean pedagogy and the Theater of the Oppressed had on students and particularly their levels of conscientization and engagement, I used three primary methods of data collection: interviews, artifacts, and surveys. I also used class audio-recordings as a secondary data collection tool. None of these data collection tools are meant to stand alone, but rather work in conjunction with each other to provide a more holistic understanding of the social interactions in this class. The data was collected throughout the 16 week semester in which the course was in session as well as interviews after the semester had concluded. All class sessions were audio-recorded to have a record of what was covered and said in each class meeting. Furthermore, I also looked for *disconfirming evidence* (Erickson, 1986a) of my hunches that the Theater of the Oppressed plays any meaningful role in their learning.

Artifacts

I employed an ethnographic data collection technique where I used material artifacts (Anderson-Levitt, 2006; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) to gain insights into:

- how and when students are engaged in the course overall
- how and when they may be experiencing "shifts" in conscientization
- how Theater of the Oppressed may be contributing to the two previous points.

The artifacts in this study were assignments written by the students answering a particular prompt that I put forth to them about a specific aspect of class. There were two types of artifacts collected: quickwrites and a more lengthy and formal final reflection.

Quickwrites

The quickwrites were very short writing assignments given at the very beginning of class. These quickwrites were hand-written answers to a prompt I posed -usually to get students to think about a certain topic before delving into the full lecture. Sometimes, these quickwrites served the function of pressing a student to think about and commit to an answer on paper and then asking students to introspectively reflect on their answers. At other times, the quickwrites helped me gauge the students' understanding or impressions on a certain topic. Students seldom had more than five minutes to answer the prompt. These writings were then turned in to me and although they were never graded on their content, they were given credit for completion. There was no set pattern on how often we would do a quickwrite. It is important to note that I did not want to draw attention to the fact that I would be doing this study on the Theater of the Oppressed or any of the other specifics of this study. At the end of the semester, I revealed to my students that I would be conducting research about the course but they did not know the exact topic. The quickwrites were deliberately "embedded" among many other quickwrites throughout the semester so as not to raise their suspicions that I had a specific investment or interest in these activities.

For this study, I analyzed two quickwrites, one asking about the Theater of the Oppressed games and the other about the Forum Theater assignment. The prompts were as follows:

Quickwrite prompt on the Theater of the Oppressed exercises:

What are your general impressions of the Theater of the Oppressed exercises?

What if anything did you find of value?

What did you find appealing/unappealing?

Out of 34 students, 26 turned in a quickwrite on the Theater of the Oppressed games.

Quickwrite prompt on Forum Theater assignment:

What was your overall experience with the Forum Theater assignment?

What if anything did you find of value?

What did you find appealing/unappealing?

Out of 34 students, 30 turned in a quickwrite on the Theater of the Oppressed games.

Final Reflections

The second type of artifact collected was a final written reflection assigned at the end of the semester. Students were given one final prompt where they were to write a 1-2 page reflection on the overall course. The exact prompt was as follows:

-What was your general experience in this class throughout the semester?

-What aspects of this class did you find the most meaningful and why?

-What suggestions would you have to make the course better?

The assignment was deliberately open-ended so I could get a general sense of what students feel is worth mentioning about the course and to better understand the context in which Theater of the Oppressed is situated. As in my pilot studies, this question seemed fruitful precisely because it does not restrict students to only discuss a pre-determined aspect of the course and because it does not directly give anticipated answers. Granted, students may feel that it is expected that they give a favorable review of the course. However, there is no outright prompting as to what specific aspect of the course they should comment on. Moreover, their responses in these prompts were consistent with other data resources including an anonymous web-based survey, the school administered PTE (Perceived Teacher Effectiveness) evaluations, and previous pilot studies. Of the 34 students enrolled in the course, 32 turned in the final written reflection.

Surveys

I used an anonymous online survey to help me understand students' levels of engagement and as a tool to help me get a better sense of the *ecology* of the classroom. This survey provides

context for other data sources and also aids in triangulating the data. Since all of the other data collection is done directly from the students through interviews or through their class writings which have the students' names on it, it is important to have a completely anonymous data source that can be used to cross-check and confirm/disconfirm the other data. Anonymity can promote the quality and validity of the survey (Berends, 2006). The survey was administered in the last two weeks of the semester and asked students to self-report on their experience in the course especially in terms of engagement and what aspects of the class were the most meaningful to them. The questions on this survey were largely pulled from the NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement) (Kuh, 2003) and the SCEQ (Student Course Engagement Questionnaire) (Handelsman, et al., 2005) and were on a Likert scale as they are on the original surveys. There is a special emphasis on gauging levels of engagement and because it would be difficult to imagine a curriculum or pedagogy being effective when students are not even paying attention (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Guenther & Miller, 2011; Handelsman, et al., 2005; Kuh, 2003; Mandernach, et al., 2011; Pascarella, 2005). In this case, I allege engagement must precede (or at least work in conjunction with) conscientization. This survey also collected demographic information on the students (including ethnicity, sex, socio-economic status, parent's educational attainment, etc.) as well as asked open ended questions on which aspects of the course students found most valuable. The survey was generated and deployed through surveygizmo.com and linked directly to the course website. This survey took approximately 5-7 minutes to complete. Out of 34 students enrolled in the course, 32 completed the survey. (See Appendix 1 for sample survey questions).

Interviews

This research study relied on semi-structured interviews (Harrell & Bradley, 2009; Schensul, et al., 1999) to capture a) how students might engage with the course material, b) how Theater of the Oppressed contributed to their learning, and c) how the course and Theater of the Oppressed promoted conscientization. Semi-structured interviews are the best fit for this study since "The questions on a semistructured interview guide are preformulated, but the answers to those questions are open-ended, they can be fully expanded at the discretion of the interviewer and the interviewee, and can be enhanced by probes" (Schensul, et al., 1999, p. 149). This is important since the focus of this research is acquiring deeper understanding on three themes that have been predetermined, yet I am unsure as to how these processes might be happening in the class, hence it is important that respondents be allowed to fully articulate their answers in their own words. I wanted students to shed light on what is not shown through other more "closed" data collection tools. This is a classic use for a semi-structured interview since its objective is to "Further clarify the central domains and factors in the study" (Schensul, et al., 1999, p. 150). However, there are components of this interview that were more consistent with in-depth open-ended interviewing (Schensul, et al., 1999) since the interviewer often posed broad questions about the student's experience in class and, to a certain extent, let the student lead the direction of the interview. This is consistent with scholars that argue that qualitative interviewing is not split up into hard and steadfast categories (like open-ended, semi-structured, and structured) but rather is in a continuum of different degrees of structure and flexibility (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). In this case, the interviews in this study were often on the *open* side of the semi-structured interview continuum.

Since I would be conducting research on my own class and interviewing my own students, I had to take measures to lessen the likelihood of students giving "desirable" answers and for students not to feel pressured to participate nor to think their course grade would somehow be impacted. Accordingly, the interviews were conducted by a third party 6-7 months after the conclusion of the course. Students were interviewed by a recent female doctoral graduate from GSE&IS who has extensive experience in conducting qualitative interviews in educational research settings. Since the majority of the research participants were female, I wanted them to know that the interviewer would also be female in hopes of making them feel more at ease. The interview questions were very broad at first -simply asking for general comments about their experience in my class. In order not to lead their answers, the interviewer did not initiate any questions or discussion about engagement, critical consciousness, or the Theater of the Oppressed. These topics were only discussed *after* the students brought them up on their own.

Initially, these students were to be interviewed in the weeks immediately following the course (Fall semester). However, this was not possible and I was not able to have the students interviewed until the end of the following semester (Spring). This posed a problem since at the end of the Spring semester many students either leave town for summer vacation or take on jobs. This factor impacted the sampling for interview participants. Initially, I planned on selecting 5-6 students from my class in a way that would generally represent the class population but that also would represent different levels of class participation and apparent critical consciousness. I sent an email invitation to 10 students at the end of the Spring semester but, of those, only two responded. I sent several emails more but to no avail⁹. Since it was clear that I might have a

⁹ Because of the lower than expected number of respondents I considered waiting until the beginning of the Fall 2013 semester but this, of course, would not guarantee a higher response rate and it would

hard time acquiring my proposed sample of 5-6 students, I changed the sampling criteria for interviews. I sent an email to the entire class inviting anyone that was interested to participate in the interviews. Thus, I was able to have five students interviewed with the only criteria being that they were enrolled in the CHS 200 course during the Fall 2012.

The interviews were conducted during the summer break of 2013 in the same classroom where our original class took place. This was done, in part, so students would have an easier time finding the room and more importantly so being in that physical space again would refresh their memories about their class experience. Since the interviews happened 6-7 months after the conclusion of the course, several students had a hard time remembering specifics from the class. While this was a frustrating limitation at times, the lapse in time also afforded students more "distance" to make other types of comments. Namely, since a whole semester had passed since the course, this allowed some students to have more time to reflect on the larger impact the course may have had on them. It allowed them to encounter the course content in different situations outside of class. Their hazy memory in some ways worked to our advantage since they could only remember the "larger picture" of the class or only to what, to them, seemed like the most important or impactful aspects of the class. For interview protocol see Appendix 2.

Class Audio-recordings

Throughout the semester, all the class meetings were audio-recorded. The purpose of this was to have documentation of exactly what was said in the class in case it would be necessary to consult these records. There was no immediate intent to systematically analyze this data source. It was merely taken as a precaution and as a stand-by for added triangulation. I anticipated that the students, in their writings or interviews, might refer back to a specific class that had a

undoubtedly bring its own set of issues since many students would probably be unavailable for different reasons (i.e. class load, changing work hours, etc.).

particular impact on them. Since I was not taking field notes, and in order to have a verifiable record of each class, I recorded the sessions in case I needed to refer to them later.

Data Analysis

The different data sources were coded and analyzed in different although complimentary ways. The data sources represent different facets of the research questions. The following section outlines the different stages of data analysis.

First Stage

The first stage of analysis was to read through all the data sources several times and look for emerging themes and patterns within each data source in the *open coding* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) fashion. That means that, at this point, I was not looking for themes that would specifically answer my research questions. This was done so as not to dismiss potentially meaningful data which initially might not seem related to my central research questions but which could provide an invaluable context to better understand the phenomenon in question. Instead, I initially only looked for general patterns of repetition and density among the participant's responses. The central question while looking through the data was "What does this data source tell me?" I also, looked for consistencies and departures from the current literature on these topics and from my previous pilot studies. After the initial passes at the data, I coded for and listed all the developing themes. Next, I collapsed and combined themes whenever possible and I eliminated themes which lacked dimension or detail within the data source. Lastly, I constructed a chart outlining the major themes which each data source represented.

Second Stage

The second stage consisted of comparing all major themes that surfaced from the different data sources. Once again, I looked for possible groupings among the themes but this

time *across* data sources. I combined/collapsed themes wherever possible. Finally, I developed a list of prevalent and recurring themes that surfaced across the data sources.

Third Stage

Once the list of recurring themes was gathered, I went back through the raw data and checked for these themes to make sure the data was consistent with the themes I generated. I then consulted the existing literature to see how these themes were represented (or not) in past research and how these themes helped to answer my central research questions.

Validity and Reliability

As is generally the case with ethnographies and case-studies, this study is not designed to be generalizable nor replicable. Hence, given the already inherent limitations of these research designs, reliability and external validity are not my primary concern. However, internal validity must be addressed. As the instructor of the class in which I am conducting research, my positionality (Alcoff, 1988; Chavez, 2008), or relational position, is a notable threat to internal validity. The research design contains several strategies to mitigate this issue in particular and also strategies to enhance internal validity in general. Schensul et al. (1999) identify two major threats to internal validity that are of immediate concern to this study -*observer effects* and omission of a population segment. The authors describe one of these threats by stating that "Participants can withhold information or lie; what they say and do is affected by their perceptions of who researchers are, what they want to know, and how and with whom they interact in the community" (p. 279). They also point to another threat to internal validity when "Some components of the population or setting may be omitted from the study" (p. 279). Table 5 summarizes this study's strategies to address those two threats to internal validity.

Table 5: Internal Validity

Threat to internal validity	Strategy to enhance internal validity										
<p><i>Observer effects</i> and desired responses</p>	<p>Contracted outside female researcher to conduct interviews.</p> <p>The topic of research study was not revealed to students.</p> <p>Interviews were conducted 6-7 months after conclusion of the course. (long after they received their final grades)</p> <p>All participation in study is completely voluntary.</p> <p>Quickwrites on Theater of the Oppressed were "embedded" among other classwork.</p> <p>In data sources where students' identity was known, they were only asked to identify "meaningful" or "valuable" aspects of the course in general -not asked about Theater of the Oppressed, engagement, or conscientization.</p> <p>Deployed <i>anonymous</i> web-based survey asking about demographic information, levels of engagement, and most meaningful aspects of course.</p>										
<p>Omission of segment of population from study</p>	<p><i>All</i> students were invited to participate in interviews.</p> <p>Besides interviews, all other data sources were part of regular course requirements and expectations. Hence, all students were expected to turn in writings and complete survey.</p> <p>Out of 34 enrolled students, the following are the completed numbers from data sources</p> <table data-bbox="771 1465 1263 1642"> <tr> <td>Survey</td> <td>32/34</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Quickwrite on Forum Theater</td> <td>26/34</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Quickwrite on T.O. games</td> <td>30/34</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Final reflection</td> <td>32/34</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Interviews</td> <td>5/34</td> </tr> </table>	Survey	32/34	Quickwrite on Forum Theater	26/34	Quickwrite on T.O. games	30/34	Final reflection	32/34	Interviews	5/34
Survey	32/34										
Quickwrite on Forum Theater	26/34										
Quickwrite on T.O. games	30/34										
Final reflection	32/34										
Interviews	5/34										

Key to these strategies is that at no point during the course of the study were research participants made aware of what the focal point of this research was, therefore making it difficult for them to give the "right" answer. With very few exceptions, the data collecting tools did not

mention key aspects of the research study like Theater of the Oppressed, engagement, nor conscientization¹⁰. I also waited until 6-7 months after final grades were turned in to ensure that students would not, in any way, be under the impression that their grades could somehow be impacted by their participation (or non-participation) in the study or their answers in the interview. Moreover, I contracted an outside educational researcher to conduct the interviews in order to lessen the likelihood that students might feel pressured to give favorable remarks to me. Since the students being interviewed were mostly women, it helped that the interviewer was of the same gender in order to reduce the possible discomfort of being alone with a male stranger in a classroom. The interviewer also had intimate knowledge of the course curriculum and Theater of the Oppressed activities. Lastly, in order not to exclude any segments of the population, all students who were enrolled in the course were invited to be interviewed. All five respondents were consequently interviewed.

¹⁰ The three exceptions are as follows: 1.) The interviewer could only mention these topics if the student being interviewed brought it up first. In the event that a student did not bring up the Theater of the Oppressed, the interviewer would note this and could bring it up at the end of the interview (this happened with only one student). 2.) The anonymous survey asked students to self-report on levels of engagement and open-ended questions on "the most meaningful aspects of class." 3.) Two quickwrites specifically asked students to comment on the Theater of the Oppressed activities. However, these quickwrites were "imbedded" among many other quickwrites throughout the semester. Nothing pointed to these two assignments as out of the ordinary.

CHAPTER 4

ENGAGEMENT AND THE THEATER OF THE OPPRESSED

In order to answer one of this study's central research question, "In what ways, if any, does the application of T.O. in this setting enhance student engagement?," this chapter will articulate what student engagement looked like in this classroom and how the Theater of the Oppressed contributed to student engagement. Particular attention will be placed on two salient types of engagement in this classroom -*emotional engagement* and *collective engagement*. Emotional engagement is an affective dimension of engagement where students internally engage with the material (Handelsman, et al., 2005). For this study, I have constructed the term *collective engagement* to refer to the phenomenon that happens when students in a classroom feel a strong sense of group cohesion which in turn helps to engage them even further. This study found that those two types of engagement were already prevalent among students in this course and the Theater of the Oppressed activities further promoted both of these dimensions. In particular, Theater of the Oppressed enhanced collective engagement by promoting interaction, relatability among students, and valuing of others' perspectives.

The Importance of Engagement

Guenther and Miller (2011) argue that "Research over the past few decades on the effectiveness of educational practice has increasingly emphasized the importance of student engagement for achieving many learning outcomes considered central to post-secondary education" (p. 10). In the age of a schooling culture that impulsively measures value almost exclusively in terms of standardized tests and API scores (Au, 2009), the research on student engagement is an important contribution especially for educators concerned with providing the most enriching educational experience for their students. These engagement scholars contend

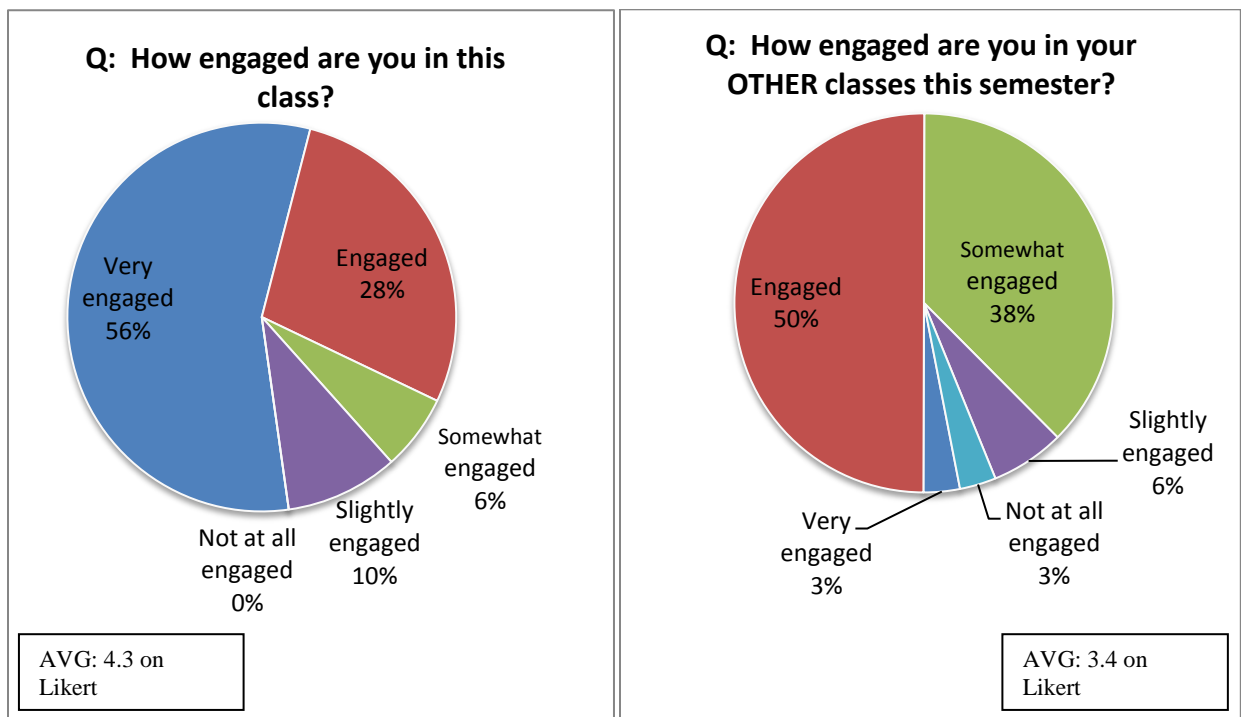
that student engagement is a quintessential quality that dictates the effectiveness of a student's time in the classroom and is closely associated with high levels of learning and personal development (Astin, 1993; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Guenther & Miller, 2011; Handelsman, et al., 2005; Kuh, 2001; Mandernach, et al., 2011; Pascarella, 2005). Mandernach et al. (2011) summarize the point by emphasizing that "Promoting student engagement is a tacit goal in virtually all course activities. Going beyond cognitive and skill objectives, engagement highlights the attitudes and dispositions necessary for extending learning beyond the classroom experience to an intrinsic and lifelong pursuit" (p. 277). So how does the research literature propose that college educators go about engaging their students? Fortunately, there is a great deal of consistency in their suggestions. Table 1 on page 37 shows how three authors summarize research data on college student learning and engagement. The overlap is most prevalent where all three authors agree that student-faculty interactions, collaborative learning, and active learning are paramount considerations for effective learning and engagement at the collegiate level.

Engagement in This Course

In this study, I examined how the implementation of the Theater of the Oppressed in a Chicana/o Studies undergraduate classroom could promote student engagement. However, before delving into what the Theater of the Oppressed actually accomplished, it is necessary to understand the general patterns of student engagement in the class overall, especially since the Theater of the Oppressed only took two weeks of the 16 week semester. It would not be possible to clearly understand the engagement that the Theater of the Oppressed promoted without seeing the larger context of engagement in the whole course.

The data collected in this study strongly suggests the students in this class are highly engaged. While the written assignments and interviews corroborate this claim, the single most convincing data comes from the online anonymous survey which students completed during the last two weeks of the semester. The survey shows that the majority of students enrolled in this class consider themselves "very engaged" (the highest category on the Likert scale) in this course. While the label "very engaged" may be somewhat vague, what does become clear is that, relative to their other classes they took that same semester, they were much more engaged in this class. The questions posed to them were, "*How engaged are you in this class?*" and "*How engaged are you in your OTHER classes this semester?*" Their possible answers were on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) Not at all engaged, (2) Slightly engaged, (3) Somewhat engaged, (4) Engaged and (5) Very engaged. The following charts in Figure 10 show the results.

Figure 10: Relative Engagement Between This Course and Other Courses



The graphs in Figure 10 show a marked difference in their self-reported levels of engagement between this course and their other courses. Notably, more than half (56%) of the respondents considered themselves "very engaged" in this course compared to only 3% in their other courses. The survey asked a follow-up open-ended question to gain some insight into this difference. The survey asked, "If more/less engaged in this class than in other courses, why do you think that is? (i.e. what is it about this class that engages you more/less?)." The answers were consistent with other data sources and pilot studies. Importantly, the most common answers dealt with the "relatability" of the course (10 answers), an interest in the topics (10 answers) and with the professor's approach/pedagogy (8 answers). Table 6 shows some typical answers.

Table 6: Survey Answers Implying Relatability and Pedagogy as Key Factors in Engagement

Answers from anonymous survey asking: "If more/less engaged in this class than in other courses, why do you think that is? (i.e. what is it about this class that engages you more/less?)."	
Answers implying <i>relatability</i>	Answers implying pedagogical approach
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -I feel more engaged by the fact this involves my culture and it catches my attention -It informs about my past and how it has influenced the present -It was very interesting and the topics talked in class were very relatable -It is more connected to my own personal life -I think I was more engaged in this class because I am able to connect with many of the topics discussed in class. -The fact that the issues my own race and even myself deal with on a daily basis makes me question the issues we study in class. -This class engages me more because it has a connection with me, it allows me to process the information and come to my own conclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -My professor actually interacts with us students. -That the teacher lets us speak our mind and give opinions and have discussions. -Class content, and instructors enthusiasm for the content -The way the professor mind blows you -The professor makes it accessible for anybody to take his class. Very articulate and knowledgeable professor. -I feel that the way the teacher shows us how interesting the topics are the students engage more compared to a teacher who just lectures

<i>-I engaged more in this class because it's a class that I can relate to. When we did an in class activity I felt most of the class had engaged and changed the atmosphere into a friends atmosphere instead of students.</i>	
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The statements above clearly show an appreciation for the connections they can make with the course as well as the professor's approach. These are the factors that students credit for their own increased engagement in this course. It should be mentioned however, that only the answers that explicitly mentioned relatability and pedagogy were counted. Several of the responses seemed to imply these factors but they were not counted since the above list only includes answers that would almost undeniably point in one direction. For example, in one student's response, she/he stated that they were engaged because the course "allows for personal input from experiences." This comment can be easily interpreted to imply that the student could make connections between their personal experiences and the course content. Hence, we could infer that the course was relatable to them in some way. However, it was not counted since they were not more explicit. Furthermore, *what* or *who* is it that "allows" their personal input? Again, it would not be farfetched to infer that they feel the professor is the one that "allows" or encourages this personal input into the course but since it is not outrightly stated it was not include in the list above. Therefore, it would be more accurate to say that *at least* 10 students explained their engagement because of relatability of the course and *at least* 8 credited the teacher's approach.

Relatability, Pedagogy, and Engagement

In the written reflections, students echoed and elaborated on the same major reasons for engagement which they expressed on the survey. When students explained why this course appealed to them, they, again, frequently spoke about the *relatability* of the whole experience.

For this study, I am using the word *relatability*¹¹ to refer to students making a clear and personal connection to the course. I use this word rather than the more common word *relevance* for several reasons. Primarily, after reading the student reflections, I feel it more closely connotes the central importance of students being "able to relate" to numerous aspects of the course such as the material, the teacher, the teacher's approach, the classmates, etc. Moreover, when thinking about book or film characters and storylines that I feel a close connection to, I tend to think of the word *relatable* not *relevant*.

Out of the 32 written reflections turned in, 25 of them *explicitly* mentioned the importance of having taken a course that relates to them, their lives, and their communities. In their reflections, students often use the word "relate" and even "relatable." This notion is apparently important to them. Table 7 shows some typical examples.

Table 7: Student Writing Samples Indicating *Relatability* of Course

I personally was very interested in the class because the subjects that were being lectured and the readings that we were assigned were relatable. As college students we are given a list of what classes we have to take and some of the courses are not interesting or we cannot relate to it.

I could relate to this class because it was about people like me.

Throughout the semester I learned about my culture and most importantly I learned about myself.

I realized the importance of knowing what's happening with our culture and people.

I always felt in some way each lesson being taught connected to who I was and where I came from.

Topics like these are ones that we often don't hear outside in media and the world daily and it was a great [way] to finally see more of a perspective about things that related to me and my culture.

The more the professor would get into detail about a certain topic or issue, I asked myself why and how it was relevant to my past experiences. Whether it was my past or my family's, I began to realize that the issues being discussed were still occurring even today.

¹¹ As I am searching for whether the word *relatability* is even a dictionary word, I ran into a news article stating that the word *relatable* is on the rise, especially among youth (Zimmer, 2010). Ironically, the word made its print debut in the educational journal *Theory Into Practice* in 1965 where they used it in a very similar to which I intend on using it.

As is seen in the Table 7, the language which the students used to signify the relevance, or rather *relatability*, of the course was fairly consistent. They primarily used possessive (or affiliative) language such as *my* or *our* to show that they feel a connection and appreciate learning about *their own* ethnic/social groups' history and issues. From this and other data sources, it was apparent that not only do the students like learning about their cultural/historical background but it is especially refreshing and meaningful since they have been negated the opportunity to learn this material through their schooling. Often, students would refer to this as finally getting "the other side of the story" or "the missing history."

Although, most students wrote about the importance of learning about *their* culture, it is frequently personalized much more than this. Rather than their history and culture being some abstract and distant concept, their writing seems to imply they feel a closer connection to their background and in many cases *see* the course content in their own lives or the lives of their families. In other words, the relatability of the course, cultural or otherwise, makes it deeply *personal*. These types of personal connections are seen in the following examples on Table 8.

Table 8: Student Writing Samples Indicating a Personal Connection With the Course

The more the professor would get into detail about a certain topic or issue, I asked myself why and how it was relevant to my past experiences. Whether it was my past or my family's, I began to realize that the issues being discussed were still occurring even today.

I also thought it was interesting because it relates to me on a personal level. The class taught me more about where I am from.

Overall this class was one of my favorite classes because it was my only class that has made me wonder what I was doing with my life.

I actually learned things that I could apply to my own life and I could relate to the class.

According to the writings, the relatability of the course material serves to hook students' interest. Most comments they make on their interest or engagement are quickly followed by comments on

how they can relate to the class. Just like collective engagement was signaled by the word "we," relatability is signaled by the word "I" or "my." These words reveal that relatability for these students is happening at the individual level of making very personal connections.

The Teacher's Relatability

As an extension of this, some students explain through the interviews that they see the professor as one of their own and feel a special connection with him. They say this not because the teacher is merely a part of their classroom learning community but because he shares a very similar background to the majority of the students. In her interview, Nancy explains that she has never had a Mexican teacher at any level of schooling before this course and now that she has, it felt very different. She says:

That's what stood out to me, that Professor Gutierrez was *really* relatable. To me he was like one of my uncles or something! He was like somebody that could be in my family...It's sad to think that as old as I am, it's the very first time that I've had a Mexican teacher.

Armando similarly argues that a key difference in this class was "being able to connect with the professor" whereas he cannot do that in most of his classes. When asked to explain this further, he states,

The fact that Gutierrez is Latino, or whatever he considers himself, and he's teaching a course that has to do with Latino content brings the class together and there is a connection between the students and the teacher.

Mayra closely parallels this remark by stating that,

It helped that [the professor] was part of my culture and he understood our situations...He knows what we've been through because of his Chicano/Mexican background and we, the whole class, identified together. It wasn't like a White male with a bunch of Mexican students.

In the preceding quote, Mayra succinctly states the essence of the collective identity of the class by saying "we, the whole class [including our Mexican professor], identified together."

One could argue that many of these students see themselves and their professor, especially after sharing their stories with each other, as *raza*. I am using this word with a specific connotation that is used commonly among Mexicans/Chicanos where the word *raza* does not exclusively mean "of the same race" but more broadly refers to people that are "of a similar type." While this word does not translate neatly to English, it could help people that do not speak Mexican Spanish to think of it in terms of *kinfolk*. The author Zora Neale-Hurston once said that "All my skinfolk ain't kinfolk." This phrase helps to distinguish the racial aspect (skinfolk) from the community aspect (kinfolk) of the word *raza*. People that consider themselves *raza*, feel a sense of affinity and community. The students' comments suggest that they see the professor as part of their *raza* and that would explain part of the initial connection and affinity that students and professor feel towards each other.

It would also be helpful to think of these affinities in terms of culture. Howard (2010), in articulating the importance of culture in education, explains that,

While race...tends to be defined as a social construct based primarily on phenotype, ethnicity usually is tied to a group's ancestral homeland or place of origin. Culture, while closely tied to race and ethnicity, is a different concept that shapes learning in unique and meaningful ways...Culture is *not* bound exclusively by one's race, ethnicity, or place of origin, but is shaped by a myriad of factors. A narrow view of culture fails to recognize how geography, immigration status, generation, social class, gender, family history, migration patterns, language, and religious affiliations all have major influences in how culture is developed" (p. 53).

The connection that these students and the professor make with each other are not just racial and ethnic, but more importantly -cultural. Furthermore, the survey revealed that the professor matches the demographics of the class in key ways that could have major cultural implications such as being first generation American-born, parents from Mexico, a native Spanish speaker,

Roman Catholic, working class, etc. These cultural matches and relatability were important for students feeling a sense of connection with the professor.

Pedagogical Approach and the Learning Environment

While the mere frequency and consistency of the students' responses is strong evidence that a culturally relevant curriculum can be a powerful tool for engagement, students also frequently mentioned (19 out of 32) through their written reflections an appealing classroom environment which they often attribute to the professor's pedagogical approach. This is seen in the following samples on Table 9.

Table 9: Student Comments on Classroom Environment and Pedagogy

The best part about this class was the way Professor Gutierrez put his information together. For example, one student said that he “mind blows” you, which is exactly what he does. For example, he makes you really think about a question that he asks and he doesn’t say the answer and makes the students figure it out themselves through basically casual discussions. It is like you are having a discussion with someone and learning at the same time but you do not realize that you are learning. That was honestly one of the best things about the class. I never felt like I was learning, until I actually thought about it then I would notice that I learned a lot more than I could ever imagine. I also loved how the professor would teach in a way to encourage us to change the status of Latinos.

This class has been really different than any other class I have taken. It did not have the regular classroom setting where only the teacher had an opinion. Every subject was different and interesting to learn about. The whole semester I felt very engaged and I felt free to speak my opinion on certain topics. I actually learned things that I could apply to my own life and I could relate to the class. One of the things that I felt meaningful about the class was that I was not afraid to say something dumb because the professor was open to anything the students said. I also liked that the whole class was able to come together and contribute their own knowledge to add to the professor’s lecture. Every day there was new information taught that I had no idea about so I was always engaged in the conversation. I felt that class was a conversation because there would always be questions asked and the class could not keep going unless there was a dialogue between the teacher and the students, and that is what I liked most about this course.

Having been a sophomore and had taken three semesters of University classes, I had a good amount of knowledge obtained. But as I entered this class I never imagined how excited and delightful this class would be. I had taken last semester Chicano Studies 100 with Dr. Martinez, and suddenly had an interest in the Chicano culture. But the atmosphere was different in this class not only in my other Chicano Studies class but every other class I had taken. Professor Gutierrez reflected a vibe that showed he was interested and excited to teach the students. Gutierrez wasn’t teaching us to teach he was teaching with a passion for us to learn, a passion that I know each student felt. [regarding some students not speaking up in class] ...this I believe is due because when the students were in class, they had their full attention to the teacher and when students were asked question they wouldn’t raise their hand because we agreed with the teacher. As soon as I entered his class I was suddenly quiet and directed my attention to the professor

because I knew whatever he said I WANTED to learn. [emphasis in original]

In my opinion the course is good as it is and Professor Gutierrez is a great professor who was able to explain and be as specific as possible, but that kept a conversation with the students through the class and was open to the point of views of everyone.

In class, I really liked how the professor asked for our opinions on things and how most people commented on the topic.

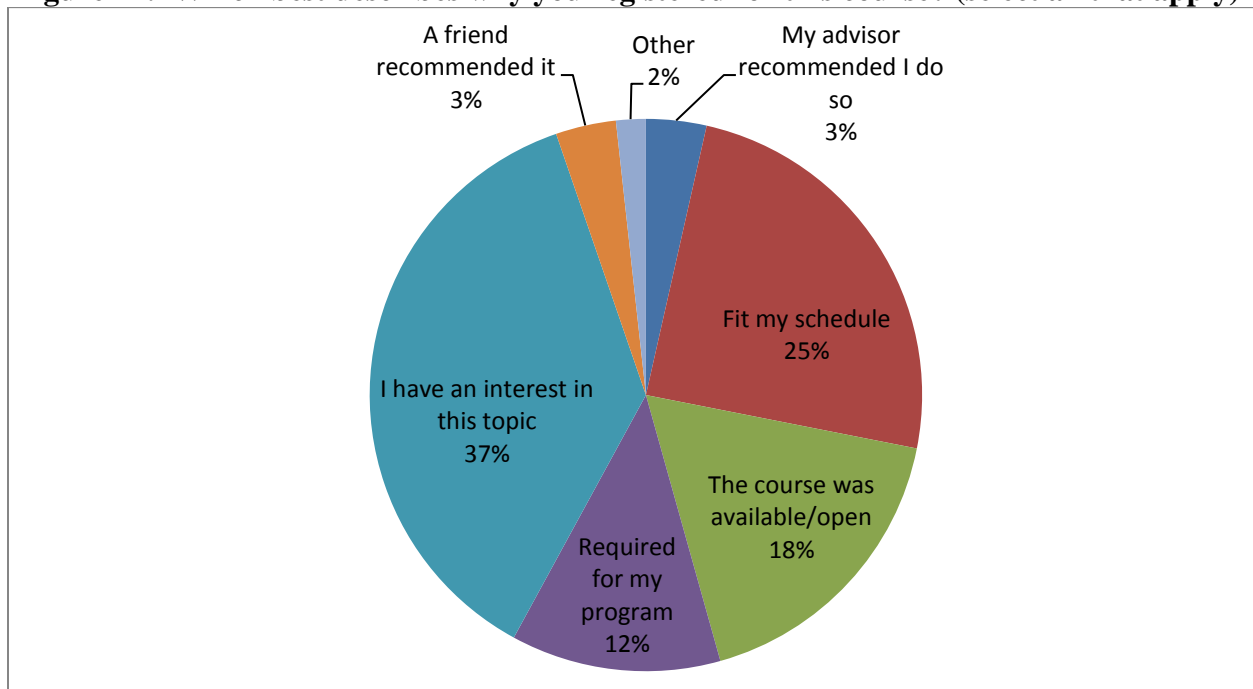
As the previous samples suggest, one of the most appealing and engaging aspects of this course for many students was having a learning environment where they felt comfortable expressing and sharing their ideas with each other and with the professor. Students often attribute the establishment of this environment, at least partially, to the professor who is accepting of their viewpoints although he often pushes them to analyze their own thought patterns. Several mentions are made to the class as a "conversation" or as a "casual discussion" and in some instances as a "dialogue." Here, as in other data sources, students point out the marked contrast between this pedagogical approach and their average "regular" classes. The students stress that this approach is appealing yet rare in their classrooms. The multiple appearance of the word "conversation" suggests that students do not feel they are simply being "talked at" but rather feel they can participate in the class discussions and also steer the course content to a certain extent. This conversational style of the course seems to make students more relaxed and contributes to a "low-stress environment" (as one student wrote) where students can focus on participating and learning. Students note that this environment is shaped largely from the teacher with his "vibe" and enthusiasm for the course and teaching.

Pre-existing Interest in the Course as Disconfirming Evidence

One of the students' frequent explanations of their high engagement levels in this course was "interesting topics." Although this phrase came out frequently (10 times in all), it is too

vague for me to incorporate as a "key factor" for student engagement. Granted, some students perceive themselves to be engaged in the course because they are interested in the topics but this rationale can be a bit circular if not outright misleading. In seeking disconfirming evidence (Erickson, 1986a), one could argue that the students are engaged because they were interested in these topics *before* entering the class. In other words, the course title itself attracted only students that already have an interest in these topics and therefore their high engagement level is more a result of their pre-existing intrigue rather than a result of pedagogy or any other factors. In fact, one of the survey questions would confirm this. When asked "*Which best describes why you registered for this course? (select all that apply),*" this is how they responded:

Figure 11: Which best describes why you registered for this course? (select all that apply)



From Figure 11 we can see that the biggest single factor was "I have an interest in this topic" therefore confirming that this was a select group of students already interested in the course topic. However, during one of my pilot studies this same issue came up and I realized the graph was not telling the entire story.

A year before this study, during the Spring 2012 semester, I taught a course titled "Chicano Studies 212: Introduction to Comparative: Ethnic & Global Societies." On the very first day of class, as a way to start the conversation about the course topic, I asked students why they took the course. Most said that it was because it filled some sort of requirement. A few students said they enrolled because they had an interest in it. Upon hearing this, I asked them what the course was about, given that the title of the course is not particularly elucidating into the course content. After much probing on my part, no one in the class could tell me what the course would be about. This conversation went on for a while and I teased them about why they would take a course where they did not know what the course topic was. There were even some comical guesses as to what the course was about especially since their course schedules stated they were enrolled in "Intro to Comp Eth & Global Soc." One student guessed, "Is that Introduction to... Composition... Ethics and Globalization Sociology?" In other words, almost no one had any idea what we would be covering in the course. That semester, I piloted a very similar survey and when the results were in, I saw that the biggest factor of why they took the class was "I have an interest in the topic." I showed them the graphed survey data in class and I asked them to explain how it was possible that according to the survey, they took the class because they were interested in it, yet, on the first day of class, they had no idea what the course was about. Students laughed at the contradiction and then offered some clarifications

Similarly, in this course, I assumed that although the course title (Key Themes in Chicano/Latino History) is not as vague as the other one, a similar phenomenon might be happening. Once again, I showed the students the graphed survey data and asked them to help me understand it a bit better. When I got to the question at hand and asked them for clarity,

some of them immediately started giggling. Table 10 shows a brief in-class transcript from an audio-recorded class session.

Table 10: In-class Transcript Showing Initial Student "Interest" in the Course

(while pointing to the graph on the projection screen titled 'Which best describes why you registered for this course?' the professor seeks to understand the students' answers by asking them for input)

Professor: If this class is anything like other classes I've had before, I'm not convinced...
(pause)...65% said that they registered in this class...

(distracted and interrupted by the sudden restlessness when some students start grinning and talking to each other)

I see some people smiling already!

(loud burst of laughter by most of the students as if they were in on a joke that was kept from the professor)

I don't know..you tell me what's happening here 'cause I don't know what the answers are - YOU know what the answers are. According to YOU, or at least two-thirds of you, the reason you registered for this class, or one of the main reasons you registered was because you have a genuine interest in this topic

(more subdued giggling from several students)

Why is that funny?

(One of the student that was giggling responds " it's not [funny]" to which the class laughs again)

(Another student chimes in attempting to bring the professor out of his ignorance)

Student 1: When I first registered I didn't know what we were gonna review. I just knew it was Chicano studies.

(student in the background agrees out loud "yea")

I didn't know [that we would cover]the labels of Chicanos and Latinos and the history of here and stuff like that.

Professor: So that means that you did not register for this class because you were interested in the topic?

Student 1: No, I registered because it fit my schedule

(class laughter)

Professor: Aha!

Student 1: *(eagerly adding as if to clarify the professor's misconception about her answer)* but later oooooon it became interesting

Professor: What do you mean later on? *HOW* later on?

Student 1: The first day when we first started talking about everything we were gonna go through, *THEEEEN* I knew it was gonna be interesting.

Student 2: I mean I was interested in it because when you're picking classes and you have an opportunity to pick something that you like, why not? I mean take it! It's your class! You're the one that's gonna be sitting in it, it's your grade. If it's a class you're not even

interested in most likely you're not gonna pay attention, most likely you won't do the homework so that's on you.

Student 3: It sounds better than science. (*giggles from class*) It was either this or science.

Professor: So when you see 'Chicano Studies', it sounds better than 'Biology?'
(*several students nod and say "yea" to let the teacher know that's how they feel*)
(*still sounding like he needs more clarification*) So that's not an interest though...
necessarily right?
(*a few students in the background say "no"*)

Student 3: kinda

Professor: (*thinking more about how to clarify things for himself*) So maybe this question should be rephrased?

Student 3: (*the sole voice while the professor is thinking to himself*) It was more interesting than biology.

Professor: Maybe I should but that as one of the options in the survey "More interesting than biology"
(*giggles from class*)

Student 4: Maybe the name of the course is catchy?
(*class laughter*)

Professor: It's catchy? 'Key Themes in Chicano/Latino History' yea..it's sexy isn't it?
(*class laughter*)
...or do you mean the "Chicano Studies" part?

Student 4: Yea (*several echoes of "yea" in the background from other students*) but maybe like as opposed to what somebody said -something like biology

(*a student says something audible but indiscernible to me which apparently struck a chord with other students who agreed and chimed in*)

Student 5: (*as if relieved that her position was finally voiced in class*) Yea! I was gonna say that. 'cause when I saw it I was like "well maybe I'll learn more about where I come from and how our society came to be as Latinos."

Student 6: Yea same thing. It's like better than all the other history [courses]

Professor: Ah ok!

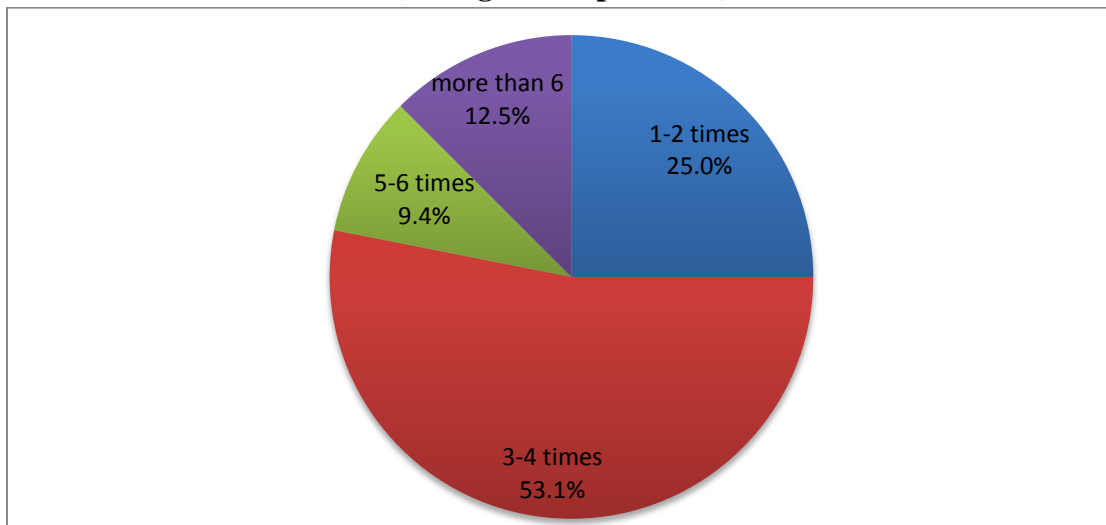
As the above transcript suggests, the students already knew that the answers that were depicted on the survey graph did not tell the whole story of why they enrolled in the course. They seemed

to have enrolled in this course because it sounded like the *less* boring class not because they had a deep interest in the topic. Within the choices they had to fill a particular requirement with a class that was available and would fit their schedule, the title of the course seemed appealing to some students because the words "Chicano" and "Latino" offered students a possible opportunity to learn more about themselves. However, this initial appeal does not necessarily translate to "high engagement" in the class. For some students, the initial "interest" in this course grows over the semester as they get exposed to more information. Also, students almost always have a series of choices in courses to fill a certain requirement. They will obviously choose the more appealing option, but again, that initial appeal does not always translate to a high level of engagement in the classroom. The students' initial interest must be harnessed and developed into a deeper interest and enthusiasm for the course material. We are left with the question, although the course title is interesting *enough* to enroll in, is it interesting *enough* to engage them?

Emotional Engagement: Talking About the Content In-between Class Meetings

Now that we have seen that students consider themselves engaged in this course and have had an initial glimpse as to what engages them, we must also examine the *ways* in which they might be engaged. A notable aspect the survey demonstrated was the degree to which students would talk outside the classroom about the course content. When the survey asked, "*How often do you talk about topics from this course outside of this classroom? (average times per week),*" 100% of the students responded that they do so at least once a week. The following graph in Figure 12 shows the rate of their responses.

**Figure 12: How often do you talk about topics from this course outside of this classroom?
(average times per week)**



The graph also demonstrates that 3/4 of all the students had conversations outside the class three or more times per week. This is powerful evidence that speaks to the degree that these students are engaged in the course material. It also sheds light on *how* these students engage with the material. Handelsman et al. (2005) describe "four dimensions of college student engagement that were distinct and reliable: skills engagement, participation/interaction engagement, emotional engagement, and performance engagement" (p. 184). The authors argue that emotional engagement, in particular, is a positive predictor of absolute and relative engagement (p. 188). Emotional engagement is the dimension of classroom engagement that deals with affective involvement in the course content such as "applying course material to my life," "really desiring to learn the material," and "thinking about the course between class meetings" (p.186). In the case of this classroom, it is important to understand *emotional engagement* since the students strongly exhibit the characteristics of this type of engagement and because of its purported role as an important factor in overall student engagement and academic success. This emotional engagement is precisely the type of effect I, as their professor, would hope to have on

students and their communities because the students amplify the classroom lesson by taking it back to their friends and families and further engaging them in the conversation. This impact on the community is what the framers of the Plan de Santa Barbara (Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education, 1969) had in mind for Chicana/o Studies. In other words, the lessons in Chicana/o Studies classrooms were never meant to stay in the university or with the individual student, they were meant to be taken back to the communities and disseminated. This is exactly what the data shows is happening.

The written final reflections not only confirm that students are emotionally engaged but they also importantly provide us with examples of what this engagement looks like. This data source showed frequent evidence of this emotional engagement primarily in the form of students having discussions outside of class about the course content. The following are some examples:

Table 11: Examples of Emotional Engagement from Written Reflections

Throughout the semester I would go home with such enthusiasm to talk to both my mom and sister about our in class discussions and the videos we were assigned to see. I would attempt to explain to my sister, who has the mentality I once had, that this country never was and still isn't this picture perfect society so many strive to teach and believe. When she would go home and tell me about the things she learned in her history course I would add input or explain in detail things that her teacher wasn't allowed to teach her in class; something that before taking this course I was unable to do. I loved being able to join in intellectual conversations with my family and friends whenever they talked about politics or their culture.

I honestly could say that I have actually learned things in this class that I have used in conversation out of the classroom, unlike many classes I was taking this semester.

Chicano Studies 200-02 was the best class I have ever taken in my life. It might sound like an exaggeration but it is not. Throughout the semester I learned much about my culture and most importantly I learned about myself. I never really thought about the subjects we discussed in class like Chicano Education, Oppression, etc., outside of class but now I speak of all the topics 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

The type of engagement shown in Table 11 is the type where students *take the lesson home* with them by frequently thinking and talking about the course content. It demonstrates a deep level

of interest in the subject matter especially since it is not an official part of the course requirements that students go home and talk with their friends and family about the course. Moreover, the lessons from class keep getting repeated and reconsidered as students have these conversations outside of class.

The interviews also confirmed the students' emotional engagement. All but one of the interviewed students claimed that they often had conversations about the course material outside of class. These outside conversations most often tend to be with people that are close to the students and that they see on a daily basis (significant others, parents, close friends, etc.). Gloria's story is a prime example of this and deserves to be told at length in order to appreciate how she engages with the material outside of class. Although she was very quiet in class (she spoke outloud once or twice in the entire semester), Gloria frequently had conversations outside of class about the course content. In particular, she had ongoing conversations with her parents even though, before the course, she did not talk to her parents that much about any topic. She states,

After this class, I really started talking to my parents and learning their perspectives which is really interesting and it taught me a lot about who I am because of what they learned from their parents and they try to teach that to us.

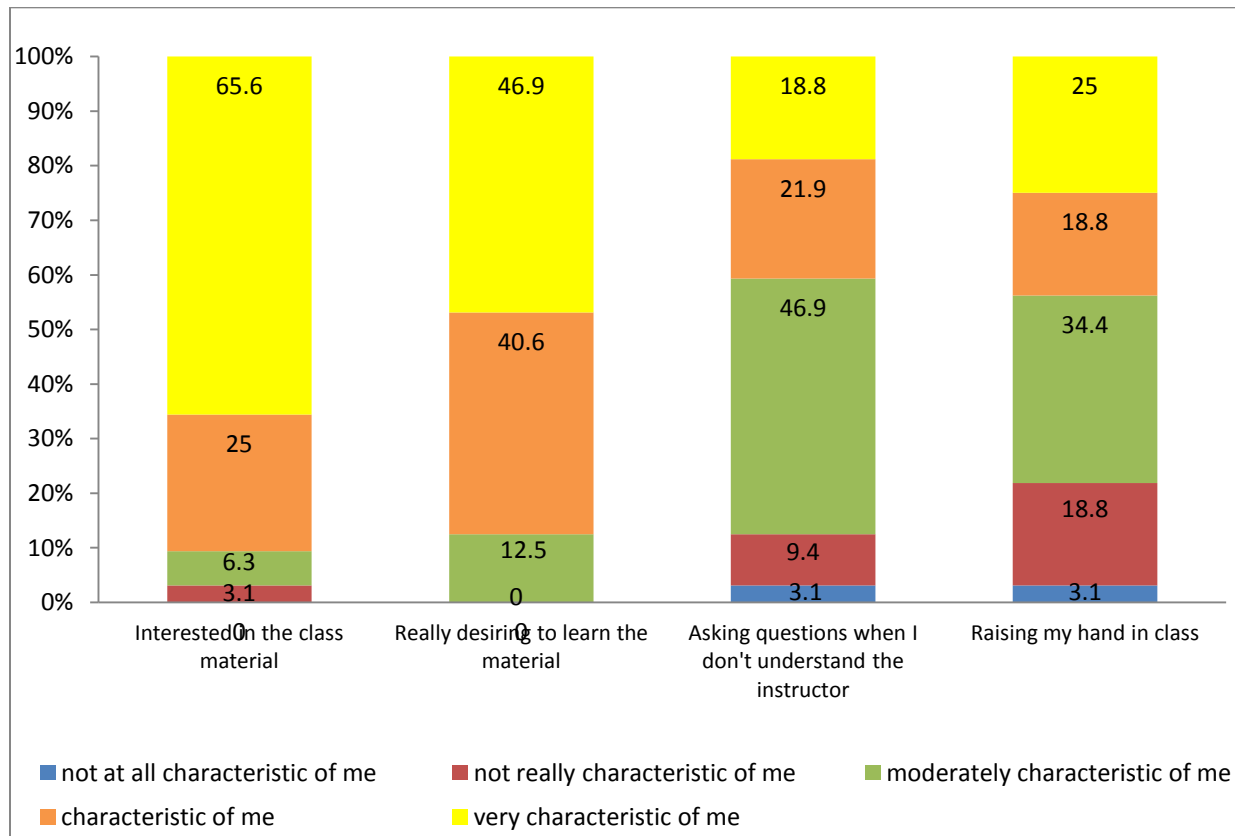
She says that she frequently talked to her dad about Eurocentrism and although he was not familiar with that word, he was very well aware of the concept. Regarding Eurocentrist views, he explained to Gloria, "That's not our way of seeing the world." She claims that once, as they were watching TV, her father followed up the earlier conversations by commenting on Eurocentric notions of beauty which are presented on TV. Gloria also talked to her parents about the Chicano Educational Pipeline and how, although the numbers are grim, she is now a part of a small percentage of Mexican Americans that are enrolled at a four-year university. "It feels good

to know that," she says. She told her father this because he has constantly been stressing the importance of education and because she considered dropping out in high school. She even says that now she appreciates her family trips to Mexico even more because she is more interested in her culture and family history and talks to her friends all the time about hierarchies and oppression. When asked when these types of conversations started she answered, "After I started getting to know more about my culture. This class really helped me not be afraid of who I am." She emphasizes that she never did that before this class. Gloria even tells of how she took it upon herself to talk to her neighbor who is in middle school and together they analyzed the content of the girl's history book which Gloria concluded told a skewed and "sugar coated" version of history.

What Emotional Engagement Looks Like in Class

Ironically, although students like Gloria consider themselves highly engaged and exhibit this engagement by frequently talking about the course content outside of class, a casual observer inside our classroom might not be able to discern this high level of engagement. That is because many students in this class do not regularly speak up during class. Traditionally, raising one's hand, asking questions, and openly commenting on the course material have been the hallmark of an engaged student. However, these survey results begin to challenge that notion since they show the very high level at which students feel engaged with the course material, yet most of the students rarely raise their hands and ask questions. Figure 13 shows the results of four survey questions taken from the Student Course Engagement Questionnaire (SCEQ) (Handelsman, et al., 2005). It shows there is a major difference in the way students self-report their interest and desire to learn in the class versus the way they participate in class when it comes to raising their hands and asking questions.

Figure 13: To what extent do the following behaviors, thoughts, and feelings describe you in this course?



In Figure 13, the left two columns show that 90.6% and 87.5% of students say it is either "characteristic" or "very characteristic" of them to be interested in the material and they desire to learn the material (respectively). On the other hand, the right two columns demonstrate that among these same students, only 40.7% and 43.8% saw themselves as "characteristic" or "very characteristic" to ask questions in class or raise their hand (respectively). From these four questions, and the previous survey data presented, it appears that students are interested in the course, they have a desire to learn the material, they feel engaged, but they generally do not ask questions nor raise their hands thus challenging unidimensional notions of student engagement.

To summarize the survey data, the web-based anonymous survey served primarily as a way to triangulate other data sources. It was important that this survey was done anonymously so students would feel more free to give their honest impressions about the course. This data source yielded insights mostly into the level, reasons, and types of student engagement. The survey data suggests that students in this course are highly engaged especially in comparison to their other courses. Students self-report that the reasons why they are engaged are (a) an interest in the topics, (b) the relatability of the course, and (c) the approach of the professor. Although, it is doubtful that the students have been highly interested in the course from the very beginning of the semester, nonetheless, their self-reporting states that they are highly interested at the end of the semester. Moreover, the survey also shows a general pattern of students thinking and talking about the course material in between class sessions. While this suggests that the students are engaged in a very important way and to a very high degree, their in-class behavior would not demonstrate this by traditional standards such as raising their hands and asking questions.

Collective Engagement

One of the most striking recurring themes that surfaced across data sources has been that students are engaged in the class collectively. For the purposes of this study, I will refer to this phenomenon as *collective engagement*¹². This dimension of engagement first caught my attention as I was sifting through their final written reflections in which students were asked to comment on the most valuable aspects of the class. As students were describing their own engagement and what appealed to them about the class, they frequently referred to a larger collective dynamic which they seemed keenly aware of. In writing about the valuable aspects of

¹² It is important to note that none of the data sources asked specifically about collective engagement or anything resembling that. The written prompts and the interview only asked students to comment on their experience on the course as a whole. Only after reviewing the data did I use the notion of collective engagement to describe the content of the students' comments.

their classroom experience, they often used words like "whole [class]," "all [students]," and "we," while referring to their own engagement and explaining what enticed them to become engaged. Here are a few examples from the final written reflections:

Table 12: Examples of Collective Engagement from Students' Written Reflections

Every time I walked into the classroom I felt like we were all one.

I looked forward to coming to class. I really liked watching the whole class participate in the discussions it made me want to participate more.

The experience of this class was great because not only was I being taught new perspectives of my roots, but also had the opportunity to do this while being in a comfortable setting. Although this class is open to anyone, the fact that most of the students in this class, were either the same background and/or race as me made me want to learn more especially as I saw more people getting involved....I liked the idea that many people often spoke up and told their own opinion.

My general experience throughout the class was great, I felt like I was actually learning in this class. I also liked that the teacher was so passionate about what he is teaching, that it made me that much more interested. I also enjoyed that we were all involved in the conversation. I felt as if the class was actually a dialogue sometimes, and not just a monologue. The first day we walked into the class, I remember the teacher allowing us to do most of the thinking and a lot of the talking. We had to think about it before he told us the real answer. This was a chance for most of the students to be involved in the discussion. I enjoyed this class so much I am taking another Chicano class next semester.

I also liked that the whole class was able to come together and contribute their own knowledge to add to the professor's lecture.

This class was very engaging and open. It created an environment where we the students could feel free and safe enough to express our opinions and contribute values from our own experience towards the subject without feeling pushed to the side as unimportant. I personally liked how we were constantly stimulated to think of our own experiences and ideas to make the key themes of the course relevant to our own life and thus make it seem important and interesting. I liked how the topics were taught in a discussion type manner, instead of direct lectures, allowing more student contribution and making the student and instructor both learn from one another. The discussion based process also made it easier for students to learn from one another, being able to share perspectives and knowledge.

The excerpts in Table 12 show, in various ways, that the students are conscious of who the other students are in the class and appreciative of the level at which others are participating. There is also a sense that these students feel they are participating together and feel cohesion and comfort as part of a community. This sense of unity is reminiscent of what Victor Turner (1969) terms "communitas" which is a deep spirit of community especially among individuals experiencing

something together. One could argue that this happens in all classrooms since all students in any given classroom share the commonality that they are all taking the same class. However, it is highly doubtful that most students feel that they "are all one" in their typical college class. These students are pointing out distinguishing markers of this class and pointing out not only that it was noteworthy but that it was valuable. More specifically, they frequently mention their collective involvement in class discussions where they feel like contributors to the lesson.

The aforementioned excerpts suggest varying degrees of a *collective engagement* in the classroom which, for the purposes of this study, I am characterizing as:

- a) a strong sense of group cohesion and "we-ness" that further engages its participants
- b) being drawn into an event by a group dynamic that increases the appeal of the actual event
- c) a classroom dynamic where students are learning with and from each other

This type of engagement is worth mentioning not just because students in this class exhibited the characteristics mentioned above, but because this type of engagement is not readily if ever mentioned in the engagement literature. Granted, "shared-learning" or "collaborative learning," which refers to students doing things together in the classroom, is emphasized and encouraged through college engagement literature (Astin, 1993; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Guenther & Miller, 2011; Kuh, 2001, 2003; Pascarella, 2005). However, what was encountered in this classroom was somewhat different especially in the larger sense of group cohesion as being a *reason* why students participate.

Initially, collective engagement would merely seem to be a *type* of engagement in this classroom. In other words, we would be led to believe that students became engaged in the course for "X" reason and one of the manifestations of their engagement was that they felt a sense of unity and were engaged as a class. However, while this is probably true to a great

extent, several students commented that they were engaged in the class *because* other students were actively engaged. This suggests that collective engagement is not just a type or level of engagement but can be a cause for engagement. In essence, many students were saying, "I am engaged because *we* are engaged." Collective engagement was not just *a way* that they were engaged, for many it was a key reason *why* they were engaged. This might have a particularly powerful effect when, as students argue, they rarely, if ever, encounter a college course where they have collective discussions.

The interviews also echoed the perception that *everyone* is engaged and that they shared a sense of community. The following are some examples.

Table 13: Excerpts from Interviews Suggesting Collective Engagement

The whole class identified together.

We were all in a common state of mind. We didn't all agree with each other but we were ok with what we were saying.

When I came here I took the class and, oh my gosh! It was like crazy! I loved it. People would come in and, usually in [other] classes I see people texting or like listening through one ear on the ipod and in this class nobody [was doing that]. Everyone was really into it.

Everyone was in a good mood to speak out and say something!

The sense of collective engagement and community these students feel appears to be all encompassing. That is, students through the interviews, corroborated the written reflections by stating that they feel *everyone* in the class is engaged. However, when students say "everyone," is this just a way of speaking? Can it be taken literally? Or is it an exaggeration? Since so many students are repeating a very similar idea across data sources, we must take into account what they are saying. That does not necessarily mean that we should believe that every single person in the class is highly engaged. It does, however, suggest that many students have the *impression*

that everyone is engaged and that impression is meaningful and lasting. Armando, for example, comments more specifically on this by saying:

I was actually surprised of the way that everyone [pauses to correct himself] well, I'm not gonna lie and say 'everyone' because maybe there was a few students in there but the majority of the class was intrigued and I honestly can say that I've never seen a class that was into a certain subject or the material that was being delivered to that extent.

Here, Armando checks himself in saying "everyone" but still explains that, to him, it seemed like the majority was engaged and "maybe" a few students were not. Moreover, he also explains that compared to other classes, he has never seen a class as a whole be this engaged.

But what are students basing these impressions on? Gloria's interview partly answers this by stating that she observed people paying attention and points to the notable absence of texting and other distractions as proof. She points this out because she says it is a radical departure from other courses. Another student says that when the professor would walk in -everyone was ready to listen and learn.

Fortunately, the anonymous web-based survey the students took can serve as a way to crosscheck these impressions. In essence, the survey data corroborates what students are saying about high levels of engagement among the class. The survey shows that 84% of respondents consider themselves engaged (28%) or highly engaged (56%). Even though it is clearly not *everyone*, it might be enough to make it seem like everyone.

Even with the survey data somewhat corroborating the claim that the class as a whole is engaged, there is still a major issue. Inside the class, this high level of engagement was not immediately apparent to me as the professor since there were many students that rarely if ever talked in the class. Those students, for the most part, still consider themselves highly engaged especially since they strongly exhibit an emotional engagement with the course content.

As the interviews showed, these students consider themselves highly engaged because they constantly think about the material, not because they raise their hand and ask questions in class. So the question stands, how would other students *know* that their classmates are engaged (emotional or otherwise) when those classmates never say anything in class? While this question is beyond the scope of the current inquiry, a further study on this topic could yield telling information on collective engagement. The larger and more immediate point is, however, that students *do* know that the class is engaged. When Armando was pressed on how he knew that others were engaged he responded, "I guess you can say it was the vibe that you get when you walked into the class." At some level, students were very much in tune with each other, whether their classmates spoke up or not. They are picking up on intuitive cues that tell them the dynamics of the class; thus lending credence to Mayra's interview comments that the students "were all in a common state of mind."

Theater of the Oppressed and Engagement

Nothing in this study's data supports a claim that the Theater of the Oppressed was the reason why students were so engaged in this class. The data suggests that students were already engaged before the Theater of the Oppressed was implemented. This did not turn out to be a case where relatively disinterested students were suddenly engaged because of T.O. activities. In a class that already self-reports a very high level of engagement, it is difficult to deploy activities that engage them even more. However, that is not to say that the Theater of the Oppressed had no bearing on levels and types of engagement. There is evidence that suggests that T.O. activities promoted both the emotional engagement and collective engagement that students exhibited.

T.O. and Emotional Engagement

As was discussed previously, emotional engagement (Handelsman, et al., 2005) is the type of engagement where students might continue thinking, processing, or talking about the course content even when they are not in class. In other words, they *take the lesson home* with them. While it has already been shown that students in this class were emotionally engaged, the interviews showed that the Theater of the Oppressed played a part in some students' emotional engagement even months after the conclusion of the course. Armando gives an example of how that might happen. He says that after we did the T.O. activities in class, he constantly kept thinking back to the skits. He states:

The [Forum Theater] scenarios that others came up with are scenarios that I see now in my daily life. So that kinda made me stop and think and reflect in my daily life on my way to work, or when I'm at a restaurant, or anywhere. I see a lot of those scenarios happening and it makes me stop and think how I learned about that in Chicano Studies class. And it gets me thinking "why does that happen? Why do those scenarios occur in our daily lives?" It also makes me think "how can I make that change? How can I get that to stop if it's a negative situation?"

Interviewer: Have you done anything? Has there been a point where you've seen a scenario and acted because you've been thinking about it so much?

One of my uncles he's very like Eurocentric, which is a word that I also learned in class, he's like "Black people take advantage of welfare" and little comments like that. I asked him "Why do you think that way? Why do you say that?" I don't go towards him and say "Stop saying that!" but I ask him "why" just so I can know what has gotten him to think that way. And it's funny because a lot of those reasons are things we discussed in class. It has a lot to do with the Eurocentric mind. It's like a state of mind that people start consuming and keep consuming and it gets passed down through centuries....I kinda got my uncle to think about it too.

While Armando goes on to describe other conversations he has had outside of class dealing with the course content, the preceding excerpt shows how the Theater of the Oppressed and the course content jointly affected Armando's emotional engagement. He did not say he talked to others about the Theater of the Oppressed *per se*, he claims that he continually reflects on his classmates' Forum Theater scenarios especially as they manifest in his everyday life. An

important part of the Forum Theater format is that the participants reflect on the situation and try to find different ways to resolve the scenario and bring it to a different satisfactory end. This is exactly what Armando says he is doing when he sees these problematic "scenarios" in his life. In the case of his uncles, Armando, after reflecting on their comments, finally confronts one of them and asks him about his way of thinking. Armando, clarifies that he did not tell his uncle what to do or that what he was doing was wrong but he wanted to, perhaps, get his uncle to be introspective and analyze the origins of his own thinking. During the Forum Theater presentations we discussed the importance of analyzing context and that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to problems. Armando is clearly demonstrating the capacity to take the lessons from here and enact them outside of class in his own way.

This is an example of the *praxis* (Allman, 2007; Darder, et al., 2009a; Freire, 1970, 1973, 1998; Giroux, 1988; hooks, 1994; McLaren, 2007; McLaren & Jaramillo, 2007, 2010) that often gets talked about in critical pedagogy which tends to be described as a merging of theory and practice or analysis and action. Here, we see Armando relating to the scenarios and seeing their embodiments in his daily life. As he observes these daily scenarios he also analyzes them in terms of what he learned in class and asks himself what he can do to change these scenarios. Antonio Faundez (Freire & Faundez, 1989), in a conversation with Paulo Freire regarding praxis, says:

One of the things we learned in Chile in our early reflection on everyday life was that abstract political, religious or moral statements, excellent in themselves, did not produce change, did not take concrete shape in acts as individuals. We were revolutionaries in the abstract, not in our daily lives. I believe that revolution begins precisely with revolution in our daily lives. It seems to me essential that in our individual lives, we should day to day live out what we affirm. (p. 25)

This is tantamount to what Armando is doing. As he is analyzing his daily life, he is also looking for opportunities to shape and act on that reality.

Forum Theater and "Stickiness"

When Armando was asked about his classroom experience in general, he stated that the course has impacted his life outside of the classroom. As an example, he gave the above story of seeing the Forum Theater scenarios in his everyday life and eventually taking action.

Armando's frequent thinking about the scenarios presented in class provides insight into how emotional engagement can work especially with the aid of a creative tool like Theater of the Oppressed. In class discussions prior to the Theater of the Oppressed exercises, we had discussed most of the themes that emerged through the Forum Theater scenarios. However, as the following quote from one of my pilot studies suggests, one of the great values that students have found in these types of activities is that it makes the lessons *real*. In the pilot interview a student states, "I am a Chicano/a [Studies] major so I have heard of the discrimination and obstacles Chicanos face, but actually hearing and seeing the different scenarios made it real." In other words, discussing the topic is one thing, seeing a dramatized portrayal of it in class is quite different. While Armando does, at other points of his interview, say that he thought about the class lectures outside of class, that is not exactly what he is saying in this particular part of the interview. In this case, Armando does not say that he found examples of the *class lectures* in his daily life, he is specifically pointing out seeing the Forum Theater scenarios in his daily life. While the themes of both the lectures and the scenarios might be very similar, he relates mostly to the scenarios. However, he does point to other class lectures (like the one on Eurocentrism) that helped him understand those concepts better. In a brief follow-up interview, Armando was asked to explain this further and he says that the lectures and Forum were both very important because they helped his understanding in different ways. He says, the lectures explained "how

those problems came about and theories to explain them" while the Forum Theater showed how those issues "play out in everyday life."

There was something about the way in which the lessons were embodied or *enfleshed* (McLaren, 1995) during the Forum Theater presentations that made them more meaningful and memorable enough to remember seven months after the event. This implies that there was a certain "stickiness" (Gladwell, 2002) to the topics and to the way in which they were presented through the Theater of the Oppressed. In his book *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (2002), Malcolm Gladwell explains how ideas become contagious and cause social epidemics. He argues that one of the key rules for social contagion is the "stickiness" of a message or idea. This implies that the importance of a message is only part of the epidemic. The message has to be packaged in a way that is memorable and increases the retention and comprehension of the message itself. Gladwell argues that:

The specific quality that a message needs to be successful is the quality of "stickiness." Is the message -or the food, or the movie, or the product -memorable? Is it so memorable, in fact, that it can create change, that it can spur someone to action? (2002, p. 92)

In the case of Armando, we see that the Forum Theater was a way of enfleshing, "packaging" and delivering the messages (messages which had already been discussed in class to some extent) and it led to Armando constantly thinking about how these scenarios played out in his everyday life as well as subsequently taking action.

T.O. and Collective Engagement

Just like there is no evidence that the Theater of the Oppressed was the major force that led to high levels of student engagement in this class, the data does not support claims that T.O. was the magic bullet that propelled collective engagement in the class either. It is clear, that the collective "we-ness" that students speak about was present before the T.O. exercises made their

debut in class. However, while T.O. might not be responsible for kick-starting this type of environment, it definitely seems to strongly support and further this sentiment. There was a great deal of consistency in students' answers across data sources that suggests the Theater of the Oppressed promotes collective engagement in three key ways: a) by promoting student interaction with each other, b) by highlighting the *relatability* of student experiences, and c) by promoting the exchange and valuing of others' ideas.

Interaction

Students' in-class quickwrites about the Theater of the Oppressed games suggested that they thought of the activities in terms of "*we are doing this together.*" In this quickwrite, they were simply asked to take five minutes in class and answer the following questions:

What are your general impressions of the Theater of the Oppressed exercises?

What if anything did you find of value?

What did you find appealing/unappealing?

One of their most frequent answer on the value/appeal they found in the Theater of the Oppressed games was that they had the opportunity to interact with each other. This points to the value they found in collective participation and engagement. The following excerpts are just a few examples:

Table 14: Comments About Interaction Found in Quickwrites

What I found appealing was just the idea of us students interacting with each other since we do not do that a lot.

I enjoyed it. Doing these exercises together changed the environment, as if we were all equal and friends instead of teacher and students.

Not only was it nice to get out of our seats and interact with one another but it was interesting to see the subjects we discussed in class expressed and demonstrated in countless ways.

I think the exercises are great for breaking the ice and getting people to loosen up and get to know one another.

As these quotes suggest, interacting with their fellow classmates was an important aspect of the Theater of the Oppressed games. The first comment points out that this is especially important since they do not normally interact in this way with each other. From the above comments however, it is unclear which type of interaction the students are referring to since the activities consisted of different types and levels of interaction. We can only assume that the comments refer to all of the Theater of the Oppressed interactions as a whole. Since many of the games required that students partner-up with another student, the experience those two students share together would presumably help "break the ice" as one student put it. However, although I did not see any overt references in their writings to paired interactions, several of the responses explicitly pointed out that they valued the class interacting *as a whole*. The following are a few examples:

Table 15: Comments About the Whole Class Found in Quickwrites

What I liked was that the exercises made the whole class involved. Also, that everyone was part of it there was nobody left out.

I felt that we got to participate as a whole, and was an opportunity to bond with classmates.

On the day of the [Forum] presentation I was more relaxed. Since, we got to work together as the whole class. I think it helps to feel less embarrassed about each other.

What I found appealing was that everyone from the class was participating even the professor and no one was making fun on no one.

These comments shed a bit more light on the types of interactions these students found valuable. Specifically, the comments corroborate that the entire class was participating during these games which was a noteworthy and appealing aspect of the activities. These comments also point out

two of the effects of this collective participation. It is perceived by one of the above students that this type of engagement helped to build bonds with their classmates. Another student points out that "no one was making fun of no one." This comment suggests the understandings for mutual respect that students had and coincides with other comments that speak to feeling more comfortable and relaxed with each other during the activities and as a result of these exercises.

The choice of language is clear and consistent in these examples. They illustrate that they were very aware of their collective engagement and participation and that this was highly valued. More specifically, it is important to them that everyone, including the professor, is participating - no one is excluded. In some ways, this collective participation is to be expected in the Theater of the Oppressed games since the professor is giving a directive to the entire class to do something. One could argue that it would be more surprising if they were *not* participating. However, none of the written reflections suggest that there is any type of coercion going on or that it was an unpleasant experience even if everyone is participating. On the contrary, the students' consistent framing of their collective engagement as an asset reflects that it was something desirable and welcomed by them. They are not merely making an observation that everyone participated, they are emphasizing that they enjoyed it and valued it. It would be expected, to some degree, that when students are forced to do something they really do not want to do and do not enjoy, the dynamics of the learning community would be tainted to the point that the class as a whole would be aware of it and their forced participation would not be seen as an asset. This group has already shown that they are "in tune" with each other by accurately discerning the level of engagement in the class. With the Theater of the Oppressed, they are once again assessing that the whole class is engaged and enjoying the activities.

Moreover, the comments go beyond just stating that they enjoyed the fact that other individuals were *doing something*. The responses suggest that these students feel that they are a part of a *community of learners* (Rogoff, 1994) and that total inclusion and participation of its members is a highly coveted level of *collective engagement*. Furthermore, several responses point out that there was a discernible benefit to the exercises in that it helped them feel more comfortable around each other and develop stronger bonds. In this case, the use of the word "interaction" suggests a deeper meaning besides merely being in the presence of each other and having some sort of perfunctory exchange. In short, their comments suggest they are building relationships.

However, as was argued in a previous section, there was already a strong sense of collective engagement throughout the course. By simply looking at the students' comments on interaction it is unclear whether these interactions were valued because they provided an opportunity to coalesce or if the students already felt a sense of community and these games merely gave them a chance to interact with their community members. In other words, did the activities serve to build the community or were they just an expression of a community that was already built? This study argues that both of those claims would be correct. In fact, that question is unclear only if we look exclusively at the previous comments. As soon as we integrate the rest of the data, the picture is much more rich and complete and tells us which interactions were valuable and why. The Forum Theater activity shows that these interactions were a way to share, relate, and connect with each other.

Forum Theater Quickwrites and Interaction

The Forum Theater quickwrites largely echo and further clarify the idea that these activities are a valuable way to interact with each other. At the beginning of the class session

following the Forum Theater presentations, students were given a quickwrite regarding the Forum Theater assignment. Students were asked:

What was your overall experience with the Forum Theater assignment?

What if anything did you find of value?

What did you find appealing/unappealing?

There was a great variety of responses although certain aspects of the assignment were mentioned much more than others. Four of the reasons mentioned accounted for nearly half of all the answers. These categories show that students largely found value in the Forum Theater assignment because a) it provided an opportunity to interact with each other, b) it was fun, c) it was relatable, and d) it allowed them to see each other's perspectives. Each of these categories could be considered a dimension of collective engagement or at the very least a factor that promotes collective engagement.

Here, as in the other quickwrites, students' responses indicate that they appreciated the opportunity to interact with their classmates. More specifically, they argue that the Forum Theater activity provided them with the space to become familiar with each other and helped them bond. The following are a few examples:

Table 16: Comments on Interaction found in Forum Theater Quickwrites

I found great value in this project, because it really bonded us students as a real class. My other classes, I don't even know half of the students!

The whole process helped me become more familiar with my classmates who are pretty nice people!

I found a lot of value in it because as a group I was able to know these new people. We were able to work together and bring up many ideas. At first it was hard because I'm not good in crowds, but with the exercises we did, I felt comfortable when it was our turn to present.

The overall experience for me was great. I liked doing the Forum theater because I got to talk to some of my peers more and got to work with some of them.

These students are commenting on the various interactions that they had with their classmates through this assignment. These interactions helped better acquaint students with each other and build bonds of comfort among themselves. The fact that the Forum Theater assignment was a group assignment, forced students to work together in small groups. Although they formed their own groups, students got to meet or develop friendships with their group members. One could argue that this interaction and bonding is inherent in most, if not all, college level group projects -not just Forum Theater activities. In fact, the current research on college student engagement largely agrees and emphasizes the importance of group work to engage students (Astin, 1993; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Guenther & Miller, 2011; Kuh, 2003; Pascarella, 2005). However, there are a few particularities at work here that rarely occur in other classrooms/group projects.

There is a specific sequence that must be taken into account when we consider the issue of building trust and bonding among students. First of all, this project is immediately preceded by a whole session dedicated to Theater of the Oppressed games. Through these games, students begin to interact with each other in pairs, in small groups, and as a whole class in ways that are analytical, playful and engaging (see Appendix 3 on games). As some students have argued, the games "break the ice" so students feel more comfortable with each other. Only after we have all done the games together do we move on to the Forum Theater activity. Within the Forum assignment, students must first get into small groups, share their experiences with each other in order to come up with a skit that resonates with all of them, and finally present the skit to the entire class. Even after this, however, the project has not concluded since the whole class now comes together and chooses one scene to do Forum interventions and have a collective discussion. The succinct sequence for all of this is as follows:

Table 17: Sequence of Theater of the Oppressed Interactions¹³

T.O. games	Forum Theater assignment		
Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	
Interactions in whole group Interactions in small groups Interactions in pairs	→ Small group discussions →	→ Group presentation for entire class →	→ Whole class discussion

From this simplified sequence we can see that most "typical" college group projects tend not to follow this sequence of events. In almost all group projects that I was ever assigned in college the formula was almost always the same. First, students were placed in a group, then the students have some type of communication to coordinate the division of labor (rarely did the whole group ever manage to actually meet outside of class). Finally, we presented in class and it was all over. On the other hand, the sequence followed in this class for the Theater of the Oppressed activities actually "warmed up" the students to work with each other and encouraged different degrees of interaction by engaging them at different levels with different group sizes. This is more akin to a series of multifaceted group activities rather than a singular group project; it is group work nested within group work. Thus, it is not surprising that many students stated that one of the most valuable aspects of this activity was the interactions they had with their peers.

Having Fun in Class

When students commented on the value of the Theater of the Oppressed they frequently mentioned having fun in class. This is important because it seems to speak to the character of the aforementioned interactions. However, despite its frequent mention, the comments on "fun" do not generally carry the same richness as the other types of comments. This is not to downplay the importance of having fun in the classroom nor the role that "having fun" played in this assignment. Clearly, students valued the opportunity to have fun in the classroom and they

¹³ See Appendix 3& 4 for detailed descriptions of the class activities

mentioned it in a high frequency in their responses. In fact, one of the reasons I use these types of exercises in the class is because students tend to have fun and enjoy the activities. However, the majority of the written comments that denoted having fun in class lacked any further elaboration on this aspect thus making it difficult to infer much on what this fun means for the larger learning environment. Here are a few examples:

Table 18: Student Comments on "Fun"

The overall exercise was fun for our group and a little difficult.

The overall experience for me was very fun.

I had a lot of fun during this activity.

Although these types of comments mention "fun" and then abruptly cut off and move to another topic, this dimension is still important because it sheds light on the quality of interactions students were having. The significance of these comments is that students are having fun with *each other*, whether they explicitly state it or not. Especially considering all the preceding comments on the collective aspect of the class and activities, it would be counterintuitive to think that the students are having fun alone. Rather, the frequent mentioning of "fun" can be taken to be a modifier of their group activities and thus unveiling part of the enjoyable nature of student interactions.

To anyone that witnessed the Theater of the Oppressed games and Forum Theater assignment in this class, it would be perfectly obvious that the students were having a lot of fun. They were actively playing, constantly smiling, and repeatedly laughing out loud. While this aspect was visible and audible during our class sessions and clearly was a key aspect of setting a mood for the students, the complexities of that fun environment are largely absent from these previous written prompts. However, while many of the comments were somewhat generic, they

were almost always stated within the first two sentences of their responses perhaps suggesting that it was one of the most memorable aspects of the activity. This, again, suggests that the fun nature of the activities contributes to the "stickiness" (Gladwell, 2002; Jackson, 2006) of the lesson.

The few comments that actually went beyond merely stating that the activity was fun, suggested that it was appealing to have fun in conjunction with fulfilling other class objectives. Here are a few examples:

Table 19: Student Comments on "Fun" as a Means to an End

It was a creative and fun way to show what we had learned connected to our lives.

I found it to be another way to learn different topics and make the class more fun and changing it [sic] the lesson to being engaged with other classmates.

It was very fun and we learned about issues relevant to the world as well.

These responses assert that this activity was a fun way to accomplish something else that was also worthwhile (i.e. learn different topics, engage with students, connect course material to their lives, etc.) In other words, they suggest that they were not having fun in class just for the sake of having fun. Having fun was a means to an end; although a meaningful end in itself. It seemed that students thoroughly enjoyed themselves and those fun interactions were valuable in developing group cohesion. Also, having fun in class did not mean being devoid of any serious content. As one student aptly and paradoxically stated, "It was a fun but serious activity."

This emphasis which students place on having fun is of great import especially in the development of higher cognitive processes. The students say they are having fun in part because the Theater of the Oppressed is replete with playful interactions. In fact, the first session of the Theater of the Oppressed is nothing but games. While, some in academia would dismiss how seriously games could be taken in a college classroom, scholars have long theorized as to the

great value of play in learning (Aronsson, 2010; Dewey, 2009; Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978). This is especially important to sociocultural perspectives which emphasize the centrality of social interaction (like playing games) in cognitive development (Aronsson, 2010; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Säljö, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). In this case, students are playing games, having fun, and as a result of that enjoy the interactions with each other in an educational environment. Furthermore, the students demonstrate that they are cognizant of the fact that they are playing, engaging, and learning simultaneously as is encapsulated in a student's comment: "I found it to be another way to learn different topics and make the class more fun and changing it [sic]the lesson to being engaged with other classmates." Moreover, while much of the discussion about play and learning from psychologists like Piaget (1962) and Vygotsky (1978) deal primarily with children, Augusto Boal argues that even as adults we still have a need to play and have fun with each other as part of our own liberation (Boal, 1992, 1995, 2006); hence his famous slogan, "have the courage to be happy." It is this playful and fun dimension that encourages participants to dialogue, learn, and grow together.

The issue of fun and enjoyment in university classrooms is specifically addressed by bell hooks (1994). Given the adequacy of her comments to this environment, she is worth quoting at length:

The first paradigm that shaped my pedagogy was the idea that the classroom should be an exciting place, never boring. And if boredom should prevail, then pedagogical strategies were needed that would intervene, alter, even disrupt the atmosphere. Neither Freire's work nor feminist pedagogy examined the notion of pleasure in the classroom. The idea that learning should be exciting, sometimes "fun," was the subject of critical discussion by educators writing about pedagogical practices in grade schools, and sometimes even high schools. But there seemed to be no interest among either traditional or radical educators in discussing the role of excitement in higher education. *Excitement* in higher education was viewed as potentially disruptive of the atmosphere of seriousness assumed to be essential to the learning process. To enter classroom settings in colleges and universities with the will to share the desire to encourage excitement, was to transgress. [emphasis in original] (p. 7)

What the students are expressing through their comments is precisely the *excitement* bell hooks is referring to. They demonstrate not only that they are having fun *just* playing games but they also suggest an enthusiasm in interacting with their classmates and getting to know them. Moreover, the fun that students express having during the activities was not restricted to only the Theater of the Oppressed. In several of the interviews, students frequently expressed that the class itself was fun and they *enjoyed* coming to class. The Theater of the Oppressed further contributed to students' enjoyment in this learning environment.

T.O. and Relatability

As was argued before, a key factor in students' engagement in this course was the *relatability* of the course content. By relatability I mean the making of clear and personal connections. Whereas previously this term was used to refer to making clear and personal connections to the course content and to the professor, in this section I argue that through the Theater of the Oppressed, students were able to make clear and personal connections to each other hence enhancing the collective engagement of the classroom community. The interactions referred to in the previous section were an important part of laying a foundation that helps students connect and relate to each other.

Relatability

The quickwrites on the Forum Theater activity suggested that students found value in the relatability of the Forum Theater assignment. Specifically, students frequently commented on how they could connect and relate to the skits being presented by their peers. The following excerpts are a few examples:

Table 20: Student Comments on Relatability

I personally thought each issue had some kind of connection to my personal life whether I experienced the scene or not.

The overall experience was great because a lot of what I saw, others have seen too. It was interesting that another person's skit can relate to me so much. [underlined in original]

I feel that all the scenes present actual things that go on in real life. I myself have been through similar situations. I found a lot of value because they are situations we Latinos face on a daily basis.

The above comments explicitly state the connection students made with the topics presented in the Forum skits. These students felt that the skits represented issues that are real and relevant to them. During the Forum presentations, several students even said that they had almost the same exact situations happen to them or somebody close to them. The relatability these students are describing is happening in two primary instances; first, when students share their experiences with their small groups in order to come up with a skit, and second, when all the groups present their skits to the entire class.

In the first instance, students get into small groups (about 5-6students) and come up with a skit that represents an issue that resonates with them. In order to do this, they first brainstorm on different topics and issues that hold a special meaning to each individual. From there, they chose one topic that they, as a group, feel in tune with and then design a skit around it. At this small group level, students are doubtlessly connecting with each other since they are discussing their experiences and trying to figure out how those experiences might overlap. In essence, their initial assignment is to design a skit that is *relatable* to their small group.

In the second instance, as the small groups are presenting their skits to the whole class, the spectators are also making connections to the themes of the skits. Although it is unreasonable that every skit would resonate with every student, it is likely that at least some of the skits would resonate with some of the students especially since they are of a very similar age

and demographic. When the class selects (by voting) the skit(s) which they want to examine more in depth, there is, again, a relatability about this scene that makes it resonate with the students. As students do their Forum interventions and engage in collective discussions, this relatability is once again solidified.

Several students responded with answers that mentioned their connection to issues that "we Latinos" face. These are two examples:

Table 21: Comments Relating to "Latino" Experiences

As Latinos, many of us encounter similar experiences.

I found a lot of value because they are situations we Latinos face on a daily basis.

I think most Latinos can relate to the scenarios that were presented because they're real for us.

This is yet another type of relatability where students feel that certain issues are particular or more prevalent for people like them. What they are in essence saying is that these issues are well known by their community. As Latino students, they can connect and relate to the topics represented in those skits.

It should be pointed out that when students discuss relatability between themselves and another student or teacher, they are often referring to similarities in lived experience. Given the unlikelihood that Chicano/Latino students will have Chicano/Latino classmates or professors in college (Solórzano & Solórzano, 1995; Villalpando, 2003), it would make sense that when they do encounter people of a similar background and hear each other's stories, it would create a strong element of solidarity among them. In fact, the rarity of being in a university space where a Chicano professor is teaching Chicano/Latino content to Chicano/Latino students as well as being able to openly discuss their own experiences might be the largest engager of all since nearly everything about the course is relatable. Moreover, the data across all data sources

confirms the centrality of lived experiences and experiential knowledge which is one of Critical Race Theory's central tenets. CRT scholars assert:

Critical race theory recognizes that the experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination. In fact, critical race theorists view this knowledge as a strength and draw explicitly on the lived experiences of people of color by including such methods as storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, parables, *cuentos*, *testimonios*, chronicles, and narratives. (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26)

In this class, few things seemed to draw students closer than sharing that experiential knowledge. Most often, these students would rally around conversations about a common struggle. Since the class content was largely about Chicano/Latino struggles in history, the students' stories proved to be an engaging and perfectly appropriate vehicle to connect and relate to the course content and to each other. The Theater of the Oppressed simply provided another medium for storytelling that increased the relatability of the course.

Two of the interviewed students specifically spoke of the role Theater of the Oppressed as playing a key role in relatability, especially through the Forum Theater activity. Armando, who was earlier cited as an example of emotional engagement because he took the lesson about Eurocentrism home to his uncles, is also an example of relatability since he expresses relating to the Forum scenes. This is not surprising since relatability is not only a prime reason why students become engaged in the classroom (by paying attention in the class and participating in discussions) but it also seems to figure prominently in emotional engagement. The logic to this is somewhat common sense. It would follow that: if a student can relate, especially in a deeply personal level, to a topic presented in class then the topic is not likely to cease being relatable simply because the student walks out of the classroom. In fact, the survey demonstrated that the

topics that engaged students inside the class were the same ones students would go home and talk about outside of class. In Armando's case he states that,

The [Forum Theater] scenarios that others came up with are scenarios that I see now in my daily life. So that kinda made me stop and think and reflect in my daily life on my way to work, or when I'm at a restaurant, or anywhere. I see a lot of those scenarios happening and it makes me stop and think how I learned about that in Chicano Studies class. And it gets me thinking "why does that happen? Why do those scenarios occur in our daily lives?" It also makes me think "how can I make that change? How can I get that to stop if it's a negative situation?"

Armando clearly sees the scenarios as relatable to the point where he sees them played out in his daily life. He can see that his life outside of class is not that distant from the Forum Theater scenarios.

Beyond individual engagement, some students' comments regard the relatability of the Forum scenarios as instrumental in building connections and relationships with other students. As a prime example of that, Mayra argues that the relatability of the course and the Forum Theater assignment in particular, helped her overcome her shyness and develop richer relationships with her classmates. She argues that this bonding was particularly noticeable during a specific lecture on Latinos and Education. She states that during that class, "students began talking about their experiences in high school and although we had different experiences we all kinda went through similar struggles." When asked to elaborate on what allowed for this bonding and sharing to happen inside of class she states that "we were all in the same state of mind...we didn't all agree with each other but we were ok with what we were saying." She claims that it made the students feel better to know that others, including the professor, had gone through similar struggles. She states, "it makes you feel better and if he's working as a professor at a college I can do it too."

She points out that she found value in the Theater of the Oppressed because it helped her overcome personal difficulties in communicating with others. Mayra, who never spoke up in class until the end of the semester, readily admits that she was extremely shy coming into this class and that she suffered from "social anxiety." However, she says that throughout the semester, she started opening up and talking with other people in class. According to her, this came about because of the level of comfort she felt among her fellow students and how as a result of this course she knew more about herself and felt more comfortable with herself. She points to the Forum Theater activity as an example of a specific event that helped her with her social anxiety. She said that this assignment pushed her to communicate with others especially since she had to do a group presentation with several other students. Her group coordinated outside of class through texts, skype, and emails. Regarding the Forum Theater assignment she says:

It was kinda nerve-racking because I was so nervous and we had to present it in front of the whole class but once you get into it you kinda feel like "ok whatever" because you already know the students and so I liked that activity because you never get to do that in a class especially in college. In college you're taking finals, you're writing papers, never an activity like that where you get to present and act out. Maybe in Theater [class] you would do that but I had never seen another class do activities like that where we get in groups and act out something.

In her statement, Mayra tells us that although the activity was difficult initially because of her social anxiety, she ended up appreciating the exercise since it pushed her to do something she normally would not do. She adds that this activity not only helped her partly overcome her shyness in this class but it has had a similar effect on her other courses since then. She also claims that while initially she never talked to anyone in this class, after the Forum Theater her group bonded so much that they still keep in touch and check in with each other periodically. That bond came out of developing a scene together which each of them had personally

encountered and specifically from having a chance to share those very personal stories¹⁴. She summarizes that the Forum Theater activity made her more "open" in her interactions with other students -even outside of this class.

The notion that students find the Forum activities relatable is totally expected. Almost by definition, the Forum Theater activities prompt students to relate¹⁵ to each other since one of the objectives is to find points of overlap and resonance among the participants. It is not surprising that students frequently commented how they could relate to each other and to the scenarios through the Forum Theater. The Theater of the Oppressed as an embodiment of the Pedagogy of the Oppressed is designed to enact democratic principles where the participants decide the course of the discussions. As outlined by Boal (1992, 1998), Forum Theater, in particular, has several mechanisms to ensure that the skits that are produced and presented are *relatable* to the participants. These Forum skits that are produced through T.O. techniques are tantamount to the "generative themes" (Freire, 1970, 1973) that Freire describes. It is contrary to Boalian and Freirean principles to present a skit that is not of any interest or relevance to the participants. Hence, students are merely confirming that the Forum Theater is working as intended. In our use of Forum Theater, students were able to make connections with each other in small groups by sharing their lived experiences and perspectives at the initial stage of creating a skit. This dynamic played out again in a larger setting when the skits were presented and discussed with the whole class. Sharing and relating with each other at different levels not only served to pique their interest and engage students, it also served to develop more cohesive relationships among the participants thus enhancing the sense of collective engagement.

¹⁴ The scene Mayra's group developed, and which she argues everyone of them had experienced in some way, was a scene where a teacher accuses a Latina student of cheating because she does not believe the students "like her" are capable of producing an essay of high quality like the one she turned in.

¹⁵ The word "relate," of course, means *to be able to connect to* as well as *to tell a story*.

Theater of the Oppressed and Valuing Others' Perspectives

Perhaps the most powerful lesson that arose from the Theater of the Oppressed for its participants is the valuing of each others' perspectives and potential contributions. Through the quickwrites, students claimed that they appreciated the Theater of the Oppressed for its capacity to show them other students' perspectives in a way they could value. Both quickwrites echoed a similar claim.

In the quickwrite where students were asked about what they found valuable about the Theater of the Oppressed games, many students (12/26 respondents) said that they valued seeing and hearing other students' opinions. They had been hearing each other's comments in class and on the online discussion board throughout the whole semester but apparently this time it was different. The following are some examples:

Table 22: Valuing Others' Views

It was entertaining but it opened my eyes to things I didn't know my brain could function with. For example the exercises where we have a driver guiding us but we can't see yet they're telling us what to do. ...The last exercise was my favorite because I got to see many people's definition of power. It is crazy to know that each of us have different ways of thinking.

I thought that it was a creative way to demonstrate how power is seen by others and as well through demonstrating our own opinions of society, world views, race, etc. I found value in the exercises with the chairs and how others demonstrated different representations of power and I found it interesting that everyone's views were roughly similar.

I liked that afterwards we had an opportunity to discuss what we did with each other and reflect on our actions and opinions.

What I found the most valuable was the insight of how my classmates act and see things. Some in a different perspective, some are the same as mine.

I found it really interesting how everyone had their own way of completing and participating in the exercises according to their ability.

It was really fascinating how everyone saw the stick differently.

Through these comments we see that there was a certain fascination and appreciation with being able to not only share ideas with each other but also to exchange ideas in this particular way.

One student comments that he appreciated being able to discuss their opinions afterwards. This could be a reference to several deliberate instances where the participants had to take a few moments after a partnered exercise to debrief with their partners or it could refer to the collective group discussions we had after several of the exercises. Considering that there was absolutely no talking throughout the activities, this debriefing must have felt like quite a catharsis.¹⁶ Overall, the responses suggest students recognize the similarities and differences in their perspectives and they appreciate being able to share those ideas.

One exercise, in particular, gets frequently (11/26 responses) referred to when students talk about appreciating others' views. The exercise is the Power Chairs (see Appendix 3 for more complete description) where students arrange (or *sculpt*) five chairs in a configuration that somehow represents power. They do this without talking and without explaining anything. According to the quickwrites, many students really liked this exercise because of the creative dimension to it and because it allowed them to literally *see* each other's perspectives of power. After seeing several interpretations of power, some students developed an appreciation for their differences in perspectives as well as their apparent commonalities.

For example, in her interview, Gloria states how the Power Chairs exercise helped her think differently about her classmates' point of view. She states:

It really made me realize everyone has a different perspective. I like listening to different peoples' perspectives, knowing what they are and knowing what they think and how they think. I'm like, "why did he put that chair over there and these chairs facing that way? What made him think that?" That was really interesting to me.

¹⁶ In fact, it is a predictable occurrence that when a partnered activity is done without talking for a few minutes, upon finishing the activity and being *given permission* to talk, the room erupts in loud conversation and laughter. This sudden burst of conversation appears to be a catharsis for participants that were undergoing a novel, intense, and fun experience together yet were prevented from verbally communicating with each other.

The exercise was a way Gloria and her classmates could show each other their different conceptualizations of power. However, Gloria is not commenting on what she learned about "power" *per se*. She is commenting on what she learned about the way others think and how it differs from her own thinking. The differences in perspectives were not received with disdain but actually further piqued her interest. Consequently, she developed an appreciation for those differing perspectives while she tried to understand what accounted for the difference. Gloria, goes on to explain why incorporating others' views would be beneficial in a learning environment such as this classroom. At the end of the interview when she was asked what changes she would make to this course, she said that she would like to see more activities such as these in class because:

It really affects how students think. Not all students like to engage in it but he [professor] was ok about it. He was like "whoever wants to, it's voluntary." Even if you didn't go up and move chairs or anything you still learn from it. And if you do move chairs then you learn from that as well....Activities would be better for students to engage with each other too. I mean, we're not just in a class by ourselves. I feel like you learn better when other people are learning with you. Like if it was just me and the professor just learning I think I would like to have other people's perspectives. Because what if I don't believe what the teacher believes? If someone else says something that triggers something in my head I'll be like 'Oh, I like the way he thinks about this thing and I don't like the way he thinks about that.' It's important to know what others think.

Through this comment, Gloria nicely sums up the value of these activities as vehicles for student interaction. She also argues for dialogical relationships within the classroom so students are not constricted and blinded by only one point of view. We also get a sense that she is not just parroting the "value of diversity." Her tone and emphasis suggests that she genuinely valued exercises such as these as a collective learning opportunity. This is central to collective engagement because at the heart of this type of engagement is an authentic valuing of what others can bring to you and vice versa.

Overall, the quickwrites on the Theater of the Oppressed yielded important information on the value students found in these exercises. Some students state that, at its simplest form, it was just nice to get out of their seats and move around and play with their classmates. However, the students also argue that this interaction also helped them build "bonds" with each other and it changed the dynamics of the classroom environment to the point of feeling more comfortable around each other. This in turn helped them feel more relaxed for the Forum Theater presentations. These comments demonstrate exactly what Boal intended to happen through the games. He has repeatedly stated that in order to feel comfortable in having "heavier" discussions with each other we must first laugh and play together in order to feel comfortable with each other (Boal, 1979, 1995, 2006). In fact, the word "trust" was often used (on seven different responses) in the reflections. Some students stated that the exercises helped them build trust in each other while others said it revealed to them how difficult it was for them to trust other people. Moreover, many of the students' comments about the value of interacting with each other note the collective interacting and participation of the *whole* class. Several students wrote in their comments that one of the most valuable and appealing aspects of the T.O. games was that no one was left out -everyone participated. The student responses also frequently echoed that the activities helped them gain new insights into concepts such as power. In this case, T.O. helped them literally see their classmates' visual representations of power and figuratively helped them conceptualize these topics better by coming up with new analogies. The comments suggest that this interaction and learning together helped them appreciate each other's input more.

Valuing Others' Perspectives Through Forum Theater

The quickwrite on the Forum Theater assignment not only echoed the sentiment that the Theater of the Oppressed helped students value others' perspectives. It also showed how sharing

experiences with each other in this way and having collective discussions paved the road not only to engagement but to genuine valuing. The most frequent response by students on the value of the Forum Theater assignment was that they appreciated hearing and seeing other students' viewpoints (18/30 responses). The following examples represent those types of comments:

Table 23: Student Comments on Seeing and Valuing Others' Perspectives

The value that I found from this project was hearing my group's real life experience.

The value is from getting feedback from different people. This way you get multiple points of view instead of just your own.

The overall experience was really good. I loved how the exercises we did had a meaning. For example, we as a class were able to connect the exercises to what we see today. Like the exercises with the chairs about showing power was a good way of showing how power is related to our lives today. I also think that the best part was seeing and hearing other people's opinions so in a way it really opened my mind to other people's thoughts. But overall, I really liked learning through the Forum Theater process.

In regards to the Forum Theater process, I found the overall experience to be an eye opener, informal, and very entertaining. I loved seeing the class' different responses and approaches to the different problems in the skit. I think it strengthened our critical thinking skills as well since we had to analyze a problematic situation and find countless solutions.

These responses are fairly clear in demonstrating that students valued their classmates' input during the Forum Theater assignment. They also indicate that the format itself is an important avenue to quite literally *see* their classmates' viewpoints. Since, in the Forum Theater, students have to come up with visual dramatized representations of an oppression, it often becomes a literal embodiment of "I *see* what you mean." A discussion, no matter how vividly articulated, is still just a discussion. That is, it is only described by words/sounds. In the case of a skit, there is now a very prominent visual and spacial element added to the dialogue. Students are commenting not only on the power of conversation and valuing other's opinions; they are commenting on the power of images in this setting.

Here again, as stated in previous sections, students point out that the exchange of ideas was valuable during at least two different junctures -during the small group discussions and during the class presentations. These responses echo what other student comments have articulated before in saying that they appreciate opportunities to hear others' points of view and appreciate sharing their own stories. However, these students do not only argue that it is important and valuable to hear what their classmates have to say. Perhaps more importantly, most responses suggest that they value hearing the *differences* in those viewpoints. In this case, the difference of viewpoint seems more important than the mere sharing of opinion. Their language suggests that during the Forum Theater, students are not just echoing each others' sentiments and stories. Phrases like "different people," "multiple points of view," and "different responses," indicate that the conversations they are having incorporate multiple points of view and that the diversity of experience and opinion is highly valued.

This valuing of difference may, at first, seem contrary to my other stated findings which show that students valued the *similarities* among their classmates especially when discussing issues that "we Latinos" encounter. However, I do not see this as a contradiction in the data. Rather, I would qualify this as the presence of a complimentary counterpoint. Students are well aware of and value the similarities they share among themselves and with their professor. Furthermore, through the course of the semester they have also developed a further affinity with their classmates through various interactions. However, this does not mean that there is homogeneity in their experiences nor, much less, in their way of thinking. It also does not mean that they only want to hear their own points of view reiterated by their classmates. While they deeply value the similarities and connections they make with each other, the responses suggest that what is happening is the realization or reification that dialogical forms of relating are, in fact,

valuable. These statements suggest that students see the great value in learning from each other. This learning is done not by diminishing and downplaying their differences but by acknowledging, respecting, and letting one's self be receptive to learning from those differences. Through these comments we also see the powerful vision of Augusto Boal and the incredible architecture of the Theater of the Oppressed. Namely, he first has participants in Forum Theater share stories and create a scene that they can all relate to thereby creating a certain cohesion and solidarity among the small groups. At that stage, the small groups coalesce around their similarities. The next stage requires the presentation of the dramatized scenario to the entire group. Here, one of the objectives is to generate different possibilities to bring the oppressive scenario to a different end. In this stage, after the coalescing has shaped the group dynamics, what the audience desires more than anything is difference of viewpoint to bring about as many possibilities as possible to the group's predicament. Now, the group values diversity and sees that it is the only way to escape from seemingly inescapable situations. Through their newly found value in diversity, participants are now communicating in the *language of critique* and *language of possibility* (Giroux, 1988).

This genuine valuing and desiring of others' perspectives is of the utmost importance to critical pedagogy (Darder, et al., 2009a; Freire, 1970; McLaren, 2007). In fact, it is the centerpiece to Freirean dialogue. Freire argues that it is the realization that humans are incomplete which leads us to find and value one another in hopes of completing ourselves only with the help of others (Freire, 1970, 1973, 1998). In a nice summation of this, Freire (1970) states, "Self-sufficiency is incompatible with dialogue" (p. 90). These students seem to have uncovered that incompleteness in themselves and no longer have delusions of self-sufficiency. In order to learn and grow together, they now seek each others' voices and develop new

dialogical relationships. Citing Mikhail Bakhtin, Bloome and Clark (2006) describe this new environment in the following way:

A dialogue is a relation among voices, people, and social institutions; a relation that acknowledges the existence of other voices. Bakhtin (1935/1981) defined a dialogue as a discourse that allows for, encourages, and acknowledges the appropriation and adoption of other voices. (p. 229)

This relationship which acknowledges and incorporates multiple voices is what Bakhtin termed *heteroglossia* (Bakhtin, 1981). However, it is not just another voice that some of these students want to hear. Some of them, have articulated (in previous sections of this document) that they want to incorporate voices that express different points of view. In this case, they are speaking of a multi-vocal, multi-cultural environment where difference is truly embraced and valued. I am not referring to the type of "I'm ok. You're ok" multiculturalism that has been sanitized and robbed of all its radical potential. The type of heteroglossic environment these students seem to be invoking is more akin to a *revolutionary multiculturalism* (McLaren, 1997) which embraces the *other* and "work[s] together from the perspective of a common ground of struggle rather than a common culture" (p.12).

The Forum Theater quickwrites demonstrated that students generally found the Forum Theater assignment valuable. In particular, students found value in the Forum Theater assignment because a) it was fun, b) it provided an opportunity to interact with each other, c) it was relatable, and d) it allowed them to see each other's perspectives. Every single one of these dimensions is somehow tied to group interactions. In other words, the most valuable aspects of this activity would be difficult, if not impossible, if students were not doing those things with their fellow classmates. The valuable aspects of the Theater of the Oppressed, as the students see it, reflect the engagement literature's emphasis on collaborative learning (Astin, 1993; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Guenther & Miller, 2011; Kuh, 2003; Pascarella, 2005) although

the dimension I described as collective engagement is largely absent from this literature.

However, the value which the students found in collective engagement and the Theater of the Oppressed coincides with sociocultural perspectives on collective learning and development (Aronsson, 2010; Säljö, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978).

CHAPTER 5

CONSCIENTIZATION

This chapter will discuss the occurrence of conscientization within the confines of my research site. The chapter will first provide an overview of how students may have experienced shifts in critical consciousness through the course in general and then examine the role the Theater of the Oppressed may have played in developing student conscientization. Particular attention will be placed on the specific facets of the Theater of the Oppressed that may support and promote conscientization such as creating an engaging and collaborative learning environment as well as how the Theater of the Oppressed provided students with a tool to *see*.

Conscientization proved to be an elusive concept to pin down in this study. As most critical scholars have pointed out, conscientization is a process not an end product (Anzaldúa, 2002; Berta-Avila, 2003; Freire, 1973; Lather, 1991). Because of this, that process was difficult to see and understand among students in this study. Making matters more complicated is the fact that the process in question is not in the least bit constant or measurable. Conscientization does not last a certain amount of time nor does everyone experience the different stages in the same way. Moreover, it is doubtful that there are even constant and reliable "stages" to be spoken of and certainly not easily deciphered by an observer. Most of the so-called "stages" or levels of conscientization (Anzaldúa, 2002) are, at best, merely metaphors to help us better conceptualize this process that is deeply personalized and fluid.

Even with an attempt at operationalizing this concept, it was difficult to evaluate and much less quantify. Yet, the operationalization and the surrounding literature on conscientization give clues as to what some general conscientization elements may look like. While this study did not yield the adequate data to make claims about the types, levels, or degrees of

conscientization that might be happening in the classroom, it does, suggest that some students are nevertheless experiencing *shifts* in critical consciousness. Furthermore, the study also suggests that the conditions that were created by the Theater of the Oppressed activities are precisely the type that can support the development of a critical consciousness.

Conscientization in the Class

In order to understand how the Theater of the Oppressed may have contributed to students' conscientization, it is important to first understand how the course, as a whole, may have promoted this same process. The students' written reflections and interviews suggest that many are experiencing some sort of *shift* in critical consciousness. These data sources also offer a glimpse as to *how* they may be experiencing these shifts.

Evidence of Shifts in Critical Consciousness in Written Reflections

At the end of the semester, students were given one final prompt where they were to write a 1-2 page reflection on the overall course. The exact prompt was as follows:

- What was your general experience in this class throughout the semester?*
- What aspects of this class did you find the most meaningful and why?*
- What suggestions would you have to make the course better?*

The assignment was deliberately open-ended in order to get a general sense of what students feel is worth mentioning about the course. As in my pilot studies, this question seemed fruitful precisely because it does not restrict students to only discuss a pre-determined aspect of the course and because it does not directly give anticipated answers.

In students' written work, evidence of engagement was much easier to see than evidence of shifts in critical consciousness. While many students articulated that this course had a major impact on the way they think, only a few went on to give further details on this. Most students,

when referring to this course, used language that can be interpreted to generally imply changes in mentality or perspective. Table 24 shows some very common examples from their writing.

Table 24: Expressions Frequently Used by Students Regarding the Course

<p><i>pushed me to think outside the box</i></p> <p><i>this class blew my mind</i></p> <p><i>This course definitely changed my way of thinking, drastically.</i></p> <p><i>The class has opened my eyes...</i></p> <p><i>...the material opened my mind...</i></p> <p><i>I am now able to see...</i></p>
--

Popular expressions like *thinking outside the box* or *blew my mind* most often imply a challenge, change, or interruption to one's regular pattern of thinking. Most of the other expressions use the analogy of *seeing* to imply a new sense of clarity or understanding about issues. This is consistent with Paulo Freire's own metaphors like "unveiling" and "emergence" when referring to a nascent critical consciousness (Freire, 1970, 1973). While the previous excerpts only generally suggest that the course material pushed students to think beyond their current limits, none of the above comments shed any light on *what* they were thinking differently about. However, consulting the operationalization of conscientization helps us begin to understand the comments a bit further. The operationalization states the following:

Conscientization is:

1. a marked change in outlook or attitude of how society functions.
2. the increased realization that there are systems of oppression rather than oppressions happening at random or on just an individual basis.
3. taking on the initiative and analytical attitude (critical curiosity) to find out more about how those oppressions work and how they are connected to "me" or "us."
4. developing individual or collective strategies to combat oppressive forces and enacting those strategies
5. *contextualizing* oneself and figuring out "What are the bigger pictures that I am a part of?"

We can see that the students' comments above demonstrate only the first part of the first point of my operationalization of conscientization which is "1. a marked change in outlook or attitude of how society functions." The preceding comments on Table 24 could be easily interpreted as "a marked change in outlook or attitude." However, we have no clue as to what exactly they are referring to. Fortunately, the following excerpts in Table 25 from the written reflections give us more insight into how the class affected these students.

Table 25: Language in Written Reflections Suggesting Shifts in Critical Consciousness

Undoubtedly, out of all the classes I have ever taken this particular class has been my favorite. Before taking this class I was ignorant towards anything history wise that was related towards my Latino culture. Once I took Chicano and Chicana Studies it was as if a veil was lifted from my eyes that allowed me to both understand and learn all those topics that before no one had taught or even mentioned to me.

[Learning]This as a result, only makes me strive and dedicated [sic] myself more so that I may break from those boundaries that have been placed on me. In the same manner, I really enjoyed learning about the Spaniards exploitation towards the Native because before this class I was taught that the Natives were uncivilized and the Spaniards were the heroes that saved us from the pitiful people we would've become, but now it feels amazing to have uncovered those lies that I was taught in school. This class has made me view the world in a way that I was before unable to do. I now am not so naive and I can see this country for what it really is. I now can judge this country myself based on its past and what it continues to do and not just what a teacher in a history class tells me.

The day where we discussed education in the Latino community was the most meaningful. Finding out that only 50 percent of Latinos graduate from high school because not all schools offer the ability for Latino students to exceed. The percentage keeps decreasing as you ascend the education. That day I can say I really became interested in the class. That day I realized we live in a society, that as Latinos we have to push hard to reach our goals. We live in a system that wasn't built for Latinos. It's up to us, not to work with the system, but to transform it.

I found it very interesting how many few Hispanics go to college, but most of our class this semester was Hispanic students. It is amazing how the United States really oppresses these young individuals to want to succeed, at such a young age. By the time Hispanic students do reach high school, they already have given up. It is easy to see that the United States does this intentionally, because they do not want to see this race succeed.

In the previous examples, students describe, to different extents, their new views on society and Latinos. In fact, one of the students in the excerpts actually used the same analogy as Freire of "unveiling" to describe her own shifts. Several students make remarks explicitly referring to social structures and systems of oppression. One student even comments that now she realizes that the patterns of disenfranchisement are, at some level, *intentional* rather than accidental. According to my working definition of conscientization, I would qualify all of these comments, including the ones in the Table 25, as indicating some level of a budding critical consciousness - especially since they point to increased realizations and clarity about the systemic nature of oppression.

Two of the above comments deserve special attention as they are particularly clear examples of language that signifies conscientization. The first, shows several instances of this type of language (which have been underlined in the following paragraph).

[Learning]this as a result, only makes me strive and dedicated [sic] myself more so that I may break from those boundaries that have been placed on me. In the same manner, I really enjoyed learning about the Spaniards exploitation towards the Native because before this class I was taught that the Natives were uncivilized and the Spaniards were the heroes that saved us from the pitiful people we would've become, but now it feels amazing to have uncovered those lies that I was taught in school. This class has made me view the world in a way that I was before unable to do. I now am not so naive and I can see this country for what it really is. I now can judge this country myself based on its past and what it continues to do and not just what a teacher in a history class tells me.

This student exhibits the classic conscientization definition in that now that she has unveiled the contradictions of society by "uncovering those lies," rather than resign to the inevitability of oppression, it only makes her more resolute as she commits herself to overcoming her *limiting situations* (Freire, 1970) . She also notably feels a sense of empowerment and confidence in her own critical agency as she can "now judge this country for [her]self." She has transcended from her "*naïve*" *consciousness* (Freire, 1973) to a critical consciousness. According to Freire, the

unveiling of oppression and commitment to transformation are hallmarks of a critical pedagogy and conscientization as he states in the following passage:

The pedagogy of the oppressed, as a humanist and libertarian pedagogy, has two distinct stages. In the first, the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through praxis commit themselves to its transformation. In the second stage, in which the reality of oppression has already been transformed, this pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes a pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation. (1970, p. 54)

The student not only expresses that she has begun this process but also that she intends to further develop it by critically analyzing new information that comes her way. In stating, "I now can judge this country myself based on its past and what it continues to do and not just what a teacher in a history class tells me," she suggests that she has no intention to merely replace the old understandings with new unexamined perspectives. Rather, she plans on continually re-examining the information she encounters. Freire states that after this conscientization process begins, "The students -no longer docile listeners -are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher" (1970, p. 81). However, the students' language tells us that even if the teacher does not have a dialogical relationship with their class, this student will no longer consume information uncritically.

Similarly, in the case of the student that says "We live in a system that wasn't built for Latinos. It's up to us, not to work with the system, but to transform it," she unveils and seeks to transform society. This student obviously sees the inequity in our society and does not believe that Latinos stand to gain from it. The student also implies that the system is inherently *unequal by design* (Au, 2009) when they mention that "it wasn't built for Latinos." Perhaps most remarkably, this student charges herself with the transforming of society rather than to work within a system that was not built for her anyway. This is a revolutionary posture and one that absolutely points to a development of a critical consciousness since they unveiled society and

propose to do their part to change it to a more equitable place. Moreover, this student is using the language of transformational resistance (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) perhaps without even knowing it¹⁷. In fact, according to Solórzano and Delgado Bernal's construct and categories of resistance, this student would likely be placed in the category of *transformative resistance* since her proposal is consistent with:

student behavior that illustrates both a critique of oppression and a desire for social justice. In other words, the student holds some level of awareness and critique of her or his oppressive conditions and structures of domination and must be at least somewhat motivated by a sense of social justice. With a deeper level of understanding and a social justice orientation, transformational resistance offers the greatest possibility for social change. (p. 319)

By this definition, which seems appropriate for the student's comment, the student has undergone some level of conscientization that has propelled her to think and act in a transformative manner. Moreover, the "critique of oppression" which the authors use as one of two criteria for transformative resistance is essentially what I am using in this study as a criteria for conscientization.

Evidence of Conscientization in Interviews

The interview participants provided similar data on their deepening critical conscience throughout the class. They all reiterated that the course somehow pushed them to think outside of their normal patterns of thinking and unveiled the world. However, they also very importantly, gave many examples of their immediate course of action as a result of the class. The interviews seem to answer the question: "now what?" In other words, once a student starts moving down the *path of conocimiento* (Anzaldúa, 2002), then what? It is feasible that many students, after taking on a course that provokes them to critically analyze their reality, might feel

¹⁷ This article was not an assigned reading in my course nor did I ever mention it. Given that this student is a freshman and has not taken other Ethnic Studies courses in college, it is very likely that their use of this language is "organic" in that it surfaces in a way where they are not echoing other scholars' concepts.

they are becoming conscientized. But what should they do after the course ends? These students' strategies are very consistent and telling. A few, took an *action*, in the traditional and restrictive sense of the word, where they go out into the world and visibly and physically do something different such as when Armando went out and spoke to his uncles in hopes of getting them to reflect on their behavior. However, all of the students interviewed took action in a much more subtle way. They all did exactly what point three of my operationalization articulates which is, "taking on the initiative and analytical attitude (critical curiosity) to find out more about how those oppressions work and how they are connected to 'me' or 'us.'" Gloria, for example, had many conversations with her parents about topics that were important to her (like Eurocentrism and education) in hopes of getting a more well-rounded understanding of those issues. For several students, the initiative in analytical attitude meant expanding the conversation beyond Latino issues. Armando and Gloria both immediately took other Ethnic Studies courses in hopes of acquiring more depth and scope to issues of social justice. Armando says, "After taking the Chicano Studies course I went on to take an Asian Pacific class and an Africana Studies class. It kinda made me want to know more. I learned where I came from; why not learn about where others come from." Gloria states she did the same, and adds that she has encouraged her non-Latino friends to take a Chicana/o Studies course "just so that they can understand where I'm coming from too." She also tells of how she took it upon herself to talk to her neighbor who is in middle school and together they analyzed the content of the girl's history book which Gloria argues presented a skewed and "sugar coated" version of history.

While these efforts to learn more about how oppression works may not seem like an *action* at all, Freire argues for the importance in what these students are doing and claims that it is a very powerful action. Freire (1970) states that in order "to surmount the situation of

oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes" (p. 47). Through the course, these students have begun their critical examination of Chicanos and social issues. At some level, they feel intrigued by the issues and sense a pressing need to examine the issues further. They are developing a deepening critical consciousness through their continued research and analysis. On this subject Freire succinctly reminds us that "critical reflection is also action" (p. 128).

Theater of the Oppressed and Conscientization

While the written reflections and interviews suggest that the course in general served as a platform to promote conscientization, there is reason to think the Theater of the Oppressed functioned in a similar way. However, we should be cautious about looking for clear and immediate causality between the Theater of the Oppressed and conscientization. It is not the claim of this study that students are becoming directly conscientized through the Theater of the Oppressed. Rather, it is my assessment, based on the collected data, that the Theater of the Oppressed is providing the conditions which nurture and promote the development of a critical consciousness. This section will focus on two aspects which the Theater of the Oppressed readily provides and which, in conjunction with a critical and culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy, support and promote conscientization. The Theater of the Oppressed promoted and supported conscientization in two key ways: by providing students a tool to literally and figuratively "see" the lessons of the class, and by providing an engaged and dialogical learning environment.

Theater of the Oppressed as a Tool to *See*

The Theater of the Oppressed proved to be a valuable tool that helped students *see* in new ways. The activities provided an opportunity for students to quite literally *see* each other as well as each other's ideas. Figuratively speaking, the activities also allowed students to *see*

(understand) certain concepts better. The notion of *seeing* is an important element for conscientization. It is not without good reason that one of Freire's principal analogies for conscientization was "unveiling" or "unmasking" the world; in other words, *seeing* the world and society for what it is. Conscientization is an act of *seeing* that implies clear perception and *insight*. Consistent with analogies about vision, the most concise definition of conscientization in Pedagogy of the Oppressed is "learning to *perceive* social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take actions against the oppressive elements of reality" [emphasis added] (Freire, 1970, pp. 15, translator's note). The students' written and spoken comments demonstrate that they found a great value in *seeing* new things or in new ways through the T.O. activities.

Theater of the Oppressed as a Way to See Each Other

One of the most literal ways that the Theater of the Oppressed helped students *see* -was to, quite literally, *see* each other. In other words, although the same 34 students sat in the same classroom twice a week for 16 weeks, many of them had never had a face-to-face interaction with other classmates. This seems like a glaring contradiction compared to some students' testimony that the whole class felt like a big cohesive unit. However, those students were largely commenting on a collective dynamic of demographic similarities, similar experiences, sharing in the classroom, and enjoying the same class together. While the class often had discussions, it was rare for students to actually face each other and directly interact during these conversations. Because of the classroom structure and the way the seats are set up in traditional classroom rows, most students just faced the front (where the teacher usually stood) when they spoke. It was extremely rare that a student would actually face her/his classmates when speaking. Rather, in most occasions, students faced the teacher in the front whether they were listening to the teacher, listening to other students, or speaking. The classroom is set up in a way that centers the teacher

and is perfectly adapted to a *banking method* (Freire, 1970) of education where the teacher, as the only source of valuable knowledge, fills the students with her/his knowledge. Thus, in a banking education, the teacher is at the center of the students' *seeing*. This happens through the teacher literally being at the center of the students' field-of-view and also by imposing his *worldview* on the students. Consequently, it happened that some students that sat towards the front of the room never really looked around at the surrounding sea of faces. Nancy's story is a telling case. When discussing the T.O. games we did in class, Nancy says that up until then she had not had much interaction with the rest of the students. Regarding the games she states:

We kinda had to talk to each other and learn each others' names. For the longest time I came in and I sat down [in front of the classroom] and I had no reason to turn around and look at everybody. I would just see whatever is in front of me. I remember being out at a restaurant and someone saying "oh, you're in my Chicano Studies 200 class" and I'm like, "really?" She's like, "I sit in the back." I had never seen this girl ever in my life and it wasn't until these exercises that it made us get up and interact with one another that I got to talk to other students.

Through her comment, Nancy exposes an important dynamic of this classroom community. Although they might hear each other speak periodically, some students seldom actually look at each other. While Nancy's case might be an atypical experience in this class (since she sits at the very front and center and usually gets there early which means she does not ever see many students on her way into class because the door is at the back of the room) it does, nevertheless, reveal that it is possible to go through the major part of the semester in this class without having much, if any, face-to-face contact.

In light of the other data sources that express how "interactive" this course was and how much class discussion there was going, Nancy's interview suggests that those interactions were of a very particular kind. In retrospect, many of the "discussions" we had in class were actually individual students talking outloud with the professor. Because the student's comments are

meant to be *public* and other students often chimed in on what the previous student said, it gave the feeling of being an open discussion. Tragically, according to students, this is the most discussion they get in any of their classes. As an observant participant in this study, I would characterize the overwhelming majority of interactions within this classroom as a) *teacher to class*, b) *teacher to student*, and c) *student to teacher*. While the sheer frequency of these interactions may have made the class feel "interactive," it was notably lacking *student to student* interaction. Not surprisingly, student to student interaction is frequently overlooked by educators in the classroom although it is thought to have a powerful effect on student achievement.

Johnson (1981) argues that:

Experiences with peers are not a superficial luxury to be enjoyed during lunch and after school. Constructive student-student relationships are probably an absolute necessity for maximal achievement, socialization, and healthy development. (p. 5)

Johnson stresses that one of the ways in which this happens is that "peer relationships influence educational aspirations and achievement" (p. 5).

This dire absence of *student to student* interaction is the reason why Nancy did not recognize her classmate at the restaurant. It is also the reason why so many students identified the greatest value of the Theater of the Oppressed as "interaction" -that is, *student to student* interaction. Nancy's comments help me better contextualize the importance of prior data such as a student mentioning, "What I found appealing was just the idea of us students interacting with each other since we do not do that a lot." This community of learners (Rogoff, 1994) that felt a very strong sense of cohesion were thirsting for face-to-face interactions. In this way, the Theater of the Oppressed games provided a much needed opportunity for face-to-face interaction where they could literally see each other. Nancy, for the first time, actually *saw* who her classmates were because the structure of the classroom and style of the teacher had discouraged her from *seeing* them up until then. Moreover, Nancy's interview also unveiled my own practice

to myself in my own complicity with colonial practices. In the larger context of this course, the Theater of the Oppressed activities provided an invaluable supplement to the other types of interactions that were happening in this classroom. The Theater of the Oppressed also served to *de-center* the professor's seeming indispensability in mediating discussions.

Theater of the Oppressed as a Way to Defy Chronotopes

Nancy's comments on finally seeing her classmates raise a profound question for this classroom. Why did students not have an ample opportunity to have more student-to-student interaction throughout the course? This is perhaps best answered in terms of what Bakhtin (1981) called *chronotopes*. Bakhtin defines *chronotope* (literally "time space") as "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (p. 84). While this term has mostly been applied to studies on literature and language, more recently, it has also been applied to educational settings (Bloome & Clark, 2006; R. Brown & Renshaw, 2006). In education, it refers to "given" or pre-existing structures (physical and otherwise) and understandings that largely determine how education will be carried out. Bloome and Clark state that:

Teachers and students step into a given chronotope and a set of given social and cultural practices defined as education that are materially manifest. They step into a given discourse. Their history and the historical context of their discourse-in-use does not begin with their first day of school, but rather with deeper roots and materially so. (p.235)

In this study, Nancy exposed an important lack of face-to-face student interaction which can largely be attributed to pre-existing educational structures and expectations that do not condone face-to-face interaction in a college classroom. Bloome and Clark (2006) explain the chronotope of the classroom in the following way:

Students and teacher enter into a physical space (a classroom) that has been pre-established with a particular size, lighting, and given furniture. Some elementary classrooms include alcoves just big enough for a table of six to seven students and a

teacher. Even the people and the types of people have been predetermined. The number of people in the classroom is a material condition influencing how people can engage in discourse. Implicit in this classroom geography are ideological assumptions about the kinds of social and cultural practices, the discourse practices, that will occur there and the space has been manufactured to encourage those social and cultural practices. (p. 235)

In our classroom, the chronotope discouraged student-to-student interaction in two major ways; through the physical setup of the classroom itself, and the expectations on interactions that both teacher and students came into the class with. The classroom itself is built and set up in a way that predetermines how the students *should* engage. The space itself unveils the intention that this space was designed to carry out a *banking* education (Freire, 1970). In our classroom, as in most classrooms on that campus and most universities in general, the students' desks are arranged in tight rows all facing the "front" of the room where the chalkboard, projection screen, and teacher's work station¹⁸ are and which is assumed to be the exclusive realm of the teacher. It is incredibly cumbersome to reconfigure a room such as this, much less, on a daily basis. In this classroom, there is no way to position the desks in a circle since there is not enough space to fit 35 desks in that configuration. Hence, unless we were doing Theater of the Oppressed activities, I took my place at my pre-determined station from where I wrote on the board and showed slideshows and video clips on the projection screen.

The students, on the other hand, like most students in the United States, mostly get a view of the back of other students' heads as they are looking towards the professor. From this set up, we can see that in order to have open conversations in class, it would be physically awkward if not impossible to position one's body to be able to see everyone's face. This, of course, is only

¹⁸ Most classes on this campus have a "smart-desk" in the classroom that allows the teacher to use the computer, internet, and audio-visual sources from the "smart-desk". This station is situated in the "front" of the class and is not movable. Only the professor can log on to the smart-desk.

the case for the students since the professor has a Panoptic view of the whole class¹⁹. When individual students spoke up, the whole class did not necessarily look over at them. Most of the time, some students slightly turned their head towards the speaker while the rest of the class continued facing the instructor. Thus, face to face interactions are not likely to happen because of the physical nature of the classroom.

The physical structure also signals the expectations of teacher and student behavior. Teachers are expected to take their place in the front of the room and enforce the pre-determined understandings of classroom conduct. Students on the other hand, throughout the course of their educational careers, have learned to take their place as passive listeners. They face the instructor from which all academic knowledge is supposed to emanate and are not to be concerned with what other students say because other students are not deemed valuable as a source of knowledge. Hence, they play their part when other students speak up and although it may have been something meaningful to the listeners, when they respond to the comment, they do so by addressing the teacher, not the student who spoke. In my case, during the course, I also unwittingly replicated asymmetrical relations of power by engaging primarily with individual students in a *class discussion*, not realizing that they rarely engaged with each other. I unknowingly was tacitly discouraging student-to-student interaction since I played the part of interlocutor during class discussions. It was especially easy to play the part since when students spoke up, they nearly always directed their gaze at me not at other students.

¹⁹ The Panopticon in education (Foucault, 1995; Kohl, 2009; Moll, 2000) is an unfortunately fitting metaphor. The Panopticon (a prison or other social structure where authorities have complete surveillance of its people) is fitting since the teacher, as the authority, is the only one who may see everyone at all times, he is literally the *overseer*. The teacher must be seen by students but only so they may obey his directives. Students may not be in a panoptic position themselves nor do they generally *see* their fellow classmates that are right besides them. They are, symbolically, seated and submissive while the teacher is standing, imposing, and *over-seeing*.

In this situation, the Theater of the Oppressed served to defy both dimensions of the chronotope in this class which prevented students from *seeing* each other. It did so by *breaking* the space barriers and by challenging pre-existing and oppressive notions of power and knowledge. The T.O. activities require that the room be cleared out of as many tables and desks as possible. This opened the space in the room not only to play games and to finally see each other but also to move into spaces that are normally *off-limits* to students (like the front of the room). Many of the exercises consist of actually looking at each other face-to-face and in some cases looking eye to eye. While this can be a bit awkward initially, it definitely breaks the unstated convention that students should not *see* each other. Moreover, depending on the game, students are encouraged to communicate through gestures, sounds, touch, images, etc. which develops their arsenal of communication styles (Burlison, 2003). In several instances, after finishing a paired activity, students are encouraged to talk with their partners about what they experienced. Unlike the regular course, it would be impossible to participate in the T.O. activities without literally seeing each other and having repeated and multi-level face-to-face interactions. Just like T.O. helped break the chronotope of my classroom, Burlison (2003) also argues that she used the Theater of the Oppressed in her communications class to break the "cookie cutter fashion" in which she was teaching the class (p.32). In fact, the frequent claim by students across data sources that T.O. was "different" or "new," could largely be a reference to its being an alternative to conventional chronotopes.

It has been argued that T.O. was instrumental in breaking with the chronotopes of this class and providing an opportunity for students to have face-to-face interactions. But why would it even matter that students see each other? For decades, scholars have argued that there are powerful biological, psychological, social, and cultural currents that make face-to-face

interaction important to human beings (Ekman, 2006; Jack, Caldara, & Schyns, 2011; Levinas, 1969). In education, this is important because those currents apply to all human interaction, not just teacher-student interactions. Yet, many educators are unaware of our unwitting role in the prevention of students *seeing* each other. The afore cited studies speak to the importance of face-to-face interaction to build communities at every level. These interactions are important in acknowledging one another as part of a community in a deeply human way.

To highlight this interaction, Joy DeGruy Leary (2004), an African American psychologist, tells of one of her trips to Africa and how she felt treated by Africans:

One of the things that I did recognize was how much [Africans] could embrace me. And they would say things to me in all these different languages, but all of it translated into a similar statement and this statement that it would translate into upon greeting me was "I see you"I was touched by that notion of "I see you" - acknowledging that you are important enough for me to connect with you and even Einstein said that the myth of humanity is our perceived disconnection. We are living the lie of disconnection while we are connected."

Through her account, Leary articulates the meaning of *seeing* as a way to build relationships and communities. By her definition of "acknowledging that you are important enough for me to connect with you," we see how the classroom chronotopes, as signifiers of prevailing educational paradigms, tend to de-emphasize the worthiness of others. Specifically, those paradigms tell us that students are not important enough to be truly seen by their professors or even by each other.

What Leary describes is similar to the approach that was enacted in Tucson Unified Schools' Mexican American Studies Program through the Mayan principle of *In Lak'Ech* (Acosta & Mir, 2012; Rodriguez, 2012). Acosta & Mir (2012) relate that at the beginning of each class day everyone would recite Luis Valdez' poem "In Lak'ech" which states:

<i>Tú eres mi otro yo</i>	You are my other me.
<i>Si te hago daño a ti,</i>	If I do harm to you,
<i>Me hago daño a mi mismo.</i>	I do harm to myself.
<i>Si te amo y respeto,</i>	If I love and respect you,
<i>Me amo y respeto yo[sic]</i>	I love and respect myself. (p. 19)

This poem represents a worldview which the MAS program wants to promote in their students and teachers. It is a way of relating to others that acknowledges and connects the participants much in the way of saying "I *see* you."

While it might seem like having opportunities in class to *see* each other might not be of great import, we should consider that these actions might be of great consequence in defying dismissive and oppressive notions of who is worthy to be seen and heard and who is not. A truly decolonizing and critical pedagogy will emphasize the importance of shattering these modes of relating and educating. The Theater of the Oppressed has shown itself to be a potentially powerful method in breaking these conventional notions.

Seeing Metaphorically

The Theater of the Oppressed also provided students the opportunity to see metaphorically. This happened in several ways. First, through the T.O. games, students were able to use metaphors to more clearly understand issues of hierarchy and power. Second, through the use of Forum Theater, students were able to see representations of oppression which in turn made the lessons *real*. Third, students were able to see each other's perspectives through the T.O. activities.

Seeing in New Ways: "Oh I didn't Think About it in That Way"

Through the students' quickwrites on the T.O. games, a major topic which arose from these writings was that the T.O. games helped students *see* things in a new way. Students frequently (18 out of 26) commented to some degree that the exercises helped them better understand a topic or pushed them to think about it in a different way. As one student nicely summed up, it gave them the "Oh, I didn't think about it in that way" experience. The comments,

for the most part, speak to the power of the Theater of the Oppressed to present concepts metaphorically. Given the argument that analogies can be powerful cognitive tools in education (Lakoff & Johnsen, 2003; Newby, Ertmer, & Stepich, 1995; Newby & Stepich, 1987; Ruef, 2005; Rutherford & Ahlgren, 1990), the Theater of the Oppressed provides an arsenal to see and understand concepts in a new way. For some students, the insight they acquired was through a new analogy or some other way to see things symbolically. For others, they were able to see visual representations of concepts such as power. Table 26 shows excerpts from their quickwrites which demonstrate how T.O. helped some students metaphorically *see* in new ways:

Table 26: Seeing Metaphorically Through Theater of the Oppressed

The exercises help us interact with each another and provide us with analogies for the otherwise difficult to understand topics.

What I found of value were the analogies and practices done. It gives the "Oh, I didn't think about it in that way" idea.

Not only was it nice to get out of our seats and interact with one another but it was interesting to see the subjects we discussed in class expressed and demonstrated in countless ways.

These exercises were valuable in that they showed us some aspects of society.

The symbolism behind the chair exercise had value for me. It was really fascinating, how in general everyone had similar images of power although we all have different pasts. Also, in the hand exercise, the person in front had total control over everyone else.

From these comments, we see that some students saw the course content reflected in the exercises and it helped them find new analogies for these concepts. While most of the comments did not specify what exactly those new analogies were nor the topics that became clarified as a result, they do suggest that there was some sort of revelatory or clarifying value to the metaphors. During the interviews, some students pointed to the Power Chairs and Columbian Hypnosis as particularly memorable exercises to metaphorically think about power and control.

Several students saw the variation on the Columbian Hypnosis (see Appendix 3), where one person controls all the participants without saying a word, as symbolic of the nature of social stratification.

During her interview, as Mayra is describing aspects of the course that were meaningful to her, she points out that the Columbian Hypnosis variation served as a metaphor for hierarchical social dynamics. After she finishes describing the pyramidal shape of the structure made out of students' bodies she states:

That exercise stood out a lot to me because it's like in a class where the teacher is saying something and the students in the very back maybe don't get it or they're not recognized. Or you could apply it to a lot of social situations where people in the back levels miss out. I saw it like a pyramid where all the people at the back end were the lower class, then the middle class, then just a few people in the upper class which controls everybody. And then the middle class kinda sends the message from the upper class to the lower class. I kinda saw it in that way. The upper class controlled what we were all doing through the hand signals. So I saw it as class.

INTEVIEWER: Where were you?

I was at the very front, I was controlling everybody. So I saw everybody in the back really struggling with what was going on. That's how I thought about it. I was controlling everybody and then everybody had to do what I was doing because I was at the head of the pyramid.

Mayra's comments tell us that she found the activity memorable since she brings it up when generally asked about meaningful aspects of the course. More importantly, she also shows us, first, that she is thinking about how the class content might relate to the exercise, and second, that through the exercise she found different ways to think about hierarchical social structures (classroom and social classes). She not only notes that the structure could represent society, she also observes the behavior of the students and concludes that something similar happens in society. Her comparison is that the way the message moves in a top-down manner in the exercise is the same way that the middle class replicates and enforces the ideologies of the upper

class and "passes the message" to the working class. For her, it demonstrates an aspect of social reproduction. Gloria similarly points to this same exercise and says:

Say that the person [at head of pyramid] would move back, then we all had to move back. That was manipulation and stratification right there. They're in power. We have to do what they do. When the first layer falls everything else falls. I never really thought about it in that way before. Now when I talk to people I tell them "You know we're at the bottom of the social stratification layers?"

For Gloria, this holds similar value as a metaphor of a hierarchical society. However, she adds some vocabulary words, (manipulation and stratification) that were introduced in this class and points to the exercise as an embodiment of those terms. Like Mayra, she notices the nature of this exercise and compares it to society at large. Furthermore, the sight and physicality of the exercise seems to have helped her understand the concept to a degree where now she can locate herself and her peers within a specific strata. The exercise, rather than being just an idea, was a visible, working, and moving model that demands everyone in the room have a position within the model. This positioning within the model most likely led Gloria to reflect on her relationship and position within society at large.

During the exercises, I never explained what any of the games were supposed to accomplish or represent. In fact, I never as much as made a comment on whether they even had another purpose beyond just having fun in the classroom. However, in the quickwrites, there was a frequent general mention by students that the exercises had some deeper meaning beyond just a fun game; although very few students actually articulated which exercises they were talking about. This was echoed during class when some students said they did not know what the deeper meaning was of certain games but they were pretty sure there had to be one. For example, during the class session when we did the T.O. games, the following question was posed:

STUDENT: I don't get what the covering the space exercise is supposed to mean.

PROFESSOR: What do you think it means?

STUDENT: I'm not sure. But it's gotta mean something though right?

Although several students asked me in class what the individual games meant or what their purpose was, I generally do not answer and simply turn the question around and ask, "Well, what do *you* think it means?" or "What did *you* get out of it?" Since they are actively searching for metaphorical meaning, rather than limit the possibilities of the "meaning" by telling them my interpretation, I promote the expansion of meaning by taking advantage of their search to construct meaning for themselves. Barone and Eisner (2006) argue that one of the greatest values in arts-based educational research is that artistic approaches invite participants to "fill gaps in the text with personal meaning" (p. 97). They further argue these approaches often have an "illuminating effect[which is] its ability to reveal what had not been noticed (p. 102). As was evident in students finding metaphors through the T.O. activities, these approaches tend to enhance perspectives by expanding meaning rather than constricting it.

Learning Through Analogies

The students' use of metaphors during the Theater of the Oppressed games signals an important way that they are using the activities. They are using the exercises to see in a clearer or different way and are very actively looking for meaning within the exercises. This not only points to students that are engaging with the course material but also suggests that when some students find a metaphor, it may help them gain insights into the course content.

Cognitive psychologists have long articulated the central importance of conceptual metaphors as a fundamental mechanism for thinking, learning, analyzing and meaning-making (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Metaphors, as stand-ins for other concepts, help us understand and unpack the nature of ideas that might otherwise be much harder to grasp. In essence they help us

see things that often are not easily seen. For example, to explain the notion of the expanding universe, astronomers often describe it as dots on the outside of an inflating balloon moving away from each other as the balloon expands. Similarly, in this course, we often spoke of complex social issues that are not always easy to immediately comprehend such as power and social hierarchies. Some educational researchers have demonstrated that self-generated metaphors are a powerful tool for comprehension of abstract or highly complex concepts (Newby & Stepich, 1987). This *analogizing* (Newby, et al., 1995) has also been shown to increase retention for students as well as help students make personal connections with the concept. Because of this, some educational programs emphasize *teaching by analogy* which they describe as "seeing with meaning what was not there before" (Ruef, 2005). These analogies help students learn by making strong connections with multiple links as Rutherford & Ahlgren (1990) argue in the following excerpt:

People have to construct their own meaning regardless of how clearly teachers or books tell them things. Mostly, a person does this by connecting new information and concepts to what he or she already believes. Concepts—the essential units of human thought—that do not have multiple links with how a student thinks about the world are not likely to be remembered or useful.” (p. 186)

These multiple links arise from encountering information in different ways; encountering through analogies is one of those ways. Moreover, Boal (1992) stresses the importance of visualization and imagination in human development when he remarks:

Humans are capable of seeing themselves in the act of seeing, of thinking their emotions, of being moved by their thoughts. They can see themselves here and imagine themselves there; they can see themselves today and imagine themselves tomorrow. (p. xxvi)

When speaking of learning in this class, Armando, in his final reflection, affirms the power of multiple and differentiated encounters with the same topic:

Stratification was always something I had a difficult time understanding in the sociology course I was taking this semester. I found it incredible how we discussed stratification in

the Chicano Studies course and I was quickly able to understand the topic in a matter of one day. Furthermore, I was also able to pick up gender stratification and understand it in a sociological context.

Through the interview, Armando clarified that he was able to understand the concept of stratification specifically through our in-class activities. This is a perfect example of multiple encounters that create multiple links and help students like Armando clearly *see* the concept he is looking at. He encountered the concept through lectures in sociology class and in my class but he did not feel like he captured the concept well until we did an activity that, to him, represented stratification.

This is also an example of how Theater of the Oppressed is an effective learning tool through multiple intelligence (Gardner, 1983, 2006) since students actively use spatial, kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal ways of engaging with the material and thus provide different ways to *see* the concepts. The Theater of the Oppressed does not give students a choice to encounter material in one way *or* the other (even though that in itself would be an advantage to unidimensional ways of teaching), it provides an opportunity to encounter ideas in multiple ways within one session. Given that many of the topics that surfaced during the T.O. activities had been discussed before in the course, this was an opportunity for students to re-encounter abstract concepts in various ways and use analogies to augment their understandings.

When it comes to metaphors and decolonizing pedagogies, Tuck and Yang (2012), in their article *Decolonization is Not a Metaphor*, argue that, too often, liberal educators are satisfied with critical consciousness as an end result because it metaphorically "frees the mind" rather than *real* pursuits of liberation like reclamation of land by Native peoples. bell hooks (1994) weighs in on critiques such as this and states:

And so Freire's work, in its global understanding of liberation struggles, always emphasizes that this is the important initial stage of transformation -that historical

moment when one begins to think critically about the self and identity in relation to one's political circumstance. Again, this is one of the concepts in Freire's work -and in my work -that is frequently misunderstood by readers in the United States. Many times people will say to me that I seem to be suggesting that it is enough for individual to change how they think. And you see, even their use of the *enough* tells us something about the attitude they bring to this question. It has a patronizing sound, one that does not convey any heartfelt understanding of how a change in attitude (though not a completion of any transformative process) can be significant for colonized/oppressed people. Again and again Freire has had to remind readers that he never spoke of conscientization as an end to itself, but always as it is joined by meaningful praxis. [emphasis in original] (p. 47)

Through this study I am arguing that the use of metaphors can be a *means* to conscientization which in turn can be a *means* for liberation. In no way would I argue that it is *enough* to merely attain critical consciousness as an end result. However, to address Tuck and Yang's critique, I would also add that what people do with their critical consciousness and the way they define their liberation and end goals is ultimately for them to decide. As Watts, Williams, and Jagers (2003) state:

Critical consciousness can lead to different ideological outcomes; strictly speaking, there is no one set of conclusions that everyone should reach. Diversity precludes that. To press for equal outcomes turns the process of critical consciousness development into indoctrination. (p. 187)

In the classroom, I do not try to steer their critical consciousness to have a singular outcome. I simply ask for critical consideration of the materials presented, not forced consumption.

Seeing Each Other's Perspectives

As was discussed in Chapter 4, one of the key ways in which the Theater of the Oppressed contributed to a collective classroom engagement is by providing an environment where students can genuinely value each others' perspectives. The Theater of the Oppressed furthered this attitude by helping students *see* their classmates' perspectives. More specifically, the activities allowed students to literally see a representation of their classmates' ideas. It was a

literal seeing of a metaphor. This happened on several occasions during the two weeks we did T.O. activities. While doing the T.O. games, students participated in two short exercises that are designed to "dynamize the senses;" these two games were from the "Seeing what we look at" game series (Boal, 1992). Through these games, students examine images without talking. These images are for the most part constructed by the classmates themselves. The first game requires the use of a four-foot PVC pipe which is given a new meaning by individual students depending on how the student interacts with the PVC pipe. For example, if a student picks up the plastic pipe and then swings it with all the mannerisms of swinging a baseball bat at an oncoming ball, then the PVC pipe is now a baseball bat. This happens for approximately five minutes without any talking and pushes students to see something different in the PVC pipe. Immediately following this exercise, students do a similar game which asks that students construct an image of power by only using five empty chairs (see Appendix 3).

Both of these games offer students the opportunity to see in different ways but according to many student responses, the most valuable aspect of the games was being able to literally see their classmates ideas. In our daily lives, when people want to explain something to someone else, they use words -written or spoken. However, in this case, since students were not allowed to talk, they had to use their bodies or props to relate meaning. In this way, people literally were thinking "I *see* what you mean." The students' comments suggest this experience allowed them to find new value in their classmates' perspectives since for the first time they were able to *see* their perspectives and realized, as one student put it, "Oh, I didn't think about it in that way." In other words, other students could make potential contributions to an individual's understandings. Table 27 shows some examples.

Table 27: Valuing Others' Views

It was entertaining but it opened my eyes to things I didn't know my brain could function with. For example the exercises where we have a driver guiding us but we can't see yet they're telling us what to do.The last exercise was my favorite because I got to see many people's definition of power. It is crazy to know that each of us have different ways of thinking.

I thought that it was a creative way to demonstrate how power is seen by others and as well through demonstrating our own opinions of society, world views, race, etc. I found value in the exercises with the chairs and how others demonstrated different representations of power and I found it interesting that everyone's views were roughly similar.

I liked that afterwards we had an opportunity to discuss what we did with each other and reflect on our actions and opinions.

What I found the most valuable was the insight of how my classmates act and see things. Some in a different perspective, some are the same as mine.

I found it really interesting how everyone had their own way of completing and participating in the exercises according to their ability.

It was really fascinating how everyone saw the stick differently.

According to the quickwrites, many students really liked this exercises because of the creative dimension to it and because it allowed them to literally *see* each other's perspectives of power.

After seeing several interpretations of power, some students developed an appreciation for their differences in perspectives as well as their apparent commonalities.

For example, in her interview, Gloria states how the Power Chairs exercise helped her think differently about her classmates' point of view. She states

It really made me realize everyone has a different perspective. I like listening to different peoples' perspectives, knowing what they are and knowing what they think and how they think. I'm like, "why did he put that chair over there and these chairs facing that way? What made him think that?" That was really interesting to me.

The exercises were a great way to show Gloria and other students different conceptualizations of power. However, Gloria is not commenting on what she learned about "power" per se. She is

commenting on what she learned about the way others think and how it differs from her own thinking.

During the T.O. exercises, students were able to see their classmates and see their perspectives. In fact, Boal (1979) claims that one of the main purposes of Image Theater is "making thought visible" (p. 137). This visibility struck a chord with many students and led them to make connections with their classmates. In her interview, Mayra remarked that because of the Forum Theater activity, she was able to develop deeper relationships with some of her classmates based on their common experiences. These experiences were presented to each other through a visible skit. Once again, students *see* each other; only this time they see each others' physical bodies *and* they see important aspect of their classmates' realities. Metaphorically, students unveil themselves and uncover their own experiences for others to see. This act of self-disclosure is yet another way that students could see each other and find value in seeing together.

Theater of the Oppressed as Embodied Critical Pedagogy

A discussion on the Theater of the Oppressed and its capability to help students *see* would not be complete without also discussing the role of the body in this process. There is a strong tendency in educational research to think of the body as irrelevant in academic endeavors or to disregard the body altogether (Cruz, 2001; N. R. Johnson, 2007; McLaren, 1995; Noddings, 1998; Shapiro, 1999). With this distancing between education and corporality, students are treated like disembodied minds that are to be filled with, perhaps fittingly, disembodied knowledge. Bearing this in mind, it should not be overlooked that while students using the Theater of the Oppressed may be seeing metaphors and analogies for otherwise nebulous concepts, the material that those metaphors are made out of is *bodies*. The students' bodies

themselves physically become *incorporated*²⁰ into the lesson thus also making the lesson visible. When students claim to see a metaphor, what they are in essence seeing is their own bodies shaped into metaphors; *em-bodied* metaphors. Since there is little talking throughout many of the Theater of the Oppressed exercises, their entire bodies, rather than just their mouths become the primary means to tell their story. Without the bodies there is no metaphor. This incorporation of bodies into pedagogy can be an important element in developing holistic decolonizing pedagogies to counter compartmentalized education that does not teach the *whole* student.

Students argue that as they act in the skits and enact metaphors, they gain clarity on particular topics thus helping their overall comprehension. For example, some students had heard about social stratification but did not quite have a grasp on the concept until they physically carried out an exercise in class that, to some students, was a literal embodiment of stratification and a conceptual metaphor to help understand hierarchies in society. Yet another example is when students designed a Forum Theater skit. In this case, again, students are embodying a situation that resonates with them. When they subsequently present the scenario to the rest of us, their bodies are the media. Several students have commented on these processes and have stated that through the Theater of the Oppressed, the "lessons became real." In other words, the lessons stop being merely mental abstractions and become visible and embodied - hence *real*.

An aspect that is also striking about students' comments regarding the course is that they were already enjoying and valuing the class to a great degree before the Theater of the Oppressed was introduced. However, when students say, "Not only was it nice to get out of our seats and

²⁰ The word "incorporate" is the perfect word to describe this since it is derived from the Latin words *in corpore* meaning "in body."

interact with one another but it was interesting to see the subjects we discussed in class expressed and demonstrated in countless ways," it begs the question, how much are my students missing out when I only resort to a very limited pedagogical repertoire? This is especially important for critical educators that think of education as the practice of freedom. bell hooks relates that, even among progressive educators, there is rarely a radical departure from conventional ways of teaching. She states:

Even those professors who embrace the tenets of critical pedagogy (many of whom are white and male) still conduct their classroom in a manner that only reinforces bourgeois models of decorum. At the same time, the subject matter taught in such classes might reflect professorial awareness of intellectual perspectives that critique domination, that emphasize an understanding of the politics of difference, of race, class, gender, even though classroom dynamics remain conventional, business as usual. When contemporary feminist movement made its initial presence felt in the academy there was both an ongoing critique of conventional classroom dynamics and an attempt to create alternative pedagogical strategies. (1994, p. 180)

Critical educators should be keenly aware that educational practices under conventional Western norms are limiting and dehumanizing for everyone but especially damaging to marginalized communities for which most education is simply a continuation of the colonial project. It is important to break oppressive and limiting practices in all their forms. That means implementing curriculum *and* pedagogy that contribute to liberation through mind, spirit, *and* body.

Colonization was largely about breaking the colonized at every level and fragmenting their existence, thus making it easier for the colonizer to control the fragments. As was stated earlier, we see this in an education geared towards the mind but absent of the body and spirit. bell hooks reminds us that in efforts for conscientization and liberation, we must teach to the *whole* student because "students want us to see them as whole human beings" (p. 15). Moreover, approaches that teach the whole student are revolutionary since they seek to repair the fragmenting effects of colonization. They seek to heal by re-membering the dis-membered (Furusa, 2006).

Approaches that incorporate the body as part of pedagogy deeply subvert colonialism.

Jaramillo (2009) tells of indigenous protestors in Mexico that show their nude bodies in public:

They [the protestors] discovered that it was sight and persistence of their healthy bodies that generated concern, not their possible emaciation. As one man recalled, "We are only peasants, we don't have other arms, and the only thing we have is our body to call attention." Their weapons were raw flesh, thick and thin, large and small, dark and darker, male and female. In the nude they subverted the legacy of colonialism that required that flesh remains subservient, separated from spirit and mind, and in honor of an imposed God. In the nude, they exposed their voice, power, and persistence, fully present in body and mind. (p. 502)

In this case, the invisible do not just want their voices heard, their power lies in their demand to also be *seen* as they are -voice and body re-incorporated. Similarly, as discussed earlier, students in my class had a voice, but their bodies were bound by their "self-imposed immobility" (Jaramillo, 2009, p. 503) as well as by my reluctance to depart from the colonial chronotopes of the classroom. Students were encouraged to ignore the other student bodies in the classroom, thus leading them to only addressing the professor and in some cases never seeing other students in the classroom.

This study speaks to the powerful potential that Theater of the Oppressed can have as an *embodied critical pedagogy* (N. R. Johnson, 2007) . In describing an embodied critical pedagogy, Johnson states that:

Embodied critical pedagogy is designed to encourage teachers and students to explore the role of the body in anti-oppression work, increase their understanding of the socio-political dimensions of somatic and movement behaviour, and incorporate the lived experience of the body in the process and dynamics of social change. By directly addressing the somatic dimensions of the traumatic impact of oppression, it is hoped that this educational approach can help resolve the ways in which individuals become dissociated from their bodily experience through oppression, and disconnected from a potentially empowering resource in their efforts to bring about social change. (p. 242)

An embodied critical pedagogy partly addresses the issue of *enfleshment* (McLaren, 1995, 1999) where oppression becomes manifested through our bodies. McLaren claims that:

Schools, prisons and other workplaces in advanced capitalist nations function (for the most part tacitly) as major sites of enfleshment through regulatory regimes of signification, majoritarian semiurgical grammars, and social and cultural practices -sites that are able to produce the fully assimilated "Western" body/subject. (p. 63)

The way in which McLaren uses the word *enfleshment* suggests a domestication of the body by hegemonic forces. However, in this study, I would argue that enfleshment is happening in a counter-hegemonic way to break some of the bodily restrictions placed upon students and teachers in an educational setting. The enfleshment McLaren describes in the preceding passage is for the purposes of domestication and is designed to *break in* bodies. The enfleshment through the Theater of the Oppressed is for liberation and is designed to *break out* of oppressive patterns.

Boal states that this liberation of the body and mind is a central concern of the Theater of the Oppressed (1992). He claims that one of the primary purposes of the games (which given their eccentric nature tend to be categorized as "weird" by many participants) is to "demechanize" the body from our daily regimented, restricted, and predictable movements. He asserts that it would be improbable for humans to act in a substantially different way when their bodies and minds are so mechanized and obedient to oppressive conventions. The Theater of the Oppressed provides just one way to break with our unexamined daily patterns of thinking and moving.

This study has shown that the incorporation of the body into pedagogy can serve to engage students as well as literally and metaphorically help them see. Furthermore, this approach is also a way to subvert colonialism by challenging compartmentalized notions of education. Theater of the Oppressed as an embodied critical pedagogy can play a key role in developing holistic strategies to help students, as well as teachers, *unlearn* the patterns of

colonization all while aiding students in unveiling and seeing issues of social justice more clearly.

Theater of the Oppressed and Conditions that Promote Conscientization

While there is little evidence conclusively demonstrating that Theater of the Oppressed on its own will lead to conscientization, there is reason to believe that the Theater of the Oppressed can support a development of critical consciousness by providing an engaged and dialogical learning environment. If we only look at the immediate conclusions that can be drawn from this study about what the Theater of the Oppressed can accomplish in class, we would see that, if anything, the T.O. activities served to further engage students. I allege that without engagement there is no conscientization since it stands to reason that the development of critical consciousness assumes that an individual must, at some level, be *engaged* with the ideas of oppression or social justice. However, not every type of engagement will necessarily translate to a critical consciousness. It is quite easy to imagine an engaged student that is only driven by the desire to get a good grade and "not motivated by social justice" nor has a "critique of social oppression" (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). This student, while engaged, is not developing a critical consciousness. However, the type of engagement that students in this class are reporting has a very particular character. The way that students describe their own engagement in this course, and especially through the Theater of the Oppressed, is in a way that highlights the connections they are making with others. Moreover, as a result of these interactions where students; acknowledge each other, hear each other's perspectives, and generally learn together, the students develop an appreciation and valuing of their classmates. This valuing gets to the point where although students may feel that they are part of a group with

many similarities, they long to expose the differences in each other so they may find more possibilities to grow together. This is the recipe for a Freirean dialogue.

According to Freire (1970), one of the most essential elements in the development of conscientization and radical change is dialogue. In fact he claims that "dialogue is the essence of revolutionary action" (p. 135). He further remarks that "we can't say that one person liberates himself, or another, but that people in communion liberate each other" (p. 128). Through these statements, Freire clearly communicates the centrality of collaborative efforts and specifically collaborative learning in the struggle for liberation. Dialogue, in the Freirean notion, is a dialectical tension that renews itself and builds on itself. It is transcending and always breaking new ground. Hence, conscientization is a natural product of a genuine dialogue. This is especially seen in literature by critical pedagogues that define conscientization as a deepening critical awareness and similarly describe dialogue as accomplishing the same thing (Allman, 2007; Darder, et al., 2009a; McLaren, 2007).

By the above definitions of dialogue, it is clear that the Theater of the Oppressed has been promoting that same type of highly engaged collective learning environment that Freire and critical pedagogy identify as a necessary precursor to conscientization. The Theater of the Oppressed is not being presented to students as a stand-alone. It is being presented as a part of a larger culturally relevant/responsive curriculum that seeks to help Latino/Chicano students contextualize and historicize their own lives. The pedagogical approach to this class falls squarely within the Freirean/critical pedagogy tradition that rejects a banking method of teaching and replaces it with a problem-posing education. While, the Theater of the Oppressed may not be conscientizing students by itself, it seems to be creating the conditions that Freire claims are precursors to conscientization. In this way, T.O. promotes conscientization by providing a

supportive learning environment. Moreover, conscientization is also promoted by the students' social conditions. The Chicana/o Studies course, in many ways, serves to decipher the signs in students' lives. Just like Freire (1970) said that "a person learns to swim in the water, not in a library" (p. 137), people do not exclusively become conscientized in a classroom. Freire (1973) further argues that conscientization, commitment, and struggle are more entangled than we tend to believe. He states, "Conscientization is not exactly the starting point of commitment. Conscientization is more of a product of commitment. I do not have to be already critically self-conscious in order to struggle. By struggling I become conscious/aware" (p. 46). This is summed up by Horton and Freire's (1990) book title "We Make the Road by Walking" which in turn is taken from a line by Spanish poet Antonio Machado (2012) stating "caminante, no hay camino, se hace camino al andar [traveler, there is no road, you make the road by walking]" (p. 6).

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Through this qualitative study, The Theater of the Oppressed has shown itself to be a valuable addition to an undergraduate Chicana/o Studies course. The data strongly suggests that these activities augmented the levels of engagement and participation that were already happening in the course. The data also suggests that the Theater of the Oppressed can be a potentially valuable tool to supplement the pedagogical repertoire of teachers concerned with critically engaging their students. Moreover, the collective engagement that was promoted by the Theater of the Oppressed, and evidenced by students' comments, suggests that these activities promote dialogical encounters which could in turn develop a deepening critical consciousness.

During the Fall 2012, I used Theater of the Oppressed techniques as part of a larger Freirean approach in a lower-division undergraduate Chicana/o Studies course. The activities were not used to teach about the Theater of the Oppressed but rather to provide an opportunity for students to engage with the course material in a different way. Theater of the Oppressed was used for a total of two weeks out of the 16 week semester. This study shows the results of that intervention as evidenced through an online survey, students' writings, and interviews.

Engagement

The students in this class self-reported very high levels of engagement especially in comparison to other courses they were enrolled in that same semester. When asked about the reasons for this increased engagement, the most frequent answers were that the course was *relatable* and that the students appreciated the professor's teaching approach. Since the students were predominantly of Mexican or Central American ancestry, they found great value in a

Chicano/a Studies course where they could encounter materials that spoke to their own history, culture, and social conditions. Students frequently remarked that they had never encountered this type of material in their educational careers and that it was a much welcomed change. This material was so noteworthy and provocative, that most students frequently discussed the course content outside of the classroom. The other major factor that students claim was important in their general engagement was that they liked the professor's pedagogical approach. Students articulate that part of that pedagogical effectiveness was due to the fact that the professor's ethnic/cultural background (Mexican, working class, first-generation American born, first generation college student) was very similar to the students'. They also point out that the teacher in this class actually encouraged students to join class discussions and share their experiences with each other, especially as it related to the course material. This sharing out loud, coupled with all the other aforementioned factors of relatability and engagement, created a collective and synergistic dynamic among the class leading some students to express that they "were all one."

With this as a backdrop to understand the larger ecology of the classroom, we can see that the Theater of the Oppressed was employed in a course where the students already felt highly engaged. While the Theater of the Oppressed certainly did not cause this initial engagement, the data suggests that the activities increased and broadened certain facets of their engagement. Namely, the games and exercises promoted students to interact with each other in physical ways in which they did not normally interact. The data revealed that while many students felt the course was "interactive" and they had many meaningful class discussions, students were very unlikely to *directly* interact and speak with each other except in isolated incidents. Furthermore, the professor was inadvertently perpetuating this lack of student-to-student interaction by the way he related to individual students. This very important dimension

to student engagement and interaction was largely absent from the classroom until the introduction of the Theater of the Oppressed. The Theater of the Oppressed activities encouraged students to actually *see* each other and engage in face-to-face interactions. Moreover, the data demonstrates that students found the Forum Theater activity particularly valuable in connecting and relating to each other. This was accomplished at two levels; through small and large group interactions. In the small groups, students talked to each other about social issues that resonate with them and then devised a theatrical skit that represented the more meaningful issues. The skits were then presented to the entire class and all the students chose one skit to examine more in-depth through Forum Theater interventions. Through the entire process at both the small and large group levels, students were able to see meaningful similarities between their own lived experiences and their classmates'. Importantly however, while those similarities appeared to increase the connectedness and cohesion of the participants, the experience seemed to also lead students to value each others' differences. Through the increased connectedness and different types of interaction which the Theater of the Oppressed provided, students were able to further develop a sense of collective engagement in the classroom.

Conscientization

The data collected through the students' writings and interviews suggested that the course had a conscientizing effect on some students. Although this study did not yield the data to make any claims as to the type, level, or stage of critical consciousness that students underwent, the data does point to evidence of *shifts* in a deepening critical consciousness among some students as a result of taking this course in general. The markers for these shifts come from an operationalization of conscientization based on a compilation of the relevant literature. Moreover, and consistent with one of the points in the operationalization, all of the interviewed

students exhibited an increased analytical curiosity about social issues to the point that several of them decided to enroll in other Ethnic Studies courses in order to explore these topics further.

The Theater of the Oppressed also seemed to shape the students' conscientization although the *shifts* in critical consciousness were not as discernible. The two primary ways which this study suggests the Theater of the Oppressed helped to promote critical consciousness was by helping students *see* in a different way and by promoting a supportive learning environment for genuine dialogue and conscientization. A recurring theme across data sources was that students claimed Theater of the Oppressed helped them "see" either new things or old things in a new way. This frequent reference to *seeing* (or some variant using clear *eyesight* as an analogy) implies increased understanding or lucidity about the nature of issues the students are *looking* at. It implies a revelatory character to their experience and thus a shift in consciousness. This is consistent with Paulo Freire's own analogy of "unveiling" to describe the process of conscientization. However, there were several dimensions in which students were *seeing*. First, students were literally seeing each other through the activities. This is significant since the students were provided very few opportunities to have student-to-student interactions throughout the general course. This was most likely due to the effect of educational *chronotopes*, or unstated and pre-determined modes of operating in the classroom. The fact that students were able to have face-to-face interactions in a space that normally does not encourage that type of engagement shows the Theater of the Oppressed's de-colonizing potential in defying oppressive norms in education.

Students also claimed that the activities helped them to see metaphorically. That is, through the games and exercises, students were able to find images and models that somehow represented a topic we had covered in the class such as "power" or "hierarchy." Although

students were not verbally prompted to look for meaning in the activities, many students found great value in particular exercises which provided metaphoric representations of more abstract social concepts. This, again, supports conscientization since it is scaffolding the lessons from the course. The lessons, which mostly have to do with the social conditions of Latinos, are *re-presented* in the activities in a multi-modal way.

Another way in which students could *see* was by literally seeing a representation of their classmates' thoughts. Rather than explain what they were thinking or feeling through words, students showed a visual or dramatized representation of their ideas. In this way, other students were able to give a more literal meaning to "I *see* what you mean." Through this seeing of each other's perspectives, several students expressed an increased valuing of their classmates' perspectives. This further developed the collective engagement which was already present in the classroom and led to more genuine dialogical relationships since students had a newly-found appreciation of their classmates' ideas.

One of the notable aspects about the act of seeing through the Theater of the Oppressed is that what is visible are the students' physical bodies. While this may seem like a trite point, it is important to acknowledge the role of the body in pedagogy. In this case, the students are using their bodies to construct a metaphor and visually represent their ideas. The incorporation of bodies into the lesson/activity makes it an embodied critical pedagogy. This is significant because of the strong tendency in academia to teach to the students' minds but not incorporate their bodies in any significant way. Through the Theater of the Oppressed, students re-incorporate their voices, minds, and bodies and thus defy the compartmentalization and fragmentation that is consistent with colonialism.

Finally, another way in which the Theater of the Oppressed may have promoted conscientization is through the creation of a collaborative learning environment where students not only interact and find increasing ways to relate to each other, but also where they realize the value of their differences in perspective. This is a critical element in the development of dialogical relationships since students concretely see the contributions that others can make to their own understanding and development. Paulo Freire points out that this understanding and the subsequent implementation of dialogical relationships are central in the development of conscientization.

Implications

On a personal note, one of the greatest values for me in doing this research on the Theater of the Oppressed in my own classroom is that it unveiled my own complicity in perpetuating a domesticating education rather than an education for liberation. In my attempts to engage students and insist that their voices be heard in the class, I overlooked the fact that students very rarely interacted with each other directly. This is an important element to point out to all teachers and specifically to educators that seek to enact the principles of a culturally responsive, decolonizing, and critical pedagogy. Specifically, we as critical educators must be aware of the types of interactions that we are explicitly or tacitly promoting in our classrooms and how they either challenge or reinforce tactics of domination. Through this study I found a renewed admiration for the Theater of the Oppressed as a tool to challenge and weaken the hidden chronotopic structures inside the classroom. While this study is localized and contextualized in one classroom, it does have important implications for the fields of Chicana/o Studies, critical education, and performance studies (i.e. Theater of the Oppressed).

Pedagogy Matters in Chicana/o Studies

As this study took place within a Chicana/o Studies course, it has important implications for this field. Across data sources, students were very consistent in emphasizing the great import of pedagogy and relatable content. This evidence echoes Rudy Acuña's (2009) assertions of the paramount importance of pedagogy in Chicana/o Studies. The data suggests that it is important to have a multi-pronged approach that emphasizes both relatable content and engaging pedagogy -not one or the other. The students in this course were incredibly appreciative of having the opportunity to learn about themselves. However, we should not take their interest for granted. The study suggests that in order to more fully engage students and cultivate their interests, it would be wise to heed Acuña's advise for Chicana/o educators to rediscover and reinvent Freirean pedagogy in the classroom. As we develop alternative teaching strategies, we must explicitly examine those approaches to see how they may challenge or support the same systems of domination we are struggling against.

So does this study suggest that Chicana/o Studies professors use the Theater of the Oppressed in their classrooms? Not necessarily. This study merely demonstrates one articulation of critical pedagogy in a university classroom. The take away point is *not* that educators need to employ this particular approach in their classrooms but it does demonstrate the power of the arts in education and differentiated instruction within a critical and culturally relevant curriculum. I use T.O. because I have had a chance to develop this skill set for a long time. This study is just one example of an effort to bring alternative teaching strategies into a Chicana/o Studies classroom to break the monotony of lectures and deliver lessons in various engaging ways.

Moreover, college Ethnic Studies programs, in general, are mindful that as People of Color in academe, we are doubly saddled with pressures to perform at a high standard. We know

that our departments and our students are scrutinized in unfair ways and therefore we hold our students to a higher standard of performance. However, we should be cautious *not* to equate students enjoying themselves in the classroom with a lack of academic rigor. In the documentary *Precious Knowledge* (Palos, 2011), educator Curtis Acosta remarks, "I know a lot of teachers are hesitant to use the word 'fun' or 'entertaining,' but I'm sorry, I'm going to use the gifts that I have and if I can make them laugh, I'm going to make them laugh." We should develop a *no holds barred* approach to education where we do not censor ourselves from teaching effectively because we may lose prestige in the academy. In fact, the Plan de Santa Barbara exhorts us to fully use our artistic resources in engaging our students.

Another possible implication of this study for Chicana/o college students, although not specifically those within Chicana/o Studies is that of freshmen attrition/persistence. Research has pointed out the importance of a "sense of belonging" (Maestas, Vaquera, & Zehr, 2007) in Latino freshmen persistence. According to the data in my study, one of the most salient features of our classroom was a sense of collective engagement. Students felt like they were part of a community within the classroom and felt a sense of connectedness with each other. Several students also commented that this feeling was *not* a part of their larger university experience. How could the sense of cohesion and community that was established within this classroom impact the students' persistence rates? Could the elements that are promoting group cohesion in this classroom be implemented in other university settings in a way that might positively affect freshmen persistence? Given that most of the students in this class were freshmen, it is worth examining this topic further to better understand these students' sense of belonging in individual courses and at the university overall. The interviewed students frequently mentioned that they looked forward to coming to this class even if it was at the end of a long day. This study

suggests that the sense of community that was developed inside the classroom could have played a significant part in giving students a reason to come back.

Finally, one of the most disturbing things that came out of the interviews was that most of the students had never had another Latino professor before me. Granted, most of the students were freshmen but even among the students that had been at the university for years, this fact did not change. One student said the most notable thing about her whole experience in my class was how "weird" it was to have a Mexican professor since in her entire life she had never had a Latino teacher. This is nothing short of a travesty especially when we consider that this is an HSI in Los Angeles, which has the largest Mexican population in the United States and the second largest Mexican population in the world (only Mexico City has a larger Mexican population). For a Mexican college student on this campus and in this city to never encounter a Mexican educator is a gross injustice. In essence, Mexican students today (particularly college students) are practically prohibited from being taught by their own people. This situation is tantamount to Indian Schools that were designed to lock away Native students and strip them of their culture and heritage. Chicano/Mexicano students are in a similar situation when they get isolated at the university and do not have access to learn about their culture or be mentored by a Chicano/Mexicano educator. In the chance those students might take a Chicana/o Studies course, we have to welcome these students in and entice them to learn more about their history, culture, and conditions. Under these circumstances, it is even more important that we fully engage these students if we should be fortunate enough to encounter them in our classrooms.

Engaging Critical Pedagogy

For critical educators, this study provides one example of what critical pedagogy could look like in a college classroom. The critical pedagogy literature provides few examples of

critical pedagogy in action, especially at the collegiate level. In this study, students clearly responded positively to the professor's approach which they described as conversational, open, and interactive. They frequently mentioned the fact that in this class, unlike others, the teacher spoke *with* them and invited discussions about their perspectives and experiences. Students also remarked that although the professor questioned them frequently he was "not judgmental" of them or their answers. The type of pedagogy they are generally describing is the problem-posing and humanizing pedagogy that Freire advocates. In this study, it was clear that this approach does *not* go unnoticed by students. Unfortunately, it is so rare, that when asked about the valuable aspects of the class, most students immediately responded that the teacher's approach was one of those valued aspects especially since they seldom encountered it before. This speaks to the necessity of this type of pedagogy not only in college but at all levels of formal schooling. The other immediate response was that the teacher and content were "relatable." This points to the importance of integrating a culturally relevant curriculum with a culturally responsive and critical pedagogy. Moreover, while this study is not meant to be a "how-to" for anything, it does demonstrate one articulation of critical pedagogy by way of a Freirean/Boalian approach. While this study took place in a college Chicana/o Studies classroom, the lessons it reveals about the power of an engaging, relevant, responsive, and critical pedagogy extend to other classrooms as well. A seventh grade Social Studies teacher as well as a college Algebra teacher can both implement these approaches provided their teaching philosophy centers and values the experiences of the student.

I must emphasize one of the key issues this research uncovered. As an educator deeply interested in critical pedagogy, I have read countless articles and books on the importance of developing dialogical relationships in the classroom. However, that literature mostly focuses on

teacher-student relationships, not on nurturing student-student interaction and relationships. As teachers, we are critical about how we engage with students but perhaps not as cautious about how students engage with themselves in our classrooms. While some of the literature might make brief mention of this or simply talk generally about the importance of dialogue, it is easy to miss and I consider it a blind spot in the critical pedagogy literature. This is especially important in college classrooms where there tends to be considerably less interaction of *any* kind.

The importance of engagement is also underemphasized in this literature. Sometimes we might naïvely think that as long as we know our content area well and understand the basics of culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy, critical race pedagogy, or critical pedagogy we will have an easier time in the classroom. In my experience as an educator in middle school, high school, and college, I have never found that to be true. The first step for me has *always* been to get the students' attention. Of course, getting their attention might be difficult but it is probably more difficult to keep their attention throughout the semester. While the *relatability* of the content and pedagogy is key, we can sometimes develop an overreliance on the material to sell itself rather than actively looking for opportunities to tailor the lessons to the specific students in our classrooms. The oft-mentioned mantra in critical pedagogy that teaching must be relevant, critical, and transformative (Giroux, 1988; McLaren, 2007) must also incorporate that pedagogy must be *engaging*.

Moreover, this study provides an example for teacher education students that are often left wondering what a critical pedagogy could look like in the classroom. It is not uncommon to hear teacher education students express frustration that critical pedagogy does not provide much insight on the particulars of actually carrying it out in the classroom. If anything, this study, more than just being one example, shows that critical pedagogy should be a process of self-

reflection in order not to replicate patterns of alienation in the classroom. In this study, potential teachers should take note of the "invisible" role of chronotopes in education. We need to be very aware of what unspoken expectations we are stepping into when we become classroom teachers and the implications of those on our students, ourselves, and our communities. Teacher candidates should also critically reconsider what engaged pedagogy looks like and what an engaged student looks like. This study exposed the problems with conventional understandings of classroom engagement as well as different dimensions of classroom interactions that were previously glossed over by the professor. Lastly, teachers should encourage their students to *enjoy* their learning by changing up the delivery once in a while -especially by incorporating the arts.

Theater of the Oppressed as Classroom Pedagogy

This study demonstrated a deployment of the Theater of the Oppressed in a non-theater college classroom. The data suggests that the effect of this approach is entirely consistent with Augusto Boal's stated purposes of promoting dialogue. While I am not arguing that every educator should use T.O. in their classroom it does bring up the question, "If educators were interested in learning about these techniques, where could they go and how much is it going to cost them?" Even with T.O.'s growth in the U.S. during the last decades, there is still a major issue with access (i.e. Who uses the Theater of the Oppressed and where?). Theater of the Oppressed trainings tend to be notoriously expensive and inaccessible. If Theater of the Oppressed practitioners want to use this work in the most effective way, then we have to make it accessible to the people that need it the most. Although the popular use of T.O. in the United States owes a lot to universities and academics, we still have a lot of work to do in disseminating Boal's techniques to marginalized communities. Augusto Boal never intended his work to be

trapped in university theater classrooms and become the purview of academics. With the increasing visibility and interest in Theater of the Oppressed, there are growing opportunities to augment the scope of this work. It requires making extensive efforts to ensure access to people who want to learn these techniques but cannot afford to take the workshops. Those who already are trained and versed in the arsenal of the Theater of the Oppressed have an obligation to use this work for its primary intended purpose -liberation. That might mean conducting free (or extremely inexpensive) workshops and trainings for people in marginalized communities. When I was in the Center for the Theater of the Oppressed in Omaha (aka OPTIONS (Omaha Public Theater In Our Neighborhoods)), one of the most powerful aspects of the group was that we periodically gave free workshops in public parks around the city. We made sure that we did not just get trapped in giving workshops to only those who could afford it. Boal told our group that ideally, everyone in the group comes together and develops their craft through the CTO but then goes back to their respective communities and implements the Theater of the Oppressed there. This study showed, what most T.O. practitioners already knew. However, those of us that do this type of work need to devise ways to maximize the powerful impact that T.O. can deliver. That means being generous with our talents with communities that have very limited access.

Limitations

There are inherent limitations in this research due to the design. Namely, the context-specific and local nature of the study make it non-generalizable and non-replicable. This study only represents the happenings in one course during one semester. Moreover, in trying to assess students' conscientization, it became clear that would be difficult with this type of research design. Conscientization as a process, implies change over time. Since this is not a longitudinal study, we can only make limited observations and inferences based on the time students were in

the class. Monitoring students' behavior and writings for hints of conscientization would be problematic since students do not experience conscientization in the same way nor could we know where the student was in the conscientization continuum at the beginning of class. I resorted to only documenting hints of "shifts" that generally implied *any* change in critical consciousness. Hence, while the data suggested that some students were *shifting*, the data does not support any conclusions as to the type, level, or stage of these shifts. Moreover, there was very little data that directly pointed to the Theater of the Oppressed as a sole conscientizer. In other words, students generally did not talk about shifts that they experienced as a result of the T.O. activities. Thus, I had to interpret the data further and infer how T.O. might broadly be promoting conscientization.

There was a great advantage in waiting for 6-7 months after the conclusion of the course to perform the interviews. Students were able to speak on how the course had impacted their lives since the course had ended. In other words, there was enough distance from the course where they could think about it in terms of the larger contribution to themselves or the most memorable aspects from that class. However, this same distance proved to also be difficult for some students since many had a hard time remembering specifics from the course. Often, students would say that they remembered really enjoying the course but they could not remember further details as to what exactly the factors were that engaged them. Also, I initially had planned on interviewing a representative cross-section of students but since it was over the summer, many students were not available or were not checking their school emails. Consequently, I ended up with five volunteers for the interviews. While there is a value in offering all students the opportunity to participate in the interviews, there is obviously a filtering of the participants in that students who volunteer might be more motivated in school generally and thus might leave us

with skewed understandings of engagement in the classroom. Also, given the digital divide in Communities of Color, it is certainly possible that not all students have internet access during the summer when they are away from school, nor would they necessarily think to check their school email when they are not taking a class. Moreover, the working-class demographics of this group suggest that most of these students have summer jobs (one interviewed student worked three jobs during the summer) or other obligations making it difficult for them to participate in this study.

Further Studies

This study brought to light a few issues that deserve further research. First, one of the most fascinating aspects of the classroom community was how "in tune" students seemed to be with each other. Several students correctly assessed the high engagement level of the class even though many of those engagement factors are practically "invisible" in the classroom. What are the contextual cues that students read in each other to determine engagement? Is it something as simple as the absence of distractions (like texting and listening to ipod) or is there much more to it?

Also, what is the relationship between emotional engagement, as outlined in this study, and in-class engagement? In other words, does taking an interest in the class translate to turning in homework and increased overt participation inside the class? If not, why not? Some students showed clear signs of emotional engagement but then had several missing assignments. How and why does this seeming contradiction happen? Moreover, what is the relation between collective engagement and emotional engagement? Does one lead to another?

Regarding the implementation of the Theater of the Oppressed, I have often wondered what difference it might make if I would outline clear and more specific objectives during the "games" phase of the workshop. I do not tell students what they should be looking for nor

thinking about during the games. In the absence of this guidance, some students have expressed that they don't understand exactly why we are doing the exercises. Rather than tell them what I want them to get out of it, I usually press them to find some meaning for themselves. However, I am not quite sure as to how it would change their experience if I outlined some basic objectives/questions such as "How does this exercise help you understand the concept of 'dialogue'?" Perhaps a future study could examine the affordances and limitations of these two approaches. Lastly, it would be beneficial to research how this work could be used outside of the classroom. Specifically, how could the Theater of the Oppressed be best used to create community outside the classroom in order to increase freshmen persistence among Students of Color?

Appendix 1: Survey Questions
Distributed online through surveygizmo.com

The following survey mostly deals with students' engagement in the course. I would like to incorporate questions on perceived levels of critical consciousness.

(* Signifies required answer)

1) How engaged are you in this class?*

- Very Engaged
- Engaged
- Somewhat engaged
- Slightly engaged
- Not at all engaged

2) How engaged are you in your OTHER classes this semester?*

- Very engaged
- Engaged
- Somewhat engaged
- Slightly engaged
- Not at all engaged

3) If more/less engaged in this class than in other courses, why do you think that is? (i.e. what is it about this class that engages you more/less?) _____

4) Was there a day/lesson that was particularly engaging for you? If so, which one(s)? _____

5) How often do you talk about topics from this course outside of this classroom? (average times per week)*

- 0
- 1-2
- 3-4
- 5-6
- more than 6

6) When discussing this course outside of class, what kinds of things have you talked about? _____

7) During this course, about how often have you done each of the following?*

	never	sometimes	often	very often
Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue	()	()	()	()
Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective	()	()	()	()
Learned something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept	()	()	()	()

8) To what extent do the following behaviors, thoughts, and feelings describe you, in this course. Please rate each of them on the following scale:*

	not at all characteristic of me,	not really characteristic of me,	moderately characteristic of me,	characteristic of me,	very characteristic of me.
Listening carefully in class	()	()	()	()	()
Coming to class every day	()	()	()	()	()
Finding ways to make the course material relevant to my life	()	()	()	()	()
Applying course material to my life	()	()	()	()	()
Finding ways to make the course interesting to me	()	()	()	()	()
Thinking about the course between class meetings	()	()	()	()	()
Really desiring to learn the material	()	()	()	()	()
Raising my hand in class	()	()	()	()	()
Asking questions when I don't understand the instructor	()	()	()	()	()
Having fun in class	()	()	()	()	()
Interested in the class material	()	()	()	()	()

9) How strongly do you agree/disagree with the following statements regarding this class?*

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I feel that the course material is important	()	()	()	()	()
I feel that the course material is practical	()	()	()	()	()
I feel that the teacher cares about me	()	()	()	()	()
I feel that the teacher is judgmental	()	()	()	()	()
I would recommend this class to others	()	()	()	()	()

10) How strongly do you agree/disagree with the following statements?*

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Racism will end in the United States within my lifetime?	()	()	()	()	()
Racism will end in the United States some day?	()	()	()	()	()
There will ALWAYS be inequality	()	()	()	()	()
I can personally influence the outcomes of social problems	()	()	()	()	()

11) Which best describes why you registered for this course? (select all that apply)*

- My advisor recommended I do so
- Fit my schedule
- The course was available/open
- Required for my program
- I have an interest in this topic
- A friend recommended it
- other

12) What academic year are you?*

- 1st year
- 2nd year
- 3rd year
- 4th year
- 5th year +

13) In what year were you born?*

14) Which best describes your ethnic/racial background? (Check all that apply)*

- African American/Black
- Asian
- Latino/Chicano/Mexican
- Pacific Islander
- White
- Native American

15) What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

16) What is the highest level of education your parents completed?*

- Grade school
- Middle School
- Some high school
- High school diploma/GED
- Some college
- Associate's degree

- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctorate degree
- Law degree
- Medical degree
- Trade or other technical school degree

17) Where were your parents/guardians born?*

	United States	Mexico	Central America	South America	Asia	Africa	Europe	I don't know
Mother	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
Father	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___

18) Do your parents own their own home?

- Yes
- No

19) List all of the ZIP codes you have lived under. List the MOST RECENT FIRST. Separate each ZIP code using commas (DO NOT LIST UNIVERSITY HOUSING)_____

Thank You!

Appendix 2: Interview Protocol

(POST UPDATED RESEARCH QUESTIONS HERE)

(POST WORKING DEFINITION OF CONSCIENIZATION HERE)

The objective of the individual interviews will be to find out the following:

- **Impact of course on consciousness/awareness. Engagement. “Shifts”**
- **What role, if any, did Theater of the Oppressed play in the above?**
- **Were there specific activities/lessons that were more impactful/meaningful?**
- **Look for and explain “Shifts” (in identity, consciousness, engagement, attitude, etc.) Shifts as result of what? Relevance to pedagogy?**

“Start-up” questions:

-Tell me about yourself. General-name, year, major, etc.

-Tell me about the course, how did it go for you? What was your experience like in this class?

-Are there aspects of the course that you liked or disliked more (found more or less meaningful) than others? Tell me about it.

-What kind of impact did those things have on you? How can you tell?

(Find out specifics! And pursue anything that might signal consciousness shifts especially as stated in the working definition, their thoughts on pedagogy, engagement, or Theater of the Oppressed)

If they mention Theater of the Oppressed:

-What did you like/dislike about it?

-Is there a particular exercise that had a bigger impact on you?

-Have you talked to anyone outside of class about your experience with the Theater of the Oppressed? If so, what was said?

-Did you find TO beneficial in any way? (Did TO change your mind about anything or help you see anything differently?)

-Was it difficult for you to engage in these types of activities?

If they mention anything signaling engagement:

You said the word “engaged,” tell me what that means to you or describe how and why you think you were engaged.

Was there anything in particular that caused you to be more (or less) engaged? How did your attitude about the course differ before and after that instance?

Was your interaction/attitudes/engagement in this class similar to other course you have taken?

Did you ever continue any of the conversations we started in class outside of class?

We covered a lot of material in class, what was it about that topic/activity that resonated with you?

If they mention changes in outlook, attitude, consciousness, etc.

What do you think led to this change in your attitude?

What role, if any, did the professor's approach have on this shift?

What role, if any, did the content have on this shift?

What role, if any, did T.O. have on this shift?

Did you talk to anyone about this shift? What was said?

Could anyone tell you see things differently now?

If students do not mention of any of the above concepts unprompted:

(Ask them directly at the end of the interview after they have had an opportunity to talk about it unprompted)

-I understand you did Theater of the Oppressed exercises in class. How did that go for you?

-Did it appeal to you? Why, why not?

-Did it help you understand any of the class materials any better?

-Have you had any changes in outlook/attitude/perspective as a result of this class?

Tell me about it.

-Tell me about your level of engagement in this class.

If not,

Some students have said that they [did shift, or found T.O. meaningful, or were highly engaged] why do you think that was not the case with you?

Appendix 3: Samples of Theater of the Oppressed Games

Examples of games

Many of the games require participants to work in pairs. Although most TO workshops I have seen do not ask the participants to take a half minute to introduce themselves to their partner, I have found it to be an excellent opportunity for students to meet new people and learn their names. These paired games are somewhat akin to other more well-known "ice-breakers" or "trust games" in that they often ask the participants to rely and, to a degree, trust in their partner while executing the exercise. For example, one of the games we did is called "The Blind Car." The following is the description found in the book *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*.

Blind Car One person stands behind another, who is the car. From behind, the driver guides the movements of the "blind car" by pressing a finger in the middle of the back (go straight on), on the left shoulder (turn left-the nearer the shoulder, the sharper the corner), the right shoulder (similarly), or with the hand on the neck (reverse). As there will be a number of blind cars driving around at the same time, it is important to avoid crashes. The cars stop when the driver stops touching them (like bumper cars). The speed is regulated by harder or softer pressure with the finger. (Boal, 1992, p. 111)

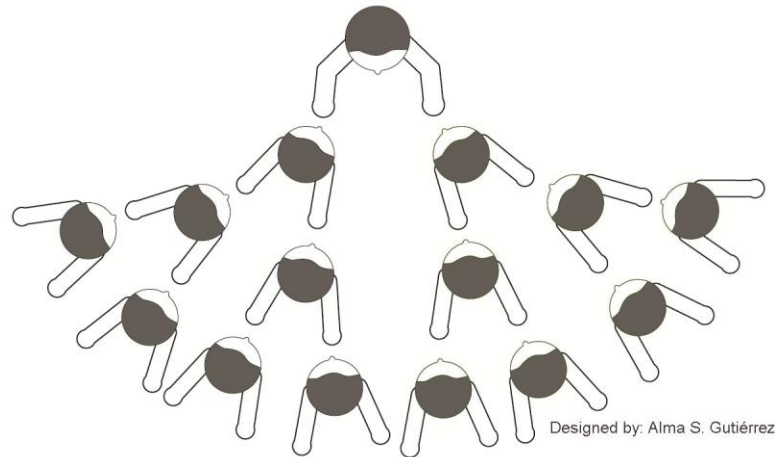
We also did a variation of this game where the "blinded" person follows their partner around the room by following a sound "beacon" (a verbalized but non-lexical sound) which they have both agreed to before separating. Rather than blindly moving around the room based on their partners touch, they have to blindly move following their partner's sound.

Another exercise we did in class is called Columbian Hypnosis. This is one of the best known games in the Theater of Oppressed arsenal. In this game, although neither participant is blinded, they take turns following each other in the following manner:

Columbian Hypnosis One [participant] holds her hand palm forward, fingers upright, a few centimeters away from the face of another, who is then as if hypnotized and must keep his face constantly the same distance from the hand of the hypnotizer, hairline level with her finger-tips, chin more or less level with the base of her palm. The hypnotizer starts a series of movements with her hand, up and down, right and left, backwards and forwards, her hand vertical in relation to the ground, then horizontal, then diagonal, etc. –the partner must contort his body in every way possible to maintain the same distance between face and hand. (Boal, 1992, p. 63)

Here again, we did a variation of this exercise that links the entire class simultaneously. In this variation, one participant holds out both hands (palms facing out) in front of them. Two other participants each get "hypnotized" by the first person's hands. These two participants will bend forward slightly and while stretching their arms back, put their palm out (fingers pointing up) so somebody else can become hypnotized by their hands. This process repeats until all the participants are "hypnotized" by a hand in front of them. The collective shape of all the participants doing this exercise should be a pyramid and resembling a flock of geese flying. The following illustration in Figure A1 shows what this formation usually looks like.

Figure A1: Colombian Hypnosis Variation



While doing this and other games, the participants are prevented from talking. The games are conducted in relative silence (except of course when they are supposed to make noise as part of the game). The lack of verbal communication helps participants focus on communicating through other means and temporarily removes them from their reliance on traditional forms of interpersonal communication. For example, during the "Blind Car," they are only communicating through a very simple touch (fingertip) and during "Colombian Hypnosis," through the movement of a hand. When participants are asked to play a very odd but engaging game and not be able to talk, a very interesting yet predictable phenomenon happens. As an exercise goes on for about five minutes with no other sound than the shuffling of feet and an occasional stifled giggle, the moment the game is over I instruct the participants to "talk to your partners." Immediately, there is always an explosion of sound consisting of intense laughter and conversation. I have pointed this out later to students as evidence of dialogue being a very natural state. When people have an interesting experience one of the first things they want to do is talk to other people about it. If they are somehow deprived of their right to converse, they cannot wait to be able to talk about it.

"This Stick is Not a Stick!"

After we did approximately 50 minutes of introductory games I moved on to a few exercises that are designed to "see what we look at" and that promote participants' divergent thinking. This is important since they will be asked to be creative in their presentations while critically analyzing the Forum scenes as well as paying close attention to the way images are presented. For example, we played a game where we all get in a circle facing inwards and I lay a three foot PVC pipe in the middle of the circle (Incidentally, this is the only "prop" I ever use. I went to a local hardware store and bought a cut PVC pipe for under a dollar. This is actually going "fancy" since I usually just did this with a borrowed broom handle). The students are told that "this tube is not a tube" and asked to come to the center and, without talking, give it a new meaning/context based on the way they relate to it with their bodies. One student comes to the center and prepares himself as if to do a squat with a heavy barbell. He reaches down and firmly clutches the PVC pipe as he then pretends to struggle as he lifts a heavy weight over his head. The students laugh to themselves understanding that in the new context, he was not lifting a very

light plastic tube but a 200 pound barbell. One after another students run up to the center and the PVC pipe transforms into dozens of new things -a baseball bat, a walking cane, a violin bow, an electric guitar, a sword, a tightrope, a skateboard, a telescope. For the next few minutes students do not see a plastic tube at all -their imaginations take over. This exercise primes us to "see" and imagine in different ways.

Power Chairs

Our last exercise for this day was the "Power Chairs." There are many variations of this exercise but this is the one I use most frequently. For this exercise we used five empty chairs. The students made a circle around the chairs and were then asked to arrange the chairs (or make a "sculpture") in any way they want to as long as their "sculpture" represents "power". Again, this is all done without talking. After one person comes forward and "sculpts" her version of a power relationship using the chairs the next person will come up and do the same until everyone that wants to "sculpt" has had the chance to do so. The last sculptor simply stacked all the chairs up in a single column. Since we were done with the exercise and free to talk, I asked the class why this last sculpture might represent "power" and a student quickly commented that it was because the chair on top was dominating all the rest. Another student, not totally convinced with this answer, pointed to the bottom chair as the most powerful since it was holding all the rest of the chairs up. Immediately, a conversation followed on the dynamics of power and why both of those answers might be correct.

Appendix 4: The Forum Theater Assignment

For this course, rather than assign a final paper or something comparable, I assigned a Forum Theater presentation to be done in small groups. The assignment took two weeks (four class sessions) to complete, not including a preparatory reading on Freire and a follow-up discussion on the generative themes the Forum assignment produced. After class discussions and readings (which included Chapter 1 of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) on the state of affairs of Latino education during weeks 11 and 12, I assigned their final project during week 13. As part of the assignment, the students had access (through the course website) to the assignment prompt, FAQs about Forum Theater, and an instructional video on Forum Theater. After the project was assigned, our next class session consisted of Theater of the Oppressed games. In the final two sessions dedicated to T.O., the small groups rehearsed their scenes and finally presented them to the class on the day of presentations.

Table A1: Theater of the Oppressed Schedule

Day	Topic of the day
Pre-	Read and discuss <i>Pedagogy of the Oppressed</i> Ch 1
1	Introduce and assign Forum Theater project -watch video (30 min) online
2	Theater of the Oppressed games (entire class session)
3	In-class time to discuss, refine and rehearse Forum scenes in small groups(40 min)
4	Forum Theater presentations (entire class session)
post	Discuss and debrief Forum presentations

Day 1: Introduction and Assignment of Forum Theater Project

This was the first time that I mentioned the Theater of the Oppressed in class. I did not give an in-depth introduction to the TO. Rather, I simply mentioned that the activities we would be engaging in for the final project came from this genre. After that brief explanation, the students put themselves into groups of 5-8 people and broadly discussed the topics they were interested in presenting through their Forum Theater skits. I gave the students three resources to consult within the next few weeks a) the actual prompt, b) a list of Frequently Asked Questions about Forum Theater, and c) an instructional video posted on the course website. The prompt outlined the basic requirements of the assignment and reminded students they were to design a skit for Forum intervention that fulfilled all of the following criteria:

The Forum scene must:

- be 1-2 minutes in length
- represent an issue that is real and meaningful to you
- have a clearly identifiable protagonist (who we can relate to) trying to accomplish something but who fails in the scene.
- provide opportunities for possible interventions where the protagonist is replaced by someone in the audience
- be a challenging situation involving at least one other person (antagonist)

Aside from the explanation in class and their prompt, I also supplied them with an 18 minute instructional video I made with the help of former students. In the video I give much more in-depth explanations on what Forum theater is as well as its basic components and the

necessity for those. Perhaps the most valuable aspect of the video is that I show a model of what a Forum scene could look like and how they are to present it in class. Lastly, I posted a list of FAQs regarding this assignment. Since I know this is a very atypical assignment for them, I anticipated and answered certain questions which they might have. I have also been making a list of these types of questions from other workshops I have given before for this type of occasion.

Day2: Theater of the Oppressed Games

One entire class session was dedicated to doing Theater of the Oppressed warm-up games and exercises. These games are designed to engage participants by having them interact with each other in physical and playful ways. In this case, I used the games to get students out of their seats and "warm them up" for the upcoming Forum Theater session in which they would be expected to be active in ways which they were normally not (i.e. acting, moving around the room, etc). Since I am asking students to do something that they probably have never done inside a regular classroom it is important to prepare them for that "new" classroom behavior and culture. I also wanted them to feel free to act "silly" if need be during some exercises in order to break the barriers of acceptable classroom behavior and boundaries. I want them to feel comfortable laughing, moving, talking, playing, interacting, etc. -all things that they are discouraged from doing in most classrooms. One of the biggest challenges in doing Forum Theater is simply to get the participants to feel comfortable coming up to the "stage" and doing an intervention. If Forum Theater is to work like it is intended, full student participations is a must. See Appendix 3 a sample of games.

Day 3: Refining and Rehearsal

On this day, I took the last half (approximately 40 minutes) of our class session to allow students to refine and rehearse their scene in-class. Knowing that this might be one of the few times everyone in a group might be able to meet, I wanted them to take advantage of that time and rehearse their parts. I also wanted to see their skits so I could offer feedback especially on production and staging. More importantly, I wanted students to get acquainted with their scene so their message could clearly get across to their classmates. By this day they were supposed to have at least a draft of a script which they could work off and which I could browse through. The last 10 minutes were exclusively to rehearse. This was difficult since many students wanted to keep talking about their skits rather than actually act it out. Some students felt they were not prepared yet while others just seemed shy to actually get up and "act." Be that as it may, I insisted that everyone get up and rehearse their scene no matter what stage of development it was in.

Day 4: The Presentations

On the day of the actual presentations, we started out by clearing out the classroom space and moving all the desks to the edge of the room. To get the students energized a bit, we played a game called "paper ball." The game requires a waded piece of notebook paper which the participants will volley up in the air as long as possible. The guidelines to the game are:

- there is no talking during the game,
- no one can volley the paper ball more than two consecutive times,
- every time the ball is hit, *all* the participants must loudly yell out a letter of the alphabet in order (1st hit=A, 2nd hit=B, 3rd=C, etc)

-once the paper ball is dropped, the alphabet "resets" and the participants start again from "A"

-the objective is to get as far in the alphabet as possible in a single try

This game quickly got the students engaged in the game and yelling collectively until someone dropped the ball "A, B, C, D, E, aaaahhhhh." Eventually, after about three minutes of trying over and over again we got as far as "R."

Once we finished our warm-up game, I had students do a rehearsal technique where the actors take their places but then "expand the stage" by taking several big steps away from each other and playing their scene in this new larger dimension. For example, if a scene calls for two people sitting on a bus together and talking, the rehearsal technique demands that rather than sitting a few inches away from each other they must sit six or seven feet away from each other and exaggerate their voices and mannerisms. This technique helps participants make their actions bigger in order to be clearly understood by the audience in a live dramatized skit. Since all of the students are doing this rehearsal technique at the same time and yelling at their scene partners from across the classroom, the increased noise level itself demanded that students be louder and bigger with their actions. Once the scenes were rehearsed like this for a few minutes, we began the presentation of our Forum scenes.

Every group came up to the front of the room and presented their skit one after another. This took a total of about 12 minutes. Once the class had a chance to see all of the skits, I asked them to select one of the scenes with which to do a Forum intervention. I mentioned that if time allowed we would perhaps do two different scenes but in the end we only had time for one. There were a total of seven scenes presented. The following is a list briefly explaining the content of each skit.

Table A2: Forum theater Skit Topics

Forum Theater skit topics
The protagonist is a Latino man with a Spanish accent. He is buying a drink at a Starbucks but he clearly does not get the same quality of service and attention that other (mostly White) customers receive.
The protagonist is a young woman at her workplace. Her boss is making unwanted advances at her and asking her to go out which makes her very uncomfortable. He even goes as far as touching her arm and face before she gets away from him and says "I need to get back to work."
The protagonist is a Latina college student that gets accused by her professor of cheating on her essay. The essay is very well written but the professor does not believe that this high caliber of work can come from "students like her" (Latina/o students).
The protagonist is a young Latino man getting pulled over by the police. He subsequently gets harassed and arrested on made-up charges of "intimidating a police officer."
The protagonist is a young Latino going to a trendy "Coach" store. He clearly gets differential and negative treatment based on his "look" of being lower-class. The store employees treat him like he is either going to steal something or like he is not capable of paying for an expensive product.
The protagonists are Latino high school students in Arizona. They are in class doing a lesson from a just recently banned Ethnic Studies book when an administrator walks in to class and confiscates the books.
The protagonist is a Latino high school student in an algebra class. The White teacher is responsive to the White students in the class while repeatedly ignoring the Latino student.

Once the class had the opportunity to observe all the skits, I had them "vote" on which scene they would like to work on first. They "voted" by applauding for each scene as I read them off. The scene which received the loudest applause would then be the students' selection. In this case, they chose the scene with the Latino customer at Starbucks. I had the group which presented the Starbucks skit replay their scene for us again so we could have it fresh in our mind.

Here is a more detailed look at the skit the class chose to work on together. The scene begins at a coffee store with a customer named Juan Pablo talking on the phone in Spanish as he is waiting in line. When he orders his drinks, the clerk (?) tells Juan Pablo the price of the drinks and as Juan Pablo is looking through his wallet the clerk impatiently tells him the dollar amount again as she extends her hand out to him and wiggles her fingers as if to rush him. Once Juan Pablo pays she asks for his name so she may write it on his cup. However, when he tells her his name she simply writes "Mexican" on his cup. The other customers (all White) all have a much friendlier interaction with the clerk. Juan Pablo realizes that even people that ordered after him are getting their drinks before him. He inquires with the cashier about his order but she simply shoos him away.

Once the class saw the entire scene again I asked everyone if what was presented in the scene was even possible in real life. Overwhelmingly, students replied that "yes" it was possible. However, some student argued briefly that although this type of behavior is still possible we are not as likely to encounter it in a blatant manner (such as the writing of "Mexican" on the cup). Be that as it may, students said that the scene was realistic and that many Latinos are likely to encounter at least some of the issues (such as being repeatedly ignored) represented in the scene.

Once we had that brief discussion on the realism of the skit, students were again reminded how Forum Theater works. They were to watch the skit again and as soon as something happened that they think is problematic, they were instructed to yell out "stop." At this point the action in the skit freezes and the person from the audience who yelled out "stop" now comes up and replaces the protagonist (Juan Pablo) and tries to bring the scene to a different more beneficial ending for Juan Pablo. There were a total of four interventions before we ran out of classtime. The following is a brief description of those interventions.

Table A3: Forum Theater Interventions

Forum Theater interventions
1. A young woman replaces Juan Pablo (now calling herself Juanita). She is slightly more assertive. When the cashier seems impatient and demands the money, Juanita tells her to wait because she is getting her money. However, eventually Juanita becomes overpowered by the bad attitude of the cashier.
2. Upon experiencing the cashier's snippy attitude, a young woman asks for the manager. The cashier tells her that she is the manager. At this, the new protagonist states that she is not leaving until she gets this issue resolved. In turn, the cashier/manager responds by stating that she is extremely busy and she will have to wait for quite a while. After a bit of waiting, it becomes clear that the manager has no intention on talking with the irritated customer any time soon.
3. A young man goes up and tells the cashier that he does not like her unprofessional behavior. When asks to speak to the manager and is informed that she is the manager, he quickly asks for the contact information for the district manager. At this request, the cashier refuses to give it to him but nonetheless tones her attitude down. When he keeps insisting that she give him the information he requested and which he is entitled to, he brings out his phone camera and video-records the conversation.

4. Upon witnessing the cashier's bad attitude towards him, a young man calmly tells her, "it's in your best interest to treat me well. You have other people looking at you observing your behavior, and if you behave well you might get more tips." The cashier does not seem too concerned with his advice and just goes on about her job but does not escalate her bad attitude.

After each of each interventions I asked students to describe the elements of the intervention strategy. I also encouraged them not to think in terms of right/wrong strategies but rather to think about affordances and limitations of each strategy. This is an important distinction since any single strategy posed may work for some students while being inadequate for others. Many fruitful conversations came out of this especially in terms of the dynamics of racial/ethnic discrimination and our responses to those. For example, many students felt a bit stumped when the cashier revealed that she was the manager. However, when a new protagonist asked to contact the district manager it seemed to give new life to the protagonists' cause. Several students said they would have never even thought about a district manager so it gave them new ideas of avenues that could be pursued in an event like this. One student asked, "would you even want to buy the coffee after you were treated like that?"

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