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The Boal-Freire Nexus: Rehearsing Praxis, Imagining Liberation in Bilingual Teacher Education

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Freire (2005) encourages people to take "critical ownership of the formation of ourselves" (p. 44) in order to be able to act upon the world in what he (1993) calls "praxis." This praxis consists of the development of critical consciousness leading to transformative action. Critical consciousness and praxis should be conceived as an ongoing and creative process through the actual doing within spaces of authoring (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 2003). Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed* might provide Freire's ideas with a stage where liberation and praxis can be concretized, rehearsed and imagined. A discussion of this Freire-Boal complementation is offered by providing examples of two studies I conducted among Mexican-American/Latinx bilingual pre-service teachers to 1) prepare them linguistically after years of subtractive anglocentric schooling, 2) to develop political and ideological clarity (Bartolome & Balderrama, 2001), and 3) to encourage them to engage in leadership and advocacy inside and outside of the classroom.

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MEN FROM THE SOUTH

Talking about Freire and Boal means talking about the specific socio-political and historical context of an unequal and oppressive Brazil in the '60s with extreme wealth disparities in the middle of a brutal dictatorship. Through literacy programs, Paulo Freire engaged farm-workers in the untangling of their own oppression and empowering them to be co-authors of their own history using reflective action through a problem-posing education based on themes generated by the material conditions of the students. Augusto Boal was engaged in playwriting and directing when he made the connection among poverty, disempowerment, and passivity by giving people a space—the stage—to discuss and rehearse revolution. Zwerling (2008) summarizes how these three components—poverty, disempowerment, and passivity—created the conditions for the birth of the liberatory praxis of both Brazilians:

> Liberation theology asks, "for whom is religion?" Paulo Freire asked, "for whom is education?" Augusto Boal asks, "for whom is theater?" Each was to answer with a preference for the poor and oppressed and against the exploiters. Equally important, each hit upon a similar methodology for accomplishing their work: the engagement of the oppressed as co-creators of their future through dialogue, empowerment and active involvement. (p. 72)

Inspired by Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Cahnmann-Taylor & Souto-Manning, 2010), Brecht, and Stanislavski (Bezerra, 2015), Boal engaged in agitprop theater as a countercultural

way to disseminate dissenting ideas until he realized the separation between the stage and the public and decided to look for ways to create something that is *for, by* and *of* the public. Like Freire, Augusto Boal was also in exile for years, spreading his work abroad in Argentina, Peru, Ecuador, and France. The legacy of these two Brazilian pedagogues is both transgressive and a threat intended to disrupt the status quo: their work empowers the oppressed to challenge the formerly invisible oppressive structures, providing spaces for self and collective authoring. In other words, the work of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal stems from the need for transformation through social action by unveiling systems of oppression and by blurring the traditional lines between teacher and student, actor and spectator to create new realities or "praxis."

Praxis consists of the development of critical consciousness leading to transformative action as a step toward the "critical ownership of the formation of ourselves" (Freire, 2005, p. 44). In the field of education, teachers might not be able to control the outcomes of critical awareness, even if such awareness was achieved. Paralysis, as a result of the disruption of knowledge and the process of unlearning, may hinder the individual's ability to engage in praxis (Kumashiro, 1999; 2000). Questions on liberatory work arise as well when a predetermined vision of what it looks like is introduced without considering the voice of the oppressed (Blackburn, 2000). In other words, oppressed communities need to be direct participants who give meaning to their liberation. Liberation and praxis should, then, be conceived as an ongoing and creative process through the actual doing within spaces of authoring (Holland et al., 2003) by marginalized communities on their own terms. Through *Theater of the Oppressed*, Boal (2000) might have provided Freire with a stage where liberation and praxis can be concretized, rehearsed and imagined beyond catharsis, while avoiding the fatalistic "I can't do anything," and the illusory "yes, we can" (Osterlind, 2008).

REHEARSAL FOR REVOLUTION

In this section, I will provide some background that connects the work of both authors, to then further examine *Theater of the Oppressed*— especially forum and image theater as they were pedagogical tools used in my research. I will also offer an example of the use of *Pedagogy* & *Theater of the Oppressed* in a bilingual teacher preparation program to: 1) prepare them linguistically after years of subtractive anglocentric schooling, 2) to develop political and ideological clarity (Bartolome & Balderrama, 2001), and 3) to encourage them to engage in leadership and advocacy inside and outside the classroom. Political and ideological clarity is aligned with Freire and Boal's work, and it refers to "the ongoing process by which individuals achieve ever-deepening consciousness of the sociopolitical and economic realities that shape their lives and their capacity to transform such material and symbolic conditions" (Bartolome, 2005, p. 98).

In her *Variations on a Blue Guitar*, Greene (2001) advocates the use of arts in education and engaging the senses and feelings as a way to move students beyond the classroom to spaces they have never experienced before. Art, she adds, "makes a demand upon the beholders—a demand that they change, look with new eyes, hear with new ears, become something they have not been before" (p. 44), highlighting art's transformative power. This is the case of performing arts, which creates an alternative reality where imagination and emotions are freed (Sanders, 2005). However, Zwerling (2008) argues that becoming merely passive "beholders" creates an emotional and physical barrier between the spectator, the actors and the stage, thus limiting the spaces for releasing thoughts and emotions. Therefore,

beholding becomes monologic, as it is directed from the stage to the spectators, who are constrained in their feelings and thoughts since they are dictated to, and their positionality (i.e., the personal space where one is situated) is predetermined with no room for change. As Greene (2001) pointed out, "nothing can be predetermined or predicted in the artistic-aesthetic domain. But anything is possible" (p. 23).

Greene's "anything is possible" is better interpreted by Augusto Boal in his *Theater of the Oppressed*. Boal states that every human being is already an artist since they can organize and transform their environment, which makes such an environment a stage where the interaction among artist / human beings take place (Boal, 2006). While in conventional theater the play is watched from a distance by spectators, in *Theater of the Oppressed* they tear down the fourth wall and become "spect-actors" since it is "obscene for a human being who is fully capable of doing to merely watch" (Boal, 2000, p. 39). *Theater of the Oppressed* challenges and widens the notion of the stage since its limits cannot be defined as it bleeds into different arenas, such as education, politics, society. As *Theater of the Oppressed* tears down the fourth wall, its application cannot and should not be limited as a tool in education (Denzin, 2009). Boal opens the possibility of the democratization of the stage where figured worlds (Holland et al., 2003) can be imagined and rehearsed: a place for the spect-actors to recreate injustice and oppression to then collectively imagine ways to rewrite the prescribed script in contrast to reality. This "rehearsal for revolution" (Boal, 2000, p. 141) provides the spect-actors with a space where self-directed symbolization as an individual and collective act is possible. According to Boal, the spect-actors who are part of this revolutionary rehearsal are more likely to put it into practice in real life (Boal, 1995). This pedagogical and performative space also allows for mutual learning, self and collective reflection in a safe environment where trust is a must.

Theater of the Oppressed also challenges the script when unveiling power relations, hegemony, and self-controlling mechanisms in every-day acts, or habitus (Bourdieu, 1990). Habitus impedes and avoids the conflictive nature of questioning rules, let alone disobedience. Habitus is then contested by means of theatrical techniques where the spect-actors are encouraged to externalize their thoughts, emotions, and attitudes to challenge the "cops in the head" (Boal, 1995) and to create a variety of solutions while acknowledging that personal struggles stem from broader societal and political issues (Osterlind, 2008) and refusing to regard oneself as a victim of fate. It also humanizes the antagonist, recognizing that they are also subjected to the same "cops in the head", and thus, the antagonist is also capable of transformation (Brown & Gillespie, 1999).

Brown and Gillespie also argue that the restructuring of the script engages the spect-actors in exercising their agencies individually and collectively against internal and external constraints even when external oppressive conditions remain unaltered. *Theater of the Oppressed* provides the tools for spect-actors to transform from within by expanding their understanding of the oppressive power structures and encouraging refusal to participate in them by acting according to the options rehearsed on stage (Rymes, Cahnmann-Taylor, & Souto-Manning, 2008). Therefore, it is vital to understand and fight oppression at a micro-level (the individual) to work on societal and political changes at the macro-level (Engelstad, as cited in Osterlind, 2008). Two of the most widely utilized branches of *Theater of the Oppressed* are *Forum* and *Image Theater*. I will explain these two techniques in the next section.

Forum and *Image* Theater

Schaedler (2010) describes the practicalities of *Forum Theater* (a branch of *Theater of the Oppressed*): a problem posed by the spect-actors is improvised, and then the ones who are not on the stage have the power to interrupt the play, replace the oppressed character, and offer a solution. At first sight, this can be construed as a problem-solving technique that can be used to improve communication skills in an ESL class, for instance. However, *Forum Theater* can go deeper than that. Kanter (2007) calls it "a space for democratic dialogue about national and international problems—political oppression, poverty and violence" (p. 394).

One of the most critical features of *Forum Theater* is the concretization of oppression, which enables spect-actors to analyze it and possibly transform it. Since the spect-actor is able to intervene in the actions on the stage, they are part of the transformation on stage; therefore, the ones who intervene do it in everybody's name, making the emotional discharge different from catharsis. Boal called this discharge "dynamization" (1995), which means the purging of fear to act to change social conditions as the spectators become actors on stage, instead of purging the desire to act as emotions are released in catharsis. Zweling (2008) describes Boal's interpretation of catharsis as the blending of mimesis (imitation), kinesis (action/movement), and metaxis (the interplay of the real and the imaginary). By the mimesis of the spect-actors' real-life experiences and stories, the texts and bodies become kinetic in a liminal space. Therefore, *Forum Theater* connects spect-actors' ideas and applies them in real situations through performance, realizing the need for abandoning rhetorical solutions due to their impracticality in real life, and the ineffectiveness of individual action for permanent change (Brown & Gillespie, 1999).

An essential aspect of *Theater of the Oppressed* is the concretization of oppression. Boal's work included the use of images created through the bodies at play that convey messages without using words more fluidly and with different interpretations as part of his "arsenal" of tools (Boal, 1992). Through *Image Theater*, the participants use their bodies to create still images of an idea, experience, or emotion-based on an agreed topic showing the power differentials, oppression, or injustice they want to change. These images can also bring to the foreground internalized oppression or what Boal calls "cop in the head" (1990). Boal used *Image Theater* in preparation for *Forum Theater* sessions.

Examples of *Forum Theater* as a transformative tool in education are many: with pre and in-service teachers (Cockrell, Placier, Burgoyne, Welch, & Cockrell, 2002; Rymes et al., 2008; Scapp, 2006,), after-school programs (Zwerling, 2008), at schools (Osterlind, 2008; Sanders, 2005; Schaedler, 2010), and at university level with faculty and staff (Brown & Gillespie, 1999; Scapp, 2006). Beyond that, *Forum Theater* has been used in different organizations concerned with human rights issues, poor communities, prisons, street children, mental health advocates, unions, immigrant rights' movements against violence, classism, sexism, racism, discrimination around the world (Picher, 2007). In the field of language teaching and learning, *Theater of the Oppressed* has been used in indigenous language revitalization efforts (Driskill, 2003), as a critical performative language pedagogy in Adult ESL contexts (Louis, 2005), to deconstruct racialized discourses among world language teachers (Wooten & Cahnmann-Taylow, 2014) and in professional development among multilingual teachers (Cahnmann-Taylor & Souto-Manning, 2010).

Translanguaging

Research shows that Spanish heritage language speakers, like the participants in my study, might experience language loss due to the years of monolingual English-only schooling and messages (Caldas, 2018; Guerrero & Guerrero, 2013; Hasson, 2006). Therefore, they may internalize the deficit dominant views toward their own language, culture, and literacy practices (Howard, 2006), which may interfere with the formation of their identity as bilingual teachers. Darder and Cronin (2018) call for a critical bicultural pedagogy to "reestablish the intrapsychic harmony of the primary culture (...) that support(s) the integrity of their cultural and linguistic rights to be" (p. 30). A critical bicultural pedagogy might empower students of color in the U.S. to develop tools to navigate dominant discourses that have historically and institutionally undervalued their worth through marginalization and silencing.

One example of the aforementioned silencing is the stigmatization of the linguistic practices that show the in-betweenness of Spanish and English among Mexican-American/Latinx individuals in the U.S. — commonly known as Spanglish or Pocho. These practices were portrayed as strategies to cover up linguistic gaps in language proficiency in Spanish and English (Zentella, 1997, 2005) from a monolingual perspective. García (2009) challenges this view by examining these multiple language practices as "translanguaging," as the way bilingual (or multilingual) individuals use their linguistic repertoire in order to communicate and make sense. Translanguaging is a unitary, integrated, and strategic communication system used by multilingual individuals beyond the compartmentalization of named languages (Garcia, 2012), which in the case of this study are Spanish and English. Wei (2011) maintains that translanguaging is a shared social practice within a space—the bilingual teacher education program—which allows both language enactment and co-creation. In alignment with Garcia, Hornberger (2004) challenges teacher instruction to facilitate biliteracy and empower students to draw from all of their linguistic resources, especially the marginalized ones. Research on translanguaging in bilingual settings has predominantly focused on the use of translanguaging practices with emergent bilinguals in elementary classrooms (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Gort & Sembiante, 2015), middle school (Infante & Licona, 2018), and high school (Poza, 2018). Little has been explored in higher education, especially in bilingual teacher preparation programs.

THEATER OF THE OPPRESSED AND LANGUAGE LEARNING/TEACHING

I conducted two qualitative studies using two of Boal's theatrical techniques as pedagogical tools —*Forum Theater* and *Image Theater*—with two different groups of Mexican-American/Latinx bilingual preservice teachers in Southwestern U.S. during their first semester of professional development sequence for a total of 40 students in their early 20s. The courses these two groups took were foundational courses on bilingual education, not Spanish language classes. Therefore, I decided to choose a bilingual approach to teaching these two classes by including minoritized language practices, such as what the participants call Spanglish or Pocho, as the language of instruction. I included *Theater of the Oppressed* as a pedagogical tool to: 1) prepare them linguistically after years of subtractive anglocentric schooling through confidence building in their Spanish language skills using all their linguistic tools in performance; 2) to develop political clarity and ideological clarity (Bartolome & Balderrama, 2001) to examine how certain discourses of power permeate daily social interactions at schools;

and 3) to encourage them to engage in leadership and advocacy inside and outside the classroom by rehearsing stances as a way to develop emerging identities as teacher activists.

The participants engaged in reenactments of in-service Bilingual teachers' narratives or *testimonios* about challenging situations or inspiring experiences in their bilingual education classrooms (Caldas & Palmer, 2017). I selected the narratives— originally told within the continua of (Spanish English) biliteracy (Hornberger, 2004)— that supported in-class themes and topics. Using the stories of experienced teachers to reenact provided the participants with a contextualized, authorized, and authentic scenarios for reenactments. These stories allowed the participants to unveil issues in the field of bilingual education that are intertwined with issues of immigration, racism, linguicism, and discrimination (Menchaca, 2011). In preparation for the reenactment of the narratives described above, the participants also reenacted concepts, memories, and emotions related to the central themes of each session. While one of the goals of these interventions was to develop confidence and proficiency in the participants' Spanish language development, multilingual practices were negotiated in class in such a way, that the classrooms became translanguaging spaces (Caldas, Palmer, & Schwedhelm, 2018; Wei, 2011).

A total of fourteen 3-hour sessions were videotaped but special attention was given to the reenactments through *Forum* and *Image Theater* and the follow-up in-class discussion. I also collected 14 written and oral participant reflections, artifacts created by the participants, and two 2-hour semi-structured conversations (Alim, 2004). Both oral and written reflections were created after each session through the institution's online learning management system.

My positionality is a complex one; it is important to acknowledge the juggling of different roles of the researcher: instructor, researcher, *Theater of the Oppressed* facilitator— or *Joker*—both an insider due to my professional preparation as a teacher, and an outsider, due to my role as a teacher educator and academic researcher. I was familiar with the two sets of participants as a Spanish proficiency coordinator who conducted workshops and tutorials to help preservice bilingual teachers in their preparation for a licensure test that measures their proficiency in Spanish. All of the participants were bilingual, with different levels of proficiency in Spanish and different language trajectories, who used English as their primary language. Being a teacher educator from the Global South whose first language is Spanish enabled me to be the language "expert" in the class, although that expertise may have been intimidating among the participants who felt uncomfortable with their Spanish proficiency. However, as an individual whose heritage language is Quechua, I understand the colonial forces that engender the internalized oppression that prevents language reclamation due to shame.

In the following section, I will proceed to describe the use of *Theater the Oppressed* techniques, specifically the use of *Forum* and *Image Theater* in the context described in the previous section. Since Spanish was the language primarily used during these pedagogical moments, the dialogues will be in that language with an English translation next to it. I will then describe the participants' dialogical creations, responses, and interpretation of the reenactments.

The Importance of Building Up and Concretizing: *Image Theater*

In his work, Boal (1992) used "the arsenal," a variety of kinesthetic activities to dynamize the bodies and to accustom the spect-actors to move in different ways and create a trusting environment as warm-up previous to *Forum Theater*. That being said, the success of *Forum*

Theater would not have been possible without *Image Theater*. I used *Image Theater* to bridge what participants knew about teaching and their practice as future teachers, which involved past experiences that affect their present identities (Galindo, 1996).

After discussing historical literacy approaches that dominated schooling in both in the United States and Mexico (Freeman & Freeman, 2006), the participants engaged in the recreation of their literacy experiences. "*¿Qué tipo de literacidad tuviste en tu infancia?*" (What kind of literacy did you have as a child?) and "*Qué tipo de literacidad quieres tu implementar en tu salon de clase?*" (What kind of literacy do you want to implement in your class?) were the questions participants needed to answer for the following activity, not with words but with their bodies. Some smiled, some looked up as if to look for ideas, others looked at each other and smiled. Some others could not hide the confusion in their faces as if they were thinking, "Now what am I going to do?" Closing of eyes made it a bit easier for them to concentrate and move in ways that they were not used to. After they opened their eyes, each participant volunteered to describe the sculptures they created. Most of the sculptures showed a phonics-based approach to literacy as an answer to the first question. For instance, one student used their arms to form a division sign to show she had to divide the syllables when decoding words, and another student placed her hand underneath her chin that moved up and down, counting the syllables to divide. For the second question, in their sculptures participants showed not only a distinction from their own literacy experiences but spoke of the necessity of a balanced approach to literacy, considering students' pace and needs:

- (arms making a 90-degree angle while intertwined) "At first, I was thinking how I learned through a synthetic method; I was reflecting on that. But I think it's important to mix both. Some children can learn analytically, and other children, there are different children… more visual, and others learn better with books, and at the end they mix together." (Sergio).
- (her hands to make a circle) "It's a circle. I have a circle because with other shapes, like squares, rectangles, they have corners and sides that can stop you. And in a circle, you just go on and on. Learning can go on and on." (Juana).
- (holding the chin as if thinking) "Open thinking to all the possibilities and beyond all you can see there" (pointing to book--Alba).

A theatrical tool within *Image Theater* is Boal's "cop in the head" used to examine oppressive voices in their heads by materializing inner dialogues in order to understand where those voices come from. This example comes from the session in which the participants engaged in philosophy writing and explored their feelings towards writing in Spanish. The participants showed their feelings about their writing in Spanish by creating sculptures and using one word to describe it. Some participants shared words that described their sculptures as "insegura" (insecure), "scared," "inadequate," "lack of time," "cansada" (tired), "nerviosa" (nervous), defeated," and "confused." After the sculptures, one participant, Sandro, volunteered for this activity in order to change the discourses that immobilize him and replace them for voices that foster action. The spect-actors helped the de-construction of the cop in the head by uttering the voices Sandro found oppressive and impeded his professional growth. In the following dialogue, I elicited the voices that told him his Spanish was insufficient. As Sandro named those voices, classmates would volunteer to embody those messages by standing next to him:

Sandro: (While portraying a pensive statue) Mi profesor de español. Yo pensaba que sí, que sí sabía escribir pero me dice "arregla esto" (as if erasing something with his hand).
Researcher: ¿(The word) corrige?
Sandro: Ajá, corrige.
Researcher: ¿Quién quiere ayudarme con eso? (Juana raised her hand and moved to the stage).
Juana: ¡CORRIGE! (while pointing at Sandro)
Audience: (gasp) ¡Juana! (laughter)
Researcher: (to Sandro) ¿Esa es la voz, Sandro?
Sandro: (Quietly) Sí.

Sandro: (While portraying a pensive statue) My Spanish teacher. I thought that I did know how to write but my teacher told me "fix this" (as if erasing something with his hand).
Researcher: (The word) correct this then?
Sandro: Yeah, correct this.
Researcher: Who would like to help me with this (Juana raised her hand and moved to the stage).
Juana: CORRECT THIS (while pointing at Sandro).
Audience: (gasp) Juana! (laughter)
Researcher: (to Sandro) Is that the voice, Sandro?
Sandro: (Quietly) Yes.

Juana volunteered to embody the teacher's command to "correct" Sandro's Spanish. She raised her voice to convey the command as her classmates both gasped and laughed at her intervention due to their surprise to her commitment to her character. It is important to point out that by the way the spect-actors were engrossed in the activity, I could see that these oppressive voices experienced by all the participants. The class quieted when I asked them to do so, and they answered with pained looks and nods. However, comedic relief like that of Juana's showed the environment made them feel safe to take risks and explore their feelings.

Moving on with the exercise, Sandro resorted to his childhood memories to come up with the following oppressive discourse that hindered not only his language development but his self-image:

Sandro: (still as a statue) Me recuerdo en segundo grado cuando estaba en clase de bilingüe y no sabía mucho español y mi maestra siempre me decía, *like* (shook his head) que yo no sabía español
Researcher: (to the audience) ¿Quién quiere ser esa voz?
Sandro: Miss Chavarrí (Ana stood up and moved towards Sandro to embody that voice)

Sandro: (still as a statue) I remember in 2nd grade, when I was in a bilingual class and I didn't know much Spanish and my teacher would always tell me like (shook his head) that I didn't know Spanish
Researcher: (to the audience) Who would like to be that voice?
Sandro: Miss Chavarri (Ana stood up and moved towards Sandro to embody that voice)

The class became silent when Sandro recalled his second-grade teacher—Miss Chavarrí— whose name he remembered well. This shared memory became apparent in the class since the cops in the head visualized in front of the classroom belonged then to the audience. Sandro moved to another circle of influence and recognized the oppressive voices in his inner circle and their debilitating power on his career as a bilingual teacher. Since at this point the

construction of the cop in the head became a construction of a collective experience, the spect-actors chimed in to help Sandro name the voices:

Sandro: Mi familia. A veces no tengo la palabra y dicen "oh, eres Chicano" **Researcher:** ¿Te dicen eso como un insulto? **Sandro:** De una mala forma **Magdalena:** Y a veces te dicen (despective tone) "y así quieres ser maestro bilingüe?" **Sandro:** Aja, así **Researcher:** (To the audience) ¿Eso les dicen a uds: "y asi quieres ser maestro"? ¿Quién me ayuda con esa voz? **Sandro:** Yo creo que está metida en cómo lo dicen	**Sandro:** My family. Sometimes I don't remember a word and they tell me "oh you are a Chicano" **Researcher:** They call you that as an insult? **Sandro:** In a negative way **Magdalena:** And they say (despective tone) "and you want to be a bilingual teacher?" **Sandro:** Yeah **Researcher**: (To the audience) Do they tell you "so you want to be a teacher!?" Who would like to be that voice? **Sandro:** I think the intention is embedded in the way they phrase things

Sandro agreed that the voices were the ones he heard whenever he wrote in Spanish; so did the spect-actors. Those were everybody's cops in the head, visible in front of the class. I needed to reassure them they were not the only ones in that position, so I stated that I shared those cops in my head. If I wanted them to be open with their vulnerabilities, I needed to start with myself first and my insecurities as a doctoral student then. Making oneself vulnerable is difficult, especially in a position of power as the instructor, but it was a necessary and powerful tool in order to make myself more available and more humane and to become part of this community as an equal. The portrayal of the first part of the cop in the head might sound somewhat uncomfortable; however, it is essential to reiterate that the class (including myself) engaged in humor and laughter throughout the process, which showed the level of peer trust.

Since *Image Theater* concretizes oppressive voices and messages, the main goal of this technique is the disruption and transformation of those materialized voices emerging from the first part of the activity. The spect-actors took an active role to transform the voices into positive ones, which evoked positive experiences with language, community building and their willingness to resist to be "written upon" as shown in the following exchange where Sandro and other participants talked back to those voices:

Researcher: ¿Cómo cambian esta voz ("no sabes español)? **Elizabeth:** (Nodding and pointing at Sandro) soy bilingüe **Researcher:** (to Sandro) Te gusta esa voz? **Sandro:** Aja **Researcher:** (To everbody) ¿Qué te recuerda a ustedes esa voz? **Ana:** Como trabajo en un supermarket siempre me gusta poder platicar con las personas que no saben expresarse en inglés	**Researcher:** How do you change this voice ("you don't know Spanish")? **Elizabeth:** (Nodding and pointing at Sandro) I'm bilingual **Researcher:** (to Sandro) Do you like that voice? **Sandro:** Aha **Researcher:** (to everybody) What does that voice remind you of? **Ana:** Since I work at a supermarket, I always like to be able to talk to people who can't speak English, and, I don't know, I'm

y no sé, estoy muy orgullosa en eso, en que puedo comunicarme con ellos.	proud of that, that I can communicate with them in Spanish
Researcher: ¿Cómo cambiamos la voz que dice "no sabes escribir")?	**Researcher:** How do we change the voice "you don't know how to write"?
José: La escritura es un proceso (other voices approved with the exclamation "ah")	**José:** Writing is a process (other voices approved with the exclamation "ah")
Researcher: ¡la escritura es un proceso! ¡Ahh ahí está! (to Sandro) ¿la escritura es un proceso?	**Researcher:** Writing is a process! Ah, there it is! (to Sandro) Writing is a process?
Sandro: Ajá	**Sandro:** Yeah
Researcher: ¿Cómo cambiamos esa voz negativa a una más positiva¿ ("y así quieres ser maestro")?	**Researcher:** How do we change this negative expression to a positive one? (so you want to be a bilingual teacher!?)
Maribel: SI quiero ser maestro bilingüe.	**Maribel:** I DO want to be a bilingual teacher.
Researcher: SI quiero ser maestro bilingue. (To the class) ¿Qué les parece? Tthe participants nodded). ¿Qué significa eso?	**Researcher:** I DO want to be a bilingual teacher. (To the class) What do you think? (The participants nodded). What does it mean?
Sandro: Que vas a hacer lo que sea para llegar a esa meta.	**Sandro:** That you'll do anything to reach that goal.

The whole class addressed the oppressive voices that Sandro experienced and were recreated by his classmates. Sandro's pensive sculpture started to smile while listening to the transformed voices proposed by his friends. Since his experience became collective memory, Sandro represented everybody in the class. The emotions they used to describe the scene after we deconstructed each of the voices ("happy," "hopeful," "moved") were palpable and vibrated in the class, therefore, difficult to put into words.

Forum Theater or "What do we need bilingual teachers for?"

> "Today in the morning we had a discussion because we were looking for bilingual teachers at my school, but what happens is that most of the children in bilingual classes had been taught only in English last year. So, many of the committee members would say: 'Why do we need a bilingual teacher! Let's hire a (English) monolingual teacher because we taught them everything in English.' I ended up leaving the meeting because these people are closed-minded. Many of these children had a great potential but the fact that they don't speak English or that the school don't see bilingualism as an advantage, they end up being stigmatized." (narrative presented in session 4 for performance)

The participants prepared for this second session by reading the first two chapters of the required textbook on both pluralist and assimilationist linguistic discourses that permeate public education (de Jong, 2011) and an article about the cognitive differences between bilinguals and monolinguals (Bialystok, 2009). During class time, participants worked in groups and created posters in which they enumerated the arguments for and against bilingualism and engaged in group and whole class discussion of what this meant for them using translanguaging practices.

As the whole class expressed their own experiences to illustrate the points of the articles read in the class, it was clear that they agreed on certain specific points and had hope for future changes. For instance, they agreed on the normalization of English as the language of power, which brings as a consequence marginalization of speakers of other languages. Paola pointed out that she felt that speaking Spanish as their first language in the US was like a disability. Luis went beyond this simile, stating that speaking English was not a guarantee of future success, such as access to well-remunerated jobs and retirement, and freedom. It could be argued that at this point, this 3-hour long session was a "success" since the research analysis, the textbook, and their lived experiences aligned perfectly. I then proceeded to show the narrative above, with the story of a local bilingual teacher, whose narrative I collected beforehand (see Caldas & Palmer, 2017). The story shows that despite working in a school in which a dual language program was purportedly being implemented, English was, in fact, the language of instruction. Owing to this, the search committee in the narrative was amenable to hiring a mainstream teacher instead of a bilingual teacher for the following year, despite the protests of the bilingual teacher who witnessed the development of the conversation. The teacher finished his narrative by denouncing the injustice of this practice that further stigmatizes emergent bilingual students within the dual language program in which he works.

After having one of the participants read it aloud for the class, we started the reenactment of the vignette. As Boal proposed, the participants were to jump from being acquainted with the story to action almost immediately. Since the better part of the session was devoted to creating posters based on the findings in the research they analyzed, and the textbook, the arguments were visible for them around the classroom so they could review them whenever they wished during the reenactments. After agreeing on the number of characters for the role play, four participants volunteered to be the first to move towards the blackboard, which became the stage throughout the sessions. Luis, Zully, Isabel, and Ursula stepped on stage; Luis was the teacher protagonist, and the rest played the search committee:

(1) **Luis:** Como estaba diciendo, mi meta es más contratar a un maestro bilingüe para el próximo año. No sé qué piensan ustedes…	(1) **Luis:** as I was saying, my goal is to hire a bilingual teacher next year so I don't know what you think…
(2) **Ursula:** ¿Para qué necesitamos maestros bilingües, el año pasado enseñamos puro inglés? (Pause)	(2) **Ursula**: What do we need bilingual teachers for, last year we taught only in English (pause)
(3) **Luis:** Vamos a cambiar; lo que vamos hacer es…la educación bilingüe es muy importante porque…	(3) **Luis:** We're going to change, what we're going to do is… bilingual education is very important because…
(4) **Isabel:** Pero, pero luego nomás se van a confundir	(4) **Isabel:** But then they'll get confused
(5) **Luis:** Pero, ¿qué se van a confundir? Van a aprender más	(5) **Luis:** They won't, they'll learn more
(6) **Isabel:** Se van a confundir los lenguajes.	(6) **Isabel:** They'll confuse the languages.
(7) **Luis:** Es parte del aprendizaje para los estudiantes; estás incorporando dos lenguas	(7) **Luis:** It's part of students' learning; you're incorporating two languages
(8) **Isabel:** Sí, pero luego van a tomar el test que es todo en inglés y se van a confundir.	(8) **Isabel:** Yes, but then they'll take the test and it's in English and they'll get confused.
(9) **Luis:** Sí, pero para eso se practica. Tenemos un currículo en inglés y en	(9) **Luis:** But that's why you need to practice. We have a curriculum in English and Spanish
	(10) **Ursula:** Will we have enough time to

| español
 (10) **Ursula:** ¿Pero vamos a tener suficiente tiempo para practicar y tenemos que estar enseñando en español y en inglés?
 (11) **Luis:** (covering his face) Ay; ya me callaste (louder laughter in the classroom) | practice if we need to teach in English and Spanish?
 (11) **Luis:** (placed his hands on his face) oh, you just shut me down (louder laughter in the classroom) |

The reenactment above showed Luis trying to articulate arguments in favor of hiring a bilingual teacher instead of a mainstream teacher. Isabel and Ursula brought up arguments against bilingualism in the classroom, such as language confusion, state test requirements, and time constraints (turns 2, 4, 6, 8). Luis stated that bilingual education was important though he did not manage to elaborate this claim further (turn 3) despite the posters at hand and recent discussion. It was clear that while intellectually Luis was aware of the advantages of being bilingual, he was unable to incorporate this knowledge yet into his own discourse during the role play even when those arguments supported his beliefs.

It is interesting to note that even when Luis read, discussed, and wrote about the articles—he was knowledgeable enough about this topic that it could have helped him in the reenactment—he felt he was unable to articulate them because of lack of experience and knowledge. Luis tried to respond to his classmates' claims without much elaboration and with false starts. In turn 5, Luis could not address Isabel's concern of further confusion to then claim that confusion was part of learning (turn 6). He ended up defending without being able to construct a concrete argument for hiring a bilingual colleague, leaving him in a position of powerlessness, as he could not address the issue. This was clear when he attempted to respond to the antagonists' concerns related to confusion and the pressure of standardized tests (turn 6, 8) with the need for more practice (turn 9). Ursula quickly shot down this attempt, forcing Luis to admit defeat both physically (covering his face) and verbally (*ya me callaste*—you just shut me down) as he could not recall more arguments that would help him continue the debate (turn 11).

During this reenactment follow-up, when asked their opinions of Luis' performance, the audience pointed out that although they believed he made good points, his intervention was not convincing. Different participants volunteered to replace Luis as the protagonist of this vignette using different arguments. For instance, Luz claimed bilingual teachers should exert their agency to be policymakers in the classroom as they know best the needs of their students:

> *Pero la ley no sabe todo lo que hacemos. El maestro es el que está en el salón, no el que hizo la ley. El maestro es el que sabe lo que necesitan* [But policymakers don't know what we do. The teacher is the one in the classroom, not the policymakers. The teacher is the one who knows what (the students) need].

Ganiva resorted to reminding the rest of the search committee members of their purportedly similar goals as bilingual teachers as she tried to appeal to their vocation to serve emergent bilingual students:

> *Pero tienes que pensar en tu meta como maestro bilingüe. Qué quieres para tus estudiantes? Te estás preocupando?* [But you need to think about your goals as a bilingual teacher. What do you want for your students? Are you concerned about them?]

When asked their opinions about Luz's and Ganiva's interventions, the audience agreed that they were not as powerful as the counterarguments. Milagros, for instance, argued that "this is how the educational system is" implying that neither vocation nor agency could change top-down mandates that permeate the classroom. After one of the interventions, as the Joker, I opened the conversation on views about the role-play while three actors were on the stage:

> "I read an article that stated that most bilingual students are more advanced in certain aspects than monolinguals so you can use that." (Ursula)

> "We have done readings where it says that if you improve your native language, ultimately, it will help you gain literacy in your second language more than 'oh I kind of know English and kind of know Spanish.'" (Ganiva)

> "I think that if you would have elaborated in that level and research, I think you would have made a great point to the person who was saying 'take off Spanish.'" (Ana María)

Ursula and Ganiva showed their knowledge of research in favor of bilingualism and its advantages by using some conclusions of Bialystok (2009, Ursula's argument) and Cummins (de Jong, 2011; Ganiva's argument), texts they read during the semester and engaged when reflecting on their performances. The feedback Ursula, Ganiva, and Ana María provided showed how they used the theory they learned in class and turned it into arguments for intervention. Beyond having the right answers to "win" the argument, the reenactments required more strategic thought about the context of the argument, the positionality of each party involved, the delivery, and rapport.

The use of reenactments through *Forum Theater* proved to be a shift in the way students engaged in learning by connecting the theory they read in the official textbook and articles to bridge that knowledge to a practical application beyond teacher-led IRE questioning (Initiate-Response-Evaluate; Cazden, 1988), an essay or an exam. In this manner, the learning focus stopped being on how much knowledge of the content of the class they could recall in order to complete a written assignment/ test and pass a class. Instead, the learning focus became how effectively they could put knowledge into practice in a highly contextualized situation where they should defend their position without having to resort to grading as a motivation/reward. The experiential and practical nature of the shift to *Forum Theater* occurred gradually as the students became more invested in the outcomes of their participation in the reenactments; be it as an actor on stage or as spect-actors in the audience (Caldas, 2019).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Theater of the Oppressed techniques—*Forum* and *Image Theater*— had a positive impact on the bilingual preservice teachers' self-conception as bilingual / bicultural individuals and their self-image as future bilingual teachers. These pedagogical choices allowed for the merging of both theory and practice where the participants could reflect on their future selves as bilingual teachers, while gaining confidence in their language practices, including Spanish. The participants were able to make connections between the topics discussed in class—transitional bilingualism, subtractive Spanish instruction, and issues of monoglossic ideologies and education, all of which might result in covert discrimination and drop-out rates among emergent bilingual students. Jenny and Ana Maria, for instance, noted the connection between

the historical deficit perspective towards emergent bilinguals of color and the colonizing goals of standardization:

> It is no wonder there have been drop-out rates and failure rates so high throughout the education system's history. We set our students up for failure because we fail to notice their individual differences through standardized testing and instead of empowering them by recognizing their successes and progress, we focus on what they lack. (Jenny, written reflection).

Similarly, Ana Maria reflected on the several factors that affect the academic success of immigrant emergent bilingual students of color, something that resonated with her own experiences:

> Immigration, race, and language are all interconnected, and each of these factors influences a student's learning and success. However, these factors are also the major obstacles that might prevent a child from being successful in the United States education system. (Ana Maria, written reflection).

Theater of the Oppressed can become the stage where "students take risks and speak from the heart, using their own experiences as tools for forging critical race consciousness" (Denzin, 2009, p. 388), and its liberatory rehearsals can turn a classroom into a critical space for resistance, which may have the potential to transcend its walls (Giroux, 2000). Even the students who did not directly intervene should not be assumed to have been passive during this exchange. Being away from the center of the action—as another *spect-actor*—provided me with a vantage point where I could observe their engagement in the action. Even when they were not physically participating in the recreation, they were present (Taylor, 2003), and were a vital force in the performance. This was clear during the use of *Image Theater*, and the way the lived experienced of one participant became a collective memory that was "exorcised" though the naming of the cops in the head shared by the whole class.

    In terms of Spanish language development, the more the participants negotiated the language of the reenactments, the more confidence they gained. In other words, the language practices chosen during the reenactments reflected their need for keeping the scenes congruent with the context of the narratives and their perceptions of the characters. At the same time, there were instances in which the actors decided to break the logical division of language and assigned translanguaging identities to the protagonists of the vignettes in order to avoid the constraints of having to use just one language. An example of this is the following intervention of a narrative between two bilingual teachers:

Isabel: No entienden el sistema educativo entonces no saben que algunas clases son mejores o cuándo deben inscribirlos, o los programas de después de la escuela. Muchas veces los padres no están completamente conscientes de lo que deben hacer	They don't understand the educational system, so they don't know some classes are better or when to sign up, or the after school programs. Parents aren't often aware of what they need to do
Marita: Pero estos padres ya tiene aquí, ponle, más de 10 años, cómo que no saben?	But those parents have been here like more than 10 years, how come they don't know? How can't they know how the educational

How aren't they going to know how the education system works? **Isabel:** *How do you know that?* **Ana Maria:** Los estudiantes no están aprendiendo a leer muy bien en el nivel. No les estamos dando otros recursos que los va a ayudar a que ellos mejoren. El currículo les está haciendo que ellos se limiten y eso no es el problema de los padres. Es más problema de los recursos que nosotros les estamos dando	system? How do you know that? The students aren't learning how to read at grade level. We aren't providing resources that will help themselves. The curriculum limits them and that's not their parents'

This division break actually resembled the actual language ecology of the class and reflected how translanguaging looks and sounds in this particular setting. The linguistic stance in the use of *Theater of the Oppressed,* along with other language strategies used in the classroom that supported the participants' multilingual practices in this translanguaging space effectively supported their Spanish proficiency (Caldas et al., 2018). The author showed how four bilingual preservice teachers' Spanish proficiency developed through translanguaging practices and negotiated horizontal classroom language policies (see Caldas at al., 2018 for more details).

This study offers an exploration of a pedagogy that has the potential to imprint in the body—as well as in the intellect— a developing political clarity (Bartolome & Balderrama, 2001). *Theater of the Oppressed* as a pedagogy blurs the lines between the lessons learned from inherited past narratives and the rehearsal of future stories to carry on the legacy of struggle and resistance against erasure inherent to bilingual education in the United States. This pedagogical approach has the potential to influence the development of a salient professional identity as advocates committed to a mission for social justice for the racially- and linguistically- minoritized Mexican-American/Latinx population. The implications regarding language in the preparation of future teachers are intertwined with the need for decolonial approaches to language from speakers engaged in marginalized language practices.

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