Theatre and Critical Consciousness in Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

Education for social justice, or critical pedagogy, is designed to empower learners and often uses the arts as primary pedagogical means. It has gained increasing attention in teacher education in recent years. However, the author's use of critical approaches to theatre with teacher education students raised serious questions about their limited level of consciousness, or empowerment, but also alternate possibilities, including theatre, for empowering students during their teacher education programs.

Critical pedagogy is an approach to education designed to help learners name the oppressive blocks to happiness and freedom in their lives and to learn to struggle effectively against them, primarily by means of a transformed consciousness, thus becoming empowered. Critical pedagogy often uses the arts as a primary pedagogical means for achieving its goals.

Critical pedagogy has been a significant and growing alternative within mainstream teacher education, though referred to more often in recent years as education for social justice. When teacher education students receive orientation to critical pedagogy, they usually read about it, discuss it, perhaps even experience it in their courses, and then usually imagine and plan how they might do it themselves as teachers one day. However, very little attention has been directed to the issue of the kind of consciousness that teacher education students have developed for themselves. Such a question is important since it is uncertain how well teachers can foster an empowered consciousness in learners if they have not developed it for themselves, even if they have learned techniques and strategies of critical pedagogy.

Reports on attempts to assess and transform preservice teachers' consciousness within their teacher education programs are rare (Bartolomé, 2004; 2008; Gordon, 2000; Milner, 2003; Sleeter, Torres, & Laughlin, 2004). Such attempts tend to occur in separate university courses through the efforts of an individual teacher educator and are usually designed to help mainstream teacher education students better understand and appreciate the marginalized position of minority students in society and in public schools, as well as to foster greater awareness of their own perspectives on those issues of social justice.

This manuscript describes my experience in teaching a drama course on critical approaches to theatre for teacher education students over a five-year period, particularly the window it provided for me on not only the issues of oppression faced by the students in their lives, but especially the limited kinds of consciousness at which they were operating in addressing them. The manuscript concludes with a discussion of the issues for teacher education implied by this experience, particularly alternate possibilities for empowering teacher education students.

Conceptual Framework

Consciousness and Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy, or education for social justice, is an approach to teaching that is designed to foster a more empowered consciousness among participants. The notion of "consciousness" refers to individuals' perceptions and understandings about themselves and the world around them—perceptions and understandings that have been shaped during their entire lives by their upbringing, culture, social class, education, and so on. The rationale for the aim of transforming people's consciousness is that without a sufficiently empowered consciousness, participants will be unable to change the limiting or oppressive circumstances of their lives since they will still be limited (imprisoned?) by the way in which they see and understand their lives and circumstances. Bob Marley (1980) was speaking of transforming—and empowering—consciousness when he sang in *Redemption Song*, "Free yourselves from mental slavery; none but ourselves can free our minds."

Freire (1972) first popularized the notion of consciousness in his landmark book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, referring to the process of critical pedagogy as "conscientization." He remains one of the most insightful and influential thinkers in

this regard. He described a continuum of kinds of consciousness, from a powerless consciousness to a highly empowered sense of agency and perspective on acting in the world.

- At the powerless end of the continuum, he found that individuals saw themselves as objects in the world (grammatically, as the object of a verb), that is, individuals to whom things happen in life, things caused by more powerful others. The result is a fatalistic view of life, a view he frequently found among the Brazilian peasants with whom he worked in his literacy program. For example, people with this kind of consciousness may sigh fatalistically that their lot in life is to have only a little bit of bread.

- He then identified the beginnings or awakening of empowerment as the point when individuals realized that they had not only their own needs, desires and ideas, but also their own voice and could begin to name issues of injustice that they faced in their lives. Freire described this transformation as a shift from seeing oneself as an object to seeing oneself as a subject (of a verb), someone who can act. Yet, Freire pointed out that at this stage the individual spoke as an individual, as an "I," and still accepted the world as is. The result of this transformation was the birth of a voice, but often a voice of complaint about the way things are. For example, this kind of consciousness would accept the situation, but perhaps complain—in the beginning of a voice—that the bread could at least be fresher.

- The next major transformation that Freire identified was the awareness that a collective voice is usually more powerful than an individual voice, so that the subject shifts consciousness from "I" to "we." However, learners still think and act within the existing framework of society. For example, this kind of collective consciousness would realize that, together and with a stronger voice, people could demand the bread they need and deserve.

- Finally, Freire identified the most highly empowered consciousness as that which maintains a collective voice ("we"), but also creatively sees the possibility of transforming the existing framework of society to a more just and equitable approach. For example, this kind of empowered consciousness would realize, in a truly transformative way, that many needy people could together buy—and control—the bakery.

Freire highlighted the importance of achieving this creative, paradigm-shifting consciousness since it was the only means of changing the common notion of "power over," to which even the oppressed are susceptible, to relationships of "power with." Otherwise, society will not be transformed in a more just fashion.

In principle, all the efforts of critical pedagogy, or education for social justice, are aimed at transforming and empowering the consciousness of learners. Only through empowered consciousness, it is argued, can disempowered people transform their lives and help create more social justice in our society. Critical pedagogy itself is based on what is widely called a problem-posing approach to education. It first helps learners identify the externally imposed problems and issues that they face in their lives. However, the two key aspects of critical pedagogy aim, first, to critically analyze the causes behind those issues, particularly powerful and oppressive forces that block learners' legitimate desires for greater happiness and freedom, and then to explore strategic solutions to improving those situations, ideally as a prelude to learners actually putting those strategies into action in their daily lives. In this approach, the teacher does not provide answers for learners, but rather helps the group analyze and strategize together, in a questioning, Socratic way.

Theatre and Critical Pedagogy

Boal (1979, 2002) developed a range of dramatic approaches to critical pedagogy known collectively as Theatre of the Oppressed, with Forum Theatre being the most widely known and used technique around the world. It is designed to use drama as a means of showing the actual situations of oppression that a group is experiencing, but also to explore improvisationally various means of struggling against and transforming those situations for the better (i.e., "a rehearsal for the revolution" [A. Boal, personal communication, 1993]).

More specifically in using Forum Theatre, a group identifies an oppressive problem that it shares in common (e.g., exploitation of workers in a factory by management, discrimination faced by visible minorities, etc.) and creates a play to show how that problem actually occurs. The play is constructed around one main character, or protagonist, who encounters this problem in the persons of one or more antagonists (oppressors) who oppose or block that character's legitimate desires for greater empowerment in his or her life (e.g., better working conditions, freedom from discrimination, etc.). These blocks may be active resistance or mere indifference, yet the effect on the protagonist is the same. The tension in the play builds through several escalating conflicts between protagonist and antagonists and then deliberately ends with no improvement in the situation (a "tragedy" in Boal's words [A. Boal,

personal communication, 1993]). The play is performed by a small number of members of the group for the rest of the group.

The constructed play deliberately shows only the problem in order to allow the whole group together to explore means of improving it. Thus, the play is shown again, but this time members of the group can take the place of the protagonist at any point in the play and improvisationally try different strategies which they think will work better against the antagonists (e.g., different arguments, help from others, etc.). The antagonists themselves then respond improvisationally to these new strategies, finding and using new weapons in their arsenal as oppressors (e.g., different arguments, use of other powerful levers, etc.). While these interventions occur within the framework of the constructed play, participants can create or invent any props or additional characters that could believably be possible (e.g., a telephone, a friend, etc.). As the number of interventions in the play increase, with varying degrees of success, the group analyzes and assesses which strategies seem to offer more promise for improving the problem and why. While a group using Forum Theatre explores its problem and possible alternate responses to it only within the safety of a dramatic mode, the goal of the technique is to ensure that together learners' awareness will be transformed by the experience and that they will feel empowered to behave differently in facing this problem in their daily lives. Under ideal circumstances, a group that meets regularly over a period of time can try some of these new strategies between sessions and then report and discuss how effective they actually were in real life, honing and refining its awareness and empowered behaviour gradually over time.

Before offering several actual examples of Forum Theatre, it may be helpful to consider the notion of "oppressed," a term originating in South America that can sound "heavy" and extreme to North American ears. Indeed, many groups I have worked with reply at first that they are not oppressed at all. However, in explaining further that any blocks or opposition by others to our legitimate desires for greater happiness and freedom is oppressive to us, most groups readily see many examples of it in their lives and see that they share many similar experiences of it. Because of the problematic nature of the term "oppressed," some practitioners of Theatre of the Oppressed use other, more user-friendly terms, such as Diamond's (1994) use of the term "Power Plays" in his work with Forum Theatre. (Boal relates an anecdote of working in France with a group of adolescent boys institutionalized in a correctional facility who claimed at first that they did not experience oppression. Upon further discussion of the notion, they realized that they experienced oppressive behaviour frequently in their lives. Their term for those kinds of experiences? *Emmerdé*, or "dumped on." [A. Boal, personal communication, 1992])

For example, a community group with whom I worked chose excessive noise in an apartment building late at night as a problem it wished to address, quite appropriate for these urban renters. The protagonist in the group's play was a woman arriving home late and tired from her day's work as a domestic, only to be prevented from sleeping by loud music coming from a neighbor's apartment. Her first attempt to achieve her legitimate desire, a good night's sleep in her apartment, was to talk to the offending neighbour, but he showed no interest in lowering his music. Her second attempt was to ask her roommate to try going with her to pressure the loud neighbour to stop, but her roommate did not want any confrontation and refused to help. Her last attempt was to call the building manager, who refused to help her since her rent was late—a powerful lever which he held over her.

In another example, a group of teachers chose as their oppressive problem the challenge of working effectively with an increased number and range of special needs learners in their classes in the face of insufficient resources and professional development. The protagonist was a frustrated classroom teacher who realized that she needed better learning resources and more extensive training if she was to be able to work effectively with her class, and thus regain some satisfaction in her work. Her first attempt was to ask her principal for help. The principal was pleasant, but deflected the issue so that she would not have to deal with it—this year's budget is already spent, it's really a decision for the governing board, etc. The teacher's second attempt was to turn to a colleague who shared her concerns. She asked him to publicly raise the issue with her in the school, but he begged off, claiming too much of his own work, and pressure to spend more time at home. A final attempt was to ask for help from the parent of one of her pupils, a parent who also served on the school's governing board. However, the parent was not comfortable in an advocacy role and was much more interested in asking the teacher to provide more time and help to her own child in the teacher's class.

In regard to consciousness, a technique such as Forum Theatre serves not only as a window to the kind of consciousness currently operating within a group (as seen in the first showing of the constructed play), but also as a means of transforming that consciousness through the collective thinking and efforts of the group (as seen in the improvisational interventions the group members can imagine as possible and try out in the second showing of the play). In summary, while Forum Theatre deals with serious, or "heavy," issues, the atmosphere in a Forum Theatre session is usually very positive and energetic as a group works collectively and creatively together to address the issues it faces. As Boal (1979) indicates, Theatre of the Oppressed is not for the depressed who have given up on their lives. Instead, it is

designed for participants who want to influence and shape their future for the better, not to wait fatalistically for it to happen to them. That outcome is based on the development of a more empowered consciousness among participants, or in Boal's words, "the courage to be happy" (Boal, 1998, p. iii).

The Experience of the Course

Description and Context of the Course

The three-credit undergraduate drama course I taught yearly over a five-year time span was unusual in that it was not designed as a professional course, that is, not a course of methods of teaching drama in school. It was intended, rather, to serve as an academic course and was open in principle to all university students. However, the students in the course were virtually all teacher education students from various programs—elementary, secondary, music, teaching English as a second language, and physical education. They were a relatively homogeneous group—young, middle-class, mostly white, and largely female—who tended to have had little or, more probably, no previous drama experience. Enrollment in the course was approximately forty each year.

In order to aid students' development as future teachers through the course, I decided to primarily target their personal growth through a good deal of developmental drama games and exercises, so as to promote confidence and ease in front of others, greater comfort in their bodies, enhanced use of voice, and greater creativity. I also chose to include in the course a good deal of work with Theatre of the Oppressed techniques, especially Forum Theatre, for two reasons. One was to foster a more empowered consciousness among these future teachers as part of their personal development. The other was to provide them experience with certain pedagogical techniques that could be widely applicable in schools, youth groups, community groups, and so on as part of their professional development.

Results: Examples of Oppression for the Constructed Plays

The first several weeks of the course focused primarily on developmental games and exercises in order to allow the group members time to get to know each other and for me to begin building a relationship with them before asking them to share personal experiences as content for Forum Theatre, a technique we would focus

on for approximately six weeks in the middle of the course. As was to be expected, the group members at first found the notion of "oppression" to be foreign and not applicable to them. Yet, with further discussion and sharing of examples, the students soon agreed that they indeed did have regular experiences with oppressive behaviour on the part of others and freely offered a good number of examples as possible content for Forum Theatre. (In the course, we tended to refer to these examples of external oppression as "blocks.") These examples that the students were willing to share publicly generally fell into three categories.

A less mentioned, but still regular, category was about several issues students had with their parents. (Many of these students still lived at home with their parents.) One issue was about the pressure parents exerted on their child not to date a particular person. The other issue was pressure from parents on students to continue their studies in university or to choose a particular field of study, despite the student's wishes to do otherwise.

A more common category was comprised of the issues students faced in their part-time jobs, an experience common to all the students (usually in retail sales or the service industry and only occasionally in educational or recreational programs for children). These issues might focus on coworkers, for example, a coworker who did not pull his or her weight or who did a poor job, thus leaving more work for the student to do on the job. More common, however, were problems stemming from the public or from the students' managers. Customers could treat them rudely, demand special treatment, or complain about their work. Problems with managers ranged from keeping employees working longer than required to unwillingness to respond to requests or complaints and even to harassment in a few cases.

A final and frequent category was made up of issues faced by students in dealing with the university. Occasionally, the problem involved an instructor, who was unresponsive to student requests or concerns about the course. More often, however, students shared stories of oppressive behaviours by the university bureaucracy. These might involve rude behaviour from university staff, sometimes blaming or "guilting" students for not knowing regulations or forgetting to do things, or even occasionally saying that they were too busy to deal with the students' requests at that time. The most oppressive experiences occurred when students were making special requests (e.g., permission to substitute one course for another, a request for a certain placement for student teaching, etc.) since that clearly gave the power of decision making to the staff involved and placed students in a less powerful position. At times, students even had problems in taking their requests or concerns to a higher level in

an office, for example front-line staff resisting giving students an appointment with their superior. It became obvious that students experienced many of these oppressive responses from the university bureaucracy, as revealed by their reaction to seeing the constructed plays for the first time. They frequently greeted them with howls of recognition and laughter, in seeing the situation reflected back to them so accurately, but especially for how well and insightfully students could play several university staff with whom all students had had to deal.

The last two categories of part-time work and university were almost always the ones chosen for developing Forum Theatre examples in class since those were the issues shared most commonly by the students.

Results: Student Consciousness Revealed Through Forum Theatre Examples

The kinds of consciousness with which students seemed to be operating in the face of oppression in their lives were reflected through Forum Theatre in two ways. The first was through the task of creating plays to show the kind of oppression they faced and the second was through the kinds of interventions they attempted in the play in order to improve their situations.

In constructing Forum Theatre plays, it is important that the desire of the protagonist be clear and strong, since it is that force that will create theatrical conflict with the antagonists during the play. In many cases, it was obvious that students were much clearer about and more focused on the oppressive blocks they faced in their lives than they were about their initial desires. The very fact of constructing the plays seemed to at least clarify, and perhaps even reactivate, their initial desires. For example, rather than focusing on indifferent or even hostile managers or coworkers at work, they had to consider their legitimate desires in working part-time (i.e., I want to fund my education or I want to help my family financially). Or, instead of focusing on the unhelpful bureaucracy at the university, they had to reignite their desire to become a teacher and to receive the best preparation possible for it. Such a response on their part raises the concern of the kind of society, and even the kind of education, that would dampen individuals' desires so much.

A second key aspect of constructing Forum Theatre plays is that the protagonist must make attempts to achieve his or her desire, so that the desire is clear even though not attained in the play. This aspect reflects the kind of consciousness upon which participants tend to be operating. While serious situations certainly prompted

students to act in their interests, in many cases it was clear that students were often not making attempts to achieve their legitimate desires. For example, in their part-time work situations, students often characterized the situation as just putting up with injustices and getting through the experience, so as not to jeopardize their job. In dealing with the university, they uniformly referred to their nonresponse as "sucking it up," that is, being unhappy with the situation, but just accepting it and getting through it—whether it was poor service from an office or an unresponsive instructor. Such approaches hint at a fatalistic, "object" consciousness, assuming that things are the way they are and that not much else can be expected or changed. Such a consciousness was mixed with the beginning of an individual, "subject" consciousness ("I") in that students certainly voiced their displeasure at these situations. However, that consciousness usually stopped at the point of complaint and only rarely moved on to taking action. Thus, even the first step of constructing the Forum Theatre plays seemed to prompt students beyond the stage of complaint about their oppressive situations to initiating some action against the oppression—at least theatrically.

Second, the group's improvisational interventions in the plays suggested the kind of consciousness that the students could imagine and try out theatrically, even if they were not living it currently. Virtually all interventions made by the students in the plays reflected an individual, "subject" consciousness ("I"), but at least one that was taking action to struggle against oppressive blocks and trying to achieve one's desires for a more fulfilled life. For example, they would address the issue, ask for decisions to be reconsidered, express how important it was to them, and so on. What was interesting was that virtually all interventions focused on being "reasonable," asking for the "right thing" to be done in the situation. Thus, in a work situation, interventions would suggest that, if all parties did their part, then everyone would be happier or the job would be done more quickly and efficiently or customers would be happier—and thus return with additional business. In the university setting, interventions tried to point out why a request would improve a student's program or preparation as a teacher or that the university regulations allowed such a request. Students never tried a strategy of appealing to the self-interests of an antagonist as a way of achieving their desires. Such a pattern seems to suggest that students expect others to act in a relatively altruistic manner, wanting to do what is right and best in a situation, rather than acting in their own self-interests (of saving time and effort, maintaining power, etc.). Such a tendency suggests that students may not have a well-developed critical analysis of society, that is, an analysis based on individuals and groups acting in their own self-interests and resulting in an unjust social order, kept in place by a stratified power structure and a limited consciousness on the part of the disempowered. Such an analysis might lead to different kinds of interventions, first theatrically and then in life.

Most notable was that students almost never made an intervention based on a collective—and more powerful—consciousness ("we"). My role as facilitator was not to tell students the kind of interventions and strategies that they could try, but rather to foster their own thinking, strategizing, and analysis of the situation. However, after a while, I began to hint broadly at other possibilities by reminding them that they could create any reasonable alternatives for their interventions, including any other people who might be helpful for them. Yet, despite my hints, students continued to simply replace the protagonist individually and try different rationales with the antagonists. Such a tendency was especially noteworthy in regard to the oppressive situations they shared at the university, since they all seemed to have experienced them and collective action against them would have been relatively easy to organize (unlike situations with one's parents that are of a more individual nature). Yet, such a transformative step seemed to escape them, at least during the time of the course in which they engaged in Forum Theatre. As a result, the students remained relatively limited in their power. Not surprisingly, their interventions usually caused some improvement in the situations depicted in the plays, but it was often of a limited nature. In fact, students occasionally felt somewhat frustrated when their several interventions in a play produced such limited results and questioned the worth of the approach.

Since the oppressive situations depicted in the plays were ongoing issues for students, I encouraged them to try in real life some of the more promising strategies that had come out of their Forum Theatre sessions. While only a few students reported engaging in such attempts, their outcomes were usually insightful. In some cases, there was no improvement in a situation. For example, one student had offered early in the course her problem of her parents pressuring her not to date a young man because he was not of the same religion. When we checked into students' progress, or lack of it, later in the course, she reported that her situation was now worse since her new boyfriend was from a visible minority and her parents were putting even more pressure on her. At other times, students reported a slight improvement in the outcome of the encounter. For example, students reported that appealing to the self-interests of university staff in their dealings with them often seemed to put the staff in a more positive and helpful mood. In the end, most students came to realize just how much effort it took to make even slight improvements in the situation, thus coming to appreciate more deeply the notion of "struggle" for social justice. However, this realization made some students wonder about the worth of even trying, when it was so much easier to just "suck it up."

Discussion

A preliminary consideration, before discussing questions raised by this experience, is the extent to which the patterns of students' reactions in doing Forum Theatre in my course are truly indicative of their actual consciousness. While my reading of this experience certainly does not "prove" that students are limited in terms of their consciousness and empowerment, I would offer the probability that their responses in Forum Theatre "suggest" or "hint at" that condition. In addition, I can only surmise that these students are representative of teacher education students in general. However, the very fact that each year's group of students in the course responded in such similar ways indicates that they may well be representative, suggesting larger and more far-reaching questions about critical pedagogy within teacher education.

Can Teachers Empower Pupils if Not Empowered Themselves?

A major question raised by this experience is the extent to which such students, assuming that they received orientation to implementing critical pedagogy as teachers, would be able to effectively implement critical pedagogy for social justice, unless their own consciousness could be further transformed and empowered from what it seems to be. Setting goals for learners that teachers have not yet attained for themselves seems problematic. It also raises questions about the typically primary focus in teacher education on teachers' learning skills, techniques, and strategies of critical pedagogy, as behaviours that can be dealt with separately from a teacher's own personal development and consciousness. The danger is that the potential of transformation for teachers appears to lie in learning a set of surface behaviours. Such learning of pedagogical techniques and strategies usually implies teachers' unlearning of past patterns of perception and communication (such as providing answers to students). Yet, to accomplish that goal, Freire (1972) himself stresses the necessity of individual teachers undergoing a deep and transformative change within themselves, essentially creating a new disposition toward engaging with others, a new disposition upon which the surface behaviours of critical pedagogy can be grafted and become ultimately effective. Fortunately, even if teachers begin by simply applying critical pedagogy techniques in their teaching, it may well have some transformative effect on their consciousness since, as Freire points out, in critical pedagogy everyone teaches and everyone learns, even the teacher.

How Best to Empower Teacher Education Students?

If that hypothesis is true, a second question that arises is how best to foster an empowered consciousness in teacher education students. A first possibility to consider is attempting to accomplish that goal through their teacher education program. It would be unreasonable to expect major changes in students as a result of six weeks of classes experiencing Forum Theatre in my course. However, it is intriguing to consider the potential of students experiencing in their program, not necessarily an orientation to critical pedagogy, but rather a good deal of critical pedagogy itself, designed to foster a transformed and empowered consciousness among students. While it seems possible in principle, it may well be problematic in reality since students identified the university itself as oppressive in several ways, not surprising since universities tend to be part of a powerful elite in society.

A second possibility within their program for students to become effective critical pedagogues would be to work within classrooms and with teachers already operating clearly and effectively on those principles—for student teaching, special projects, and so on. However, those kinds of classrooms and schools tend to be rare, often flourishing in occasional and alternative settings and unable to host many teacher education students.

Perhaps the best possibility for fostering "conscientization" among teacher education students is to provide within their program alternative field experiences or service learning with community-based, not-for-profit organizations that operate on critical principles and levels of awareness, since they tend to be some of the few organizations in society that actually "live" such principles (Lucas, 2005). Community organizations that fulfill only a service, or charitable, role to community members, such as a food bank or homeless shelter, would not be appropriate for such experiences for teacher education students. While such services are important in certain aspects of society, Freire (1972) himself warns of the non-transformative and oppressive danger of this sole role. "Any attempt to 'soften' the power of the oppressor in deference to the weakness of the oppressed almost always manifests itself in the form of false generosity; indeed, the attempt never goes beyond this. In order to have the continued opportunity to express their 'generosity,' the oppressors must perpetuate injustice as well." (p. 29)

Instead, students would need to work within activist community organizations that truly operate on principles of critical pedagogy, that is, critical analysis of social issues based on an imbalance of power and self-interest, as well as collective action to address those issues to achieve greater social justice. For example, Project

Genesis works within a highly multicultural and generally low-income Montreal neighbourhood. It provides many services for neighbourhood residents, but it also facilitates a number of citizen committees on key social issues, such as health, housing, welfare, and so on. Participants on these committees work to critically analyze the social roots of the problems plaguing these important areas. They may link poor housing conditions for many area residents to lax efforts by the city to crack down on landlords, landlords who pay property tax to the city. Or they may highlight and critically analyze the inadequate public funding of the health care system. That is, while the health care system is struggling financially, they will point out that many large corporations in Quebec pay no taxes at all, thanks to laws made by the very government that is not adequately funding the health care system. Beyond these critical analyses, they also prepare public recommendations to present to appropriate authorities, at times even participating in public demonstrations to foster greater awareness of the situation.

As another example, this time in the area of education, Parents in Action for Education is a project of the Montreal-based Third Avenue Resource Centre. It originally coalesced around the concerns of a number of marginalized parents about the quality of the education their children were receiving in the public school system. The movement has since fostered critical analysis of the self-interests of the school system which are often at odds with the desires of parents, has developed capacity-building experiences for the involved parents (such as public speaking, organizational skills, etc.), has organized public discussions and forums on discriminatory issues within the public school system (dropouts and social class, race and academic success, labelling of at-risk learners as self-fulfilling prophecy, etc.) in order to draw public attention and awareness to these issues, and has pressured school boards to address some of these issues by changing their approaches. In a recent development, the movement succeeded in convincing the city's largest school board to include minority parents in the process of developing the board's policy on parental consultation and involvement.

Ideally, by working within such critical, activist organizations as alternative field experiences or service learning, teacher education students would have a good chance not only to develop critical awareness of social issues, but also to experience collective and transformative means of struggle to change unjust situations—in sum, to develop a transformed consciousness. Only with such experience, learning and transformation does it seem that students would truly be ready for implementing critical pedagogy for social justice.

Theatre and Critical Consciousness in Teacher Education

Finally, Forum Theatre can serve simultaneously as both a window (for others) as well as a mirror (for participants) of the kind of consciousness that teacher education students have developed. At the same time, as a form of critical pedagogy, it can prompt change in consciousness by the participants. Even in the short time that students experienced Forum Theatre in my course, it was clear that they experienced a reactivating and clarifying of their desires as well a prompt toward slightly more empowered responses to oppressive situations that they faced. One can only imagine the potential outcomes for students of experiencing much more critical pedagogy during their teacher education programs.

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