A Deep-er Practice for Educators: Reflecting, Unpacking and Confronting Racism through Critical Performative Pedagogy

Natalia Ortiz

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A DEEP-ER PRACTICE FOR EDUCATORS:
REFLECTING, UNPACKING AND CONFRONTING RACISM THROUGH CRITICAL
PERFORMATIVE PEDAGOGY

by

NATALIA ORTIZ

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

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A Deep-er Practice for Educators:
Reflecting, Unpacking and Confronting Racism through Critical Performative Pedagogy

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Natalia Ortiz

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

A Deep-er Practice for Educators: Reflecting, Unpacking and Confronting Racism through Critical Performative Pedagogy

Adviser: Professor Wendy Luttrell

In the current political climate, we have seen time and time again the killings of black and brown youth, witnessed the separation of immigrant families, and the mass murders caused by nativist xenophobic white rage. Teachers in schools across our country need to be better prepared to engage in critical race dialogues and need to understand their location in the larger educational system so to contest, rather than reproduce, racism. This study is based on the premise that teachers are not adequately learning about structural oppression that impact the experience of school children and are not trained in the art and practice of critical self-reflection required to address the needs of our students (Milner, 2008). This study offers an alternative reflective practice, a deep-er practice, one that engages the body and mind.

Time to Act: Reflecting, Unpacking and Confronting Racism through Theater was a six-week experiential study that explored the use of applied theater and Theatre of the Oppressed techniques to engage in critical dialogues around race and racism. The inquiry group included fifteen educators from across New York City and met from January to March of 2016. Through a careful examination of data which included videotaped sessions and fieldnotes, transcriptions, and pre- and post- survey interviews, this dissertation details an arc of depthness that goes beyond a surface level understanding and intellectualization of race and racism. Schools and teacher education systems everywhere should consider using the framework, template and meaning-making process of depthness elements: time, storytelling and sharing, the entire body with feelings, connecting the dots, and being left with the thirst.
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Dedicated to the memory of my pops. Felix Ortiz, presenté!
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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Race:
a hierarchical classification system of human beings invented by Europeans who would come to be categorized as white. This hierarchy uses ‘whiteness’ as the model of human worth for the purpose of establishing and maintaining social, economic, and political power.

The system draws on physical characteristics such as skin color, hair texture, and bone structure to reinforce the idea that race is biological. However, there is no scientific basis for race.
(Adapted from Chisolm and Washington, 1997, p. 30-31)

Racism:
“a pervasive system of advantage and disadvantage based on the socially constructed category of race. Racism is enacted on multiple levels simultaneously: Institutional, Cultural, Interpersonal, and Individual. Individuals internalize and enact these assumptions through individual behavior and institutional participation. Woven together, these interactions create and sustain systemic benefits for whites as a group, and structure discrimination, oppression, dispossession, and exclusion for people from targeted racial groups.”

“a distinction must be made between the negative racial attitudes held by individuals of color and White individuals, because it is only the attitudes of Whites that routinely carry with them the social power inherent in the systematic cultural reinforcement and institutionalization of those racial prejudices. To distinguish the prejudices of students of color from the racism of White students is not to say that the former is acceptable and the latter is not; both are clearly problematic. The distinction is important, however, to identify the power differential between members of dominant and subordinate groups.” (Wellman, 1977; hooks, 1992; Bell, Funk, Joshi and Valdivia, 2016)

Internalized:
Oppression is internalized so that it operates not only through external social institutions and norms, but also through discourse and practice. (Fanon, 1968; Freire, 1970; Memmi, 1965; Miller, 1976; Bell, Funk, Joshi and Valdivia, 2016) “However, internalized subordination and domination can be unlearned through consciousness-raising, examining and challenging oppressive attitudes and assumptions that have been internalized and imagining and enacting new ways of being.” (Bell, Funk, Joshi and Valdivia, 2016)

Interpersonal:
is verbal or nonverbal communication and/or actions by those with racial privilege, white people, that consciously or subconsciously harm, discriminate against, isolate, and/or minimize the experience of those with little to no historical/structural power, People of Color. (Definition provided by Center for Racial Justice in Education)

Institutional:
“Racism at the institutional level is reflected in the policies, laws, rules, norms and customs enacted by organizations and social institutions that advantage whites as a group and disadvantage people of color.” (Bell, Funk, Joshi and Valdivia, 2016, p.135)
White Supremacy:
A historical and institutionally perpetuated system of ideas and beliefs that exploits continents and nations and oppresses People of Color. The purpose of white supremacy is to maintain and defend a racialized system of wealth, power, and privilege. (Adapted from Martinas & Ellinger, 1992) It assumes as normal and rational that the interests and perceptions of white individuals are central in society (Gillborn, 2006).

Color-blindness:
Because of its ablest language some scholars have chosen to use “Color-Aversion” as an alternative term to describe the not noticing of race in order to not appear racist. The idea that by noticing there is a race distinction you are therefore racist. “By overlooking the cumulative and enduring ways in which race unequally shapes life chances and opportunities for people of color (Massey, 2007), actually reinforces and sustains an unequal status quo. By leaving structural inequalities in place, color-blindness has become the ‘new Racism’” (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000).

Colorism:
This refers “to a bias that favors light skin over dark skin linked to a racial hierarchy. People of color who consciously or unconsciously accept the color prejudices of the broader society,” uplifting white ideals of beauty and antiblackness (Bell, Funk, Joshi and Valdivia, 2016, p.145).

Race Consciousness:
Is an awareness that policies and practices have impacted the lives of people of color and white people either at an advantage or disadvantage. This consciousness is “actively seeking to perceive, understand and challenge racism. It also paves the way for imagining a more just and inclusive society that affirms diversity rather than reducing it to a white normative ideal” (Bell, Funk, Joshi and Valdivia, 2016, p.138).

Meritocracy:
An ideology of meritocracy assumes that individual efforts are fairly awarded. And while people of color understand there is racism, “they tend to view it as an individual phenomenon, rooted in the attitudes of the ‘Archie Bunkers’ of the world” (Tatum, 1992, p.6) versus understanding that racism is a “system of advantage” and disadvantage therefore challenging the ideas that rewards are based only on one’s merit and hard work.

Respectability Politics:
refer to ways people of color should behave and act in order to be better received and treated by white people. This can be the ways that people of color talk, or walk, or how they do their hair, or decide to dress, all in order to access some ‘upward mobility’ despite their racial make-up.

Theatre of the Oppressed Terms

Joker:
“The Joker figure is, in various different contexts and combinations, the director, referee, facilitator and workshop leader; in the context of Forum Theatre, the Joker is the person who acts
as intermediary between audience and performers, and is attached to no one party – just as the Joker in a pack of cards belongs to no one suit but floats between them.” (xxvi)

A facilitator, the “difficultator” as Boal put it, who is responsible for guiding the conversation between the players on stage and the spect-actors. Their role is to push spect-actors to find more active solutions (Boal, 2002, p.262).

**Spect-actors:**
“‘Spect-actor’ is a Boal coinage to describe a member of the audience who takes part in the action in any way; the spect-actor is an active spectator, as opposed to the passivity normally associated with the role of audience member.” (xxvi)

**Magic:**
“‘Magic’ as in ‘Stop – that’s magic’ refers to interventions in Forum Theatre which move from reality to the realms of magic or fantasy – for instance, a spect-actor who takes the place of a penniless protagonist and suddenly finds a thousand pounds in the road; this is probably magic, but, as in all cases, it is up to the audience to decide.” (Adrian Jackson in Boal’s Games for Actors and Non Actors, 2002, p. xxvi-xxvii)

**Image Theater:**
a form of that is silent and through the use of still silhouettes

“Image Theatre is a series of exercises and games designed to uncover essential truths about societies and cultures without resort, in the first instance, to spoken language – though this may be added in the various ‘dynamisations’ of the images. The participants in Image Theatre make still images of their lives, feelings, experiences, oppressions; groups suggest titles or themes, and then individuals ‘sculpt’ three-dimensional images under these titles, using their own and others’ bodies as the ‘clay’.” (xxii)

**Forum Theater:**
“Forum Theatre is a theatrical game in which a problem is shown in an unsolved form, to which the audience, again spect-actors, is invited to suggest and enact solutions. The problem is always the symptom of an oppression, and generally involves visible oppressors and a protagonist who is oppressed. In its purest form, both actors and spect-actors will be people who are victims of the oppression under consideration; that is why they are able to offer alternative solutions, because they themselves are personally acquainted with the oppression. After one showing of the scene, which is known as ‘the model’ (it can be a full-length play), it is shown again slightly speeded up, and follows exactly the same course until a member of the audience shouts ‘Stop!’, takes the place of the protagonist and tries to defeat the oppressors.” (xxi)
CHAPTER 1

SETTING THE STAGE

In a time of rapid educational reforms that include high stakes testing, teacher evaluations, privatization of schools, to name a few, it is especially important for teachers to be able to locate themselves in the larger education system, and how these current reforms may be reproducing the structural racism that impact our young children. This project is based on the premise that teachers are not adequately prepared in their teacher preparation programs to engage in critical dialogues around social justice nor to have conversations around race and racism (Young, 2003; Milner, 2008; Sue et al., 2009; Pollock, 2009):

With only one or two courses that even have sessions that focus on race and racism…many teacher education students leave un(der)prepared to teach students of color, and students of color become victims whom society—the media, politicians, parents, and adults in and out of schools blame for many of the problems in P-12 education. (Milner, 2008, p.7)

Many pre-service and in-service teachers are not learning about structural oppressions that impact schooling and are not trained in the art and practice of constant critical self-reflection required to better address the needs of our students.

My goal in this project was the use of Critical Performative Pedagogy (CPP) and the critical dialogues that came up for educators when using Theatre of the Oppressed and Applied Theater techniques as a performance art method. CPP is a practice where performance is used as methodology to engage in reflection and interchange that includes “notions of discourse and embodiment” (Gallagher, 2014, p.120). Augusto Boal (1995) defines as:

A system of physical exercises, aesthetic games, image techniques and special
improvisations whose goal is to safeguard, develop and reshape this human vocation, by turning the practice of theater into an effective tool for the comprehension of social and personal problems and the search for their solutions. (p.14)

Applied theater is different than traditional forms of theater; the space is usually unconventional, in other words it doesn’t have to take place on a stage but can happen anywhere at any time (Pretki, T. & Preston, S., 2013, p.9). Theater for social change, drama in education, and Theatre of the Oppressed all fall under the umbrella of Applied Theater. The physical embodiment of a problem and uncovering its connection to the larger structural inequalities, then discussing all of the possible “real” solutions, leads to an embodiment of reflection and consciousness, which Peter McLaren (1995) calls “refleshment,” that is helpful when working with youth. Refleshment is “forming a space of desire where we can assume self-consciously and critically new modes of subjectivity hospitable to a praxis of self- and social empowerment” (McLaren, 1995, p. 74).

My dissertation explores how educators engage in critical dialogues around race and racism through the use of Theatre of the Oppressed. This study provides a deep-er practice so to better prepare educators both in and out the classroom. My research questions were the following:

a. How do dialogues about race and racism present themselves, both in performance and through discussion, when using Applied Theater and Theatre of the Oppressed among a group of racially diverse teachers?

b. How do understandings about race and racism get surfaced?

c. How are conflicts and feelings expressed?

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1 Freire (1970) defines Praxis as “the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (p.79).
d. How do facilitators play a role in exposing and addressing the conflicts and feelings that arise?

e. How did the participants (the teachers) perceive the technique of theater to bring forward dialogues?

Continual educational research focused on reflective practices, like critical performative pedagogy around issues of racism can contribute to better preparing teachers to work with and enhance the educational experience for our public-school students who are largely poor, immigrant, and students of color. Through the use of theater of the oppressed and applied theater techniques, the discourses that were revealed and the critical dialogues that occurred about racism went beyond conversation, it was a deeper experience that connected the heart and mind and led to re-imagining of possibilities, therefore contributing an additional practice to the existing literature.

In the next section I will review the literature that grounded my interest of study, which include the following four strands: reproduction of racism in schools, teachers’ understandings of race and racism, holding courageous conversations about race and racism, and race and racism in teacher education.

**Reproduction of Racism in Schools**

Amanda Lewis (2003) put it succinctly in her book, *Race in the Schoolyard*, when she wrote that: “Racial inequalities are…products of racialized institutional and interactional practices within the education system” (p.188). Other scholars have suggested that schools are implicated in the reproduction of social (and racial) inequalities (Mickelson, 2003; Noguera, 2003; Lewis, 2003; Leonardo & Grubb, 2013) and are negatively affecting the development of our youth (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001; Valenzuela, 2008; Leonardo & Grubb, 2013). Young
people are targets of racism and racial violence in several domains: on the streets, in public housing, and in schools. Ullucci (2010) argues that in order to prepare teachers to work with children from different backgrounds, “a critical first step is a willingness to see how discrimination functions in society. Teachers cannot see racial inequities if they position race as insignificant in schooling and see racism as a historical artifact” (p. 1196).

Racial inequity in schools takes form in many ways: high stakes tests that are biased in ways that disadvantage low income and emerging, bilingual students and students of color; punitive disciplinary measures that criminalize and push out students; underprepared teachers thrown into the classroom with a colorblind and/or culturally deficit approach; and/or curriculum that is non-inclusive of their students’ histories (to name a few).

**Teachers’ Understandings of Race and Racism**

Studies have shown that “teachers often unconsciously hold racial or cultural biases that affect their expectations of students and ultimately affect student performance. Moreover, teachers can operate from a cultural “deficit” framework in which the perceived emotional, social, or psychological needs of students of color can overrun their academic competencies” (Atwater, 2008, p. 252). The deficit lens that racially unconscious teachers carry into the classroom is what Joyce King calls a dysconscious racism (1991). This deficit lens has been suggested as one factor in the lower academic success among children of color (Chubbuck, 2004, p. 302), because of the “low student expectations” some teachers have for students of color (Atwater, 2008, p. 248). This is why race and racism must be discussed in critical ways in teacher education.

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2 It is important to note that while I discuss “teachers” as an entity, I do not see teachers as a monolithic group and know that teachers hold multiple understandings.
education programs in order to dismantle dysconscious racism, which King (1991) defines as an impaired consciousness that:

…tacitly accepts dominant white norms and privileges. Uncritical ways of thinking about social inequity accept certain culturally sanctioned assumptions, myths and beliefs that justify the social and economic advantages White people have as a result of subordinating others. (p.135)

This form of racism promotes cultural deficit approaches to teaching as well as a colorblind perspective. Color blindness “is the refusal to acknowledge the costs and benefits associated with one’s racial and cultural identity” (Ullucci & Battey, 2011, p. 1196) and, according to Rosenberg (2004, p. 257), allows people to deny that “race, especially skin color has consequences for a person’s status and well-being. That blindness to skin color and race remains a ‘privilege’ available exclusively to white people.” Colorblindness can be a “promoted school philosophy whether it is ‘hidden’ within the attitudes and practices of school staff” but when teachers’ avoid racial differences it “can lead to discrimination, favoritism, or classroom conflict…[and] offers a paradigm of easy ‘escapism’ to avoid dealing with the cultural reality” (Atwater, 2008, p.248).

This is one of the ways the colorblind perspective works to reproduce racism; it keeps the conversation away from race, and, therefore, more comfortable and safer for white people (Leonardo & Porter, 2010).

Colorblindness can be socialized in the following ways of seeing race:

- Good Intentions and Respect - This shows up when you have a teacher who really wants to treat every student equally and the same and doesn’t see race as impacting any of their decisions. But by doing this and not engaging with race
you then deny students of color of their lived experience as different from their white counterparts.

- Denial of Lived Difference and Erasure - If a teacher is unwilling to say they see race then they deny the lived difference of people of color being impacted by systemic racism and white supremacy. This can lead students to feel not seen and can give in to the notion that students of color have experienced struggle and hardship due to their own ineptness, versus seeing an interwoven system at play that negatively impacts students of color.

- Refusal to Engage Privilege - By not saying you see race, then you are also refusing to name and see your own race and its relationship to a system of privilege and denial. And, perhaps face that you or others may have benefitted from a system that has provided you with resources, access and safety.

- Fear of Being called a Racist - For fear of being labeled a racist, some teachers would rather not say that they notice/see race and therefore fall into a colorblind “I don’t see race” rhetoric.

The Race Talk

The colorblind, race doesn’t matter, and colormuteness, the resistance to describe people as racialized (Pollock, 2009), discourses in our country make it difficult to talk about racism and whiteness, as if it were taboo or unnecessary. Mica Pollock (2009) brings our attention to race talk that oversimplifies race groups, often ignoring the complex borderlands people navigate, but she argues that “we must often simplify diversity in order to purposefully challenge an existing simple race system, in which the distribution of social and tangible resources remains perennially unequal” (p. 43). Talking about racial categories should be contested and complicated “while
keeping race labels strategically available for analyzing social inequality” (p.43). However, people who choose to be colormute and talk in de-raced terms “often expose the ways in which race matters to them most explosively” (Pollock, 2009, p.43). People, but particularly white people, fear being labeled as racist and this results in colormuteness. Also, white people’s colorblindness avoids any acknowledgement of white privilege and white supremacy. Thus, race talk creates a certain resistance and discomfort for white people in particular (Singleton & Linton, 2006; Gay & Howard, 2000; Schick & St. Denis, 2003). This uneasiness manifests in many ways, “including various combinations of denial of inequality, selective perceptions of reality, guilt and anger, and at times withdrawal” (Schick & St. Denis, 2003, p. 57). But holding courageous conversations must materialize in order to better serve our students.

Zeus Leonardo and Ronald K. Porter (2010) write about the importance of understanding race dialogue as inherently “risky” (p.141; hooks 1990) and never safe, so they encourage educators and anyone invested in critical race pedagogy to engage in dialogue that is open to “contradiction and tension” (p.141), which bell hooks (1990) calls a space of radical openness. Race dialogue necessitates violence, not the violence that we know of but a “violence that humanizes, or shifts the standards of humanity by providing space for the free expression of peoples thoughts and emotions that are not regulated by the discourse of safety” (Leonardo & Porter, 2010, p. 148). Therefore, conversations about race, in mixed race settings, are inherently violent, because racism is violent for people of color so to discuss this oppression necessitates conflict. The “safe space” discourse operates to protect white people from their discomfort, but in order to get to the root of dialogue all participants must be prepared for turmoil, uneasiness and risk, and remember that the focus is not whether one leaves the conversation more or less racist, but further understanding systemic racism and its many manifestations.
Critical race analysis and reflection is important for educators of all walks of life, in particular those who work with youth in public school settings, pre-service and in-service teachers, white educators, and educators of color. White teachers need to discuss racism and more importantly whiteness. Ruth Frankenberg (1993) argues that it is important to make whiteness visible, so that it is a reality instead of it remaining invisible. Whiteness is not usually brought into the discussion of race and racism because it is understood to be the norm. Racism is not just about people of color but of all racial identities and white people must understand that they are implicated in the racial order and its maintenance. Many times, in racism discourse white people view racism as an issue that people of color face “but not as an issue that generally involves or implicates [white people]” (p.6). Whiteness is a status, a culture of dominance, which often is difficult for white people to see, but easy for people of color to name. Whiteness “generates norms, ways of understanding history, ways of thinking about self and other, and even ways of thinking about the notion of culture itself” (p. 231). Frankenberg argues that the need to speak of “the social construction of whiteness” and its relationship to racism has to be examined by whites in dialogue with people of color (p.6). White people must learn its dominance and how it forms their daily experience (p.6), instead of just seeing the fight against racism as something external or optional or as an act of compassion. As part of learning about whiteness and one’s own white racial identity, while there are many stages and models of whiteness none of which “are attractive to the white individual struggling to define a positive sense of whiteness” (Tatum, 1994, p. 471), Daniel Tatum (1994) encourages white individuals to practice a fourth model of whiteness, ally-ship, “to speak up against systems of oppression, and to challenge other whites to do the same” and not to “help the victims of racism” (p.474).
Many assume that teachers of color may not need to process racism in a teacher preparation program because their experience is sufficient, but this assumption proves false. Ladson-Billings (2005) discusses this as well as Rita Kohli (2012). Kohli worked with teachers of color and created a closed space, without the presence of white educators, where they discussed race and racism. Kohli found that these focus groups were important for teachers of color. They learned a lot about themselves, as well as each other. Kohli states, “It cannot be assumed that they [teachers of color] are fully equipped to navigate and facilitate race relations within diverse classrooms and schools” (p.192). In her study, she found that her participants had different levels of comfort around discussing racism in the classroom. She emphasizes that the participants felt comfortable acknowledging this uneasiness in their group because they were in a separate space from white teachers, which she suggests should happen in teacher education programs either as a one-time thing or an ongoing series. She says that teachers of color need “critical interracial dialogue about race in schools” in order to develop “critical consciousness in teachers of color, which can enhance their critical and cross-racial classroom practice” (p.193). Kohli informs us of the importance for people of color to discuss race in closed spaces but it is not mutually exclusive from the need to have race conversations in settings of diverse racially mixed people.

It is important for both white teachers and teachers of color to discuss the challenges of racism collectively for we are all responsible for its dismantling. Ximena Zúñiga (2003), like Kohli, advocates for homogenous group formats, because it “allows individuals to explore social identity issues and common concerns” but then she argues the importance of coming back to the heterogenous group “prepared to engage with these issues more fully” (p.14). It is through the diversity of perspectives that the dialogues get altered, complicated and expanded, “these
inclusions challenge conventional identities and promote more expansive configurations of identities” (Anzaldúa, 2002, p.4). It is critical to remember that in a mixed race setting the internal choques experienced by people of color and the disequilibrium of white people should not be avoided. This oversight is one of the ways that we see the violence manifested, as described by Leonardo and Porter (2010). For my research it was important to observe the collective constructed understandings of racism from all members of society and to see how critical dialogues among the participants can lead the way for critical reflection and collective action.

Race and Racism in Teacher Education

Sadly, teachers are not getting the adequate preparation they need to work with a diverse group of students because teacher education programs nationwide are greatly influenced by the current educational reform landscape which does not prioritize culturally sustaining pedagogy or racial consciousness, but instead cares about test scores and accountability measures. The CAEP standards introduced in February of 2014 became the sole accreditor for educator preparation in the United States and do not have an explicit “diversity” standard like standard four in the previous NCATE standards. The plan for CAEP was to implement the concept of diversity throughout the standards. The example CAEP gives on their website is when in Standard 1 says “all students can learn,” it covers the NCATE Standard 4 on diversity, a catch all phrase that hints at colorblindness. It mentions equity in its last sub-bullet in Standard 1 and discusses the importance of recruitment of educators of color and gives examples of ways to change admission in order to be more inclusive. Since the implementation of these standards, we know that measures and teacher evaluations are taking priority above issues of diversity, equity and teacher

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3 I discuss this further in the Theoretical Framework section.
self-reflection. The language in the CAEP standards is not only very vague, but it positions issues of diversity and teacher reflection as less than a top priority. In order for teachers to receive adequate preparation around issues of “diversity” in teacher education programs, it should be stated as a mandatory standard in the current policy followed by most accreditation programs.4

Because the teaching force in district (non-charter) public schools has become increasingly White, 80% and our students are majority students of color, 64% Black, Latinx, Asian and American Indian, it is very important for teachers in teacher education programs to become better prepared to teach and meet the needs of their students despite their racialized and cultural differences. (See figure #1 and #2 below for demographic information.) This is not to say that white teachers because of their racial identity(ies) cannot teach students of color, and this does not mean that teachers of color are better prepared to teach this population. However, a recent report from the Learning Policy Institute titled, “Diversifying the teaching profession: How to recruit and retain teachers of color” (Carver-Thomas, 2018) highlights that teachers of color impact the overall success of students of color in schools and also benefits white students, because they are more likely to engage in conversations about bias and racism which in the end supports all students. The report also supports that regardless of racial background all teachers must possess “the knowledge, attitudes, dispositions, and beliefs necessary to meet the needs of

4 Teacher education programs should look to the Newark Montclair Urban Teacher Residency (NMUTR) program as an example of a program that takes racial equity seriously as part of their teacher training. Not only is their curriculum discussing Critical Sustaining Pedagogy, but they are also having their pre-service students undergo trainings such as People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond’s Undoing Racism Workshop and the Center for Racial Justice in Education’s Talking about Race in the Classroom training.
their students” (Milner, 2008, p.5) and so must be given the opportunity in teacher education programs to discuss and reflect on race and racism. Ryan and Dixson (2006) write,

> It is important for all teacher educators and others who work with pre-/in-service teachers, especially those who take on issues of race and racism as part of our pedagogical project, to consider the ways in which we participate in and promote, albeit tacitly, White privilege. (p.181)

Teacher educators must look for ways to address, study and reflect on race and racism in teacher education, and as King (1991) suggests should “develop a sound liberatory praxis…which offers relatively privileged students freedom to choose critical multicultural consciousness over dysconsciousness” (p. 143-144). Cochran-Smith (1995) argues that one way to do this is by developing racialized curricula that includes readings, discussions, assignments and activities. Another approach is to prepare pre-service teachers in culturally (relevant) sustaining pedagogy (teaching).

**Figure 2.** National Center for Education Statistics. (2011-12). Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) Percentage distribution of K-12 students, by sex, race/ethnicity, school type and selected school characteristics: 2011-12 (Data File). Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/sass1112_2013312_s12n_003.asp
What does critical race pedagogy and dialogical reflection and action look like in the classroom? It is through culturally sustaining teaching that critical pedagogy and dialogues come alive. Many scholars have discussed the importance of critical race conscious teaching or what is known as ‘Culturally Relevant Teaching’ for the youth of urban schools. Gloria Ladson-Billings has done a lot of work around what she calls Culturally Relevant Teaching, which she defines as “an approach that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally and politically by using cultural referents to impact knowledge, skills and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 1994). She observed excellent teachers of African American students and found that these teachers were practicing culturally relevant pedagogy by seeing themselves as part of the community, embracing the community of the students, and seeing students as academically succeeding as opposed to the deficit mindset. She argues that current educational researchers and faculty must help “prospective teachers understand culture (their own and others) and the ways it functions in education” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.483). She explains that in order for Black children to succeed teachers have to be prepared in cultural relevant pedagogy. Geneva Gay and Kipchoge Kirkland (2003) agree with Ladson-Billings and add the importance of teacher self-reflection as part of the practice of culturally relevant pedagogy.

It is important to mention that there is literature that complicates culturally relevant teaching, because many teachers have misinterpreted its meaning in practice and have ultimately essentialized the cultures of youth of color. Some scholars have argued that the term ‘relevant’ does not emphasize the importance of a truly pluralist schooling experience that integrates all shifting cultures. Within the literature that describes culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Gay, 2010; Paris 2012), ultimately, I have identified Django Paris’ term of culturally sustaining pedagogy as most useful.
Django Paris (2012) agrees with the core of Ladson-Billings’ (1995) use of the term culturally relevant pedagogy as something that should be maintained in schooling and as a critique of the exclusivity of culture in the classroom. Nonetheless, Paris argues that the term used should be “Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy” (p.95). He argues that the terms “relevant” or “responsiveness” do not ensure a continuing presence, the term culturally sustaining requires that our pedagogies be more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people — it requires that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competences of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence. (p.95)

In other words, cultural pluralism should be part of the norm and continuous in the “democratic project of schooling” (p.95). Paris also makes clear that in understanding the cultures of our students, educators must be open to the change in culture “traditional and evolving ways they are lived and used by contemporary young people” (p.95) so to not fall into the dangers of essentialism and stereotyping of cultures. Although he believes in Ladson-Billings approach to critical pedagogy he offers a different term because he says that educators, policy makers and the public should think of concepts that are more equitable and promote “social and cultural justice” (p.96).

Teel and Obidah argue that teachers who are competent possess an “awareness of race, of the possibility of their own racism and the racism of others, and the significance of these perceptions in the teaching and learning process” (p. 4). Therefore, “teachers need to be open to the fact that racism still operates in structural and interpersonal ways” (Ullucci & Battey, 2011, p.1196) in order to address the urban school achievement dilemma. The so-called achievement
gap is part of a long history of institutional racism that has omitted the narratives of students of color and has set standards based on a White historical narrative which has led students to fail and disconnect from the learning process. It is less about poor students and students of color not being able to achieve but more about how the institution of schooling has been set up to push out these students. The neoliberal attacks on schooling that include high stakes standardized testing, teacher evaluations that are based on student test results, the privatization of schooling through the corporate charter school movement and the closing of failing public schools are all institutional political practices that target poor youth of color and has perpetuated racism. Racism is the practices and policies that continue to reproduce racial hierarchies. Teachers need to understand how these neo-liberal educational reforms connect to racism, along with learning about the everyday racism they encounter in their classroom. Part of being race conscious requires a critical analysis of societal structures and policies as well as mastering self-reflective exercises.

**Reflective Practices in Teacher Education**

In a race-conscious society, the development of a positive sense of racial/ethnic identity not based on assumed superiority or inferiority is an important task for both White people and people of color. The development of this positive identity is a lifelong process that often requires unlearning the misinformation and stereotypes we have internalized not only about others, but also about ourselves. (Tatum, 2001, p.53)

Teacher reflection is a skill that is imperative for all teachers, they must learn to look inside themselves and their relationship to the larger society, which Johnston and Ochoa (1993) call “studying themselves systematically” (p.65), in order to take an active stance against racism and other forms of institutional oppressions that get upheld and reproduced. It is this skill that allows teachers to understand, question and challenge their actions in and outside of the classroom that may impact their relationships with their students, the success of their students, and their overall happiness in the profession. Unreflective teachers “lose sight of the purposes
and ends toward which they are working and become merely the agents of others” (Zeichner & Liston, 1996, p.9) and do not see teaching as a political act that is connected to maintaining whiteness.

Race reflection is a never-ending process; it requires individuals to think about their racial being in relationship to others’ racial identities and experiences, resisting stereotypes and always leaving space for unlearning and relearning (Milner, 2003, p. 176). Race consciousness is a means not an end, it is something that must be practiced daily with the hope that “by working together actions could change material lives” (Gallagher, 2014, p.224). When reflecting on race one must constantly and always consider the players, their personal histories and the setting (the context) in order to stay away from re-inscribing stereotypes or essentializing. The literature around critical race reflective practices in teacher education identifies many strategies such as testimonies, journal writing, discussion around critical incidents of practice and critical race dialogues (Luttrell, Holland, & Ward, 2006; Pui-lan et al., 2005; Milner, 2003; Tripp, 1993), all of which can and should be used by teacher educators. To extend upon these options, I am interested in how the body can be used and accessed in race reflection together with the reading, writing and dialogue.

Critical performance pedagogy (CPP) is another reflective practice that recent scholars have explored as an approach to practicing critical consciousness in teacher education (Pineau, 2002; Harman & French, 2004 and 2011; Harman & McClure, 2011). This kind of teaching engages Freire’s (1970) concept of praxis, reflection and action, because it “requires performers to think about how and why their bodies are behaving in the ways that they are” (Pineau, 2002, p. 50-51) and then advocates for refreshment and action in the social world, therefore termed critical performative pedagogy. Critical performative pedagogy has all the elements of critical
pedagogy: the problem posing (a critique of systemic structures), the reflection (a belief in different possibilities), and the call for action; but it adds in the performing reflective body.

Because critical performative pedagogy is a new field of work, there are limited studies using Theatre of the Oppressed as the performative method with teachers in urban education. The main scholar doing this work is Ruth Harman, who has adapted Pineau’s original concept of CPP. However, it is important to mention that in all of the studies on critical performative pedagogy that I reviewed the researchers are not only observing the space where the performance is being used, they are also the ones facilitating, shaping and interpreting the experience from their particular perspective (Pineau, 2002; Louis, 2002; Harman & French, 2004 and 2011; Elliot, 2007; Harman & McClure, 2011; Emeka-Ogbonna, 2013). Facilitating the performative methodology is tricky, as I will show in the following example. In one study with urban teachers conducted by Harman and French (2011), the authors wrote that the teachers hesitated to see the performance practice (Theatre of the Oppressed) “as a dialogic way to challenge institutional practices” (p.100). This hesitation could be due to the inadequate role of the facilitators (referred to as “jokers” in the practice) not to the limitations of the method itself. Jokering is key in the performative methodology of Theatre of the Oppressed. The joker is the one who is responsible for guiding the conversation and play, so that participants are able to examine structural influence in the interpersonal conflict. Harman and French do admit, “although our intent was to open discussion about how the conflicts related to institutional policies and practices, we remained too fixed on individual conflicts” (p.100). They link this limitation to another study that argues that Boalian techniques stay focused on the individual, arguing that it’s a flaw in the method instead of talking about the importance and power the
facilitator (joker) has in how conversations are guided. My point, and interest in this thesis is the importance of the role of facilitators in how CPP works.

In this research, I did not put myself in the dual position of researcher and facilitator, for two reasons: first, because I have not mastered the skills of jokering and second, so that I could maintain both the connection and distance required in participant observation. I observed and analyzed the critical dialogues about race and racism that were communally created in the practice of critical performance pedagogy and how people’s bodies became mediums for learning. By critical dialogues, I adapted Ira Shor’s definition: Such critical dialogues question canons of knowledge and challenge power relations in the classroom and in society (Shor, 1992, p.87) and can take place through the use of a performance methodology that uses the “body as a medium for learning” (Pineau, 2002, p.50) which I will discuss in the next section.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

**Critical Race Theory**

The Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework was developed by legal scholars like Derrick Bell, Kimberley Crenshaw, and Richard Delgado in the 1970s to expose the reproduction of racism in law and civil rights policies. From its inception CRT began to extend into other disciplines such as education in order to expose colorblind and race-neutral policies as oppression in new forms, rather than conceiving of racism as random acts by individuals (Ullucci, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Täte, 1997). There are five tenets that guide CRT research (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001): (1) a centrality of race and racism that recognizes the intersections of race with other forms of subordination, (2) challenging the dominant narratives, (3) a commitment to social justice, (4) valuing of storytelling and experiential knowledge, and (5) being interdisciplinary. I used these five tenets of CRT because “teaching is
never just about good intentions and working hard but is also about frameworks of power and privilege that require concrete change” (Ryan & Dixson, 2006, p. 182). Using a CRT lens, I looked at how oppressive structures and discourses of racism got deconstructed, how human agency got reconstructed, and how equitable and socially just relations of power got (re)imagined (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p.9).

It is important to acknowledge that CRT is not absent of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). We are all racialized beings with complex identities living in and through the borderlands of intersectionality. Gender, sexual orientation and other identities were welcomed in this study, however there was an intentional focus on how race and racism, specifically, got discussed and processed.

Critical Pedagogy

The framework of critical pedagogy and authors such as Paulo Freire and Peter McClaren were at the core of my research study. Critical pedagogues understand the dialectical relationship between the individual and the social structure, and work to address problems simultaneously through reflection and action, which Freire (1970) coins as praxis. In this line of thought it is important to understand that “the individual, a social actor, both creates and is created by the social universe of which he/she is a part” (McClaren, 2009, p.61) and that power and ideology permeate all of social life and therefore we must question knowledge formation. Once the individual understands these tenets of critical thinking, then they will practice the art of conscientização (consciousness) and praxis. Critical consciousness happens through the constant use of dialogue and not the authoritarian banking method:

…[T]he correct method lies in dialogue. The conviction of the oppressed that they must fight for their liberation is not a gift bestowed by the revolutionary leadership, but the
result of their own conscientização. (Freire, 1970, p.67)

Freire argues that people are socialized beings who come with knowledge, and so in order to learn and relearn we must trust individuals to engage in problem posing dialogue. Ultimately encouraging the practice of praxis that tackles pain, oppression, and inequality, in order to foster the imagined possibility and hope of justice and freedom (McClaren, 2009, Pg.74).

Critical Dialogues

Dialogue is the essence of revolutionary action. In the theory of this action, the actors intersubjectively direct their action upon an object (reality, which mediates them) with the humanization of men (to be achieved by transforming that reality) as their objective. (Freire, 1970, p.135)

Paulo Freire and Ira Shor (1987) write an entire book using dialogue where they discuss the pedagogy of liberation and explain the dialogical method and its importance in executing a conscious-raising education. They argue that it is “through dialogue, reflecting together on what we know and don’t know, (that) we can then act critically to transform reality” (p.99). They present critical dialogue as different from discourse that reinforces dominant narratives, Freire (1987) writes, “dialogue is a challenge to existing domination… In other words, the object to be known is put on the table (by teacher) between the two subjects of knowing (or more). They meet around it and through it for mutual inquiry” (p. 99). Dialogue is “the process of both learning and knowing” (Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 379), in other words it is the presentation and deconstruction of knowledge and then the creation of new knowledge. In my study I observed and analyzed the ways race and racism were presented, deconstructed, and dialogued with a group of diverse educators. Shor (1987) believes that racism, along with sexism, can be critically studied using the dialogical method and that it could help “raise awareness of the unequal discourse between the sexes and the races” (p.166). The dialectical relationship of critical dialogue can foster imagination because it is the “denouncing of the present and announcing the
future. To anticipate tomorrow by dreaming today,” (Shor & Freire, 1987, p.187) it was this kind of deep reflective process, practice, and imagining that I learned about in my study.

**Choques and Bridges**

Gloria Anzaldúa, a Chicana tejana-lesbian-feminist poet and theorist, writes that in order to reach toward the fluid process of transformation we must loosen our borders, walk the borderlands, and bridge with the stranger. El Choque, she describes, is when “la mestiza” undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. Like all people, we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference cause un choque, a cultural collision” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p.99). Like Leonardo (2010), Anzaldúa does not believe in safe spaces and promotes moving past the illusion of ‘safety’ and stepping into “unfamiliar territory” in order to actually build community. To do this we risk being vulnerable and wounded (Anzaldúa, 2002, p.3) and “present to the pain of others without losing themselves (ourselves) to it” (Anzaldúa, 2002, p.4). She argues that conflicts, choques, can be transformational reflective moments because it brings about conocimiento (understanding). Anzaldúa, in observing heated discussions noticed people attempted to bridge borders, “Bridges are thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness. They are passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives…Transformations occur in

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5 Anzaldúa defines herself and others who carry chicana/united statesian identities as a *mestiza*. A person who “continually walks out of one culture and into another…alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro, me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio. Estoy norteada por todas las voces que me hablan simultaneamente.” (Translation: a soul in-between two worlds, three, four my head is filled with contradiction. I am disoriented by the many voices that speak to me simultaneously.) (Anzaldúa, 1987, p.99)
this in-between space” (2001, pg.1). In my research I borrowed from Gloria Anzaldúa concept of choques that were processed, through critical dialogue and performance, by and between the participants of color.

**Critical Performative Pedagogy and The Body**

There are many theories I pulled from when thinking about the body and its active role in reflection, transformation and action. Michel Foucault’s (1979) discussion around the disciplined “docile” body, as a body that is used for production and socialized to behave and enact certain ‘positions’ is important in understanding how our bodies are oriented toward reproducing a larger capitalist economic agenda. Foucault highlights how structured disciplinary measures (seen and unseen) in society remind these bodies how to behave. For example, a prison system instills fear that has people stopping at red lights at three in the morning even though there are no cars or police officers in sight, or schools which have conditioned most students to come to class, sit behind desks and complete the tasks assigned by their teachers without questioning school staff, as stated by Jan Nespor, “school was organized to create a particular body — silent, motionless, and masculine” (1997, p.xvii). Our bodies are mechanized to act and move in particular ways that feed into an oppressive machine. But I have been influenced by Sandra Lee Bartky, a feminist scholar, who complicates Foucault’s theory by mentioning the difference between how male and female bodies are read and used, as opposed to the universal neutral body Foucault suggests. Without acknowledging the imposed feminine identity on female bodies then one is only reproducing sexism (Bartky, 1990, p.65), and, of course, if we ignore a racialized body then we also reproduce racism. Bodies are not neutrally read or surveilled and do not resist in the same ways, they are not universal. Our bodies are complicated sources of deep knowledge that are influenced by racialized and gendered systems of oppression.
McLaren and hooks, both of whom are critical pedagogues, call for the use of the body in imagining change and action (Mc Laren, 1988; Hooks, 1990). McLaren’s terms of “enfleshment” and “refleshment,” describe the body as active in systemic injustice: “enfleshment connotes the process through which a body acquires certain habits over an extended period of time;” and “refleshment… invokes a body’s innate ability to learn alternative behaviors…what was learned can be unlearned…” (Pineau, 2002, p.46). Elyse Pineau uses these terms and builds off of them in her explanation of the Ideological Body, similar to enfleshment, which acknowledges that people “enter classrooms as embodied persons” that are marked by “cultural norms” (p.44). She also discusses the impact schooling has on our bodies:

> [it] systematically domesticates our bodies; it incarcerates them in rows of wooden desks, robs them of spontaneity through rigid demarcations of time and space, and in fact devotes a great deal of energy to hiding the fact that we have bodies at all. (p. 45; see also Nespor, 1997)

Pineau states that schooling reproduces oppression because it forces young people “to live in a disembodied or dispassionate world” (p.46). She calls upon schools to engage young people in a full-bodied learning experience. Pineau claims that there should be a shift from the “body on display” like the many presentations that happen in classrooms, to the “body as a medium for learning” (p.50). In other words, she advocates a critical methodology that focuses on learning by doing, through a “rigorous, systematic, exploration-through-enactment of real and imagined experience in which learning occurs through sensory awareness and kinesthetic engagement” (p.50). The essential components of critical performative pedagogy are the following: First, it is important to understand that the inequities of power and privilege physically impact our bodies, therefore we must resist and struggle against it through physical action and activism. Second,
CPP develops “research that accounts for how particular bodies present themselves in the classroom and provide detailed…accounts of what one sees and experiences in the course of a study” (p.53). Lastly, it is critical to use performance methodology in all classrooms at all levels of learning. Freire (1987) writes,

> Gestures, intonations of voices, walking in the classroom, poses: We can do all these things without being conscious all the time of their aesthetic aspects, their impact on student formation through teaching… I think that from the moment we come into the classroom, at the moment you say, Hello! How are you?, [*sic*] to the students, you necessarily start an aesthetic relationship. (p.118)

Teaching is aesthetic and we should learn how we have been socialized to act/behave, then recreate our physical participation in the dialogic relationship between teacher and student in order to do our jobs better as liberatory educators who foster consciousness raising.

In this chapter I have framed the layers of analysis that have guided the study, teachers talking on race and racism, embodied knowledge, applied theater and Theatre of the Oppressed as a mechanism for deep-er reflection and lastly, teachers connecting the dots from micro practice to structural conditions. And so, my goal in this research was to consider the creative methodology of applied theater and Theatre of the Oppressed, and what educators could learn and relearn about their socialized beings and use their bodies to practice praxis and transform their understandings of knowing and learning always in community.
CHAPTER 2

CONTEXT, PARTICIPANTS AND METHODOLOGY

As the co-coordinator of the Inquiry to Action Groups (ItAGs) organized by the New York Collective of Radical Educators (NYCoRE), a grassroots educator’s collective, I have access to a space where teachers come together to “make connections between social justice issues and classroom practice by sharing experiences, responding to readings, exchanging ideas and developing plans of action.” On NYCoRE’s website, they define an ItAG as:

An ItAG is an Inquiry to Action Group. It’s similar to a study group, but the goal is that after the group inquires into a particular topic, they will together create action around their area of study, making it a true community of praxis. The topics and themes chosen are always consistent with NYCoRE’s points of unity, which have to do with issues of education and social justice.

Usually an ItAG includes up to 15-20 participants and runs from January to March. Participants meet for six weeks, one day a week for two hours, with two co-facilitators identified and chosen by NYCoRE from their network of radical and progressive teachers and activists, “one of the two facilitators is almost always a classroom teacher; the other may be a teacher, or someone with knowledge or experience in the topic area, and successful effort is made to create co-facilitator teams that are diverse in race and gender” (Picower, 2015, p.8):

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6 Frequently asked question and descriptions of past ItAGs can be found at http://www.nycore.org/projects/itags/ A “how-to” guide for creating ItAG’s is available at http://www.edliberation.org/resources/how-did-they-do-that/inquiry-to-action-group-itag-1/inquiry-to-action-group-itag.
7 NYCoRE’s Website: http://www.nycore.org/projects-2/itags/#itagfaqs
Who leads the ItAGs? They are co-facilitated by a teacher and one other person who has knowledge in the topic area. For example, when we offered an ItAG on Parent Organizing for Teachers, the group was facilitated by an elementary school teacher and a parent organizer who had both worked at a school that was started by parents in Brooklyn. The ItAG facilitators typically have prior relationships with NYCoRE and our ongoing work, either as former ItAG participants or members of working groups. The ItAGs themselves are coordinated by NYCoRE. The facilitators, and NYCoRE members, are all volunteers. (NYCoRE Website)

The goal of the ItAG is that after the group studies a particular topic, its participants take some form of action, “making it a true community of praxis” (Picower, 2015, p.8).

In my analysis of survey data collected over a longitudinal period of six years, composed of 109 responses which represents a 33% of the total number of ItAG participants, collected from ItAG participants at the end of their experience, I found that the majority of participants represent the New York City teaching force, which is 76% Female and 58.6% White (the mean for ItAG participants over a span of six years is 77.8% Female and 58.3% White). However, 41.7% of ItAG participants identify as people of color, the largest contingent of which are Latinx (20.4%). The participants come from different schools all across the city, with the majority (61.5%) currently teaching in public school settings in Manhattan (33.3%), Brooklyn (27.8%) and the Bronx (18.5%). The ItAG space was well suited for my study because it attracts racially diverse teachers who are which was important because I wanted to observe racial dialogues across racial groups.
The ItAG Journey

As one of the co-coordinators of the Inquiry to Action Groups I reached out to Jade, one of our NYCoRE members who had been active in the organization for a while, is a social worker in a school setting, identifies as a woman of color, and has had experience with Theatre of the Oppressed techniques due to her involvement with the Forum Project. When I shared my research questions with her, and we talked about the possibility of her facilitating the ItAG, we agreed she would be a great fit. I then set out to find her a co-facilitator. We sent out emails to certain NYCoRE members for facilitator recommendations and we were recommended Lisa, a white woman who taught theater at an art school in the Bronx. She was open to engaging in conversations about Race and also suggested her colleague and friend, Gabriella. Soon enough they all confirmed their interest in facilitating this inquiry to action group. We met and had a meeting and they were off to start planning for this group that would kick-off, Friday January 29th, 2016.

Each facilitator shared a mini-biography:

- Jade is a social worker, teaching artist, and community organizer who grew up in NYC. From performing guerrilla theatre on the subway, to teaching critical literacy through theatre with youth, to traveling across schools teaching & performing on education & social justice issues, Jade strongly believes in the power of theatre for transformative action. She currently works as Site Director at a high school with the Community Schools

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8 When I first embarked on my research journey, as part of the ethics of this project, participants and facilitators consented to the use of pseudonyms in order to protect their identity. However, since the collection of data and as I finish this thesis, I have wanted to use the real names of the facilitators in order to honor their work, their thoughtfulness, and their craft. In future publications, I plan to ask the facilitators for their consent around the use of their real names so that they may get the credit that is due.
Initiative and looks forward to continue learning and sharing ways theatre can be used for critical dialogue and action around race.

- Lisa is a theater artist and social justice educator with an MA in Applied Theatre (CUNY.) Through her work she seeks to illuminate under-told and hidden histories, centralizing the perspectives most omitted. Locally, Lisa devises and directs social justice themed plays with Bronx teens and is working to develop applied theatre curriculum for undoing racism. Her work in theatre and peace building has also taken her to Rwanda, Uganda, and Northern Ireland.

- Gabriella is a facilitator, educator and artistic director. She received her MA in Applied Theatre from CUNY and is currently working towards her MS in Organizational Change Management at The New School. She is an Associate Program Director at CUNY Creative Arts Team, an organization that creates participatory issue-based dramas to engage in critical discourse. She is devoted to making spaces more accessible, inclusive and just for the purposes of social change. Her work in applied theatre has taken her across the United States as well as Romania & Iraq.

The Inquiry to Action Group was titled “Time to Act: Reflecting, Unpacking and Confronting Racism Through Theater” by the facilitators, and the description read,

How does racism manifest in our educational and pedagogical practices? What are ways we can unpack race and racism in our personal, professional and organizational participation? This ItAG, for teachers, will explore institutionalized, interpersonal and internalized racism using applied theater and Theatre of the Oppressed techniques. No prior theater experience or anti-racism training is necessary.
It met every week from February 1\textsuperscript{st} to March 14\textsuperscript{th}. Monday evenings from 6:45-8:45pm at the CUNY Graduate Center in New York. On all of the communications and registration material there was clear messaging that this ItAG would be part of a research project so everyone who participated was aware of this prior to signing up.

**My role.** I attended every week for the full duration of the session, as well as all of the facilitator planning sessions (six). The participants met me as the ItAG coordinator at the first kick-off event and learned my enthusiasm about the ItAGs. During the ItAG Kick-off I introduced my role as participant observer, my research questions, and discussed the consent as well as the video recording of all six sessions. I made clear to the participants and facilitators that I was not interested in proving the effectiveness of the ItAG, but in identifying and analyzing discursive patterns and themes about race and racism and how these are co-constructed through the theater process and reflected through the medium of bodies and critical dialogue. During this time participants had the opportunity to ask me questions as well as to follow up with questions. Participants had the choice to hand in the signed consent then or at the first ItAG Session in case they needed more time with the paperwork. All fifteen participants decided to continue with the ItAG and signed the consent. There was a question by one participant who asked if they could sign the consent, but at any point in the process they could renege their consent and I affirmed that they most definitely could, which no one ended up doing. I believe that my long-term involvement in NYCoRE, and specifically with the ItAG community helped with the building of relationships with the participants.

Being part of the NYCoRE community afforded me some benefits and limitations. One benefit is the trust from participants therefore consent came easy. Another benefit was the ability to answer questions facilitators or participants asked around the structure or logistics of the ItAG
model, especially around the patterns of inconsistent attendance/tardiness of participants, which are common trends across all ItAGs over the years. This said, a significant limitation may include participants not being entirely honest in their exit interviews around their experience with the ItAG, and/or the “timeline structure” of the ItAG because of my closeness to the organization.

The participants. Fifteen participants registered. Of the fifteen, there were two participants who identified as male and thirteen were female. Of the fifteen ten identified as people of color (1 Arab, 4 Black, 3 Afro-Latinos, 2 Latinx) and five identified as white. Of the white participants, 4 were female, and one male participant. Of the fifteen participants, there was one male of color.9 Their ages ranged from 24-35 years of age. Five of the fifteen participants worked as teachers at a K-12 School, six worked in youth development either through Girls, Inc., Brotherhood/Sister Sol or Learning through an Extended Arts Program (LEAP), two were adult educators/organizers with the Street Vendor Project and one participant was an education student at New York University (NYU).

Because of the resistance and discomfort that comes with talking about race (Singleton & Linton, 2006; Gay & Howard, 2000; Schick & St. Denis, 2003) I was committed, for ethical reasons to tackle the critical courageous dialogue that emerged from the participants to see what possible actions and/or shifts of consciousness were realized, instead of exposing the individuals. For this reason, participants were assigned pseudonyms in order to focus on the process and not the individual. The pseudonyms of the participants and their responses to the prompts “Provide a thumbnail sketch of important pieces of your identity,” gender identity, and age are listed in the

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9 The field of education is heavily white women educators, there are very few males, and fewer males of color.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Thumbnail sketch</th>
<th>Gender identity</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>A young questioning colombiana-nueva yorker artist, organizer and educator</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>Jewish, white, organizer, lover of theatre of the oppressed, from Chicago</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amira</td>
<td>Muslimah, femme, lefty, Arab, 2nd generation</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristin</td>
<td>I identify as a white woman with a disability/disabilities. I am a teacher, a New Yorker, and an American.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>I am a white, cis-gendered educator, writer, and full spectrum doula who facilitates creative writing workshops for middle grades, always trying to ensure I do so through an anti-racist, intersectional feminist lens.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>white, male, heterosexual</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reina</td>
<td>Afro-Caribbean Woman</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shayna</td>
<td>Black, Queer, Femme</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>I am a Black: Puerto Rican, Bermudian, African-American cis-hetero woman.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toya</td>
<td>Black Hispanic, She, Her</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharice</td>
<td>I’m a Black-Queer-Femme-Faerie.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valerie</td>
<td>Hispanic, I am a female of color, born and raised in Brooklyn.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erica</td>
<td>I am a black woman, an artist, literacy and literature lover and a mom.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lila</td>
<td>white</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3. Participant Information Table (see Appendix A)*
**Data collection.** I attended every week for the full duration of the session, as well as all of the facilitator planning sessions. On the first day of the ItAG I announced who I was, my purpose for being in the group and asked the group for consent both for the research project and to videotape all of the sessions. Because I am well trusted in the NYCoRE community as an activist teacher scholar this was not a problem, and everyone consented.

The Data collected includes the following: a pre and post survey interview of the participants (See Appendix B and C), six video recorded workshops and transcriptions of each workshop, photographs that captured the still images created by the participants as they used their bodies through image theater (a form of Theatre of the Oppressed that is silent and communicates ideas, feelings, etc. through the use of still silhouettes) that may highlight a discussed problem in various stages of frozen images as well as photographs of posters used, eight participant exit interviews, and written observations in a fieldwork journal. Throughout I reflected and wrote out my thinking, feelings, and experiences around my role in the research process shared these with my dissertation advisor as well as my colleagues to make sure that I was transparent and accountable.

**Data analysis.** I collected and analyzed multiple data sources as a form of triangulation and descriptive validity. For each week of the ItAG I wrote memos and then organized and analyzed my data according to specific dialogues and discourses that came up around race and racism week to week. Inspired by Paulo Freire and Ira Shor I was interested in the critical dialogues that were mutually created, that questioned standards of knowledge and power dynamics in schools and society at large (Shor, 1992, p.87). In this kind of critical dialogue there were problems posed and then the participants reflected on their lives, asked questions and made meaning as part of a community, so to consider how to change the problem and engage in action
McLaren & Leonard, 1993, p. 30). So, when reading through transcripts and looking through footage, I identified exchanges between facilitators and participants where there was critical dialogue (as defined above: problem, reflection, questioning, change and action) about race and racism. For example, I described a critical dialogue in my fieldnotes in the following way:

**The problem.** A majority of black students don’t pass the state test

**The reflection.** that happens in dialogue is a person saying: what am I doing or not doing to help them pass?

Or it can be: Well perhaps the test itself is culturally biased, exclusionary- we should analyze them for racial/cultural biases.

**The possible change/action.** named in the dialogue: a small group of teachers end up signing up to analyze the state tests for cultural relevance as well as rubric measures.

Or: Two peer teachers volunteering to observe the teacher’s teaching practices and test preparation lessons in order to help these students pass the test.

In my analysis of the dialogues I traced themes/patterns of discourse between participants and facilitators (for example: color-blindness, color-muteness, white guilt, institutional vs. interpersonal racism). In addition, I looked for themes and threads that emerged from the six memos I wrote, the transcripts from each session, and the transcripts of all of the exit interviews. I asked for help from my colleagues in an interpretive community about my analysis, and I included excerpts from some of my journal entries and field notes in order to show transparency. In my analysis of the multiple data sources, I identified a persistent metaphor used by the participants to characterize their experiences as Deep, Depthness, Depthful. In the next chapter, I will flesh out this metaphor to better understand the nature of the dialogues about race and racism that were surfaced through the teacher practices.
CHAPTER 3
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

“I walked out of every single class being like, wow. I’ve thought about something, I’ve
gone deeper with something, I need to check myself on something, I need to think about
what the impact of this is.”

“a new set of tools and really depth-ful tools.”
– Lila, Transcript from Exit Interview, March 28th, 2016

When I first embarked on this research journey, I went into it with Gloria Anzaldúa’s
concept of choques as the driving concept, looking for the internal conflicts that would lead to
some new learning on behalf of the participants. I was interested in identifying these conflicts
because as Anzaldúa argues, the conflicts, and the attempt to bridge borders, lead to
conocimiento (knowing). However, as I really listened, watched and made sense of the data, the
references to deep and powerful, depthful, kept surfacing. Many of the participants
classified their experiences as deep and powerful, saying things like having walked away with “depth-ful”
tools, and “going deep quickly” setting this experience apart from other workshops or classes
they had experienced. According to the Merriam-Webster definition, Deep (as an adjective) is:

1. Extending far from some surface or area: such as
   a. Extending far downward
   b. Extending well inward from an outer surface
   c. Extending well back from a surface accepted as front

2. Having a specified extension in an implied direction usually downward or
   backward

3. a. Difficult to penetrate or comprehend
   b. Mysterious, obscure
   c. Grave or lamentable in nature or effect
d. Of penetrating intellect  

e. Intensely engrossed or immersed  

f. Characterized by profundity of feeling or quality  

As the researcher, I was intrigued to explore the metaphor of depthness and extract the elements that made it deep. What about critical performative pedagogy, and explicitly, the use of Theatre of the Oppressed and applied theater techniques to engage with race and racism, is deep?

The Elements of Depthness:  

Valuing Time

“I thought it was great, really well facilitated and we did activities that I thought led to us sharing stories and going deep quickly. I feel like it was kind of rare in other classes or workshops that I've done."

"Like something kind of intense and meaningful in a very rapid period of time."

– Emma, Transcript from Exit Interview, March 21, 2016  

The construct of time, how it was used, is the first element of depthness that makes the way for the other elements. Elise in her reflection above discussed “going deep quickly” alluding to the idea that depthness usually takes a longer amount of time, therefore implying that in this practice we got to go “deep” fast. This then made me think about the role of time. Taking time to plan, to be in process, and not rush to solutions. I reflected on the limits of time to continue the critical dialogue or to come to closure, the value and imperative of using the time allotted responsibly and the challenges of being fully present in time to attend to the stories and experiences being shared by the participants. All of these aspects of time explain why participants felt this experience to be “deep quickly.”
Stories That Go Deep

“People of color have experiences of having difficulty of how to negotiate and talk about race, especially with white people, and with administrators, and just like colleagues…I think it’s really healing because you get to talk about it in that space first off.”
– Joshua, Exit Interview Transcript, March 21, 2016

To share our stories, to be seen and heard, is so basic yet so rare, especially for people of color whose stories are often left at the margins. So often in our production driven society there is little time and value given to learning a person, their truth, and hearing their story. Stories usually get shared in intimate settings, with friends and/or families. But rarely do we find spaces where your truth, your experience is welcomed and valued as knowledge. The six-week Inquiry to Action group was built off of the truths the participants shared around their experiences with race and racism.

Stories that go deep have two sides: the teller’s side of vulnerability and risk taking and the receiver’s side of being present and willingness to hold the feelings that get shared. The experience of the storyteller to extend inwards, backwards and outwards in order to share their experience, is deep and can be healing as Joshua mentioned in his exit interview. The uncertainty that goes with sharing your story and unsure of how it will be received, is deep. And to sit with the receiver, in a relationship around the stories that come filled with detail and emotion, is also deep.

Entire Body with Feelings: Connecting the Mind and Body

"Actually doing the theater exercises and connecting with that in a way that wasn't just talking about it, was really powerful.”

"It was such a powerful thing to have that embodied experience."  
– Jackie, Exit Interview Transcript, March 21, 2016

A language that emerges from our bodily living speaks of a kind of rationality distinct from one that is intellectually rooted. It demands that we listen to our bodies, feel our
emotions, release our passions, and reunite our critical powers of thinking with our feelings in hopes of a fuller humanity… (Shapiro, 2005, p.27)

We know with our bodies. When we do work that connects our minds (what we think/the intellectual) with what we feel in our bodies and in our hearts, there is a bridging that happens, a connection that is deep. Often human experiences get processed through dialogue, but when we bring our bodies into the telling or receiving of a story, and actually use our bodies to capture the feeling, the essence of the story, without the use of words, this pushes participants to get out of their heads and extend inwards causing a sense of depthness. Sometimes the engagement with the body causes a feeling that surprises the individual, this sweeping feeling represents when the mind is meeting the heart. It is a realization that our bodies are connecting to the experience emotionally, and not just at an intellectual level. When participants get to revisit experiences with their bodies, a connection to the heart happens causing emotions to surface. This bodily knowing is what many critical pedagogues argue needs to be more present in teaching and learning (Shapiro, 2005; McLaren, 1995; Pineau, 2002; Harman, 2004; Darder, 2009; Fox, 2014).

In a study conducted by Sherry Shapiro (1998) with a group female dancers, she had them express their experiences around the times they felt they have been silenced through their bodies, in movement, without the use of words, she describes:

as they re-experienced their tacit knowing…their level of anger increased. The bond between them grew with the recognition of their shared suffering as their bodies remembered the indignities and the pain. (p.149)

Two things happened, feelings of anger surfaced and connection between the participants also grew; and this is similar to the experiences of the participants in the ItAG. Many named the simple ask of engaging our bodies, and (re)experiencing pain, conveying it without words and
sharing it with others led to healing, as well as an empathic connection with one another. "Race is such a loaded topic... even like a simple thing like that (referring to the embodying of their experiences), opens up a huge discussion...” (Joshua, Exit Interview Transcript, March 21, 2016).

It was the simplicity of the task, to use our bodies, no need for technology, other advanced tools, no readings — nothing else but our stories and our bodies — that led to a community of praxis, a connection that held vulnerability and empathy, an inward self-reflection, which sometimes meant sitting with discomfort around the feelings that surfaced when the mind met the heart and body. It was this experience that was profound and penetrating, in other words deep.

**Connecting the Dots: The Relationship between the Individual, the Institutional, and the Ideological**

"I need to be more aware of how I'm acting as an agent of systemic change which is not a one-size fits all kind of thing, but it's a really good wakeup call...”

– Shayna, Exit Interview Transcript, March 24, 2016

“...We were kind of questioning ourselves as well, like, "All right, why does this person think that way? What was their life experience that led them to think that, not that that justifies it", but these are like people that we deal with on a regular basis.”

– Amira, Exit Interview Transcript, March 21, 2016

Connecting the dots from the individual to larger discourses, seeing how the institutions uphold certain beliefs and then looking at how individuals navigate those same discourses: either perpetuating them intentionally or unintentionally, or actively disrupting/resisting them was a deep practice. Lois Weis and Michelle Fine (2012) name this line of analysis as “critical bifocality”, “that documents the linkages and capillaries of structural arrangements and the discursive and lived out practices by which privileged and marginalized youth and adults make sense of their circumstances” (Weis and Fine, p.176). It’s the idea of looking at how people navigate interlocking systems of power, but also how those systems operate within people, what Wendy Luttrell characterizes as the “two-in-one-ness” of power relationships that are
experienced “from the outside in and the inside out” (2009, p.125, 156). Connecting the dots was part of the performative pedagogy as a means to encourage the participants to understand that individuals are not “self-contained units dangling freely and able to pursue their life choices unencumbered by constraint” (Weis and Fine, 2012, p.176) that there are structures, systems in place that impact the everyday lives of students and adults. By seeing and understanding the linkages between the outside in and the inside out, then there is room to look for the strategies and interconnected approaches so to achieve justice or as Weis and Fine state beginning to understand “the circuits of solidarity that need to be connected for educational justice to be realized” (p.196).

**Left with the Thirst: No Easy Fixes, Many Possibilities, and a Lack of Closure**

“I think also, in acting out all this conflict, this doesn’t mean there is a certain solution to it, so like, which can be a little frustrating. So, it’s not necessarily about like having the expectation to find a solution, but rather to like, to play out…”

– Amira, Transcript ItAG Session Five, March 7, 2016

The element of being left thirsty, not fully quenched or satisfied with one approach, one answer to a problem or a conflict, leads to a new set of questions or possibilities. Connected to the element of critical bifocality, an understanding of an individual and their relationship to the systems, led participants to reflect on the many ideologies and institutions impacting one interpersonal conflict, and therefore understanding that there may be many possible approaches and steps towards liberation. The critical dialogue that accompanied the playing out of the different possibilities led to deeper awareness of the many systems and how they connect and impact the interpersonal manifestation of oppression. This element reminds me of the saying that “Racism and White Supremacy are woven into the fabric of American society” and in order to unweave it, we must first understand all of the threads involved in upholding it, to then think about how to disrupt each thread, which requires different approaches and strategies. And then to
create a society that is free of racism and white supremacy requires both the knowing as well as the many possibilities/approaches that were required in the unweaving of the original society in order to avoid recreating and reweaving of a society that can replicate harm. And so, this requires that we also leave space for imagination, that is not magical, but rooted in possibility. This thirst, the wanting, the unknowing, the lack of closure left participants with Merriam-Webster’s definition of Deep (3b and e), in mystery, feeling a bit obscure, therefore intensely engrossed and immersed to try to find possible solutions.

**And Back to Valuing Time**

In truth, a session of Theatre of the Oppressed has no end, because everything which happens in it must extend into life. (Boal, 2002, p.276)

“I do this organizing class, basically. Twice a month I meet with a lot of other community organizers, primarily people of color, and we talk about a lot of things, but there as a conflict that came up, and in my head, I was like, "Oh my god, let's Theater Oppress this shit. Do some sort of forum with it." That was my first instinct, whereas before I was like, "Oh, I don't know, should we just talk. How do we bring people together and talk about it?" I felt like having that be my first initial reaction was like, "Okay, wow, this is definitely something I want to play with in the future and really more informed about or learn how to do properly." That's in terms of my everyday.”

– Amira, Exit Interview Transcript, March 21, 2016

We start and end with time as an important element in getting and going deep. Using Critical Performative Pedagogy and in particular Theatre of the Oppressed and Applied Theater techniques is a process, a practice that goes beyond the designated time allocated. It will always feel like there is not enough time to go deeper, to get to all of the solutions, which is why it becomes an embodied practice that must “extend into life.” How do we make space and time to connect our minds with our bodies through this practice in our classrooms and schools? How do we foster a value for the emotive, the empathy, the body in our ways of teaching, learning and knowing?
As I discussed in the introduction and in my literature review, a lot of the Race work that happens in teacher preparation is kept at surface level, it stays on an intellectual level, engaging the mind through reading and writing and in some classes a little bit of biographical reflection where pre-service teachers are asked to reflect on their racial identities and understanding of Race and Racism. This surface level race work is better than no work at all, however what if we made time to go deeper with race work during teacher preparation? If we engaged the elements of depthness, how would this better prepare educators to understand systemic racism and its relationship to schooling as well as reflect on their relationship to and complicity in racism in order to better find the ways to disrupt and practice antiracism in their classrooms ultimately with the goal of dismantling it and creating new just possibilities?

In the following chapters I will explore each of the above outlined elements of depthness and how they surfaced in the qualitative data.
CHAPTER 4

VALUING TIME: DEPTHNESS THROUGH THOUGHTFUL PLANNING

“I thought it was great, really well facilitated and we did activities that I thought led to us sharing stories and going deep quickly. I feel like it was kind of rare from other classes or workshops that I’ve done.”

– Emma, Exit Interview Transcript, March 21, 2016

The planning, the preparation and intentionality that goes into the embodied practice and sharing of stories is the first element of depthness. The three facilitators from the beginning of this six-week journey were strategic in scaffolding this performative practice around race and racism. The facilitators in almost every session asked participants to share their truth and their stories in the space. Storytelling involves vulnerability and risk-taking on behalf of the story teller, and for those receiving the story there is the responsibility to listen and be present. Brené Brown, social scientist, popular figure and knowledgeable on vulnerability says, that vulnerability is “uncertainty, risk and exposure” (Brown, 2014). In every session, the facilitators planned for and scaffolded a space that would hold the stories of the participants responsibly. They did this by,

1. First, beginning with games. “The spect-actors “need to be warmed up beforehand with exercises and games” (Boal, 2002, p.241). Playing allows us to break out of the day to day bodily performance. We have to loosen our bodies, like how dancers must stretch before performances, or singers must exercise their vocals before a singing performance. We must de-mechanize and make space for possibility in our bodies.

2. Second, transitioning to self-reflection, an individual practice, that happened via journaling or reflecting on a prompt.

3. Then, moving from self-reflection to story sharing, from the individual to a small group (sometimes pairs, sometimes in threes).
4. Fourth, asking participants to use their bodies and enact the story, as per “the statue-making image theater game is an essential tool in emboldening the spectator” (p.241, Boal, 2002) because it is with our bodies that we think and feel.

5. Lastly, engaging in collective dialogue and praxis (Freire, 1970).

On the first day of the ItAG participants set community agreements, reflected on and shared their identities, shared some raw and emotional experiences with race and racism, embodied and performed their stories and ended with reflection. During the sharing, after the self-reflection work, I observed one group composed of three participants of color, who all had different shades of brown. They took turns sharing their experiences around the way race/racism impacted their everyday life negatively, and the images that came to their heads that represented their story.

Erica, who self-described as a “black woman, an artist, literacy and literature lover and a mom”, the darkest brown female in the group of three, explained that she envisioned doors closing in her face, with the illusion of an open door. Maria, who self-described as “a Black: Puerto Rican, Bermudian, African-American cis-hetero woman”, the lighter skinned brown woman in the group, discussed the intersectionality of race and class and an image of stairs versus an escalator. She saw herself going up stairs, not going up on a ladder because she still had lighter skinned economic privilege, and the ladder in her mind was perceived to be for darker skinned poorer black people, which was filled with more risk and unsteadiness. Yet she still did not have the chance to use the escalator, which was reserved for white people. The only male in the group, Joshua, discussed his feeling of constantly having to try to lift others up, due to the “bullshit” racism of society and him feeling how heavy it is and the anger that grows in him. The image he created is one of picking his brown partners up and then all of them collapsing together due to the institutional racism they face. Each story was heavy, sad, and filled with struggle: doors
being closed, the work and labor of going up steps versus the easiness of an escalator, and the constant lifting until one day they collapse. These are the ways these three participants experience the negativity of racism in their day to day.

*Figure 4. Three Scenes of Struggle*
After they performed, the audience was asked to shout out words that came up for them while watching the images. Words that were shared were: Struggle, Walk, Rejection, Internalized, Doors, Access, Power, Hue and Restraint. The three performers titled the piece, “Three Scenes of Struggle.” This group was able to deliver their truths through their bodies. Audience members picked up on the doors, the rejection, the lack of access to power, the restraint and even the “hue” of skin color in the piece. This performance piece did not include dialogue, only movement and some sound, and still evoked the feelings and the impact that the participants had with racism in their daily lives.

The scaffolding of this session set the stage for the next five weeks. The participants walked into a space where there was care for the stories told, agreements to abide by if and when feelings were hurt, a plan and a purpose for the time spent together. This made way for a collaborative courageous space for sharing, like the sharing of rejection, privilege, anger and defeat that ensued in the group above. The time and value that was given to this practice allowed for vulnerability, to be seen and recognized by others (as people shout out reactions), closing the empathy gap (Noguera, 2018) and opening up the possibility for connection and healing (Way et al., 2018).

Not only was each session thoughtfully planned and allowed for connection, but the arc of the ItAG (Inquiry to Action Group) led the participants on a deep journey to explore and unravel many threads of one simple racist interaction through theater exercises and critical dialogue.
Session Scaffolding

Our Stories and Our Bodies

The agenda for Session’s 1 and 2 (see Appendix D) demonstrates how the Facilitators centered the individuals in the room in their bodies through warm up exercises. The set-up of Session 1 encompassed introductions, community agreements, a human barometer game that got us moving and sharing stories, into tableaus and image theater. In Session 2, participants begin with a community conversation, transition to movement and playing, from there they go back to reflecting on their lived experiences, to sharing in dialogue with another, to a group embodiment exercise and lastly to checkout on poster paper. Here you see that the facilitators have made it a point to start the Inquiry to Action by engaging the stories of the people in the room and warming up their bodies mostly through image theater.

Connecting the Dots

In sessions 3 and 4, the facilitators brought in applied theater exercises that would get the participants thinking deeper around one interpersonal incident. It is through the techniques of hot seating, mantle of the expert, roll on the desk/office, travelling graffiti wall and simultaneous dramaturgy (see Appendix E) that participants took a deep look at one micro incident, analyzed it, unpacked it, questioned it, connected it to the institutional and ideological, back to the individual, to then try out possible solutions to that one incident. Once participants practiced teasing out the many threads that could inform one incident, they were introduced to Forum theater for sessions 5 and 6.

Possibilities in Action

In the last sessions of the ItAG the facilitators introduce Forum Theater, this technique is “a theatrical game in which a problem is shown in an unsolved form, to which the audience,
again spect-actors are invited to suggest and enact solutions.” (Boal, 2002, p.xxiv) After having spent the last two weeks pulling apart the many possible backstories informing one individual and/or one interaction and its relationship to larger systemic oppressions, the participants were then more equipped with a larger range of possible solutions that involve a breadth of thinking, and an understanding of the layers and complexity of one scene.

**Figure 5. The Arc of Depthness**
CHAPTER 5
OUR STORIES OUR BODIES

Connecting to our bodies helped get out of the world of positivist, elitist conceptions of knowledge production…and instead connect to people’s own ways of knowing and value those ways of knowing. (Fox, 2014, p.25)

Currently, teaching and learning in the classroom and in teacher preparation programs do not engage our bodies, as Darder reminds us, “the production of knowledge is neither engaged nor presented as a historical and collective process, occurring in the flesh and its sensual capacities for experiencing and responding to the world” (2009, p.218). Since our bodies have been socialized and enfleshed (Foucault, 1979; McLaren, 1988; Bartky, 1990; Darder, 2009), the use of art, in this case Theatre of the Oppressed and applied theater, an art that engages the body “should be taken seriously as a methodology”(p.153) argues Madeline Fox (2014) in her YPAR study with youth and the use of theater, because it is through this practice, that we can “produce knowledge of meaning, and of weight” (p.152) that will help us reach collective liberation.

In the first two sessions of the ItAG the facilitators focused on getting the participants sharing their stories and into their bodies around the way Race and Racism has impacted and informed their lives, and their work as educators.

Stories that go deep

Once the group went over their agreements, as discussed in the prior chapter, participants had an opportunity to share identity webs. They paired up and responded to the following prompts:

- Which identity positively affects you, negatively affects you and why?
- Which identity are you most aware of? Least aware of, and why?
The sharing of our identities on the first day of the ItAG set the precedent that in this space our stories, beings and truths are welcomed. Knowing very little about those who were in the room, participants were asked to take a risk and share parts of who they are. Answering questions around their identities and how they impact their day to day, and also the identities they are not as aware of, therefore highlighting privilege. Already, this activity is shaping a space of vulnerability and possible discomfort. I remember the discomfort that came up for me in answering the question, which identity are you least aware. I answered Able-Bodied and Heterosexual. Immediately, I faced the discomfort of having to sit with my privilege. Not having to think about how I move in the world and/or who I love, makes it clear to me that I spend very little time thinking about how systems and narratives have benefitted my lived reality as an abled-bodied heterosexual, and in turn, also don’t always see the ways that differently abled and LGBTQ-GNC individuals are harmed daily by my unintentional oblivion, as well the larger
manifestations of systemic oppression towards differently abled and LGBTQ-GNC people. This opening activity gave way to the thinking around and about the stories held in our bodies and presented by our bodies and how that impacts how we move through the world. Our bodies have meaning, and may hold power, regardless of whether we are aware of it or not. This made way for the kinds of conversation that we would begin to have around Race and Racism, as a systemic oppression that impacts how we as racially identified individuals move through society, consciously or subconsciously, which is why we must engage our bodies in the learning, not just our minds.

The facilitators transitioned from the identity web share to an activity called the Human Barometer on an X and Y axis (described here):

### Human Barometer (Session 1, 2.1.16)

**Goal:** Physical activity to gauge participants’ feelings, understandings of, and/or relationship with a particular set of questions, topics, and/or issues.

**Instructions:**
- Ask participants to stand in the middle of room.
- Explain that the room represents and X (horizontal) & Y (vertical) axis. Facilitators ask participants to walk across the spectrum of the horizontal axis according to their relationship with the question, i.e., “how much has race come up for you in the work that you do? left side of horizontal axis – Not so much; right side – Very much (a lot); position yourself across the spectrum according to the side you’re closest to (or not at all - participants can stand in middle if they are unsure).
- To add another layer, you can ask participants to walk across the vertical axis in relation to the first question, i.e, “in relation to how much race comes up for you, how comfortable are you dialoguing on issues of race & racism? move up if you are very comfortable, stay in the middle if you’re not so sure, move back if you are not so comfortable, etc.
As the participants moved along the axis, they turned and talked to the person next to them, when the facilitator added the other layer (question around comfortability) they moved and talked to the new partners near them. After about 10 minutes the facilitator, in this case Jade, asked participants to share to the whole group what came up for them in their small group conversations. Then Jade prompted a second round of X/Y Questions:

For this question, you're gonna move back on this x axis, so this is gonna be a lot, this is gonna be not at all. (pointing her hands to the different ends of the room) The question is: how much does race impact you in everyday life?

All the time. Maybe that's a better one. Not at all. (signals with her body across the room on the X-axis.) Okay. Then, now you're gonna move on the y axis, this is
positively, and this is negatively (pointing to the extremes of the room vertically). So, given that question, how much positively, how much negatively?

Everyone ended up in a quadrant, after it was clarified that they needed to reflect on their race, so the question was, “How does YOUR race impact you in everyday life?” From there, Gabriella, stepped in,

So, here's what we're gonna do. Rather than just sitting and talking about it, we're gonna have about 15 minutes. That's not a lot of time, but you're going to create a piece of theater. That is going to sort of embody why you're standing where you're standing. What where you're standing looks like. So, for a quick sort of recap on some different conventions you might use. You can use images, frozen pictures, tableaux, you can use sounds or soundscapes. You can use words, dialogue. Though I'm gonna say ... and of course, movement. Now because we only have 15 minutes, I'm gonna say, let's try not to use more than eight lines of dialogue. No more than eight lines. Let's focus on movement. Let's focus on sounds. Whatever is coming up for you in your conversation about why you stood there is going to be the stimulus for this theater piece. Just going to be sharing. It can be as short or as long as you'd like. Don't get too stuck in talking. There's gonna be a tendency to just want to sit down and talk. Explode that out. Dynamize as soon as you can. Would be my suggestion. [sic]

For this second round, instead of focusing on words and discussion, the facilitators encouraged the participants to limit their words and to get into their bodies to capture why they, in community, in relation to the others that were positioned in the quadrant, stood where they stood. It was this ask that led many participants to feel the power of knowing with their entire body (Freire, 1995) as individuals in relationship to their peers. When people engage their “physical
bodies they come to know things in a uniquely personal and heuristic manner” (Pineau, 2002, p.50). What follows is a series of reactions, reflections to this embodied devising that came from various participants during their exit interview.

The Entire Body with Feelings: Connecting the Mind and Body

Simple, Yet Not So

Many participants spoke to the simplicity of being asked to connect their stories, experiences to a physical enactment. This practice alone led to a reflection of how we don’t typically engage our bodies in full understanding of knowing and being. As Jackie reflects:

Like a putting a physicality with it (a story). I’m even surprised to realize it, that I feel like I have such little experience with that… It was like a story that’s emotionally charged and you’re putting a physicality with it… I didn’t anticipate how charged it was to put those things together.

Something as simple as using our bodies as the tool is not so simple because our common practices in society have asked us to tap into our minds and quell our bodies. The practice of using our bodies and moving into them is a scaffolded practice and a muscle that needs to be stretched and flexed even though the participants refer to it as simple. The simplicity, they refer to, lies in the not needing to use any additional resources for deep experience and/or learning. It’s the very act of using our own bodies for depth and reflection. Like the sharing of an experience in a frozen tableau or an image that had a repetitive movement and sound, which made conversations about racism more accessible and approachable to Joshua. He mentioned it being “eye opening and shocking” that something as simple as getting into our bodies to do an ‘image thing’ made it easier to talk about it and “attacked so much” in only three-minutes. Interesting how Joshua used the word “attack” to describe the feeling he had using our bodies to capture
how race negatively/positively impacts his life. Perhaps he used this word because he ended up in the quadrant: race impacts him a lot, and negatively, therefore violently “attacking” him daily. So, his use of words could be taken as a metaphor. Something so big, like racism that attacks him daily, can be addressed through the use of our bodies which gets to so much.

Lila, similarly, reflected on the immediate connection her and her partner were able to have in those short minutes of the activity, by the practice of molding their bodies,

We both kind of looked at each other and said, "Do you have an instinct in your body?"

We were both like, "Yeah." It was just really ... Then we both did this, I did this unmasking and armoring and thing about how I have power. Kind of complexifying that. She did this really sitting in these multiple identities. Then we came together and did the James Baldwin quote about love is taking off the mask we know we cannot live without or cannot live without and we cannot live within. 10 We clasped hands. None of it was like, she was like, "Let's try saying this." We just folded into this super depthful interaction that we never could have accomplished with words alone or with a dialogue alone. It just entered us into this space that was even beyond our consciousness but was interacting in such a deep way.

All they used were their bodies and stories, and the impact was grand and deeply felt. Lila in this excerpt hints to another reason embodying is powerful, connection with another person in story sharing and, in the embodiment, that then creates a new story that is co-constructed, a new possibility, a new connection.

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10 “Love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within” (Baldwin, J., 1993, p.95).
Connection and empathy

“To connect with another person on that level is such a privilege and so beautiful to be trusted with someone's truth in that way. I felt like that was maybe kind of the third piece… engaging a different part of who we are in that vulnerability and in that space.”

– Lila, Exit Interview Transcript, March 28, 2016

The sharing of stories and then the telling of them through our bodies triggers the part of our brains that allow for empathy and vulnerability and creates a third space that is co-created, co-felt (Gutierrez, K. 2008), a way of knowing that exists “between texts lived and studied, institutions and sociocultural practices, local experienced and historically influenced” (p.149).

It brings you into interaction with people in a completely different way than you ever are and it asks you to tell stories that you would never really tell otherwise. Then for your stories to have a story together. Then for you to be in this depthful interaction of your deepest stories and experiences. It’s just that process is so powerful.

As shared by Lila, this third space goes beyond the telling and listening of a story, it allows for the embodied retelling and reacting to a story that is a new version, a new experience with the story itself “a transformative space where the potential for an expanded form of learning and the development of new knowledge are heightened” (Gutierrez, 2008, p.152) therefore creating the “depthful interaction (that) … is so powerful” (Lila, Exit Interview transcript, March 28, 2016).

In this connection, the participants who share and experience the stories also embody the feelings that arise in the embodied sharing of another’s story. Emma shares a time she felt most uncomfortable was when she embodied the story of Amira, her friend, and had to blurt out a racial slur at her,

afterwards I felt so uncomfortable, having said that to her. I actually called her later after the class and we talked about it… I didn’t realize what an impact it would have on me. I don’t know, and like what it would have on her… She’s heard it before and it’s her story,
but for me it felt very uncomfortable. It almost made me emotional, I couldn’t get it out of my mind.

The discomfort Emma describes is directly connected to the actual scenario that she was forced to play where she called her friend “terrorist”, this experience, her discomfort, that came from having to play that out was so charged that she had to follow up with her friend around it. She also mentions feeling “almost” emotional, because her friend actually experienced this, and “she’s heard it before” and she connected to the possible discomfort she had hearing this, “I didn’t realize what an impact it would have on me, and I don’t know, and like what it would have on her.” The embodiment of this story moved Emma past the dialogue, having just heard the story from Amira, and got her in her body, into Amira’s actual experience which caused her to feel uncomfortable and even “almost” emotional. To know, to think and to process in our bodies in the reenacting of our stories, or a slightly new version of our actual experience is exactly what Freire means when he wrote, “I know with my entire body, with feelings, with passion and also with reason. It is my entire body that socially knows” (Freire, 1995). Recent experts who study trauma, have explained that trauma is embodied; it is felt and remembered not only by our brains, but by our bodies (Van der Kolk, 2014; Menakem, 2017). When we retell a stressful experience or memory, our bodies participate, and the feelings are not just felt in the brain, but throughout our bodies which is why many have encouraged the practice of somatics in the healing of trauma. In this practice of sharing stories of racism and devising an image, participants were enabled to enter a third space of connection, embodied knowing and understanding, and in Joshua’s case a healing experience, one that felt like “group therapy” (Joshua, Exit interview transcript, March 21, 2016). This embodied knowing and understanding
then led participants to look inwards and reflect, which led to a third reason why these embodied devising’s were so powerful.

**Self-Reflection**

In many of the reflections of the participants they referred to the early embodying of their experiences with race and racism, as practices that got them to take a deeper look at their lives, think about their experiences and walked away with new learnings. This reflection manifested in two ways, one was the inward reflection, to look back in time, tell a story and then perform it. This is the practice of performative reflexivity (Turner, 1988), to “turn backwards and inwards, to engage the double-lensed act of looking at themselves look at themselves” (Alexander et al., p.43). The other was the self-reflection caused by the spectating of another’s story. In both events participants found themselves reflecting on their own lives, leaving with questions, noticing’s and new learnings.

Jackie in her response to the question was there a time throughout your experience with the ItAG that you felt discomfort? If so, can you talk to me about it? She shares a moment of performative reflexivity. Jackie shares,

One time when I felt kind of uncomfortable was when ... I think it was just the second class. It was when we, in smaller groups, told one another stories of when we had experienced or witnessed an instant or confrontation that had to do with race. The thing that I shared was something that I had talked about, something that had happened to one of my students that I had talked about with my boss and friends and whatnot. I didn't realize until we got up to do it in front of people that I was still feeling really upset about it, and I could feel myself getting choked up. I think there were two levels on which I felt discomfort. One is just feeling uncomfortable crying in front of people, ever, which I
think is not unusual. Also, just being a white woman and just knowing a broader context of white people taking up a lot of space with their feelings about things that are happening to other people. I just felt self-conscious about that.

In this sharing, Jackie says, “I didn’t realize until we got up to do it in front of people that I was still feeling really upset about it, and I could feel myself getting choked up” the embodiment of her experience witnessing a racist interaction made her realize that she still had feelings about it. This is an example of how the mind meets the heart through this embodied practice. She explains the discomfort with her “getting choked up” to be twofold, one, feeling uncomfortable to cry in front of people and two, crying as a white woman, “knowing the broader context of white people taking up a lot of space with their feelings about things that are happening to other people”. She is referring to the discourses of white fragility and the centering of white women’s tears that distract from the hard realities of “other people” not her reality as a white woman, causing her to feel self-conscious around her tears and how they may center her feelings versus the “things that are happening to other people”, the harm being done to people of color, and in this case it was a student of color. This is an example of performative reflexivity. Jillian, turned backwards, and inwards, found herself emotional and then looked at herself getting this way, and noticed her discomfort with her feeling of sadness. She felt surprised by the emotions that surfaced, and then got in her head around whether her tears would center whiteness instead of the experience of her student and reflected on her racial identity in that moment. Jackie’s self-reflection was caused by the feelings that surfaced when her mind and body connected in the embodied retelling/reliving of the time she witnessed racism.

Amira shared her self-reflection, after watching another participant’s embodied story with Racism where he shared benefitting from his white privilege:
…when we had done the exercise where you directed the two people in your group to share your story, that was really eye opening. Eye opening in the sense of, not that I hadn't seen that happen, but I think seeing it so directly and having that person be at the forefront. I don't know, in the work that I do, it's like I see a lot of the effect of racial policing, and I know what that looks like to an extent, but it's a lot different when someone is talking about their personal experience with law enforcement and being, like your kind of off the hook because your white. Stuff that I know exists, but it's a lot different when someone shares their intimate, personal story and connection to that.

I guess there's a lot of nuance and it's not so obvious or it's not so, just broad stroked kind of thing. That was really informative for me. Then also just thinking about for myself, I'll think a lot of times, whatever I'm lighter skinned at some points of the year depending on where I am. I remember someone had made this comment about how it's so relative depending on the room you're in. If I'm in a room full of white people, I feel very non-white, and when I'm in a room full of darker skinned folks, I feel very white. Things like that, I think, recognizing how that sort of shifts and how every person of color doesn't have the same experience with race and racism. I think I just got thinking about my own privileges, of course, as a lighter skinned person, but also my own interactions as an Arab or a Muslim or whatever might be in New York.

In this “eye-opening” reflection Amira shares that while she knows things to be true, such as racial profiling and white privilege there is something “different” to have someone share (act out) their experience with law enforcement and be let off the hook because of their whiteness, the spectating of this reality was not “broad stroked and obvious” but “nuanced”. This then led her to reflect on her experience as a lighter skinned Muslim woman and her proximity to
whiteness, therefore the privileges she may have been afforded in her own interactions that differ from “darker skinned folks”. Even though the story was not hers, she connected to it, and reflected on her own life around the ways she may have benefitted from light skinned privilege. For Amira this moment is a *choque*, as a woman of color she is having to wrestle with her identity as a Muslim woman who has experienced racial oppression and her light skin which may have afforded privileges. This duality is one I have wrestled with but it is this tension that leads to deeper learning and consciousness raising around the ways to use my light skin privilege to disrupt racism, or ways I can name colorism when it’s happening, and/or the responsibility I have to work with other light skinned women of color to own their privileges in order to continue to build solidarity with darker skinned people of color. The awareness that comes from the tension is what leads to new understandings and new ways of being.

The self-reflection that came out of the activity of telling a story around a time you experienced and/or witnessed racism, the embodying and performing it, and the empathy and connection that it created between the spect-actors made these early performative practices powerful. From this performative practice, participants self-reflected inward, then outward, connecting with others and back to their self-conscious. This directionality of self-reflection (performative reflexivity) is the practice of self-depthness. From our stories and our bodies shared in sessions one and two, we transition to the larger systems, messages and ideologies that have impacted and shaped our experiences with Racism.
CHAPTER 6

CONNECTING THE DOTS

“Theatre of the Oppressed moves from the individual to the general, rather than vice versa.”

– Adrian Jackson (Boal, 2002, p.xxvi,)

“I think that’s where we want to sit in this work is to be able to be grounded in reality, but going beyond the walls that oppression creates around our responses and our beliefs and our habits. I felt like that encompassed so much of the work we were doing throughout in a very powerful way.”

– Lila, Exit Interview Transcript, March 28, 2016

“It's so often grounded in a moment. I think that's a challenge. I appreciated some of the activities that we did, because it started to pull it back. I liked the one where, leading up to session four maybe, where there was the room, and people put different objects in it. There was also the gallery wall, with the different moments in someone's life that impacted who they were. Then that all led into the scene. I thought that was nice, because it began to think about it was able to take this moment and speak to how all these other moments in someone's life formed that. I appreciated that.”

– Matt, Exit Interview Transcript, March 21, 2016

The middle two sessions (Sessions 3 and 4) guided the participants to connect the dots from the interpersonal interaction (conflict) to the Ideologies and Institutions in dialogue either explicitly or implicitly with the conflict at hand. This is an essential piece in practicing Theatre of the Oppressed techniques. It is important to have the point of conflict engage with the larger forces behind the oppression which influences the interpersonal manifestation to take place. This is the practice of critical bifocality (Weis and Fine, 2012) and “two-in-one-ness” (Luttrell, 2009) that I discussed in a previous chapter. For example, a scenario where a student of color calls a teacher out for being “so white” after getting reprimanded for being loud in the classroom can be connected to many institutional and ideological manifestations of oppression. The scenario is embedded with many layered manifestations of racism that inform the interpersonal conflict and interactions that take place, including an interplay between the following social conditions, policies and ideologies that produce racial inequality within schooling. The high percentage of
white (female) teachers in the education field which is the result of intersecting inequalities, including gender, race and class. The internalized ideology of the white savior complex on behalf of the teacher. The patriarchal organization of schooling that relies on women’s invisible labor as teachers that places the teacher in that position in the first place. The institutionalized racism of education that has historically benefitted white students whether through curriculum and standardized testing impacting the student of color’s frustration with their schooling experience. The ideology of meritocracy, that if you go to school and “work hard” you will be successful, which invisibilizes the systemic racism that makes it especially difficult for people of color. The racial segregation of schooling and the anti-blackness (association of “loud” with black) bias which gives way to the excessive control and punishment of black bodies. The white supremacist assumptions about whose bodies/education is most valued and the white cultural norms that serve as the standard of production and behavior in schools. All of these institutional and ideological manifestations of oppression could be playing out in the one interpersonal interaction between the student of color who calls out their teacher for being “so white.” The connecting of these dots can inform the brainstorming of approaches to resolve this incident, in a way that is not further producing harm, while also holding that the problem is larger than just this interaction.

In applied theater and Theatre of the Oppressed it is important for the spect-actors/actors to get to a point where they are thinking about the many institutional and ideological forces (like those mentioned above) that may be at play in one scenario. This practice with critical bifocality (Weis and Fine, 2012) usually happens in the brainstorming and critical dialogue that occurs around naming the conflict at play. The applied theater and Theatre of the Oppressed approach is in part to lead the actors to strategize and practice arriving to change through action. The
brainstorming exercises allow the spect-actors to explore the multiplicity of possibilities, which may include many relationships such as:

- the relationship between the character to its society,
- the relationship between the character and the collective dialogue (happening with the other immediate characters and/or spect-actors)
- as well as the relationship between the characters and their consciences

The exercises below got the spect-actors/actors to brainstorm and engage in critical dialogue to connect the dots, and examine the many relationships that impact the characters, which in turn helps them to imagine different realistic solutions that are not magical and not ‘scripted’. It was the practice of turning the soil in order to create space/possibility for (re)newed growth.

**Exercises Used to Connect the Dots**

**Exercise: Role on the Desk/Office**

*Figure 8. A photograph of the Principal’s Desk/Office*

We’re gonna learn about some characters today, and before we get introduced to these characters we are going to invade somebody’s space and kind of pick at their items to
make some conjecturing about who this person is and what they’re like… You’re gonna go through the door, this person is not going to be in their office any time soon, so you don’t have to worry about getting walked in on. You can snoop. And pick one item to bring back outside of the office and tell us about what that item is.

(Facilitator Lisa, transcription, February 29, 2016)

Role on the Desk/Office, is an applied theater technique adapted from Role on the Wall, an activity that was taught to two of the facilitators by professors at CUNY’s (City University of New York) Applied Theater Master’s Program. It is widely circulated in Applied Theater circles in New York City and “can be translated to many applications, such as the role on the desk version.” (Lisa, Email Communication, October 8, 2018) It is an activity “where a facilitator lays out objects to elicit speculation and meaning-making. Participants are asked to assess the objects relevance to the content area being explored” (Gabriella, Email Communication, October 8, 2018). In the adapted version, we used, Role on the Desk, participants explored the desk/office of the principal character in the scenario. This exercise is meant to get the participants digging deeper into a scenario before actually meeting characters. It creates a space for analysis, inquiry and possibility. The facilitators curate the office with possible messages interpreted by the original scenario that may or may not impact the principal’s behavior. They curate the office/desk by thinking about the pictures the character may have up, posters, articles they are reading, and so on. A participant goes through the door of the office, snoops, picks one item from the office, and then shares with the group what they see and why it resonated for them. The scenario used was inspired by Joshua’s story (below).

Scenario: A light skinned Afro-Latino male attends a predominantly white elementary school, whose closest friends were the only two other Black boys in the school. They all
got into trouble and the other two darker skinned boys were targeted and he was always left off the hook and was the “golden boy” of the three. (The race discourses in this scenario include: Colorism, Anti-Blackness, policing of black bodies, and a different set of rules and expectations applied based on the skin color of the students.)

The first item chosen was a computer and there was an article, The Asian Advantage from the Review (https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/11/opinion/sunday/the-asian-advantage.html) that was open in a tab with highlighted excerpts. The participant then proceeds to read the highlighted excerpts:

- They’re like, ‘Oh, you’re Chinese and you’re good in math,’” the book quotes a girl called Angela as saying. “It’s advantageous when they think that.”
- (Of course, positive stereotypes create their own burden, with sometimes tremendous stress on children to earn those A’s, at the cost of enjoying childhood. And it can be hard on Asian-American kids whose comparative advantage isn’t in science or math but in theater or punk rock. Among Asians, there’s sometimes concern that there’s too much focus on memorization, not enough on creativity.)
- Another factor in Asian scholastic success may be the interaction of social stereotypes and self-confidence. Scholars like Claude Steele have found that blacks sometimes suffer from “stereotype threat”: Anxiety from negative stereotypes impairs performance. Lee and Zhou argue that Asian-Americans sometimes ride on the opposite of “stereotype threat,” a “stereotype promise” that they will be smart and hard-working.
- Lee and Zhou also say the success of Asian-Americans, far from revealing a lack of discrimination, is in part a testament to it. They say Asian-Americans work
hard to succeed in areas with clear metrics like math and science in part as a protection against bias — and in any case, many Asians still perceive a “bamboo ceiling” that is hard to break through.

Then Lisa, one of the facilitators asks, “what might that tell us about the person who owns this computer?” participants responded, “maybe the person is Asian” or “studying Asian people’s experience with stereotypes” “interested in social theories” “interested in the construction of race”. Then the person read other tabs that were open some of which quotes were highlighted “skin color does not automatically grace you with some form of entitlement, if you want something you’re going to have to work at it, the fact that your ACT scores aren’t up to par falls directly on your shoulders not society’s, you’re the only one that could have done anything about it.” Lisa then asks the group if there was anything they learned:

• “I feel like whoever, they may not be on the side of all minorities umm getting equal education…”

• “I’m not convinced about how they feel about racial stereotypes and racial equity, because the stereotype promise and threat article seem to be somewhat progressive…, where, as the other one was just blatant racism. But looking at either of them doesn’t determine what the person’s values are.”

• “I also think that this person is some type of administrator at a school, possibly a school that has a high Asian demographic. With good scores, test scores at that school, because there’s a lot about competition (referring to the articles), possible a low black demographic.”

Here the participants are speculating, and coming up with some ideas around who this person is. One participant assumed the character is an administrator but not sure about where they stand in
regards to race and racism, because the first article was somewhat progressive, but the other tabs were clearly part of a racist “pull yourself up by your boot straps” narrative. This narrative is related to ideas of meritocracy. While it may not be intentional racism, it perpetuates racist beliefs that in order to succeed in this country one must work hard however it dismisses the reality of policies that have intentionally harmed people of color making it very difficult to actually attain wealth in this country. By believing in this narrative, the blame then gets put on individuals for their “lack” of hard work versus making light of the institutional and interpersonal racism that impact the day to day lives of people of country. But as the participant suggested, we don’t actually know if the possible administrator whose office this is believes in meritocracy, we just know they were reading about this idea.

Figure 9. A photograph of a participant interacting with the Principal’s Desk/Office.
The second person chooses to analyze a photograph. A man and a woman who appear to be South Asian and perhaps the parents of the character. A third item is picked out, a clipboard with notes around ideas for the next staff professional development (PD), which includes bullets such as:

- We are all human beings.
- We have to look beyond color.
- Everyone is equal.
- All lives matter.
- Treat people with respect, especially students.
- Students who don’t respect each other face potential suspension or expulsion.

From these statements, we can make inferences around this person’s approach to PD. It’s a very colorblind approach where we all matter, race and color are not important, and human respect is the most important take away. When the facilitator asked, what new information can we gather, a female participant of color responded with, “lots of post-racial ideas and respectability politics…”11 (Gabriella), one of the facilitators then asks the participants to please hold on to what we speculated from interacting with the principal’s office and think about how these speculations may connect to the next activity. She posed the following questions: “What are some of the things we hear? What are the ways they may or may not be problematic?” This first

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11 Post-racial ideas refer to the idea that racism can’t be an issue or problem in our country since we had Barack Obama, a black president, sit at the highest level of power in our country.

12 Respectability politics refer to ways people of color should behave and act in order to be better received and treated by white people. This can be the ways that people of color talk, or walk, or how they do their hair, or decide to dress, all in order to access some ‘upward mobility’ despite their racial make-up (Harris, 2003).
brainstorming activity allows for the participants to be in a state of inquiry, forming questions, without answers that can help provide context in understanding the character we will soon meet.

**Exercise: Traveling Graffiti Wall**

In this exercise participants were asked to walk up to the different chart papers along the walls and answer the question: What might you say or do to challenge this perspective. All of the chart papers contained messages and perspectives the principal received growing up that may have made an impact. All of the message chosen by the facilitators are ones they, and I have heard many times and perhaps at some point had absorbed. I, for one believed in message number two below, and not until college understood how this mindset does not take into account systems that have made it especially difficult for certain communities to move up the capitalist ladder. The four messages read:

- “Why should my taxes pay for all those people in the benefits office line? They need to stop being lazy and get a job. Nobody should get a free ride.”
- “My parents were immigrants and worked their way up. We struggled, but we made it. If we can do it, anyone else can.”
- “The most qualified person should get the job. Period.”
- “It’s fine with me if foreigners want to come here to get a better life for themselves, that’s the American Dream. Just show your appreciation and learn English!”
Figure 10. Photographs of the Posters used in the Travelling Graffiti Wall Activity
In this poster dialoguing brainstorming session, many of the participants responded through inquiry, opening up the conversation to further understand the original comment by asking questions. On some of the posters there were additional facts provided that added nuance and complexity to the original statement such as, “our current economic model actually requires some percentage of the population to be on or under employed to function as intended” which was a response to the statement that read, “Why should my taxes pay for all those people in the benefits office line? They need to stop being lazy and get a job. Nobody should get a free ride.”

The Travelling Graffiti Wall gave participants an opportunity to rehearse their thinking and questioning by interacting with a statement and by reading all of their colleagues’ responses. This kind of activity may have created more possibilities in their brain bank for how to engage with the principal character since the principal may have internalized these messages. When you zoom in on the principal and learn more about them, and the possible dysconscious racist ideologies that have been absorbed, it informs the spectactor that this interaction with the student is more than just this interaction, but a sea of stories that have impacted the principal’s worldview and in turn how they address their students of color. In this particular case, the principal may have internalized a well-intentioned we’re all human, colorblind approach (all lives matter), a pull yourself up by your bootstraps approach, a people choose to be poor and miserable because they’re lazy kind-of-thinking, and if my family of immigrants were able to do it than anyone can perspective which negates the possibility of race, anti-blackness, language-access and class being other intersecting factors that may impact different immigrant families in their attempt to “financial success”.

The facilitators used Role on the office/desk and Travelling Graffiti Wall to get the participants to engage with the ideas/ideologies that the character is in dialogue with or perhaps
has adopted, before actually interacting with the character in a scene. Referring to travelling graffiti wall, a participant stated, “I thought this activity was useful because you had to respond in a calm way, you’re not like, “What the fuck is wrong with you?” You could make a point on paper, and think about what you want to say and see what other people had said.” (Amira, Transcription, February 29, 2016) This approach allowed the participants to engage with and confront the ideas that get upheld by institutions such as schooling and the media, as opposed to simply minimizing it to the individual level and it gave them opportunities to practice what they could say or ask to better understand the scenario at hand. I do think it’s important to highlight Amira’s use of “fuck”, a strong perhaps passionate word choice when sharing the usefulness of this activity because it emotes frustration and perhaps anger, real feelings, that do surface when some of these messages get said explicitly time and time again. And for Amira, an Arab Muslim femme woman, these messages could be part of the many microaggressions she has had to indulge, so that “fuck” is felt for her, and this activity created a space for her to name that strong feeling and process it through writing in community. Engaging with the travelling wall of messages, was a reminder that what is said by any individual, is larger than the individual and connected to dominant narratives that get absorbed. And so, from the brainstorming activities, that got us discussing the Principal’s office/desk, and the messages they grew up with, the facilitators transition to the scene where we meet the characters.

**Exercise: Simultaneous Dramaturgy**

So, all of this being like, ‘oh well I had time to think and respond,’ and then looking at each other’s responses, this is how we coalition build, this is how we brainstorm… Keeping in mind, as you were reading other people’s responses, what felt really useful to you, keep that in the back of your head. We’re going to go back into this person’s office but we’re gonna see a scene happen… The one actor who is the protagonist is going to be able to freeze the motion and step out and ask for some help. And you can offer things that can be said, it could be facts, it could be humor, it could be any of those strategies that feel like they could be useful to employ, you’re going to be able to give that advice
to this character and then she will step back in and play it out and see how that works for her.

(Facilitator Lisa, Transcription, February 29, 2016)

The scenario used was inspired by Joshua’s story (as mentioned above). In this scenario, the characters include the principal and a student who got in trouble with their peers for dirtying up the bathroom. In Joshua’s sharing the week prior, the principal used coded racist language and encouraged the student (him) to stop hanging out with “those kids”. The principal continually reminded the student (Joshua) of his potential and compared him to the lack of potential she saw in the other students. During the Simultaneous Dramaturgy activity, the group had the opportunity to offer suggestions to the student interacting with the principal in their office. They ran the scene once through:

Transcript of the scene:

Principal: Ready? Have a seat.
Okay, so I've heard that you were just in the bathroom earlier today, and there was a mess in the bathroom. Can you tell me a bit more about that?

Student: I was- I was playing with some friends at recess.

Principal: Can you just speak up a little bit?

Student: Okay.

Principal: Thank you.

Student: I was playing out at recess with my friends, and we were playing basketball, but it rained yesterday, so we just got kind of muddy. So I said that maybe we should just go clean up so that we didn't get in trouble and, so we tried to clean up, and then a teacher came in.

Principal: Okay, so tell me, so why were you coming inside with mud on your shoes?

Student: 'Cause it was raining.

Principal: Okay, so you know to clean yourself up before you get inside the school right?
Student: That's what I was trying to do.

Principal: Okay, so why did you create the mess then.

Student: I don't know.

Principal: You don't know?

Student: No.

Principal: You know what I think it is? I think these kids that you're hanging out with, I think it's that whole crew of people, you just need to lay low with them, you know. You don't need to hang out with them. It's causing a problem every time. Every time, Brisa, every time I see you some issue comes up and it's with the same group of people.

Student: But those are my friends, we've known each other since we were like, born.

Principal: Okay. So they were your friends, and I'm telling you, for you to get to the next level, for us to stop having this conversation, you need to stop hanging out with them, okay?

Student: I don't want to stop hanging out with them.

Principal: You don't want to stop hanging out with them.

Student: They're nice to me.

Principal: Okay, but this is what I'm trying to tell you, okay. I used to be like you. I grew up with those kinds of kids, you know, I didn't actually have a lot of money growing up, I'm just telling you. My parents came here, and they did their thing, but you see me, you know? In a suit and everything, my hair nice. That's what you gotta do. That's what you gotta do. And these kids you know, they've got their pants down, they're combing their hair, I'm telling you, every time I have to have the same conversation with them.

Student (quietly mumbles): I think the comb in their hair is cool.

Principal: I'm sorry?.. I'm sorry.

Student: Nothing.

Principal: Nothing? Listen, what I'm trying to tell you is that, you- I see a lot of potential in you okay, I do. And I'm having this conversation with you, just to be
honest with you okay, I care about you. I know that you wanna do well in school, I see that you- Yes. So, tell me. Tell me more about that. What do you want me to do when you finish school Where do you want to go.

Student: I want to be a scientist, I wanna work at mission control with NASA.

Principal: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay. I see you like a scientist. I do, but you know what? I need you to make sure that if you wanna keep your grades up, you've gotta stop getting into all this trouble, okay? Those friends, it's not gonna happen.

Student: But they want to be scientists too.

Principal: They don't look like scientists. I'm just being honest with you, okay. Now you, you have that look about you, you know. I was just like you, and I think that having that look, taking care of yourself, cleaning yourself up, making sure you've got pants up, you've got your hair nice. You have to look respectable, alright? Alright? Alright? So I just wanna make sure that we're on the same page here, okay? I don't wanna see any more trouble, any of this nonsense with those students, okay? I'm doing this 'cause I'm looking out for you, alright.

Student: Can I go now?

Principal: Okay.

Underlined in the text above I have pulled out some of the coded harmful language, such as “those kids” who “wear their pants down and have combs in their hair” referring to perhaps Black or Brown youth who have a certain style of dress being seen as the trouble makers when it is clear in the scene, that the lighter skinned student of color, was the one who led the group into the bathroom. The student admits it was their idea, and still the principal, who is also a person of color, accuses the other students to be the leaders of the trouble. It also becomes clear that the principal thinks the student “has potential” and can see them becoming a “scientist” but not the other students who are not at her level, when in fact the students asserts that the other students get better grades than her in class. For this twelve-year-old, the way the principal is “looking out for them” is to separate them from the other black students who happen to be her friends. While both characters in the scene are people of color, we have seen that the principal is practicing,
unintentional colorism and anti-blackness and believes in respectability politics. There is also a power dynamic in the scene that make it difficult for the students to really push the principal because they fear getting into further trouble. The spect-actors brought this tension up in the debrief and engaged in critical dialogue that made way for possible short term and rewind strategies. Rewind strategies, is the term I’m using when thinking about the possible ways one could have interrupted, or created waves, in the lives of the characters to minimize the harm in the first place. The education, the spaces, the strategies that would enable the principal to have a different worldview, one that is more affirming of the student and more self-reflective, and in the students’ case, a set of tools to help them with these sorts of circumstances.

Some advice the spect-actors gave the student during this exercise:

- “With the wrong people” → Spect-actors tell the student to ask: Why do you keep calling them the wrong people? If this meeting is about me why do you keep bringing them up? The principal responds, “You know why?” The student looks out to the audience and whispers, “I don’t know why.”

- “You have potential, you have a good look about you” → Spect-actors tell the student to say/ask: At the assembly, you told us to give respect to everybody how come you’re saying something different now. The principal responds, “I am. I’m teaching you about respect, they don’t come from places where they are taught about respect.”

- “those kinds of people” → Spect-actors tell the student to ask and say: What do you mean those? I don’t think that’s very nice. But, the student didn’t use this suggestion.

In the scenario, the principal’s well-intentioned coaching is embedded with the larger ideological narratives of, meritocracy, “My parents came here, and they did their thing, but you see me, you know? In a suit and everything, my hair’s nice. That's what you gotta do. That's what you gotta
do.” An ideology of meritocracy assumes that individual efforts are fairly awarded. And while people of color understand there is racism, “they tend to view it as an individual phenomenon, rooted in the attitudes of the “Archie Bunkers” of the world” (Tatum, 1992, p.6) versus understanding that racism is a “system of advantage” and disadvantage therefore challenging the ideas that rewards are based only on one’s merit and hard work. This belief in meritocracy doesn’t take into account the possible institutional manifestations of antiblackness, sexism, and other forms of oppression that play out making it difficult for certain people to attain wealth in this country. Also, the respectability politics the principal alludes to around how one should dress and behave, upholds whiteness as the standard of style, beauty, and comportment “I was just like you, and I think that having that look, taking care of yourself, cleaning yourself up, making sure you've got pants up, you've got your hair nice. You have to look respectable.” This ideology makes it so one has to look, talk and dress a certain way in order to be taken serious and seen as valued, as worthy (not only professional). Otherwise your intelligence and ability are doubted and questioned. Both of these ideological narratives being voiced by the principal is orienting young people to a way of seeing and interacting with others and themselves that can be damaging, like it was for Joshua and his friends, and perpetuates classism and anti-black racism which should be disrupted.

**Critical dialogue.** After we played the facilitators held a space for reflection and debrief. Participants shared their frustration around not knowing how to best support/advocate for the student. They left with many other questions and possibilities for truly solving the conflict at hand as opposed to creating a magical solution. Shayna says,
The big roadblock seems to be this big ageist perspective. I just don’t know how to give a child advice to an actual child, except for, “know who the grown up is that supports you.” That’s just where I’m stuck so I invite anyone to help me get unstuck.

Shayna poses a problem and invites the community to engage in a critical dialogue. Sharice responds with her experience working with middle schoolers and shares a strategy. She advises students to use trigger words with adults like “I feel uncomfortable or unsafe” so that adults can pause and think more carefully about their approach. Then another participant added, “like a know your rights training” for students when engaging administrators who don’t always have their best interest at heart. The group in unison responded with a “YES!” Then another participant shared another strategy that she uses with her students around writing down the details whenever something happens so that they have their account. Another participant questioned how to do that with students who may not have the literacy skills, and the participant recommended recording it, perhaps on their phone, or on a voicemail. Another strategy included, asking for an adult ally to sit in the meeting with the principal and act as an advocate. The sequence of this emergent dialogue in community made way for possible strategies to help support and advocate for students when in conversation with adults. As I mentioned in my theoretical framework, the use of critical performative pedagogy includes critical dialogue which creates new possibility, and different solutions to approach the problem being addressed through the theater.

While the conversation first started out with the strategies to support the youth in the scenarios, the conversation around the coded language used by the principal came later. One participant brought up the question: “Would a 12-year-old know that what she is saying is problematic versus thinking she’s just looking out for me? How will they know that what she is
saying is wrong and not okay to be said?” (Exact question from Transcription, February 29th, 2016) Lisa one of the facilitators then asked the groups to focus on that question: “What are some strategies that can be used when the racism is couched in vague coded language? And how do we begin to teach our youth to pick up on that problematic language?” The group then divided into smaller groups to engage in critical dialogue and come up with some possible strategies.

*Report back from the first group.*

Valerie: Uh, I'll guess I'll start with our group. So we wanted to know how to prepare a child or children to catch the things that were being said and insinuate the weight of what the person was insinuating. So I thought a couple of cool things was he (referring to John) suggested kind of brainstorming with the group, with the class and saying you know, the general phrases that you hear that can be racist, you know, those people, big hair, comb in hair, pants sagging, you know, that kind of stuff. And just break them down, and say, okay, well this is not appropriate to do this, this is racist to do this. Emphasizing the importance on, the importance of the person and not the appearance of course. And there was a few other ones. I know one of them was building relationships with students so that they have the confidence to either come back and share it with you, you know within eye line of someone they can trust. Or, each other.

Right, because they are so disrespectful to each other and the phrases come out of their mouths so quickly. Catching those moments and teaching them in a way, “what are you really saying here?” There was something else.
There's just so many. Oh, no no, the importance of giving them the confidence to ask questions, because she did not, she never really said anything clearly enough. And you could have asked questions if you had the confidence to not look stupid or feel wrong in asking questions. What do you mean by those people? I don't understand that they're smart and they get better grades than me, why are you still saying they're not good for me to hang around with? And I could be a scientist but they can't? You know, asking those questions in a respectful manner somehow gives children the confidence to be that bold, but also do it respectfully, which is tricky.

The first group brainstormed ways to support and educate youth on identifying the coded racist language when it’s being used or insinuated and then peeling the layers by asking questions in order to get to the larger systems and discourses. From the transcript, above, I have identified the strategies offered by the group (underlined). The first is to take commonly used phrases and to deconstruct them for the racism asking the students questions around what it really means? What it’s really saying? I imagine something like, asking youth to engage with some of the following questions:

- Who are those people? What do they look like? Are they all the same, are they black and brown?
- What’s wrong with sagging pants? What are they saying is the problem here?
- Do your clothes determine your intelligence or your level of respect? What is the problem if someone judges you and limits you of your potential based on how you appear?
If there is time spent engaging with youth around these commonly used phrases then they will have more of an awareness around when it comes up, what it means, and understanding why it may be problematic. The other strategy the participant Valerie and her group shared is the relationship building piece between teacher and student. If there is a relationship a student will feel safe to engage with the teacher about a possible problematic interaction, if there isn’t a relationship students will not go to the adult for support. The third strategy was intervention and modelling the unpacking of the coded language. Even when students talk to each other they say problematic things that may be perpetuating harm. So, the importance of a teacher/educator stopping students when they say something problematic, intervening, and then modeling the questioning, “what do you really mean when you say that?”. And the last strategy is just that, the questioning. The nurturing of questioning in a classroom, the fostering of a learning culture where inquiry is valued and encouraged. If educators are able to do this then students start to develop confidence in doing just that, questioning. Instead of shying away from it or being fearful so to not be seen as disrespectful or entitled and getting into further trouble. There was an opportunity for the student in the scenario to inquire deeper and ask the principal questions, such as “What do you mean by those people? I could be a scientist but they can't? Why?” Enabling students to ask questions “respectfully” is a great strategy, but if the relationships are not there with the adults, in this case being the principal, then perhaps the questions may lead the student into further trouble, and could put them a risk since there is a power dynamic. This is why there isn’t only one answer but varying possibilities and circumstances to consider when brainstorming strategies to support youth.

The strategies given by this first group are what I call rewind strategies, strategies that are to be practiced if we were to rewind the hands of time. The importance of building relationships
with students, deconstructing and making meaning of racist coded phrases, and developing questioning skills and confidence are all strategies that needed to be implemented before the moment of conflict for the student, therefore a sort of rewinding, a backwards design approach.

**Report back from the second group.**

Shayna: So we were talking about marginalized adults in variety of different ways that they might be marginalized, um, language barriers, education access, place in their life, like being in transitional housing, etc. And just, we're really just getting started. We should form a group to talk about this for hours and hours. But, some concerns were about making sure that we're not coming across as further disempowering or devaluing a person's opinion, even it's something that we find to be problematic. And so how to engage in a way that feels like there's a mutual peer thing happening dealing with these complications around education and language, etc. The two strategies that we just started to pick at is, like the two different scenarios of facilitating a group versus having a one on one.

In facilitating a group, the strategies are often broadening, asking broad questions and pulling in support from folks in the room that may have, you know, some understanding or conversation already around these issues if that exists. But there's a lot more to unpack, like what if there isn't.

And then in a one on one, it's understanding the difference between a real empathetic question versus a Socratic question, and that like if a Socratic has an agenda, then it may become a block to actually building relationship with that person, and actually coming to a point of shared understanding. That it's probably best to just move throughout this in actual empathy and asking, getting at what
they are actually trying to say that is causing them to use this language or this framing. If they have a problem they're trying to solve, how you can get involved in that in a way that moves away from racializing or otherwise using oppressive frameworks.

Amira: And ultimately, in a one on one, you want to contextualize what's framing that opinion. And like what's bringing them - at the same time, you don't want to invalidate their experience. Or...like be quick to shut them down so to speak. So, it's like how do you kind of walk that fine line, what is it that's brought you to think this way, and how can I like make you question your thinking.

The second group tackled the question, how to call in “marginalized adults” if and when they are using internalized coded racist language. From the transcript, above, I have identified the steps that were named. First they named the importance of setting the tone as a “mutual peer thing” versus “further disempowering or devaluing” their opinion, this means they first affirm the person. Then the approach is different if the call-in conversation is happening in a group setting or one on one. If in a group, the participants recommend inquiry as a great approach, “asking broad questions” to encourage discussion and then “pulling in support from folks in the room.” Instead of taking the ‘expert’ approach informing the “marginalized” individual being called-in that what they are saying is problematic. This is a completely different pedagogical approach and may cause the individual to get defensive or disengage. If the discussion is opened, and if one has the support of others in the room, I would recommend that the person holding the call-in conversations summarize and or close the conversation around why the coded phrase is harmful.
If the call-in conversation happens one-to-one, the participants in this group recommended an empathic approach, a question that builds and encourages lived truth of the person, such as, “tell me more about what you mean?” versus using a question that has a leading intention, like correcting or schooling them, because this then can create a block and could lose the opportunity of connection, and/or a deeper understanding for why the comment was said in the first place. From this point, then one can further the conversation and get to the issues at hand, without using “oppressive frameworks.” Amira adds that in the one to one approach, ideally the educator/instructor doing the calling-in gets an opportunity to understand and contextualize the problematic statement by hearing the stories of the student. The student then gets to sit with the call-in and question their thinking knowing that their truth was held and that the feedback was coming from an authentic relational way. This one-to-one approach allows the instructor to get to the different dysconscious messages the student may have internalized (like those up in the graffiti wall activity), which then gives the educator more information to work with when calling them in on the harm of the language used. In both the group and one-to-one approach the participants are advocating for a non-expert “mutual peer”, inquiry based, pedagogical approach to the calling in of a “marginalized adult” who is using coded racist language.

**Report back from the third group.** The third group, composed of three women of color, brainstormed around how to engage people of color who have internalized their own racial oppression and white supremacy and commit racial microaggressions, and/or use coded racist language.

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13 Racial Microaggressions are brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating verbal and non-verbal messages to people of color intentionally or unintentionally (Sue, & Constantine, 2007, p. 137).
Maria: We were just talking about, like, examples of how does this happen? and the challenge between saying like...when your students are people of color, they can't be racist, but they often perpetuate internalized racism. Where are they getting that from? I was thinking like how they have that in themselves...Our students are getting it from somewhere. And if they're kind of like dancing around, saying something offensive...bordering on racist, or bordering on perpetuating racism or anti-blackness. And if you confront them, then a lot of times they are like, I don't know what you're talking about. You're the one who's like turning this into something negative. I just meant something completely innocent and it's facetious and it's not true. And kind of just being at a loss for what to do at that point or how to deal with that situation most effectively.

Sharice: There's just a lot of frustration, because it's hard, there's so many things to - there's so many places where it's coming from that it's so hard to like pick a spot to like start, the process of fixing or more awareness or things, so there's a lot of frustration.

Gabriella, the facilitator jumps in: Which makes me think how do we make spaces for young people and adults alike to say what we believe about the world. I mean, if we look back at the, like, messages that were given, you know, to wrap this all up. Like the messages here, were the things that this character heard when she was younger. And sort of got her to where she was today. So, it makes me think, how do we make spaces for people to share what they believe and then sort of challenge those notions for whatever reason they call them out. Okay, why do you
believe that? Where did we hear it? Is it something that you see in your day to day life? It's like, I don't know, it feels like not an easy answer but how do you make spaces like that?

**Report back from the fourth group.** In this last group, there weren’t any strategies shared by the participants but a resonating frustration for how to really unpack all of the internalized oppression and anti-blackness our students of color breathe in on a daily basis, “it’s so hard to pick a spot to like start the process of fixing or more awareness” says Sharice and when you do try to address it with your students you are met with a “facetious” or “you’re turning this into something negative” response as mentioned by Maria. And perhaps this is why Gabriella as a facilitator jumps in to suggest a strategy. The facilitators serve as jokers (which I will address in the chapters to come), thinking carefully around the ways they can hold the space and push to realistic “non-magical” possibilities to address the harms that are expressed and felt, since Sharice seems to be suggesting that her group is overwhelmed with where to start, where to “pick a spot.” Gabriella mentions the creation of a space, or more spaces, to really share beliefs, worldviews, as a strategy, that way there is more of an understanding of the “smog” that is being breathed in and out. For an understanding of what is meant by “smog,”

Books, computer games, the Web, television - there are so many places that we can be exposed to stereotypes, that we can be exposed to distorted information. And there is a whole universe of information that we're not getting. Think about these stereotypes, these omissions, these distortions as a kind of environment that surrounds us, like smog in the air. We don't breathe it because we like it. We don't breathe it because we think it's good for us. We breathe it because it's the only air that's available…if we have all been breathing in smog, we can't help but have have our thinking shaped by it somehow. As a
consequence, we all have work to do. Whether you identify as a person of color, whether you identify as a white person, it doesn't matter. We all have been exposed to misinformation that we have to think critically about. (Tatum, 2002)

The creation of spaces, like our ItAG, and through the theater activities This then gives a clearer way to sort and challenge those notions. A space to then unpack the misinformation, and engage with questions like, “Why do you believe that? Where did we hear it?”, from there connecting the messages to larger institutional and ideological frameworks. While this is one approach Gabriella suggested, there are some other ways the facilitator/joker could have stepped into to support this group. The facilitator could have followed up with an affirmation and question, such as:

I hear your frustration, what does it look like to do this work with young people of color, especially when you’re confronted with sarcasm, and a dismissiveness? Maria, can you give us an example of something a student of color has said, where you have said something? (give participant the chance to respond) Great thanks, now turning it back to the whole group, first, what is the problem or the racism/anti-blackness/bias in the statement? Where do you think, the student is getting it from? Think about the institutions that have influenced this way of thinking/seeing? Okay, now, how would we engage with this student or the class in a conversation around it? What are some short-term strategies and long term strategies?

This approach would have allowed some collective brainstorming and critical dialogue to move the participants from frustration to possible action. It could have also answered the question around where the students are getting it from. I also hear in Group 3’s shareback, that there is more to unpack around the students who “can’t be racist” yet can perpetuate racial
discrimination, and the question “where are they getting that from?” I wonder if in this question there is disappointment on behalf of Maria that the students of color don’t get it, and perhaps they should as they are the victims of racial oppression. But they are getting it-- the racism, the anti-blackness, the white standards of beauty-- from the smog, since they too are breathing it in. Leonardo writes “many of them (people of color) are just as confused as whites when it comes to an organic understanding of racism. Many people of color have shown their inability to perform crucial analyses of the causes of their own oppression.” (2004, p.265) So then, how do we, the educators, create opportunities, like the space Gabriella suggests, to further unpack the problematic statements our students of color sometimes regurgitate, in order to have them learn to analyze their own circumstances.

Lisa, one of the other facilitators gives an example of how to connect the racist coded messages to larger institutional and ideological frameworks. She tells us about a conversation she was having with another white person about Jimmy Kimmel’s response to Oscars so White, which was him “perpetuating all of these stereotypes in a really horrible way”, and then the white person she was speaking with said, "Oh well these stereotypes of black people are true. They're everywhere and they perpetuate them." And Lisa responded by connecting it to larger historical institutional narrative and says,

actually, who controls the image of black people as buffoons comes from Jim Crow and it's called this, and you can go look it up and the dude's name, the character was called Jim Crow and he was a buffoon controlled by white people to portray that stereotype which now has iterations for the last sixty, seventy years. So, just giving like a quick, you think that because of this moment in time where this one white person made a decision to create this thing that then has had a tremendous effect, in my mind really helps.
In this example, Lisa doesn’t provide the space for inquiry as much as provides an example to connect the statement to larger narratives, “you think that because of this moment in time where this one white person made a decision to create this thing” referring to buffoons and Jim Crow. Lisa is modelling to the participants how to make more visible the smog an individual has breathed when they are saying something that is harmful. Perhaps there could have been more space to first explore with authentic inquiry around the smog to then make the connections, such as “Can you explain what you mean? Do you think the way the black people are portrayed in the media is an accurate representation of Black people?” that way you have a better sense of what the individual has come to understand, and then come in to shed light on the larger issue at hand like Jim Crow and buffoonery to break the oppressive patterns of racism and white supremacy in the media the way that Lisa shared with us.

While the last group was overwhelmed with where to start with “strategizing” to disrupt the smog of antiblackness, facilitators Gabriella and Lisa made way with strategies, maybe not where to start, but possibilities. Lisa demonstrates how to take a problematic racist statement and connect the dots to the larger institutionalized and historical racist narratives, as a way for others to do the same if the space is not available. And, Gabriella advocates for the creation of spaces like our ItAG. She acknowledges that the creation of these spaces, like the one they/we were in, is not easy, but ends with the question how can we create/make these spaces to engage in communal inquiry and to arrive at newer understandings around the way that our language, approach, is tied up in larger frameworks and what we can do together to disrupt and resist the smog in order to make space for newer ways of being and breathing cleaner air?
A Space to Connect the Dots

“We went from investigating a space, to talking about how to talk about ideas, to seeing a scene, and then debriefing and then processing that, and it was so just so rich in such a short amount of time. That was my favorite…a lot of AHA’s.”

-Shayna, Exit Interview Transcript, March 24th, 2016

This intentional time together, the space to connect the dots, analyze and brainstorm strategies gave way to new possibility, strategies, action if you will. What would happen if we were to make the time to create these spaces, value them, as suggested and supported by the facilitators and participants of this ItAG? Would we then see less and less scenarios like the one the facilitators played out, or like the one Joshua shared with the group because these messages would be interrupted? As educators, how can we turn our classrooms and advisories into spaces where we can take the coded racist messages disguised in the media, in cartoons, in books, in films, or that our students regurgitate, and in community analyze them, deconstruct them and then connect it to larger macro institutions and ideologies?

The analytical practice of connecting the interpersonal conflict or statement to the institutional and ideological frameworks (the connecting of the dots), that happened using theater techniques like Role on the Desk and Travelling Graffiti Wall, in sessions three and four, must happen first in order to clear a way through the smog and attempt solutions. In all three groups, the strategy that surfaced was the importance of creating the space whether with youth, or with “marginalized adults” to analyze and question the coded racist language or conflict or ideological narratives being enacted by people, and the importance of having facilitators (teachers) assist in the making of critical bifocal connections. Understanding the smog, connecting the dots between the individual and the institutional/ideological, this practice, could possibly reduce the harm and oppression that could be unintentionally reproduced through the solutions posed, if not analyzed through this “connecting the dots” lens first. These brainstorming sessions prepared the spect-
actors for the dialogue and action they would rehearse in sessions five and six through forum theater.
CHAPTER 7

LEFT WITH THE THIRST: PLAYING OUT THE POSSIBILITIES

“Forum theater is built on the premise that there is no single and simple solution to conflict, but a gamut of perspectives and possible solutions.”
(Cahnmann-Taylor and Souto-Manning, 2010, p.95)

**What is Forum Theater?**

In sessions five and six, the spect-actors were introduced to Augusto Boal’s Forum Theater technique. Boal used Forum Theater in the 70s to work through oppression and look for alternative possibilities with rural workers in Latin America. This theater form starts with a central character, the protagonist, who is experiencing an oppression, which they are unable to overcome. As part of this technique, a facilitator, known as the joker, enables the conversation between the players on stage and the spect-actors (audience members). The selected scene is played out once, there is conversation, suggestions, ideas facilitated by the joker and then it’s played out a second round where audience members can step forward and replace a character to prompt a different outcome, and/or a new character can be introduced played by a spect-actor from the audience. This is when the thoughts of the spect-actors get acted out. The protagonist remains in play improvising their responses to the new characters who are in scene. This approach engages the audience, breaks the “theater wall”, which keeps the action on the stage separate from the experience and interpretation of audience members. It allows for the rehearsal of different strategies to engage the oppression with the goal to try to get at the root of the oppression and think through what it would mean to achieve change through action. In the book Teachers Act Up! (2010) Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor and Mariana Souto-Manning include a graphic that captures the flow Forum theater that I have described above:

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14 See Glossary of Terms.
Figure 11. Critical Theater of the Oppressed Model, retrieved from Cahnmann-Taylor, Wooten, Souto-Manning, & Dice, (2009)

Not seen in this image is the 5th step which is Action, “In this last phase, there is a collective and individual plotting of action, both on the individual and on the societal levels” (p.95).

Maria’s Story

In the ItAG session five, the facilitators introduced the participants to Maria’s story, detailed below. The facilitators chose this story because it connected very much to the stories
participants had previously brought into the ItAG space, both in their upbringing, as well as in the stories shared about their educational work places.

Characters

- Maria
  17 years old. Lives at home with mother and father, younger brother, Theo, and little sister Rosa. She is about to graduate from high school. Hopes to go to college. She would be the first in her family to do so. Her ambition is to be a social worker or community worker of some kind. She wants to “be useful”, to “give back”. Mrs. Sanchez, her school counselor has encouraged her to apply to Purley, a small prestigious school upstate (8 hours driving distance).
- Vincent, Father
  45. Works construction. Family and tradition are very important to him.
- Lucia, Mother
  43. Works in a midtown store. Loves her children but can be controlling. Has intermittent health issues and is often very tired.
- Theo, Brother
- Rosa, Sister
- Kelly, Best Friend
  Maria’s best friend. Also hoping to go to college.
- Mrs. Sanchez, School Counselor
  Very supportive of Maria. She encouraged her ambition and helped her develop her confidence and potential. She has helped her with college applications.

Scene 1

Maria and Kelly, excited and nervous about their college applications. They are hoping to go to Purley together.

Scene 2

Maria and Mrs. Sanchez. Mrs. Sanchez has heard, unofficially, that Purley will offer Maria a place. She can expect notification any day. She may even have a scholarship. She should certainly apply. In the meantime, her parents should submit the FAFSA forms for
financial aid. She offers to meet them to explain everything if that will be helpful.

Scene 3

At home. Mother and father come in from work. Rosa is playing and Theo in his room. The business of getting supper ready is underway. Maria tries and eventually manages to tell her parents the news. Their first response is one of surprise. It seems they underestimated their daughter. Mom does congratulate her but is unhappy about how far from home Purley is. Rosa picks this up. She doesn’t want Maria to leave home. Dad agrees. He asks what it all means: he is worried about the expense. Maria explains about FAFSA, and the scholarship opportunity. He says he is unsure about all this. He needs to consider costs and wants to make sure Theo will be able to go to college next year. “It’s more important for a man to have the proper education. He’ll need to be the wage earner when he marries.” Theo walks in on this. There is an ‘atmosphere’ and he doesn’t know what to make of it.

Scene 4

Maria meets Kelly. Kelly seems ‘down’ but denies anything is wrong. When Kelly asks, she says she has not heard anything about college. “Fingers crossed—for us both” says Kelly. Maria agrees.

Scene 5

At home, after supper. The official college offer has now come in but dad tells Maria he has thought it over and she can’t go. He just can’t afford it. He doesn’t want loans hanging over him. If anyone is to go to go out to college it will have to be Theo. Also, Maria is needed at home to help out, especially with Rosa. (Rosa is pleased by this suggestion.) And if Maria took a job, mom could go part-time and get more rest. Theo
begins to say he is not sure he wants to go to college, but dad silences him. He leaves the room with Rosa. Mom is quiet. Dad goes out. Mom asks Maria to help her clean up. She does. They work in silence.

Scene 6

Mother and Maria meet with Mrs. Sanchez. Mother thanks her for all she has done but explains that Maria got a little carried away and did not think carefully about what she really wanted. Maria will speak for herself. Slowly, Maria explains that she didn’t think about what leaving home would mean. She now realizes she wouldn’t be happy. Mrs. Sanchez is surprised and concerned. She says she thinks it’s a great shame and a waste of Maria’s potential, but beyond that she can’t find a way to argue with them-it is not her decision. Mom comments that perhaps in the future Maria can apply to a local community college.

Scene 7

The next day at school. Kelly has just heard that she has a place at Purley. She is excited and wants to hear Maria’s news. Has she heard yet? Will they be going together? Maria says they won’t. She has changed her mind and has decided not to go to college. Kelly can hardly believe her ears but when she challenges Maria, Maria gets angry: “What’s so special about college? It’s a waste of time and money.”

Prior to playing with the Forum scene, facilitators introduced the technique of forum to the spectators and had them discuss in small groups their awareness/knowledge with this particular technique. The facilitators then broke themselves into three different groups to support each group in playing out scene 6 from Maria’s story. In the 6th (last) session, the facilitators would ask one of the three groups to volunteer to do a whole group forum theater but before this
happened, participants caught some of their absent colleagues up to speed around Forum theater. In one of these discussions, Amira says,

I think also, in acting out all this conflict, this doesn’t mean there is a certain solution to it, so like, which can be a little frustrating. So, it’s not necessarily about like having the expectation to find a solution, but rather to like, to play out…

Then another participant interrupts and chimes in, “to inquire” and then Marissa one of the facilitator adds, “to complicate”. This “playing out”, the asking questions and imagining possibilities are the gems of critical performative pedagogy. Forum Theater, is yet another Theatre of the Oppressed technique that is less about finding the “right” and “only” solution, but instead to probe, “play out”, practice, and discuss the many possibilities for understanding the scene and trying to achieve liberation for the characters in the scenario. Forum Theater is not just about the playing on stage, but the critical dialogue that accompanies the playing out of possibilities. Boal writes,

I believe it is more important to achieve a good debate than a good solution, because, in my view, the thing which incites spect-actors into entering the game is the discussion and not the solution which may or may not be found… Debate, the conflict of ideas, dialects, argument and counter-argument – all this stimulates, arouses, enriches, prepares the spect-actor for action in real life. (Boal, 2002, p.259)

There is not a “cheating” magical solution, and it is the Joker’s (the facilitator’s) role to push spect-actors to find more active solutions (Boal, 2002, p.262). Not reaching a solution, and being left in inquiry and conflict, could be especially frustrating for someone who is passionate about fixing the wrongs of society, I myself at times have shared in this frustration. However, it could also be revelatory, because it allows for a broader frame of reflection one that is more informed,
that requires relationships, time and perhaps necessitates many approaches, and involves many characters.

![Figure 12. Photograph of the participants in the Forum Theater practice](image)

The group that performed the forum scene included Maria, played by Emma (a white woman), and her mom, played by Gabriella (a light skinned Latina woman), and Mrs. Sanchez played by Lila (a white woman). Please note that while Maria the character is played by a white woman she did not playout stereotypical features of Latinx youth. This is important to note because sometimes in replaying the scenarios in the portraying of a character who is a person of color, they may run the risk of performing racial stereotypes. In this case, it would have been to “appear” Latina, perhaps mimicking a Rosie Perez accent, a possible “rolling of the eyes” attitude, and other stereotypic behaviors. But the participants did not do this. They played a young girl without over exaggerating stereotypes connected to her racial identity and spect-actors new the racial identities of the characters.

Transcript of the scene:

Mrs. Sanchez: Welcome, it's so great to see you!
Mom: Nice to meet you.

Mrs. Sanchez: I'm so glad you got your mom in. Um, we’ve just been talking a lot about school and I know Maria is so excited, and so am I, about this amazing opportunity that she has

Mom: Yes, thank you so much for having us. I first want to say thank you for all the help that you've been offering Maria in terms of getting together her applications, and all those sorts of things. I did want to say before we move any further that I think that our little Maria here, maybe, might have gotten ahead of herself, and maybe got a little too ambitious for the circumstances that we're currently in. It's just not possible for Maria to go away with the things that are going on with the family right now, and she recognizes that it's really important for her to be able to help out at home, it's something that's really necessary at this time. We are thinking about getting her into college, but I just think that it's not the wisest decision for it to be as far away as it is. I think that we might need your help down the line if we start thinking about local community colleges.

Maria: Yeah. I thought about it more, and I just think that I wouldn't be happy being so far away from my family. So, I'm just going to stay close to my family.

Mrs. Sanchez: I must say, I'm a little surprised, I think we were expecting to talk about financial aid and this amazing opportunity that you have in front of you that you worked so hard for.

Mom: Right, I think she's recognized that priorities are a little different than I think maybe she considered.

Mrs. Sanchez: I definitely understand it's really important she supports the family. And being such a bright student and knowing that she wants to support you all in the future, I just have to say it's kind of a waste of her potential.

Mom: We think that she's doing just fine, and thank you for your thoughts, but this is the decision that we've made.

Mrs. Sanchez: Okay.

Mom: Thank you so much.

Mrs. Sanchez: Thank you, take care. Good seeing you.

**Reflections Post Round 1 Forum Scene**

Spect-actors are asked to share noticings and reactions from first round of the forum scene:
• Maria, the student, doesn’t talk at all. “She’s very minimally present.” The adults do all the talking.

• Mom is using “we” a lot around the decisions made leading audience and counselor to think that the decision was made in conversation with her daughter, a joint decision.

Matt plays the joker and asks the spect-actors if there is anything that Mrs. Sanchez could have done to push back a little bit to support Maria. Audience members respond:

• Ask more questions

• Ask Maria more about her thought process, since they had last spoken.

Matt: What kind of language should she use?

Audience member responds with:

• The last time we talked about this… I’m curious to hear from you …

Matt: How would you feel about taking over Mrs. Sanchez and stepping in… Prompting Jackie to step in as the new Mrs. Sanchez.

Colleague steps in.

Participants clap it up.

The Joker, in this case Matt, is the facilitator, or the “difficultator” as Boal put it. The role of the Joker in this theater technique is to facilitate “the interactions and re-enactments that will take place” (Cahnmann-Taylor and Souto-Manning, 2010, p.42) and to engage the spect-actors in questions and dialogue. This enables a collective analysis of the oppression. The joker prompts the spect-actors around the ways we can address the harm in the scenario avoiding the magical solution. The Joker should also ask questions that bring into conversation the ways in which systemic oppression find their way into the scene, so that the interpersonal scenario that is being played out is not occurring in a vacuum, but very much part of a society where there are
oppressive ideologies at play. When opening up the conversation to the spect-actors, members are encouraged to bring in their schema, and make meaning of the scene in order for critical dialogue to happen. I will talk this through a little bit below.

Replay Forum Scene Round 2

![Figure 13. Photograph of the participants in the Forum Theater practice, Round 2.](image)

All: 3, 2, 1, action.

Mrs. Sanchez: Hi, thanks so much for coming in.

Mom: Thanks for having us. I don't want to take up too much of your time, but I want to let you know that we've been talking a little bit about Maria's future and I think that we've decided that maybe she got a little in over her head about these plans for going away to college. I don't think that she really considered how much it was going to cost, not just financially but in terms of what the family's going to be missing out on not having her presence. It's just not something that we can sort of be thinking about at this time. But we are thinking about local community colleges, we're still excited about Maria getting her education, it just can't be so far away right now.

Maria: Yeah, I thought about it more, and I just think that being so far away from my family wouldn't be helping. So I think I'm just going to stay closer.

Mrs. Sanchez: Okay. Thank you again so much for coming in. You've already done so much work, not even just this year, Maria, but over the past few years, and already
starting filling out some of the forms. So just talk through a little bit more of what your thought process has been since the last time that we talked. I hear you very much that you want to stay close to your family.

Mom: I'll let you know some of the things that we've been talking about. So, I'm not sure if Maria has clued you in on this, but I'm only able to work part-time because I am currently ill, and there's a lot of responsibility. We've got Maria, and she's got two siblings at home. We don't necessarily have that sort of money, me and my husband who works full-time, but he's not even making enough for us. We definitely need someone who can help me out, so I think that that was sort of a factor. I'm sure to what extent Maria, you shared with Mrs. Sanchez what was going on. It's just, it's difficult.

Mrs. Sanchez: Okay, I hear you. So it's not the cost of going to school ... We could get a full ride, but rather the financial loss at home.

Mom: Yes.

Mrs. Sanchez: Gotcha. I think that's pretty legit ... (Looks out to the spect-actors)

In this replay of the scene, the new counselor, whose racial identity is also white and therefore makes visible a different aspect of systemic racial oppression, poses a question to Maria, “talk through a little bit more of what your thought process has been…” which opens up the way for Lucia, Maria’s mother, to explain in more detail why they made the decision to not allow Maria to attend her first-choice college which happens to be far from her home city of New York instead she would go to community college in the city. Maria’s mom explains that she is ill, and only works part time, has two little ones that Maria helps take care of, and her husband works all the time. It’s less about the money and more about the support and help Maria provides. The counselor at this point, breaks character, looks to the audience and says, “I think that’s pretty legit.” Everyone laughs, perhaps because of the way she broke character as it was clear that to continue would be too difficult and perhaps against her ethical understanding of the situation. When Matt, who played the joker, asked Jackie who stepped in as Mrs. Sanchez how it felt to play her she mentioned, “Having a mother and a child saying there’s a lot going on at home that’s hard. I wouldn’t want to really push on that and respect that it’s not really my
business.” (Transcript, 3.14.16) Lucia, Maria’s mother, shared all of the real struggles their family is dealing with, something Mrs. Sanchez cannot fix as a school social worker, so how can she push further and encourage Lucia to change her mind and let Maria go to her college of choice? This highlights a moral conflict for Mrs. Sanchez, the social worker, and perhaps Jackie, the participant, playing the character. Although her role is to advocate for Maria’s going to college, she cannot do that knowing that there are real structural dilemmas her mother is dealing with. We transition into holding a debrief discussion of the scene. These discussions are essential in any use of Applied Theater or Theatre of the Oppressed techniques. The dialogue is what makes way for collective analysis, new understanding and possibility.

Critical Dialogue

It is “through dialogue, reflecting together on what we know and don’t know, (that) we can then act critically to transform reality” (Shor & Freire, 1987, p.99). In the following excerpts below, I will lift up how participants shared the knowing (step 1), the questions (step 2) and the possible imagination (step 3) to denounce the present or the tension at play in the scenario.

Joker: Alright, thanks. Give it up one more time. (Everyone claps) Did anybody in the audience notice anything this second time around that they didn't the first? Or anything that was different that you wanted to speak to? What about Maria or Mom?

Joshua: I didn't see the first time (came late), but what I noticed from this was that you really allowed them to speak through what was going on. Because you had to go pretty deep into everything that was going on, so you couldn't really brush it off. You had to really spell it out, in a way, which I think would've been useful for you all as well. Say, for example, something came up that you thought you
could've switched; you really spelled it out though, so you were allowed that time to not just say she can't do it, but you gave your full situation, which was good.

Shayna: I just gotta say that it's making me think about the limits of a compartmentalized system. That her job as a counselor is to support the student, not the family. Is there a world at school in which she could be like, "Oh, here's a job resource for you and medical care so your kid can go to school!"

Lila: I also think that, it depends on if we're counselors or college counselors, because our role in our school is different. My role in this school is to support the whole family, so I would go through a whole family plan process and be like, "Does this make sense? Does it not? Could she transfer? Why? What do you need? What does your family need? Do you want to bring the husband in? Let's talk about it, right?

But I think that if you're a college counselor it's stamp, vote, yes, no. So I think it depends on what kind of resources we're able to offer. Also, if you're just a college counselor ... not just, but if that's your role, then mom is coming in with "I have information to deliver," versus, "I'm here to engage in a process with you about what's possible." I feel like that really shuts the doors almost like, "Please let me say more!"

Jackie: Yeah, especially that they never met before. At all...because even to introduce this idea of resources, it's past the point when they're coming in and having this conversation in a lot of ways.

Shayna explains her frustration with how compartmentalized our society is. She says, “the counselor’s job is to support the student and not the family.” Shayna is identifying a
problem (step 1), then asks, is there a job, a world where we could support the whole family in a school setting? (step 2) She asks this question because part of what she envisions as a possible solution is one that addresses the needs of Maria’s mother, Lucia, who is stressed with work, the care of two small children and a health issue. These are things society should help with so that Maria could in fact access college without the fear or concern of leaving her family to struggle without her. The question Shayna poses gets away from the magical solution and makes way for more discussion and collective brainstorming (step 3), it also sheds light on the complexity of family decisions. It is too simple and reductive to fault Lucia, Maria’s mother, for Maria’s inability to access this college opportunity. To say Lucia doesn’t care about her daughter’s success, or she is perhaps selfish, is an un-informed judgment detached from the ills of society that impact and inform Lucia’s reasoning as well as the outcome of structural discriminatory policies.

Part of Shayna’s question is also highlighting the need for our school counselors to take a more holistic approach to guidance. Another participant, Ariana, added to the conversation and mentioned the differences between a college counselor and a counselor. She argues that a counselor’s approach is different than a college counselor, because it’s more of a holistic approach, a process that involves the whole family. However, this approach requires resources and time, something that most counselors don’t have when they are responsible for a caseload of 300 students in some cases. The ratio of counselors to students in our country is significant. In the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA)’s State-By-State Student-to-Counselor Report the national average ratio is 482 students to 1 counselor; New York State’s average is 635 students to 1 counselor and the recommended ratio is to maintain a 250:1 ratio. Only three states have that
average as of 2015: New Hampshire, Vermont and Wyoming. This lack of attention from our
government to the added significance and success that counselors can provide our youth and
their families, of course without the unsurmountable caseloads, is a failure to our public-school
youth. If schools are meant to be extensions of their communities (Dewey, 1902), then schools
must bring in more critical race conscious counselors who are supported in partnering up with
other community social service organizations to provide their families with the resources they
need. Although Lila’s comment was not meant as a direct response/solution to the problem posed
by Shayna, she is offering a possible solution that could help Maria in this situation. Perhaps
even college decisions should engage a process with the whole family, and should not be limited
to just a college counselor, because a decision like college often does depend on the social
conditions of the family. Perhaps it is a joint process, where the college counselor and the
counselor work together, with time, and informed planning. The compartmentalized system is
still in place, but if teachers and counselors are to work within this system, how can they create
processes in the meantime that support the whole family. This is an example of the critical
dialogue creating possibility, imagining a different reality for Maria, or the other Maria’s out
there.

As the discussion continued, Lisa, the facilitator adds what she in her group did the week
before, making visible the iterative process of critical dialogues and the role of race. She
mentioned that the mother or the counselor can be the protagonist in this particular scenario. Lisa
says,

I want to throw out that last week in my group, we tried it both ways with agreeing that
we would take on the counselor as the protagonist, but we also played it where the
mother is the protagonist. Because that also felt ... Like sort of more relevant to the group
of folks that were working, and that was really rich too, and I think that that should be clear that this particular scenario is a little problematic in that I feel like it's sort of ... I felt reading it, like I was meant to believe that the protagonist is going to be the college counselor. Whereas, what if you have a room of people who are like, "I'm tired of educated white people bullying me into telling me what I should eat and what I should, and “how I should run my family” and all this other shit? You're not my family. Yeah, and how do we fight against that? And it looks way different. And I felt like, it's nice there's ambiguities in the scene where ... I was kinda watching from Gabriella’s (who played the mother) perspective and wanted to like come in as a mother and be like, "Hey, I appreciate you wanting to help my daughter, but how fucking dare you decide to put all these ideas into her head without having any understanding of what her family is going through, and now you have really upset her. And you should have had me involved, and, why didn't you? What made you think that you could do that? You could play this a lot of different ways depending on…”

The counselor, Mrs. Sanchez, whose racial identity we do not know although can be assumed due to her last name, has been played by white women participants, which pushes us to discuss the following possibilities. It now becomes a scenario where she, a white woman, knows what is best for this young student of color and which can then lead the mother, a Latina woman, feeling like, “I’m tired of educated white people bullying me and telling me what I should eat…” as Lisa stated above. This angle is “way different” than if it were a woman of color counseling Maria and her family. It is different because it is a manifestation of interpersonal racism and perhaps the internalization of superiority on behalf of the white counselor. Lisa in her reflection discusses that playing the counselor as the protagonist “felt more relevant to the group of folks” she was
working with, a large majority of women of color who perhaps were hit with a choque when engaging with this scene, that was perhaps too familiar to them, the normed belief that white people know best. Their group’s approach, was to name this, and then try out a different forum to resist that narrative. Lisa, models what this could sound like if she were to take on the role of Maria’s mother, “Hey, I appreciate you wanting to help my daughter. But how fucking dare you decide to put all of these ideas in her head without having any understanding of what her family is going through. And now you have really upset her. And you should have had me involved, and, why didn’t you?” This interpretation brings forward the racialized discourse of the white savior complex (WSC) and cultural superiority that many white educators may hold when working with poor black and brown children. This narrative, WSC, was coined by Nigerian-American novelist Teju Cole in response to a popular video on YouTube “Kony 2012.” This White Savior complex “reduces the historical complexities of present realities to a sort of white rescue mission that becomes legitimated by its appropriation of social justice language” (Anderson, 2013, p.39). Many teachers have internalized this messaging of the good white teacher who will save the students of color from failing (Aronson, 2017; Matias, 2016b; Vera & Gordan, 2003b). This white savior complex is filled with deficit thinking assumptions of communities of color that perpetuates a cultural superiority of white people. In this scenario, the social worker, played by white women both times, is acting as if she is there to save Maria and assumes what she knows as true, to be best for this family, therefore dismissing the reality of Maria’s family, a family of color, and telling Maria what’s best for her disregarding her mother’s request. “In this case, this white female teacher (social worker) seemingly assumes that her student is not cared for because the ways in which her values explicate care and responsibility do not align with her students” and in this case, her student’s family, “and therefore must intervene,
which in turn allows for her to reap the emotional benefits and feel-good effects of white saviorism.” (Aronson, 2017, p.48) How would her response differ in engaging with Maria and her family, if the counselor was aware of racism as a systemic oppression, and “the hegemonic project of whiteness that allows for white privilege to exist to an understanding of a project of white supremacy” (Aronson, 2017, p.52) and her participation in it as a white woman? How could she pull from that understanding, name it and openly reflect on her whiteness and privilege in this interaction? And how could this reflection then impact her approach to Maria and her family? In order to break from this white savior complex white educators need to understand their own participation in the “broader understanding of white supremacy and its role in institutions such as schools” (Aronson, 2017, p. 52; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). Some of the possible things Maria could say and do:

- First apologizing, “I’m sorry Maria, I assumed what was best for you and your family. I did not trust you and your family, and my good intentions got the best of me. I realize that I may have fallen into the white woman counselor who thinks they know what’s best for my students of color, and that I’m here to try to save you from your reality, and that’s not fair on you and your family, and I need to do some work to check my assumptions and biases. Again, I apologize.

- Then follow up and ask, “How can I support you Maria and your family in your next steps so you can achieve your post-secondary goals?”

How does this analysis shift if the counselor were to be a woman of color? Then the racial analysis can bring us to questions around class privilege and/or internalized white supremacy. People of color may share racial oppression but may still perpetuate/experience colorism and
reproduce ideas of meritocracy blindsiding the lived experiences of people of color in more disparate circumstances. Sometimes this manifests as,

- A social worker of color who has internalized that families of color don’t care about their children’s education or
- Don’t actually think their families are ‘capable’ of knowing what’s best for their children due to their assumptions of “educational or intellectual ability”

We did not discuss this question in the session, but it was one that came up for me as a participant observer. I am not sure if it was not further discussed because Gabriella jumps in after Lisa’s reflection to highlight the complexity of the scenario, and asks the group to reflect on the forum model and Matt’s role as joker therefore pushing the conversation along, and unintentionally shutting down further exploration to Lisa’s point. Or perhaps it didn’t happen because no one had this question arise for them, or it did arise for them but they did not have the courage to bring it into the space, or because the conversation went in another direction. There may not be a single answer to this question, but I raise it for further consideration and exploration. The point is that critical dialogue demands nuanced understandings of race and racism, the intersections of class and how it is manifested in this scenario between Maria, her mother and Mrs. Sanchez.

As the discussion continued, Joshua, brought into question the roles of Theo (Maria’s brother) and her father.

Joshua: Well, the other thing that is not discussed in that scene, the college counselor doesn't do, is they don't necessarily come up with an actual action plan. What it ends with is, perhaps in the future she comes by a local community college, which leaves her totally in this nebulous place and if you already have a family in which
like the father is more concerned about the son getting an education, then like, where is ... And the college counselor doesn't necessarily know that either, that that's really the place it's coming from. Yeah, and so like that's something that she doesn't know that she could investigate or something, but, if it's left in that way of like ... She's not gonna do anything and that's it. Regardless of if she wants to go to college or not, it's problematic 'cause there's really no further steps of like, what's gonna happen now? And like, what does Maria's future actually look like? They didn't really discuss that.

He mentioned there is no action plan for Maria, she’s left hanging, and that there is no way the counselor could find out that the father is more concerned with having Theo go to college instead of Maria, especially if Maria does not know this and the mom does not offer up this information. Joshua suggests that the preference of Theo going to college is the critical, and the main reason this scene with Maria exists in the first place, and hints to the left unanswered question: how is this sexism absorbed, reflected and addressed in the family? In another forum opportunity, we could further explore the intersectionality of gender and race, and the ways patriarchy and sexism impact Maria’s access to college. With more time, the Joker could push the spect-actors to think about other key players who are not in this scene with questions like:

- In listening to Lucia (Maria’s mom) talk about their family hardships to Mrs. Sanchez, what could the internal monologue of Maria be?
- Who are the players that are not in the room but are impacting this decision, how would they respond if they were in the scene?
  - “I just want dad there” says Lila
• What are the larger structural issues impacting this moment, how? What scenes and which characters would we need to incorporate in order to help address Maria’s situation?

The responses to these questions could help facilitate a longer forum theater play that would help achieve different outcomes for Maria and would lead to conversations around the possible shifts that would need to happen in our society in order to support a student like Maria and her family. And Gabriella highlights how Joshua’s question around Maria’s father actually shows us the various steps it would take to actually overcome Maria’s circumstance. She says,

What does it actually take to actually overcome some of these oppressions, it's like to flip the table and make something completely new… it becomes way more clear how complicated it is to flip the table. 'Cause what is flipping the table look like in this situation with the father or with the mother? …How do we evaluate what's at stake here and what Maria actually wants and what she's willing to sacrifice or compromise?

Flipping the table, overcoming the multifaceted oppression of racism, sexism, patriarchy, poverty, ableism all at work in the scenario is larger than the characters in the scene, yet we must approach the scenario by engaging with the characters in that moment. The Critical discussion allows the spect-actors to assess the scenario beyond the moment at play, and to question and strategize around the many possible questions that are unanswered but impact the scenario. Both the mother and counselor can go at each other, and can be named the “oppressor”, as well as the father from behind the scenes, but the real question is whether Maria goes to college, says Gabriella:

The circumstances surrounding her are the things that are stopping Maria from going.

That said, oftentimes you think about the oppressor as like the evil person who is just
100% solely evil and all they have is they have no good bone in their body, they're just evil, evil, evil. And what I think this does is that it complicates that, and it says like actually, there are real circumstances that are encouraging this mother to sort of make the decisions she's making, and they are to the detriment of Maria to a certain extent, but they are to the benefit of the family.

It is this kind of scenario that highlights how complicated oppression is and our understanding of it. Gabriella reminds us, that often times we think about the oppressor as “evil”, an individual who is intentional in their harm, and while there may in fact be actions of hate enacted by an individual, the acting out of scenarios accompanied by critical discussions, complicates the understanding of the interpersonal conflict and makes way for understanding of larger systemic oppressions woven into each interaction. The characters are all navigating oppression and acting under specific conditions of oppression, so the real question becomes how do we disrupt and dismantle these internalized ideological frameworks through our interpersonal interactions. This technique, this performative pedagogy and practice help us see clearer the relationship between Maria’s family to larger systemic hurdles and can serve as inspiration to avoid and disrupt future Maria scenarios,

If I’m Maria, a Maria character, watching this I can imagine it giving me ideas about my own situation even if my mother would never come to talk to my counselor. I think this imaginative practice is useful. (Shayna, 3.14.16)

The body-mind practice of acting your thoughts and then discussing the possibilities in community is praxis. In the playing and discussing of these forum scenes we did not come out with concrete next steps, we left with further questions that could help us imagine various strategies. Boal in an interview with Democracy Now when asked to explain forum theater said,
…everyone can say stop and jump on the scene and try a solution or an alternative and then we discuss that alternative and then a second or third, as many as people are there. So, what we want is to develop the capacity of people to create, to use their intelligence, to use their sensibility, because we live in a society which is very imperative, who says all of the time: Do this, go that way, dress this way, eat that. And we don’t want the orders, we don’t want the imperative mood. We want the subjunctive theater, in which we say, how would it be if it were like that? Then we ask, we bring questions. We don’t bring certitudes, but the questions. The doubts are the seeds of certitudes. Then some certitude comes out. But it is from everyone. Everyone has the right to speak their word and to act their thoughts, not only to talk about, but to act their thoughts. (Boal, Democracy Now interview, 2005)

Forum theater, the Jokering, the discussion between the actors and the spect-actors is a practice that brings forward the many approaches to an oppressive circumstance and does not provide a quick fix. It is the questions that provide some certitude and possible next steps.

It was forum theater that culminated the six-week session, and the realness of struggling to find solutions for Maria’s scenario is part of what made the experience of the participants deep, because they were left with no easy answer. It is the ability to ideate (idea+create) through our bodies, discuss possibilities in community while avoiding the magical solutions, and still walk away from a scenario with further unanswered questions that left participants with a thirst to do further work. To continue to search for the answers that will dismantle the oppressions forbidding Maria, and the future Maria’s from accessing higher education. “I walked out of every single class being like, wow. I’ve thought about something, I’ve gone deeper with

\(^{15}\text{Brown, 2017.}\)
something, I need to check myself on something, I need to think about what the impact of this is." (Lila, Exit Interview, March 28, 2016) The intentional design of investigation of who we are, as individuals in our bodies, in relationship to the larger systems, connecting the micro interaction to the macro internalized narratives, and making space to practice our ideas through our bodies accompanied by critical dialogue and communal knowledge production is what made this six-week journey deep and powerful. “I think Theatre of the Oppressed and applied theater, and understanding your own context, and your own experiences; I think it's huge. It’s so powerful…Because it, especially for folks who aren't academically inclined, it cuts through a lot of that bullshit" (Matt’s exit interview, March 21, 2016). It gets straight to our feelings, to our stories, and to our experiences.
CHAPTER 8

BACK TO VALUING TIME: A PRACTICE

“[T]he collective practice of these performance techniques can become a rehearsal for real dialogue and social action in teachers’ lives.”

(Cahnmann-Taylor, M. and Souto-Manning, M., 2010)

“Art is long and time is short”

– Benjamin Franklin’s riff on Ars Longa, vita brevis

One main takeaway that resonated for all of us involved in this study, me as a participant observer, the facilitators, and the participants was that there wasn’t enough time. Six weeks was not enough, the two-hour sessions were not enough, two hours of prep time for the facilitators before the sessions was never enough. I remember the feeling of wanting to spend more time digging deeper at the end of many sessions. There wasn’t enough time to really understand the practice of Forum Theater in its entirety, there wasn’t enough time to discuss the racial dynamics at play in a scenario and there wasn’t a concrete action plan at the close of a session, we were left with the thirst. In my experience as someone who facilitates spaces using Theatre of the Oppressed and Applied Theater techniques is that this feeling is common. There never seems to be enough time because this is an ongoing practice that requires time, so time will always be a limitation. We are having to fit this critical performative pedagogy, this way of being, thinking, analyzing into structured time, a classroom, a workshop, a conference. This practice is about a process, one that continues after the workshop, or in this case, after the ItAG has ended.

Sometimes the end of a session can cause tension because we have internalized a system of production, of concrete clear takeaways, wanting an approach, a solution, a clear set of next steps, which is so counterintuitive to the creative process. We have learned, from schooling and the current educational landscape, that outcomes are more important than process. However, the beauty of this practice is that the process itself is the outcome, which is what makes it deep. This
practice pushes against the idea of a uniform, singular, “right” solution or approach to a conflict/oppression. What seems to stick with participants are the unanswered questions, the feelings and analysis of those feelings that arise in the playing, or the processes of engaging in the collaborative critical dialogue or the one or two strategies that get offered for possible action in a collective brainstorming activity; but ultimately it is the yearning to engage further and continue the analysis, it is the deeper, generative, iterative thinking that this practice has to offer to the field of education.

While there never seems to be enough time, and it becomes clear that this is a practice, a pedagogy, there is still a process of planning, thinking and responsibility that must be carefully constructed and thought through. Because there is never enough time, it is all the more imperative that planning, thinking and ethical considerations must be attended to (not listed in any particular order):

- Establishing a mindfulness within the time allotted, and how to scaffold the play, the critical dialogue and intention of the work.
- Sessions always start with a “getting in our bodies” play
- There is always a mini-lesson that introduces the theater technique and the issue/tension being discussed through that chosen technique.
- There is always the practice with the technique, which is followed with/by a debrief discussion that usually creates opportunity for critical dialogue which includes a problem(s), collective thinking through, and strategizing with different possible action steps which sometimes get tried out through theater play.16

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16 In practicing, different applied theater or theater of the oppressed exercises we use the term play interchangeably with practice. To play with and in our bodies.
• Space for processing real time feelings that come up for participants in the moment. Because we live in a racist, sexist, ableist, classist, hetero-normative society and facilitators must be mindful around the ways they, meaning racism, sexism, ableism, etc., get expressed in our playing.

• And we must make space for folks to share their identities, for us to read signs of identities which can also be misread, and engage in honest and sometimes challenging discussions. And because of time…

• We must be mindful of the ways we close out a session. How do we not stay in the moment of the “re-embodying” of trauma, but push through that to get to visioning play that gets us to engage with the “ideal”, the ways we can achieve a more equitable and liberated reality.

• Lastly, our journey towards this change must resist magical thinking and solutions. And could encompass a community of actors/players, many approaches/strategies to disrupt the interpersonal manifestation of a systemic oppression which includes engaging in difficult and brave conversations. The sitting with a realm of possible questions and approaches could be used to dismantle the systemic oppression responsible for the interpersonal conflict at play.
CHAPTER 9

AN EPILOGUE: TIME TO ACT IN TEACHER EDUCATION

“Any approach committed to human liberation must seriously address the body as a site for both oppression and liberation”

– Shapiro, 2005, p.18

Through the research and analysis, I came to the understanding that the use of critical performative pedagogy, in particular the use of Theatre of the Oppressed and applied theater techniques, provide a deeper embodied reflective experience for the participants leaving them with a practice, as well as practical tools, to further unravel the workings of oppression and their individual interactions with the systems at work. While this was a 6-week commitment, participants walked away with a life-long practice, one that engages the body in knowing, centers stories, relationships and human to human connection, applies the lens of critical bifocality, investigates and strategizes through collective critical dialogue and makes room for possibility and a thirst for continued learning. We have seen through this study, a deeper practice for educators to reflect, unpack, and disrupt racism in schools requires an intentional space where participants are taken through an arc of depthness (please refer to figure 5, pg. 58). A practice that includes an opportunity for individuals to engage with their own stories in their bodies through the use of theater as a mechanism for reflection. The connection of the dots from micro practice to structural conditions, the development of the critical bifocal, two-in-oneness lens, both through critical dialogue and play. And lastly, the time to try out different possibilities in forum theater and explore possible action steps sometimes being left without closure and a thirst. This process, this practice, is not a prescriptive one as it will look different in different hands, with different facilitators and participants. A critical performative pedagogical approach is one that is responsive to the needs and the stories that are being shared in the space by the
participants. However, from my findings with this Inquiry to Action Group, it may be worthwhile to consider the outlined ethical considerations above, and the arc of depthness as a guide when designing your deep-er practice.

Currently, the teaching and learning that happens in classrooms and in teacher preparation programs “is neither engaged nor presented as a historical and collective process, occurring in the flesh and its sensual capacities for experiencing and responding to the world” (Darder, 2009, p.218). We do not engage the body enough in the production of knowledge. Creating spaces for critical performative pedagogy and the use of applied theater and Theatre of the Oppressed techniques to be part of Teacher Education programs as one approach to teaching and learning is one starting point. It can be a practice used across the curriculum in teacher education and could also be used by teachers in classrooms across disciplinary areas as well as incorporated in other educational spaces like advisories.

However, I must acknowledge the tension of my suggestion to engage in this practice with the reality of schooling and teacher education programs as these currently exist. In schools, high stakes standardized tests make it difficult for teachers to create space for this kind of creative learning process. Often teachers are required to use mandated curriculum that teaches to the test. We also know that teachers in schools are having to navigate the classroom, the planning, the testing, the unrecognized emotional labor of working with young people and their families, the department meetings and professional development meetings which aren’t always useful or helpful, so when and how do these spaces get created to integrate this kind of performative pedagogy? Many Teacher Education Programs are inundated having to prep their students to pass the edTPA\(^\text{17}\), finding school placements for their students’ practicum experience.

\(^{17}\) edTPA is a performance-based, subject-specific assessment and support system used by teacher preparation programs throughout the United States.
and meeting CAEP standards themselves. Only if a faculty member is knowledgeable and practiced in performative pedagogy will it be introduced in a said core class: theories of education, foundations, educational policy, curriculum development, or the one ‘diversity’ class. So, while this is the current reality of teacher education programs and schools across the country, we can and should imagine and create intentional spaces in the school systems and/or curriculum for this practice to live. The introduction of critical performative pedagogy is about the radical imagining and possibility that exists within the confinements of neoliberalist racist school practices and policies. It is a deep-er pedagogical approach to learning, that helps educators in understanding the structural oppressions that impact the educational sphere, and furthermore in understanding our roles as educators in interrupting them.

Many scholars of critical pedagogy, have written and argued for the use of our bodies as a medium for learning, especially in the field of education, and I will add my name to this body of pedagogues. What I offer with this dissertation, is a way for teacher education programs, alternative educator preparation programs, faculty and teachers in classrooms, to find the way, create the space to implement and take serious critical performative pedagogy as an approach, a practice, that can prepare teachers and educators more deeply around race and racism in order to create more liberatory classrooms for students across the educational landscape.
CHAPTER 11

A REFLEXIVE PROVOCATION

After writing this dissertation it became clear to me that I was privileging Joshua’s voice throughout this process, and it was important to reflect on the ways I perhaps subconsciously was listening attentively to his voice and participation in the Inquiry to Action Group because of his unique positionality. Joshua, self-identified as a Latino Male and because that’s “not part of the census, then Black.” (Joshua, Exit Interview, March 21, 2016) He was the only man of color in the group, and this is important to name because this ItAG was largely contextualized by the larger New York City educational landscape which is highly racialized and gendered. In New York City we don’t have many educators of color, and even fewer men of color. According to the NYC Men Teach Initiative currently men of color make up 8% of the 76,000 NYC public school teachers and only 2% nationally.18 As the only male of color who participated in the ItAG perhaps his voice, reflections and experience were important to highlight and affirm as an attempt to make visible this institutional dilemma.

18 NYC Men Teach: Mission retrieved from https://nycmenteach.org/our-mission/
CHAPTER 10

IN PRAXIS: AN INVITATION TO TRANSFER THIS PRACTICE TO A SCHOOL

Setting: A brick building. Safety agents on the steps welcoming in students who are checking their phones and wearing their airpods while rocking their heads back and forth to music. The halls are flooded with high school students some keeping to themselves, others speaking their languages to one another. Teachers, walking with clipboards and books in their hands, telling students to take their hats off, touching the shoulders of some reminding them to turn in their homework, and suddenly the bell rings. Students say bye to their friends with kisses, and hugs, and some give each other daps. Some students run, some walk cool, calm and collected, while others dance into their classrooms. The dean and principal step out into the hall to make sure all students have cleared the halls. Teachers close their classroom doors, instruction begins.

We know that schools are busy and that there is a lot we need to change but I would like you to imagine with me what it would look like to really take this practice, critical performative pedagogy and the arc of depthness, into our schools. This would require a team of people on the ground to prioritize this at their school, while also performing the daily undertakings. A possible plan would look as follows:

- **Step 1**: At the start of the year teachers and staff would engage in a 3-hr Professional Development (PD) where they explore the practice of Theatre of the Oppressed and applied theater techniques. The objective of this first session would be to have the adults practice using their bodies, flexing this muscle and start to take risks by de-mechanizing their socially conditioned bodies.

- **Step 2**: Setting the Stage: A team made up of teachers and school leaders, will facilitate a yearlong practice where the community studies the ISMs using their bodies. In the first Monday afterschool PD, this team introduces themselves and this approach to their community and develop a set of community agreements so to encourage a space of radical openness. During this session participants also prioritize 3 of the ISMs to discuss over the course of the year in PDs. The list of
ISMs to choose from include: Racism and Colorism, Sexism and Genderism, Ableism, Ageism and Adultism, Classism, Heterosexism, Nativism/Xenophobia, Colonialism, and Sizeism

Step 3: For each PD, staff receives an article about the Ism being discussed and the team follows the arc of depthness, which begins with,

- Our stories and our bodies: After reading the article assigned, each participant reflects on the way they have experienced or benefitted from this system of oppression, then using their bodies they create and image with two colleagues which is shared, discussed and the process debriefed.

- The following week practice connecting the dots: Participants in groups reflect on the ways this ISM has been seen/portrayed in institutions: media, or policies and their implications. This session uses texts, and is mostly analytical.

- And the following weeks of PD transition into the possibilities and action: Participants connect the ISM in study to the ways they see it manifest at their school and write up scenarios. Once the scenarios are written/discussed, participants practice acting them out and collectively forum the scene, practicing new actions/ideas/possibilities to disrupt the ISM. In closing and as a community, participants commit to one actionable step to disrupt this ISM at their institution.

After each arc cycle where an ISM gets embodied and dialogued, participants go back to themselves reflect on new learnings, and/or questions they have from having engaged this practice and share these reflections in community with their
colleagues. This arc is repeated for each prioritized ISM the teachers identified at the beginning of the year.

Once this practice is piloted by teachers, the school can consider bringing a similar practice to their students in advisory/or homeroom.

A school that can hold the work must prioritize, make time for it, and see it as a continual practice, not just a one-time activity. Similar to the way we think of restorative justice, it’s a practice of doing circles. This would be a practice to use our stories and bodies in the teaching and learning especially when engaging with systems of oppressions. If a school embedded this practice we would see these possible snapshots: students creating tableaux to answer a do-now question in a science class; Administrators would be prompting teachers to pause and hot seat a difficult interaction with a student (refer to Appendix E for Hot Seat activity); and/or during a student group counseling or advising session students would be using forum theater to come to the different possible solutions to a conflict. These are just some of the ways I can envision a school that has started to use the body as a medium for learning. It would require a mind shift, a pedagogical shift, a re-thinking of teaching and learning to one that includes the body, welcomes conversations about the isms and their relationship, and finally, embraces a deep-er practice.
## APPENDIX A: Facilitator and Participant Pseudonyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Pseudonym</strong></th>
<th><strong>Thumbnail sketch</strong></th>
<th><strong>Gender identity</strong></th>
<th><strong>Age</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jade (Facilitator)</td>
<td>Sri Lankan American who was born and raised in Staten Island, NY and is a Community School Director in an NYC high school</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa (Facilitator)</td>
<td>I am a queer, white radical feminist theatre artist yogi seeker.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriella (Facilitator)</td>
<td>Chicana; Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>A young questioning colombiana-nueva yorker artist, organizer and educator</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>Jewish, white, organizer, lover of theater of the oppressed, from Chicago</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amira</td>
<td>Muslimah, femme, lefty, Arab, 2nd generation</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristin</td>
<td>I identify as a white woman with a disability/disabilites. I am a teacher, a New Yorker and an American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>I am a white, cis-gendered educator, writer, and full spectrum doula who facilitates creative writing workshops for middle grades, always trying to ensure I do so through an anti-racist, intersectional feminist lens</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>white, male, heterosexual</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reina</td>
<td>Afro-Caribbean Woman</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shayna</td>
<td>Black, Queer, Femme</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>I am a Black: Puerto Rican, Bermudian, African-American cis-hetero woman</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toya</td>
<td>Black Hispanic, She, Her</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharice</td>
<td>I’m a Black-Queer-Femme-Faerie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valerie</td>
<td>Hispanic, I am a female of color, born and raised in Brooklyn</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erica</td>
<td>I am a black woman, an artist, literacy and literature lover and a mom</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lila</td>
<td>white</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B: Pre-Survey for Participants

1. Name (Participant will be given a pseudonym)
2. Home Address
3. Email Address
4. Job Title
5. School/Company/Organization
6. Age
7. Have you participated in an ItAG before? If so, which one?
8. Please provide a thumbnail sketch of important pieces of your identity. (How do you self-identify?)
9. Why are you interested in participating in this ItAG?
10. Have you previously participated in any anti-racist training or workshops? If yes, can you tell us about your experience?
APPENDIX C: Post Survey/Exit Interview for Participants

1. Name

2. How would you describe your experience with this ItAG? Why?

3. What is something you would say to a person who is interested in taking this ItAG next year?

4. Please provide an example of a time during the ItAG that you felt surprised and explain why.

5. Please provide an example of a time when they you felt uncomfortable and explain why.

6. Lastly, please provide an example of something that happened or that was said that they will carry forward in your teaching and/or classroom.

Post Survey for Facilitators

1. Name

2. Job Position

3. School/Company/Organization

4. Age

5. How would you identify yourself?

6. Why did you decide to facilitate this ItAG?

7. Was this your first time facilitating an ItAG?

8. Was this your first time facilitating a workshop on Racism and/or Theatre of the Oppressed?

9. How would you describe your experience with this ItAG? Why?

10. Please provide a thumbnail sketch of important pieces of your identity. (How do you self-identify?)
APPENDIX D: Planned ItAG Agendas

NYCoRE ItAG Agenda for Day #1
Monday, Feb. 1st, 2016

Physical warm up (10 min) 6:45-6:55
Bombs and Shields

Introduction 6:55-7:30
• Identities web- (2 min per person?) 30 min.
  Present web of identities you hold and why you are here (facilitators and Natalia included)
• Space logistics: (5 min.)
  Bathrooms, snack sign up, students coming in to check their lockers, Natalia’s role in the room (camera, presence)

Community Agreements (15 min) 7:30-7:45

X,Y axis human barometer (20 min) 7:45-8:05
1. How well versed are you in issues of race and racism?
   How comfortable are you dialoging about race? Reflect
2. How violent/nonviolent is a microaggression?
   How likely are you to speak up if you witness a microaggression that is not aimed at you? Reflect
3. What is your relationship to privilege? Reflect
4. How much does race impact me --- very much not at all negatively/positively?

Group commonalities 8:05-8:30
a. Group yourself according to something you have in common (2xs) (5 min) 8:05-8:10
b) Reflect (5 min) 8:10-8:15
   What came up for you? What are you noticing?
   What made you choose where to go first and/or second?
c) Present a tableau about what it is to have this thing (5 min) 8:15-8:20
   share back simultaneously
d) Add sound and gesture (5 min) 8:20-8:25
e) Sequence them (5 min) 8:25-8:30
f) Share back (5 min) 8:30-8:35

Reflection (10 min) 8:35-8:45
Review survey data/ look it over and reflect

NYCoRE ItAG Agenda for Day #2
Monday, Feb. 8th, 2016
Group discussion 6:45-6:55 (10 min total)
- Who wants to be point person for NYCoRE conference?
- View & reflect on survey data about ItAG participants
  - What do we notice?
  - How can it inform what we do together in the next five weeks?

Warm-Ups 6:55-7:10 (15 min total)

i. Line Races: 6:55-7:00 (5 min)
- Goal: physical warm-up + energizer
  (try to be the group that finishes first. when in order, all put your hands in the air)
- In two groups: line up according to …
  - how many times per week you post to social media
  - how long your commute is
  - how late you go to bed
  - how many articles you read in a day

ii. Group Commonalities 7:00-7:10 (10 min)
   a. Group yourself according to something you have in common (2xs) (5 min)
      i.e., Fav. movies? Something about your identity or who you are; try to group yourselves
      also without discussing anything
   b) Reflect (5 min)
      What came up for you? What are you noticing?
      What made you choose where to go first and/or second?

Journaling 7:10-7:20 (10 min total)
- Brainstorm stories of racism manifested (witnessed or experienced directly)
- Pick one and write about it
- stories will be shared (take care of yourself)

Concentric circles 7:20-7:26 (6 min total)
Make and inner and outer circle (3 min each)
Tell your story to your partner. switch.

Retell Stories 7:26-7:32 (6 min total)
- Refine stories to get at the heart of the matter
- rotate in circles
- retell
- receive feedback from your listener: 3 sensory details that are key to the story
- choose three images (in your body or your imagination)

Story circles 7:32-8:02 - (25 min)
Take turns telling stories in groups of 3 or 4
For each: direct 3 images or simultaneous dramaturgy to accompany your story when you share
it back to the larger group.

Sharing of stories 8:02-8:32 (30 min)
Participants will share back each of their stories from their groups.

**Reflection 8:32-8:45 (~15 min)**
- Write & reflect on chart paper throughout the room
  - What was the experience like telling your story?
  - What was it like embodying/and witnessing stories?
  - What themes were present?

Looking ahead, continue readings & we will identify forms to further theatricalize your stories. If you don’t want to workshop your story any further, pls tell one of us after session.

**NYCoRE ItAG Agenda for Day #3**
**Monday, Feb. 22nd, 2016**

**Group discussion 6:45-7:00pm (15 min total)**
- Debrief on last session / Review reflections from chart paper
- Address the use of oppressive language
  - What is theatre’s role/relationship to the representation of oppressive words?
  - How do we keep people safe?
- Intro to the session goals - discuss session outline for day & moving forward

**Bombs & Shields 7:00-7:05 (5 min total)**
- Participants will anonymously and randomly choose one person that is the person that is the “bomb,” and one person that they will “protect.” The facilitator will then ask everyone to walk around the room, shielding themselves between the “bomb” and the “protector.” The objective is for each participant to move around the space attempting to stay as close as possible to their selected protector and as far away from their “bomb.”

**Scenario: Learning Theatre in Education (T.I.E.) techniques 7:05-7:45 (40 min total)**
- Influenced by Jill’s story - we will read aloud the scenario and discuss the techniques together as one large group
- Then, we will break into groups of 4
- A facilitator will be in each of the groups and model / introduce the framework
- Break it down: What did we just do? How did we do what we just did? How would you set up environment prior to getting into drama?
- Rehearse (figure out audience)
  - Several people try on different roles
  - Between each round, discuss ways to problematize the drama from each role you might play

**Sharebacks: 7:45-8:40 (45 min total)**
- Share back how each group has engaged in “hot seating” and “mantle of the expert”
- Reflection after each team presents

8:40pm-8:45pm: NyCore Conference Chat
NYCoRE ItAG Agenda for Day #4
Monday, Feb. 29th, 2016

Materials: tape, book, iPad, chart paper, markers

Announcements: (6:45-6:55) (Gabriella – Lisa supports)
  • Registered?
  • Kristin invited to share her story from this week
  • Participants will receive:
    • a resource for activities/instructions
    • visuals (performance recordings)
    • Notes (minutes) of each session

Outline today’s plan:
  • scenario inspired by Joshua’s story
  • new conventions: role on the desk/ sim. dramaturgy
  • You will be the participant and have an experience but be wearing two hats- participant/facilitator --> we’ll reflect afterward

Warm up: (6:55-7:00) Jade
Demechanizing the brain/brain invasion

1: Roll on the desk/ in the office (20 min) (7:00-7:20) Lisa
  • Book “Gangs and Society” with a post it recommendation
  • a picture of a family (Jade)
  • shitty article about education on an iPad (Lisa and Jade)
  • an inspirational poster: pull yourself up by your bootstraps/
    one race, human race (Gabriella)
    • “all lives matter?”

2: Traveling Graffiti wall (20 min) (7:20-7:40) Jade
Chart papers with messages/perspectives she received growing up that have made an impact.
What might you say or do to challenge this perspective?
messages:
“Why should my taxes pay for all those people in the benefits office line? They need to stop being lazy and get a job. Nobody should get a free ride.”

“My parents were immigrants and worked their way up. We struggled, but we made it. If we can do it, anyone else can.”

“The most qualified person should get the job. Period.”

“It’s fine with me if foreigners want to come here to get a better life for themselves, that’s the American Dream. Just show your appreciation and learn English!”

3: Scene --> Sim. Dramaturgy (7:40- 8:10) (Lisa)
Joshua enters the principal’s office, not knowing why she’s there. The principal gives context to the reasons why this character has been summoned.

“I’m not worried about you. You are a good kid, your grades are strong, Your [sic] reputation precedes you. Getting nearer to college you have to think about how you want to be seen. You don’t want to be just another latina working in a kitchen. There are no hand outs. [sic] You have to work hard. Do you want to you’re better than that. you deserve more.

Joshua breaks fourth wall to ask audience what she should say. The principal is always helping me out, I don’t want to disrespect her.

(take advice, problematize)

**Reflect** (8:10- 8:45) (Gabriella)
Give out handout of the conventions

NYCoRE ItAG Agenda for Day #5
Monday, Mar. 1st, 2016

**Forum**

Materials: appliance assignments; definitions of nationality: the status of belonging to a nation ethnicity: the fact or state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition.

race: a specious system of classification developed by Europeans for the purpose of classifying and separating groups of people into a social hierarchy, which gives advantage to those of European decent.

**Procedure:**

**reflection debrief: 6:45-7:05 (20 min)**
reading the anonymous survey results aloud.

**Warm up** that get us into groups (7:05-7:10)
the appliance game! dishwashing machine, blender, iron

**check in: 7:10-7:15**
name, racial and ethnic identity

**Go Bananas 7:15- 7:16 (1 min)**

**Intro forum 7:15- 7:25 (10 min)**

- Intro to Forum theatre: origins, uses, guidelines of traditional form + how we’ll be using that form in this session (ie. only sub out the protagonist, not the antagonist; instead of 4 scenes, just focusing on scene 2: moment of conflict b/t pro and antagonist)
- Group read entire scenario (5 min)
- Break out into the groups determined from the warm up, + fold in latecomers

**Breakout groups forum (7:25-8:00)**

- Talk about the story that would be distilled it into an image.
- Identify protagonist
- Create forum scene
- Rehearse scene plus spect-actor interventions

Traditional forum model (for reference)
scene 1 image: show protagonist in a moment of success
scene 2 image: moment of conflict b/t pro and antagonist
scene 3 image: opportunity for ally intervention
scene 4 image: moment of defeat

**Share back (8:00-8:20)**

**Reflect: (8:20-8:30)**
Delve deeper into forum scene OR talk to group about best use of last session (8:30-8:45)

NYCoRE ItAG Agenda for Day #6
Monday, March 7th, 2016

Final session!!

**Warm up** (10 min) 6:45-6:55

**Debrief/ overview** (5 min) (6:55-7:00)
We will share back the scenes we worked on last week, with the audience as spect-actors.

**Forum** (30 min) 7:00- 7:30
Gabriella’s group shares their forum
General group acts as spect-actors

**Whole group Discussion** 15 min (7:30- 7:45)
Questions, issues that came up for you either last week or during today’s participation

**Break out groups discussion and work time** (35 min) 7:45- 8:20
I. Action planning
- Explore/discuss "actions" our group can take

- Check in with conference group about impulses on what they want to do

**Come together** (20 min) 8:20 - 8:40
Final all- group meeting.
Share action plans.
General reflection.

**Close out** (5 min) 8:40-8:45
APPENDIX E: NYCoRE ItAG Time to Act Activity List

### Identity Web (Session 1)
- **Goal:** Written activity to have participants reflect on their own identities and relationships with privilege & oppression
- **Instructions:**
  - Participants will write their own “identity web” on a paper that consists of all the ways they identify themselves.
  - They will then share something about their identity & rotate a couple of times to share something new about themselves.
  - This can be done in a large group, groups, and/or pairs.

### Human Barometer (Session 1)
- **Goal:** Physical activity to gauge participants’ feelings, understandings of, and/or relationship with a particular set of questions, topics, and/or issues.
- **Instructions:**
  - Ask participants to stand in the middle of room.
  - Explain that the room represents and X (horizontal) & Y (vertical) axis. Facilitators ask participants to walk across the spectrum of the horizontal axis according to their relationship with the question, i.e., “how much are you impacted by race? left side of horizontal axis - not at all; right side - definitely; position yourself across the spectrum according to the side you’re closest to (or not at all - participants can stand in middle if they are unsure).
  - To add another layer, you can ask participants to walk across the vertical axis in relation to the first question, i.e., “in relation to how much race impacts you, how comfortable are you dialoguing on issues of race & racism? move up if you are very comfortable, stay in the middle if you’re not so sure, move back if you are not so comfortable, etc.

### Tableaux & Image Theatre (Sessions 1 & 2)
- **Goal:** Frozen images, i.e., having participants freeze still to represent an idea, topic, issue, etc. Participants can freeze by themselves, in pairs, groups, etc. to represent a collective idea.
- **Instructions:**
  - Ask participants to “freeze” into an image that represents the way they perceive an issue they’ve heard of, seen, experienced, etc.
  - You can also ask the participants to “dynamize” by asking them to add movement and/or sound to their image(s).
  - Because there are many different types of image theatre, you can learn about more techniques [here](#).

### Line-Up Races (Session 2)
- **Goal:** Serves as a good physical warm-up/energize and community-building activity
- **Instructions:**
  - In two groups: line up according to questions you’d like to pose to the group. For our ItAG, we explored:
• how many times per week you post to social media
• how long your commute is
• how late you go to bed
• how many articles you read in a day

• Try to be the group that finishes first. When in order, all put your hands in the air

Group Commonalities (Session 2)
• Goal: Serves as a good physical warm-up/energizer & community-building activity, also for reflection on similarities & differences, what draws people to and from each other
• Instructions:
  o Group yourself according to something you have in common
    • Options: Facilitator can give prompts, or ask group to give prompts for each other, or ask people to move into groups silently, without talking about or indicating what brought them together, only to discuss after
  o Ask groups to reflect on what brought them together, or what they might have prioritized about themselves to bring them into the first group over the second
• You can find variants of this activity here and here (can be done w/o writing).

Concentric circles (Session 2)
• Goal: Serves as a good listening activity and opportunity to start story-sharing
• Instructions:
  • Make an inner and outer circle
  • Start with each person in the inner circle telling a 1-5 min. story to person facing them on the outer circle. The person listening does not say anything throughout - they simply listen.
  • After stories are shared/time is up, facilitator can either give time for the person listening to share their reaction in words, a frozen image, sounds, or all of it.
  • Facilitator then asks outer story to share, and inner circle to share reactions once done. You can learn more about it here.

Story-sharing circles (Session 2)
• Goal: To share a story or aspect of a story relating to a particular issue/topic; practice empathy & listening skills
• Instructions:
  o Redistribute participants into groups
  o Ask each person to share story about themselves relating to issue. Facilitator can be present to provide a time limit, or ask group to be conscious of time
  o Each person tells their story until everyone has gone and then they reflect
  o Facilitator can then ask group to pick a story / set of stories / themes from the stories to create images, skits, sounds, movements, etc. to represent their discussion
  o You can learn more about it here

Bombs & Shields (Session 3)
• Goal: To examine participant interaction in initial stages of community-building. This is a good physical warm-up/energizer & group-building activity.
• Instructions:
• Participants will anonymously and randomly choose one person that is the person that is the “bomb,” and one person that is their shield. The facilitator will then ask everyone to walk around the room, asking each participant to keep themselves between their “bomb” and their “shield. The participants should stay as close as possible to their selected “shield” and as far away from their “bomb.”
• This is a good initial activity to examine why some participants may choose others for particular roles; if there are certain participants who were chosen by many to represent a particular role; to reflect on the hectiness of moving around in the midst of getting to know new people in the room.

Theatre in Education (Session 3)
• **Goal:** To examine an issue that a group is facing, i.e., in a school, and role-play different characters (i.e., people involved in a particular situation) to explore various perspectives on the issue.
• **Hot Seat**
  o This convention, widely used in Theatre in Education, offers the group the opportunity to question a character from the drama while they remain in role.
  o The group can be framed to operate in a role relationship to the character e.g. social workers, police officers etc., or they may instead be themselves. Questioning of this kind requires the actor playing the character to make informed decisions about the character’s background, attitudes, values and history.
• **Mantle of the Expert**
  o Normally utilized within a Teacher-in-Role facilitated drama. The major feature of this convention is that students are inducted into role as characters with specialist and specialized knowledge relevant to the central dilemma of a drama. In its purest form, mantle of the expert requires an approach to teaching and learning that is holistic and therefore cross-curricular, endowing students with expertise.
• **Things to Keep in Mind**
  o Consider how you might set your audience up & frame what you are about to do.
  o The character’s name, gender identity, race and ethnicity can be adapted to suit whoever plays the teacher character. Keep that in mind as it might influence your backstory, values, experience.
  o Ask your audience to play people other than themselves; ask them to try on different perspectives and opinions. This will provide some anonymity and distance from themselves and make the conversation more rich.
  o You can find more information on this [here](#) and [here](#).
References


