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Theatre of the Oppressed Facilitation Guide & Resource List

Breakout session offered as part of “**Plenary Workshop: Touring the Many Worlds of Virtual Facilitation,**” CLT Virtual Symposium 2021

Created by Brazilian theatre artist, political activist, and Nobel Peace Prize nominee Augusto Boal (1931-2009), **Theatre of the Oppressed (TO)** is an arsenal of theatre games and techniques used to promote social change. TO is about imagining possibilities and exploring pathways to change. We can nurture different outcomes through opening up our imagination.

Introduction Activity: Name and Gesture

Participants are invited to turn their cameras on and unmute, say their name and do a gesture or movement (no sound) to embody how they're feeling right now, in the moment. Then the rest of the group will mirror you and say your name and do the gesture you did.

Common Ground/True for Me: Everyone turn their cameras off and mute your mics. Facilitator says a series of prompts. If it's true to you and you feel safe doing so, turn on your camera and see who is with you. This is typically a silent activity.

- Live in the U.S.
- Live outside of the U.S.
- I have experienced snow this winter where I live
- I am an educator or teacher
- I am a faculty developer or instructional designer
- I am an artist and/or performer
- Right now I teach my students 100% online
- I still feel a little nervous about teaching online
- I have had fun in an online workshop or class
- I have taken an online theatre workshop or class before
- Everyone on camera. Raise your hand icon (or physically raise hand):
 - I have heard of Theatre of the Oppressed
 - I have some experience with TO
- Anyone want to offer a prompt?

Debrief: What did you observe or notice in this warm-up? What other prompts might you ask?

Facilitator notes, options--Prompts can range from low stakes, medium stakes, higher stakes. More higher stakes prompts might ask about social identities, privileged and oppressed identities, and other prompts that might cause vulnerability. As a facilitator/instructor, the prompts you include might depend on goals of the class/workshop and whether you feel that safety and trust has been built in the group. A debrief of the exercise afterwards would be important.

Movements/Opposites: Everyone make sure they are muted. We are going to practice doing the following movements together. You may choose to remain seated or stand up for this activity. Also, there's no single correct way to do a movement; move in a way that feels right for you. Movement pairs (Practice each a few times, with the facilitator calling out the movement):

- Wave to the Group. Hug yourself.
- Wiggle. Stay still.
- Make yourself as big as possible. Make yourself as small as possible.

The facilitator calls out the different movements, at random. Then instruct the participants to do the opposite of the movement called out. For example, if "hug yourself" is said, the participants would "wave to the group." Call out the different movements and see what happens. Play around with pace--call things out slowly, then quickly.

Debrief: What did that feel like? What did you notice or experience?

Variations: try out different movement pairs. Another game that is popular with children is "Stop Go Melt (melt = move slowly to lying still on the floor, or another adaptation). Figure out a fun opposite for "melt."

*Facilitator notes: This embodiment game is an example of **de-mechanization**. In *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (2002), Augusto Boal wrote, "Our ordinary, daily movements eventually mechanize our bodies" (p. 56). These exercises are about "de-mechanizing, de-structuring, dismantling" our way of moving through and understanding the world. They challenge our bodies and brains to resist our "default" ways of being in the world, preparing and encouraging us to find innovative ways to act and react.*

Image Theatre: In Image Theatre, "participants are encouraged to use their

bodies rather than language to portray and communicate realities” (Cahnmann-Taylor & Souto-Manning, p. 33). It allows us to explore emotions, experiences, memories, and issues through our bodies. Image Theatre allows participants to consider multiple perspectives in a particular moment or situation, and can promote critical group reflection and strategy development.

We engaged in “**Image of the Word**” games: individual statues and a group machine. These activities “illustrat[e] a subject using other people’s bodies” (Boal, Games for Actors and Non-Actors, p. 181)

Individual statues/Auto Images

- Community
- Disconnection
- Power

Group image

- “Online classroom”: machine work (repetitive sound and gesture). Consider all the players in this scene, **seen and unseen**: professor, students, internet access/wifi, university administrators, what else (can shout it out) etc. Turn off cameras, volunteer to start us off as the “Teacher.” Pop on to add to the image. We’ll do this “Machine of the Online Classroom” for a bit. Play with: loudness, speed up, go quieter, slow down.
- Each person in the machine is then invited to strike a pose that feels heavier in your body for whatever reason.
- Then the facilitator will count slowly to five. At each count, the actors are invited to make a small shift in their body to make it better or to provide relief for your body. These are called micromovements or microtransitions.

Debrief:

- Machine actors: How did that feel? What did you notice or experience?
- Audience members: What did you notice or observe?
- What changed?

Facilitator notes: Remember that change is not linear, nor is it always huge. Remember that the 5 micromovements can be incremental steps, whatever that means for you. Each micromovement could represent an hour, a day, a week, a month, a year, a decade.

Resources (a starting point, not exhaustive)

Books

Theatre of the Oppressed, Augusto Boal
Games for Actors and Non-Actors, Augusto Boal
The Rainbow of Desire, Augusto Boal
Teachers Act Up! Creating Multicultural Learning Communities Through Theatre, Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor & Mariana Souto-Manning
Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Paulo Freire

Organizations

Embody Change, LLC: www.embody-change.com--This is Theresa's creative consulting practice. In addition to offering public workshops, Theresa partners with educational institutions, organizations, and groups--with the ability to offer online/virtual services nationally and internationally.

Theater for Change UW: <https://www.washington.edu/teaching/innovation/theater-for-change/>-- With Tikka Sears, Theresa co-founded TfC UW (Seattle campus) in 2012, and Tikka continues to direct this vital program. Site includes a comprehensive resource list with links:
<https://www.washington.edu/teaching/innovation/theater-for-change/tfc-resources/>

Branch Out Theatre: <https://branchouttheatre.com/> --based in Canada, Branch Out Theatre offers excellent virtual workshops to learn different TO techniques

Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed: www.ptoweb.org-- dynamic international organization that advances collaborative work in popular education and liberatory theatre. Check out their [Educational Videos](#) resources!

Podcasts

Listen to Theresa and Tikka Sears' recent appearance on Nothing Never Happens: The Radical Pedagogy Podcast (hosted by Dr. Tina Pippin & Lucia Hulsether):
<https://nothingneverhappens.org/theater-of-the-oppressed/embodiedpedagogyonline/>