

The theater of the oppressed: mediation and construction of autonomy¹

O teatro do oprimido: mediação e construção da autonomia

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ABSTRACT

The following text aims to situate and demonstrate the results of an experience of appropriation and use of the methodological principles of the Theater of the Oppressed (BOAL, 2015) in mediation strategies for the teaching of Arts in schools with the Arts teachers of the education system in the municipality of São José in Santa Catarina, Brazil. We pointed out some factors considered favorable to the student's autonomy and ability to interpret and compose the world from his relations in the field of teaching / learning developed through artistic dialogues and through investigative and committed to democratic and free perspectives workshops. Our theoretical framework relied on the ideas of Augusto Boal in the field of dramaturgy and Paulo Freire and Immanuel Kant in the field of education. The workshops allowed a profound reflection on the current moment of Brazilian education, totally professionalizing, which leaves no space and time for what is not written or calculated. The metaphor of João and Maria made it possible for teachers to seek for the student's look within the teaching / learning space and to take this look into account in the process of building knowledge within a constitutionally democratic and open to experiences space.

Keywords: Autonomy. Mediation. Art. Education. Theater of the oppressed.

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RESUMO

Este artigo tem como objetivo situar e demonstrar os resultados de uma investigação de pós-doutoramento que analisa uma experiência de apropriação e uso dos princípios metodológicos do Teatro do Oprimido (BOAL, 2015) em estratégias de mediação do ensino de Artes nas escolas, junto aos professores e professoras de Artes da rede de ensino do município de São José em Santa Catarina, Brasil. Apontamos alguns fatores considerados favoráveis à autonomia e à capacidade do estudante de interpretar e compor o mundo a partir de suas relações no campo do ensino/aprendizagem desenvolvidas através de diálogos artísticos e de oficinas investigativas e comprometidas com perspectivas democráticas e livres. Nosso referencial teórico contou com as ideias de Augusto Boal no campo da dramaturgia e Paulo Freire e Immanuel Kant no campo da educação. As oficinas permitiram uma reflexão profunda sobre o momento atual da educação brasileira, totalmente profissionalizante, que não deixa espaço e tempo para aquilo que não é escrita ou cálculo. A metáfora de *João e Maria* possibilitou aos professores procurarem pelo olhar do estudante dentro do espaço ensino/aprendizagem e levarem em conta este olhar no processo de construção do saber dentro um espaço constitucionalmente democrático e aberto às experiências.

Palavras-chave: Autonomia. Mediação. Arte. Educação. Teatro do oprimido.

Introduction

This article is part of a post-doctoral research project conducted at the *Instituto de Investigação e Formação Avançada* [Institute for Advanced Education and Research] of the *Universidade de Évora*, Portugal, in 2018. The purpose of this piece of work is to reflect on an experience of appropriation and use of the methodological principles of the Theater of the Oppressed; more specifically the Forum Theater, in mediation strategies for the teaching of Arts in schools together with the Arts educators of the elementary education school system in the municipality of São José in the state of Santa Catarina, in Brazil, during the year 2017. We pointed out some factors considered favorable to the student's autonomy in the relationship between teaching and learning developed through artistic dialogue and investigative workshops committed to the perspective on child's intellectual autonomy. We seek to understand the children's process of creation from the student's viewpoint within the pedagogical context and to do so we expanded beyond the ordinary role of arts educators.

Art in itself is an experience which goes beyond discipline and control. We can say that Art is a transgressive practice. Even when it is practiced in a more formal setting like a school learning environment. The school space is laden with discipline and control. Therefore, what are the pedagogical models and didactic approaches that can be used to help us transgress in the teaching and learning space? We ought to take into account those models and approaches whose principles and concepts respect the Rights of the Child. This perspective considers the possibility of using alternative pedagogical approaches to the school disciplinary model which reproduces the rationalistic and exclusionary model and, consequently, teachers are made to conform to a technically-oriented and bureaucratic setting. In order to understand the child as creator and constructor, teachers need to think of autonomous learning practices which seek to listen to the child and also seek to develop dialogic practices, so as not to see children as lesser beings but, quite the contrary, we should see them as beings capable of creating, recreating, observing, selecting and constructing an understanding of the world around them. Thereby, we can articulate the knowledge of the Arts taking into consideration a perception of childhood which enables us to understand the children's outlook on life and their own way of looking at their longings and at their daily personal dramas. As educators, we should always task ourselves to blaze new trails and this one is a possibility.

The many forms of creating, recreating and formulating hypotheses rely on children's imaginative skills. The arts, time, nature, adult mediation and narrative are all factors considered favorable to children's imagination (GIRARDELLO, 2011, p. 75). In this regard, adult mediation is seen as a tool for the construction of knowledge whose aim is to enable us to take care of, to help and to support the child throughout the whole process. According to Girardello (2011), the importance of imagination for children can go far beyond the strategies and learning resources recommended by teachers. And, the author goes on saying: "Imagination is neither a *gift* nor an objective and qualifiable data from the subjectivity of children. It can be educated, as many scholars argue, from different theoretical perspectives" (GIRARDELLO, 2011, p. 76, our translation, author's emphasis).

The author bolsters this idea quoting Douglas Sloan on that: "It seems to me that the chief task of education is the education of imagination" (SLOAN, 1993 *apud* GIRARDELLO, 2011, p. 76, our translation).

We seek out more ways to implement pedagogical approaches that allow the fellow classmate to understand that everything may happen differently. These pedagogical strategies should take into account any detail or any word that the student may say and also anything he may have to interpret and by doing so those strategies enable the student to invite his fellow and at the same time he

learns how to be invited so as to learn for the other ones. In that regard, the whole idea of continuing education may provide an opportunity for teachers to develop new practices so as to oppose the conservative and technical-scientific dominant culture of education. Our understanding is that the movements in the teaching and learning spaces should be stimulated by the potential of imagination which develops the interpretation skills and the children's ability to recreate the material world. These stimuli may arise from getting contact with what can be touched. – fire, air, water and the Earth – and also in the encounter with the infinity of the universe – the stars, the weather, the immensity of the sea (GIRARDELLO, 2011, p. 78). In this sense, imagination and information can walk side by side, “mutually feeding the child's curiosity” (GIRARDELLO, 2011, p. 79, our translation). Thus, the principle of teacher and learner autonomy plays a crucial part in guaranteeing freedom and democracy in the teaching and learning space allowing the infinity of our imagination.

We understand the concept of autonomy in education as a commitment to acting fairly and freely praising the natural goodness and spontaneity of the student-subject. We can, clearly, see that the school, as much as the society in which we live, is still guided by a sense of autonomy which, very often, understates its own role for the benefit of the new media revolution, they project the concept of autonomy into a future perspective and, consequently, this concept becomes commonplace in the media discourse on communication technologies (DEBUS, 2018, p. 26).

Our reflection on school education understands the teaching and learning from a new social configuration generated by changes in communication technologies which engendered other movements in education and in the processes of knowledge construction. Many of these movements indicate the principle of autonomy as the basis of pedagogical practice. In this respect, theater, cinema, music, sculpture, painting and etc., can become triggering factors in mediation process.

In summary, we can say that we seek pedagogical actions which enable us to reduce the distance between the institutional spaces and the place where children and adolescents dwell. However, it is necessary to develop new skills, elicit different types of behavior and to get to know new cultural contexts which involve the teaching and learning relationship of those individuals who were born into a fully digital world: the digital natives.

Our theoretical framework allows us to make use of the pedagogical possibilities and the dramatic arts practice from the Theater of the Oppressed methodology created by Augusto Boal (1977, 2015) taking into account the concept of learner autonomy in the teaching and learning relationship and how this concept is intrinsically linked to other concepts which today belong

to the same semantic field, such as emancipation, protagonism, independence, interaction and participation. The methodology developed by Boal allows actors and non-actors to build dramatic courses of action applicable to their every day life and to a more radical, transgressive, unsettling theater, politicizing the social experiences which involve, in this case, teachers and students from an autonomous and emancipatory perspective. In order to connect education with this perspective, we made use of the school educational concept developed by Immanuel Kant (1999) and Paulo Freire (2006). Kant was one of the first thinkers of the modern age to develop a conception of autonomy in Education; it was at a time when religious beliefs were formed on the basis of authority and tradition and, therefore, reason and free thought were seen as subversion of the established order. Thinking, speaking and acting would be parts of the same movement toward autonomy which is guided solely by the individual free will. This will can be stimulated from the intelligible world as well as from the sensible world. In line with Freire's (2006) ideas we seek to understand the student as a subject who should take ownership of his own learning (appropriation) and experience the power of recreating the world; an autonomous and social subject, intellectually prepared for new experiences in an authentic and dynamic learning space, as intended by Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed.

The student as creator and constructor

When we refer to the student's autonomy, we are thinking about those pedagogical principles aligned with children's rights which can ensure full respect for them. This calls for a perspective that considers applying different pedagogical approaches as an alternative to oppose the traditional paths as well as the disciplinary technically-oriented and beaurocratic education system which, very often, excludes children's voice. Those alternative methods show us, in accordance with Friedrich Nietzsche (2008, p. 62, our translation), that "educational perspectives should not only serve to orient the individual to a task but also to perceive them as creators and constructors". In order to see the child as creator and constructor, we ought to think of the teaching and learning environment as a place to listen to the child and to construct dialogue so as not to see them as "lesser beings" but, quite the reverse, we ought to perceive them as beings capable of creating, recreating, observing, selecting and formulating hypotheses concerning the world around them. Thus, we can articulate the knowledge of the Arts taking into consideration a perception of childhood which

is able to understand the children's outlook on life and their particular way of looking at their longings and at their daily personal dramas.

Although defined as a rational being, man cannot be considered as a simple existence ready for knowledge by means of reason. According to the philosopher Immanuel Kant (1999), man is not merely a theoretical being (Pure reason) but, mainly, a practical being (Practical reason) endowed with moral consciousness; and this is dependent upon experience which forms the basis for that practice. This thinker argues that "[...] education and instruction should not be simply training but they ought to teach how to think according to principles" (KANT, 1999, p. 28, our translation). Experience teaches us that we are able to benefit from our attempts but, on the other hand, they can also lead us to good and bad results (KANT, 1999). "In that matter, we can clearly see that experience is necessary that's why education can only achieve excellence through the practice of many generations" (KANT, 1999, p. 29, our translation). In this context, we can assure that the goal of education is to form autonomous subjects through guiding rational principles in the teaching and learning spaces of experience.

For Kant, complying with the rules of coexistence in the student's context and in their learning space should imply that we can ensure the student's dignity and full respect for their rights. The student's will should not be ignored, otherwise education becomes mere training. It is important to be alert to that, so that the students are able to act with conviction and not only by mere force of habit; they should not do good as a means to some other good but instead as an end in itself (KANT, 1999, p. 68). For this reason, the philosopher ponders over the matter: "If dogs and horses can be trained so can humans. [...] However, it is not enough that children should be merely trained; for it is of great importance that they shall learn to think." (KANT, 1999, p. 27, our translation). In that way, he develops a pedagogy for autonomy in which practical reason prevails over pure reason through a movement aligned with reason and freedom. The chief task of an autonomous education is to educate man for a rational life. From this Kant's (1999) idea we can think that everything in nature works according to nature apart from man. As a rational being, he lives in accordance with the law, that's why men ought to be autonomous considering that he is a free and self-determining subject among other animals in nature.

Freire's concept of subject points out the appropriation and experimentation concerning the power of recreating the world. We must understand that the respect for the autonomy, dignity and identity of the student-subject may empower them to bring out the best learning qualities and virtues in their space of experience. The educatee's autonomy, dignity and identity ought to be respected otherwise this teaching approach may become "inauthentic, empty verbiage and inoperative" (FREIRE, 2006, p. 62, our translation).

Freire (2006) stresses that experiences and autonomous practices should not be confined to school spaces but they must occupy all the spaces seen as vital to the student-subject's learning. However, "the school environment can become a vital space for human beings to develop individual and collective practices of emancipation" (FREIRE, 2006, p. 98, our translation).

In his "*Pedagogia da Autonomia: saberes necessários à prática educativa*" [Pedagogy of Autonomy: necessary knowledge for educational practice], Paulo Freire (2006) reflects on the teaching and learning space which strengthens the learner autonomy and he draws our attention to the differences between training, teaching and educating. Teaching according to Freire requires accepting the challenges of new practices as long as they prove to be innovative and enriching; rejecting, at the same time, all forms of discrimination based on the grounds of color, size, social class, etc. While recognizing that we are part of and unfinished process, we know for certain that humans are conditioned beings. However, there is always a possibility to interfere in reality in order to transform it. Above all, "teaching requires respect for the autonomy of the learner's being" (FREIRE, 2006, p. 46, our translation).

However, this teaching is very restricted to the debate among educators. The child's point of view does not appear in this scenario. For Freire (2006) a teacher plays a central role in the teaching and learning relationship and the child will develop his sense of autonomy from that relationship. It is the teacher's curiosity which will foster the student's curiosity (FREIRE, 2006, p. 85). In this sense "a good teacher is the one who is capable of, while he speaks to them, bringing the students into the intimacy of his thoughts [...]. Your students get tired, they don't sleep" (FREIRE, 2006, p. 86, our translation). Before choosing any method or technique, the teacher "must be sure that the cornerstone to teaching is the curiosity of the human being" (FREIRE, 2006, p. 86, our translation). Obviously, Freire's ideas are not based on the one-sided respect relationship endorsed by the authorities. On the contrary, "the teacher's democratic authority must be aligned with the students' right to freedom" (FREIRE, 2006, p. 90, our translation). It is through my critical thinking as a student that "I can critically reflect more on my role as an authority figure" (FREIRE, 2006, p. 90, our translation). In that sense, one of the most fundamental qualities an authority figure should maintain is the confidence in himself by respecting the students' right to freedom. "Sure of himself, the authority has no need, at every single moment, to reaffirm his position of authority. He does not have to ask anyone, knowing he is a legitimate authority, 'Do you know who you're talking to?'" (FREIRE, 2006, p. 91, our translation). His self-assurance is mostly based on his ability to do his job successfully. According to Freire, "the teacher who does not take charge of his professional development [...] the

one who doesn't prove equal to the task is not morally entitled to take charge in the classroom activities" (FREIRE, 2006, p. 92, our translation).

In this context of "the coherently democratic authority" we realize that there is an effort to instigate freedom "[...] so that it can build itself, in itself, with the help of materials that, although coming from the outside world, elaborated by it, its *autonomy* [...]. Its autonomy that is founded on the *responsibility* that is being assumed" (FREIRE, 2006, p. 94, our translation, author's emphasis). In that regard, the imperative of responsibility is what allows children's autonomy to develop in the relationship between teaching and learning. Teachers as a democratic authority figure ought to bear witness to the fact that "what matters the most in learning a topic covered in class is the construction of undertaking responsibility and freedom" (FREIRE, 2006, p. 94, our translation). That construction depends on how teachers approach the relationship between authority and freedom. According to Freire (2006), that relationship is almost always tense and so it results in discipline problems. That depends on the harmony and balance between authority and freedom, and which "necessarily implies respect for one another, expressed in the assumption that both make of limits that can not be transgressed" (FREIRE, 2006, p. 88, our translation). In this sense, teaching requires freedom and autonomy simultaneously and, in this scenario, teachers play a central role in promoting student's autonomy. It is up to the teachers to build up a sense of purpose and freedom in the teaching and learning space, imposing limits from a moral perspective. "The more freedom critically defines its own limits the more authority is granted to it so that it can stand up for itself" (FREIRE, 2006, p. 105, our translation).

Vygotsky (1991) argues that the building up of knowledge occurs through social and cultural interactions which are socially guided and historically constructed. In this matter, phenomena are studied and understood as moving processes. Paulo Freire (2009) believes in such processes as well and points out that it is important to consider the processes of social reality which engender the construction of knowledge and enable us, at the same time, to realize the idiosyncrasies of the individuals.

Education as the practice of freedom, unlike the practice of domination, implies that it is the negation of man conceived solely as an abstract subject, isolated from others and detached from the world he inhabits and that practice also negates the world as a reality absent from man (FREIRE, 2009, p. 81, our translation).

Both Freire (2006, 2009) and Vygotsky (1991) agree that the life experience of individuals and their personal background perform a crucial role to the construction of knowledge. The environment becomes a source of knowledge that's why the educational practice should not be confined to the mere teaching and learning school space. The two thinkers lived in different historical contexts and produced their work with different concerns – whereas Vygotsky was most concerned with the psychological development of the subjects, Freire, diversely, used to focus mainly on the pedagogical development –, however, they have something in common; their theoretical framework which forms the basis of their theories: the dialectal and historical materialism (GADOTTI, 2013, p. 21).

Dramaturgy as Pedagogy

The teacher's role as mediator between the student and the physical and metaphysical world makes all the difference to the autonomous relationship in the field of education. In this sense, drama creates an opportunity for teachers to mobilize and facilitate tools to foster the student's imagination and autonomy in the teaching and learning spaces. Dramatic language serves the purpose of improving listening skills and fostering creativity and dramatically organized aesthetic communication. Theater as a language provides a space for reflection and for action and helps bring about social transformation.

The Theater of the Oppressed, in line with Augusto Boal's (2015) theories, "[...] is theater in this most archaic application of the word: all human beings are actors because they act and spectators because they observe. We are all 'spect-actors'" (BOAL, 2015, p. 13, our translation). In this sense, The Theater of the Oppressed is a theatrical form among many others that exists in every human being "[...] and it can be practiced in the solitude of an elevator, in front of a mirror [...], in a town square for a million spectators. At any place... even inside a theater house. [...] Theater language is human language par excellence" (BOAL, 2015, p. 13, our translation).

Boal (2015) develops some guiding principles of the Theater of the Oppressed (which is a complex and coherent method) that we should not lose sight of. The first principle aims to transform spectators into protagonists within the dramatic setting and the second one is to cause people to change society rather than solely interpret it. In that regard, the method developed by Boal (2015) assumes that every human being is capable of acting. In order to prove his point, this dramatist devised a set of techniques, games (dialogues) (BOAL, 2015)

and exercises which help people demechanize their bodies and minds allowing them to understand their own problems and it also empowers them to rehearse solutions and change the outcome of a scenario for the better.

We made use of the techniques that came from the Theater of the Oppressed's arsenal. The technique employed may be about a fight or a game that have their own rules that can be changed but the rules will not cease to exist. The aim is always to provoke a deep debate about social issues. The Forum Theater dramatic scenes always start with a story based on real life events and the solution proposed by the protagonist (the oppressed) will be analyzed during the forum session which is the main goal of the Forum (BOAL, 2015, p. 49). In this theatrical experience which we actively shared with the Arts educators of the elementary school system in the municipality of São José, we split the larger group, on an average of sixteen teachers, into four smaller groups. In those small groups every participant is invited to tell a real-life story of harsh oppression. Among the stories told each group of teachers was supposed to pick out one story so that we could have four stories selected. After that, we returned to the larger group which should choose only one story. However, the group decided to choose two out of the four stories. One of those stories was about a woman's school life experience when she was a sixth grader in elementary school around the age of eleven. She was attending a math class where an authoritarian teacher enforcing strict obedience in the classroom used to oppress those students who had difficulty in solving math problems. The other story was told by a fifth-grade elementary school teacher; one of her students would always be excluded from participation in the tasks by his classmates. None of those groups would allow "the classmate" to take part in the activities and that happened for so many reasons but the teacher did not know how to intervene. Thus, it was up to the Forum Theater to figure out ways to fight against oppression. We should remind ourselves that the teachers presented fragments of their personal stories related to their school life experience.

From that point forward, we planned our actions for the workshops so that we could integrate and expand our critical knowledge about theater and we also made use of pedagogical approaches which helped them see students as capable of taking charge of their own learning. The workshops were developed from April to November during the year 2017. There were seven monthly sessions that lasted four hours each. The workshops were designed and run in two sections. At first, we run through the games and exercises; playing games and performing exercises. Then, in the second section we started building up the stories and assembling the stages (scenic construction). Scenery encompasses all the physical elements of the stage designs such as painting, sculpture, etc. We also took into consideration the role of music as an integral part of theatrical production.

The mediation strategies were used to trigger a heated debate which encouraged them to assemble the stages and from that point on, everything became theater: teachers started giving voice to the voiceless students who were excluded from the knowledge construction process. The dramatic structure was based on the fairy tale Hansel and Gretel (*João and Maria*, by the brothers Grimm) (GAIMAN; MATTOTTI, 2015). In this retelling of the story, children get lost in the forest of school. There were conflicts between monsters (the antagonists) which dwell in these forests – school’s endless rules, authoritarian teachers and school principals – the children abandoned in the forest of school (the protagonists). In this particular case, the protagonists were represented by João and Maria. In subsequent scenes, the antagonists were allowed to exercise harsh oppression against the protagonists without any reaction from the last ones.

During the year 2017, the Brazilian education system underwent a pretty harsh time. In the previous year a *coup d'état* was carried out in Brazil, removing from office a legally constituted government from office which had been implementing, rightly or wrongly, many economic, social and cultural inclusion policies. Shortly thereafter, a conservative government came into power; embracing a more conservative outlook on education and moral issues which are strongly associated with archaic religious dogmas. In that regard, school education was deeply affected by those old-fashioned conceptions of life. School subjects such as Sociology and Philosophy were no longer required and arts teachers faced a significant reduction in the workload. Moreover, this aesthetic discipline has been under attack since then. Artistic nudity came to be seen as a mere explicit sexual content. Different types of visual arts exhibitions were closed down in a violent fashion throughout the country. The *Base Nacional Comum Curricular* [National Curricular Common Base] (BNCC) for the arts teaching, that encompasses a broad range of arts from visual arts, dance, music and theater, became compartmentalized again. In that regard, that compartmentalization issue helped influence the debates and it also had quite an impact on the scene construction as a whole.

An experience on Forum Theater

The dramatic structure was devised in the big Forum and actors and spectators allowed themselves to step forward and take the place of one of the oppressed, showing they could change the situation to enable a different outcome. In this sense, we came to find that there are different aesthetic, affectional and pedagogical possibilities. These possibilities are just like

glades in the forests; open spaces of possibilities through which we could learn how to fight back oppression and authoritarianism in the teaching and learning space, articulating knowledge and taking into account the importance of children's senses, their outlook on life and their peculiar way of looking at their longings and personal dramas.

The Forum Theater plays are designed to pose a question so that the audience must supply the answers about the oppression the oppressed suffer but do not know how to fight against (BOAL, 2015).

Maria and João in the jungle of knowledge

Scene 1 – The school as a happy place. Recess time, students are screaming, yelling and laughing out loud and all that hustle and bustle. Maria is standing in line at the school cafeteria talking to a friend, waiting to receive her favorite meal.

João is on the school campus running after a ball.

The sound of a bell signaling the end of recess the students head back to the classroom.

Scene 2 – Classroom drama – situations of oppression.

Maria is called up to the board to solve a math problem but she doesn't know how to do it. She has an emotional block. She trembles with fear and urinates on herself in front of class. An angry teacher says that she'd better go home and help her mother clean the house. He asks her to leave the room and wait outside the classroom door.

Scene 3 – Classroom drama – a situation of exclusion.

The math teacher leaves the room and the Portuguese teacher comes in and asks the class to split into five groups. The students get moving and start forming groups. João tries to engage with a group but he's not welcome. So, he tries to engage with another group but again he's not welcome. He is rejected by all of them. His fellow classmates say he's such a troublemaker, besides he doesn't like to take part in the activities and keeps shoving people all the time. They say he's also talkative and smells. The teacher intervenes and makes him sit at a desk away from the other students and asks him to copy a text from a book.

Scene 4 – The school health inspection closes the cafeteria.

Maria is on the school campus and she is very upset about the situation. João is playing soccer on campus and he shoots a nice kick but accidentally he breaks a window pane.

João will be barred from recess for two weeks as a punishment.

Scene 5 – A school (nonpartisan) and a new curricular base.

No recess allowed and ten minutes for lunch. That is really all based on productivity: teachers and students time management strategies.

Schools content glorifies the work of Art as a mechanical reproduction.

Dictation and oral exams reintroduced as a strategy to improve teaching quality.

Psychological pressure on the students increases and the excluded ones are sent to the principal's office and their names will be blacklisted. Their parents will be made aware of their children's shortcoming.

Scene 6 – A question is posed to the ones who are offstage: How can we put a stop to a situation of oppression?

The question sparked a debate. Actors and spectators trying to find a way to help students unburden themselves and a way to transform the education system. The solutions proposed were: to organize a general strike, the removal of public managers from office, to take legal action to monitor the compliance of existing laws such as the Brazilian Constitution of 1988 and the Brazil's Statute of the Child and Adolescent enacted in 1996. The proposed dilemmas explored on the stage made the forum debates intensify. After discussing the issues from a dramatic point of view, they decided to continue to follow the law since it recognizes the rights of children and adolescents as citizens and the school as a place for democratic actions as well. Despite all that, the Constitution of 1988 and Brazil's Statute of the Child and and the Adolescent are still in force. Time for rights.

Scene 7 – Law abidance.

A grand jury is empowered and the verdict is given: the principals and the school manager are removed from their position of power for being authoritarian and inadequate.

Scene 8 – A new educational approach and a critical thinking school committed to fostering children's imagination and to the construction of knowledge.

While the number of arts classes increases, the number of math and grammar classes decreases.

We shall have a recess of twenty minutes from now on. The reopening of the school cafeteria with organically produced food. Happiness is just around the corner.

A song was played in the final scene... *João and Maria* by Chico Buarque. The characters were singing the song and a guitar and percussion instruments were used for the accompaniment.

Final considerations

Based on this study we can assure that the Theater of the Oppressed in all its fullness as well as the Forum Theater allowed teachers to become protagonists in the processes of the construction of history and reality as Paulo Freire (2006, 2009) argues in line with the Pedagogy of the Oppressed proposed by Augusto Boal (2015). This also allowed the construction of utopias within a context of critical and political expectations which helps to shape the foundation of a project that emancipates the student-subject as well as the teacher-subject.

The fairy tale narrative Hensel and Gretel (*João and Maria*) by the brothers Grimm guided the dramatic structure and this metaphor allowed a reflection on the reality of what it is to be a child or what it was like to be a child throughout the history of humanity. In this brothers Grimm's narrative retelling, teachers came to find their students lost in that big forest that is metaphorically the school. In that sense, utopias are possible to be achieved because they are like glades, open spaces of possibilities. Every glade represents a possible utopia and one of them allowed an aesthetic and affective reality as an act of resistance and empowerment necessary to battle against authoritarianism and oppression in school education.

Although it is not a theatrical form with violent proposals, the Theater of the Oppressed seeks conflict. It is through conflicts experienced by the oppressed that we find the solution to end oppression. For this purpose, we need to learn to listen to, to be creative and to communicate with one another. The perspective of dramatic art allowed a space for reflection, action and aesthetic, ethical and political transformation using strategies that are at a certain moment, against and, in others, in favor.

The workshops also allowed a deep reflection on the current moment of Brazilian educational policies which seek processes of technical rationality that do not envision spaces and time for critical reflection, particularly in the field of arts. Moreover, the metaphor of João and Maria made it possible for teachers to seek for the student's look within the teaching and learning space and to take this look into account in the process of building knowledge within a constitutionally democratic and open to experiences space.

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