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PERFORMING PRAXIS

Exploring Anti-racism through Drama

Our relationship with the learners is one of the roads that we can do to intervene in reality over both the short and long term ... our relationship with the learner demands that we respect them and demands equally that we be aware of the concrete conditions of their world, the conditions that shape them (Freire 1998: 102).

This chapter will critically examine praxis in a program dealing with racism and discrimination in schools. We will explore how the theatrical process we use not only de-normalizes acts of discrimination, but also provides a space to develop an “as if” world, where an anti-oppression praxis (Adams, Bell and Griffin 1997; Kumashiro 2000) is modeled and enacted. Such a praxis involves looking at the relationship of identity, power and social change questioning structures of power in the world, communities and, most importantly, schools. We will look at how working against racism is possible to address in student-student relationships and problematize the program’s difficulty in extending this work to identify, and change, institutional and societal beliefs and practices.

PRAXIS

Paulo Freire (1970) writes that praxis involves action and reflection where each element builds upon the other as “the act of knowing involves a dialectical movement which goes from action to reflection and from reflection upon action into new action” (31). These actions take place in the real, not some imaginary or hypothetical, world and this world is the world of people interacting with each other. As interaction around important issues, praxis is always risky, requiring that a person “makes a wise and prudent judgment about how to act in this situation” (Carr and Kemmis 1986: 190).

Word and action, action and reflection, theory and practice are all facets of the same idea. Actions as praxis is not merely doing something (what Freire describes as activism) or acting upon, or doing something for the sake of doing. Praxis is a creative act, and dialogic in that both our actions and the world are emergent in the action.

In praxis, the facilitator draws participants into a process of critical reflection by first discovering the generative themes that are the common experiences in one’s social milieu, developed by people to make sense of the world around them. Once

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discovered, the facilitator or educator and participants work together to initiate new understandings of what is going on and one's place within it. The goal is to determine appropriate action and change.

In this chapter, we use Fregeau and Leier's (2002) division of the process of praxis to structure the discussion of our school based anti-racism program as follows:

- Understanding one's social reality
- Reflecting on that reality and experience
- Realizing that it can be changed and imagining how
- Deciding one has the power to make changes, and
- Taking action to make changes in that reality

1. UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

The anti-racism program

A Canada-wide survey commissioned by the Dominion Institute (Ipsos-Reid 2005) in March 2005 found that one in six Canadians (17%) report that they have been the victims of racism. More specifically, the residents of the prairie provinces of Saskatchewan/Manitoba (27%) report they have been the victims of racism. Residents of the same provinces (76%) say that Aboriginal¹ people are the most likely to be the victims of racism.

In releasing the survey results, Rudyard Griffiths, Executive Director of the Dominion Institute commented that "these poll results unfortunately indicate that racism and discrimination are a fact of everyday life for millions of Canadians. Despite the advances we have made as a country to eliminate intolerance, we cannot become complacent about the need to challenge racism and discrimination at their every occurrence" (2).

The Ipsos-Reid poll showed approximately 30% of Canadians feel that schools and families would be most effective in promoting racial tolerance. At the same time, other studies have documented that schools are sites of racist incidents and practices (Huff 1997, Schissel and Wotherspoon 2003, Silver and Mallett 2002, Wilson 1991). In our program, we view the incidents of racism to have potential in anti-racism education. We include these incidents as part of the learning process as we examine, through experiential activities, racism as it occurs in the lives of students at school.

In 1994, a public school board in Canada created a program to develop the capacity of youth between the ages of 12-18 years for leadership in anti-racism and cross-cultural education in their schools. The school division has ten high schools and close to fifty elementary schools. Compared to other jurisdictions, the student body would seem to be dominated by Eurocanadians, although there is a cultural and racial mix. The largest group of racialized students in the school is Aboriginal and that is where the greatest amount of racial tension in the community exists. The students and teachers who participate in this program are from different cultural and racial backgrounds. The program motto - Together We Will Make a Difference! - reflects a belief that it is everyone's responsibility to work toward

building communities where individuals are safe from discrimination, prejudice, stereotyping and racism. In this chapter we analyze the program in terms of praxis, focusing primarily on one aspect of the program, a retreat, although implementation in the schools is also included. The retreat is an intensive three day training that brings together school staff, students and facilitators in a setting away from their schools and the city. At the retreat, we use Power Plays (Diamond 1991), a Canadian adaptation of Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal's (1979, 1992, 1995, 1998) Theatre of the Oppressed techniques along with community and trust building activities that explore issues of identity and power in order to facilitate the development of youth leadership to address acts and attitudes of school-based discrimination.

BUILDING A SPACE FOR COMMUNITY

Risks are inherent in discussing what we want to de-normalize. Racism and discrimination are risky subjects, partly because they are not talked about in school, and partly because the issues are a complex interweaving of power, identity, attitudes, behaviours, and institutional and cultural structures. Trust amongst participants is important to enable them to share their lived experiences of discrimination. We use many experiential activities that involve themes of exclusion and inclusion, and link them through debriefing to life in school. The goals of the retreat are to familiarize the participants (including adults) with the language of discrimination and racism, to enable trust to be developed, and for stories to begin to emerge that help both facilitators and participants understand the reality of students.

Experiential activities include warmup games and trust exercises that inform different levels of the creative process, provide experiences of issues of power (exercises that embody leaders and followers) and, at the same time, enable a safe space to emerge. We begin with "Who is Here?", an activity that introduces concepts of multiple identity and group membership. "Responding to Difference" explores how difference is constructed and dealt with both individually and in society. "Power Flower" (Burke et al 1991: 87-88) helps student identify who they are (and aren't) as individuals, and as a group, in relation to those who have power in society.

We engage in activities and debriefing on important aspects of racism. One game, "Discriminadot" (Selby 1988), introduces the notion of exclusion through the random placement of dots on participants' foreheads and asking participants to group themselves. Another, "Sticky Labels" explores how we are "labeled" by others in terms of negative and positive qualities that affect social interaction and status.

Theatre games are used to contribute to a sense of community through Boal's (1992) *Knowing the body*: feeling what we touch, listen to what we hear, and seeing what we look at. We work in small groups to develop our sensory consciousness of the world and share the storied lives of the participants.

The games, small group work and theatre activities build trusting relationships among participants that allow a deep level of sharing. A powerful sense of community is developed that extends beyond the retreat setting.

2. REFLECTING ON REALITY AND EXPERIENCE

Seeing our own and others' stories

To try to know the reality that our students live is a task that the educational practice imposes on us: Without this, we have no access to the way they think, so only with great difficulty can we presume what then they know (Freire 1970: 102).

Stories are central to the learning process, as they mediate between self and others. As students develop different sets of images, they come to see their experiences reflected in those of others as they share common experiences. This forges bonds that grow out of, and expand, the program. Therefore, an integral part of the process is to enable participants to express themselves individually and collectively. Boal (1979) calls this "making the body expressive" (130). Turner (1982) suggests that "narrate" traces its lineage from the Latin *narrare*, "to tell," and Latin *gnarus*, "knowing," both deriving from the Indo-European *gna*, "to know" (86-87). Thus, narrative is a way of knowing, a search for meaning that privileges experience, process, action and risk. The shared roots of both storytelling and knowledge indicate the way knowing is shared through action. Knowing is achieved in representation through word, image or sound.

At the retreat, students begin to represent their world by sharing stories non-verbally through Image². Based on the idea that a "picture paints a thousand words" (Jackson in Boal 1992: xx), students recall an incident or experience they have had and create a body shape or image to represent that experience. Imaging enables the participant to fill the body shapes with feelings and thoughts that come from the interplay between the physical shape and experience. Thoughts and words initially emerge from the individual's awareness of the static body in the Image and the world around the Image. Images can be activated into further motion, movements that arise out of the interplaying of the physical shapes of bodies and their interpretation in words and action.

Image as narrative is introduced through "Complete the Image" (Diamond 1990) which is first done by two people shaking hands in a frozen image in front of the whole group. Anyone who has an idea can jump up, tap one of a pair shaking hands and replace them in a new body shape in relation to the other, adding a new element, creating a different Image, a new story. After a few Images in pairs, more characters are added to one of the Images until there are six or seven people who are making a story out of the original paired Image. We then decode the image by asking the group what they see as the story, emphasizing that one image can be interpreted in many ways, from many perspectives³. When it seems the group has understood the method, we begin again. This time we ask the group to think of a particular theme like life in school, or racism in school while completing the

image. We then ask the group to identify who has power in the Image story, who doesn't and why.

Such an Image is a tool of Bertolt Brecht's (quoted in Roman 1993) "complex seeing of analysis" (158) – a set of visuals which emerge from generative "themes which contain the possibility of unfolding into again as many themes, which in their turn call for new tasks to be fulfilled" (Freire 1970: 92) with rich ramification in the lives of learners.

Just as there is a transformation from that of the story teller into the story shower, playing with Image leads to a transformation of meaning. "The image work never remains static...the frozen image is simply the starting point for a prelude to the action, which is revealed in the dynamisation process, the bringing to life of the images and the discovery of whatever direction or intention is innate in them" (Jackson in Boal 1992: xix-xx).

As text, Images are a form of communication between storyteller and audience. They access events, places and personalities that exist, not as isolated facts, but as inter-related representations that emerge as we remember (Simon 1994). The issues become clearer as we work through image. When we see another's images or hear his/her story, we as members of the group may invest that story and those characters with the colours of our own experience. We grasp the story and make it our own.

In this way, Images are tools to reflect upon action in the world outside the retreat. At the same time, constructing the Image is an act of creation so becomes something more than mere reflection. Through this process, Image brings to light what is otherwise hidden and withdrawn. In the case of Image, this language of "double seeing, where the image of the real is real as image" (Boal 1995: 43-44), the Image forms a kind of mirror with us being both inside and outside it. Imaging through performance invites participation through performance – embodied explorations of the interplay through body, mind, and imagination; we perform possibility and absence into being and becoming.

3. REALIZING THAT REALITY CAN BE CHANGED AND IMAGINING HOW

The "Wildest Dream"

Image work enables a listening to stories, overcoming the act of hearing, "since it entails not only hearing, but also feeling what is listened to, getting involved with what is being listened to, and being actually engaged with the speaker – and then, reflecting on all this, systematizing what has been listened to first" (Freire 2002: 13).

In our work at the retreat, students create images that tell the story of their experiences of power, oppression and racism in their lives. The image work produces a creative space for students to develop the capacity to represent and give expression to their view of experience and reality. The Images created by the students most often deal with stories of oppression in their lives at school, but sometimes includes experiences in families, with peers or in the community. As we examine each individual Image to identify commonalities and differences, students

come to see their experiences reflected in those of others and recognize that they are not alone in their experiences of exclusion and powerlessness. This recognition of self in the experience of others illustrates the commonalities shared by students, forging bonds among them. A composite image is then created that incorporates the most powerful aspects of each of the individual images. We call the composite image the Image of Oppression. Students reflect on the Image of Oppression to identify the characters and their role in the Image. We discuss with the participants who has power over, who is under power, and how that power is expressed. We identify the central conflict in the Image. This exploration helps students deconstruct the power relationships inherent in racism and oppression and leads to an examination of how that power is developed and maintained.

The Image of Oppression is followed by an adaptation of an exercise called Your Wildest Dream which was developed by David Diamond (2000). Your Wildest Dream takes the Image of Oppression and asks the participants to make an Image that is not an opposite of the Image of Oppression, but one that takes us into our imaginations to explore what our dreams might be for an ideal that would represent, for example, 'A world without racism'. Then Images are made to represent the intermediary steps that could transform the Image of oppression (which is of a concrete situation) into the Image of the Your Wildest Dream, which is much more imaginative and abstract. As students come up with the intermediary steps between the Images, they discuss the possibilities for change and examine the consequences of the attempts to change. We begin to see the little changes that are necessary. Who is able to change first? How might other characters respond? What changes does this cause? What is blocking the desired changes? What will enable the change to occur? In the interplay between the Image and the discussion of transformation, students start to see where hope lies and what are the significant moments of change, creating an 'as if' world or, more accurately, a 'what if' world that is about 'what if we could change things' or "what if we acted to change things".

Doing so gives student voice so that their issues lead the program within the structure set by the leaders. Sharing helps students overcome isolation and breaks the silence of oppression. Discrimination starts to be denormalized. On numerous occasions we have heard students comment that they thought bullying and discrimination were just the way things were but that hearing others' stories enabled them to understand that these acts were wrong and they should do something about it. Students come to see that they are not alone in their experiences of feeling oppressed. In the representation of a common incident of oppression they discover the features of domination and how it is enacted. Students come to understand how power is achieved through numerical strength, different forms of power, and coercion and fear. They can see how power is exercised in speech and in their body. In working through the stages from the incident of oppression to the wildest dream, students identify who the players are, the roles they play and gain some insight into the possibilities for change, for personal or societal intervention.

4. DECIDING ONE HAS THE POWER TO MAKE CHANGES

Forum Theatre

In engaging one's audience in this process of consciousness raising, the educator is required to help draw the audience into a process of critical reflection by first discovering the group's "generative themes" as the baseline for the dialogic encounter. These themes are the common elemental orienting concepts of one's social milieu, developed by people to understand the world around them; and once discovered, the educator and audience work together to initiate a self-generated new understanding of historical reality and one's place within it (Freire 2002: 81)

In the program retreat we have a student leadership team, composed of more senior students and past participants of the program who have experience in representing their reality through drama. We work with this group to develop a Forum play that incorporates their common experiences of exclusion, discrimination, prejudice, and racism. Each play includes various characters like oppressors, victims and bystanders, or potential allies of the antagonist and protagonist. The first time we perform the play for the participants in the retreat setting, we use it for discussion of the issues the characters in it are facing. We ask each audience member to think about which character's struggle they identify with the most. After the play, we ask the audience to help us create a Status Lineup, so that we can physically place the characters in the play according to the power they have in the scene. This leads to interesting discussions about who can potentially use their power; who will refuse; who will never have power; and what is the potential for certain characters to take action.

Later we perform the play using Forum Theatre (Boal 1979) with the retreat participants as audience members. Drawing on Boal's critique of the usual role of the audience in theatre, he developed the term spect-actor to change the role of audience to participant, where the audience is invited to suggest and enact solutions to dramatized problems. A situation is shown in an unsolved form (the Forum play), to which the audience (spect-actors) is invited to suggest and enact solutions. Many alternative solutions or interventions are enacted in the course of a single forum. The result is a pooling of knowledge, tactics and experience similar to what Freire calls praxis as "untested feasibility [inedito viavel]" (Freire 2002: 8). Thus, praxis is not merely behaviour; it is the possibility of doing something that has not been tried before and that can only be understood in terms of the commitments that informed it. Thus, interventions are rich concrete instances of 'what might be possible'.

After watching the play to its problematic ending, the play performance is repeated several times with students invited to become spect-actors. Students can and do intervene on behalf of a character they identify with, whom they see having a struggle to overcome power. "The keener the desire to take action, the more the spect-actors hurry on to the stage. They enact thoughts, rather than just speaking them" (Dwyer 2004: 199). We encourage students to try out their ideas for action as spect-actors, and that we can learn from each intervention, not just those that produce a more "satisfactory" result in the play. We find that as students see their

peers go on the stage, everyone is likely to be more engaged and critically conscious. "There is a kind of knowledge – or perhaps, better a will to knowledge and power – which is apprehended in similar circumstances and which is qualitatively different from knowledge sitting in your seat as silent witness" (200).

We debrief each intervention asking both the actors as characters and the spect-actors who intervened what has happened and how the intervention affected their character. We also explore the barriers to action, because usually, each new action carries with it some kind of risk.

A recent play was about a teenage girl and her new 'brother'. The girl resents that her mother has begun living with an Aboriginal man. The mother hasn't got much time for her daughter and the man has also brought a son into the household. The girl has a lot of power in her school peer group and there are others wanting to become like her. There are also students with learning disabilities and several other characters who are caught between what they want and how they have to act because of peer pressure.

Jim, a student with a learning disability, was playing himself in the play. A spect-actor came on the stage and replaced a character who wanted to befriend Jim, but couldn't because of peer pressure. In the original play, Jim wanted to disappear whenever conflict occurred. As he put it in rehearsals, "that is the only way I can survive high school". Thinking that it was important to support Jim as the character isolated from the rest of the school population, the student spect-actor intervened on behalf of another character and went out of his way to befriend Jim. But Jim still ran away and did not respond to the overtures of friendship from the character.

In the debriefing after the intervention the facilitator asked Jim why he acted this way...wasn't it good that he had a potential new friend?

"Yes," Jim replied, "But he wasn't helpful before. He changed on a dime this time – he could always change again – so why should I trust him now?"

"Then", the facilitator asked Jim, "how does trust get built?"

Jim responded, "Trust has to be built one situation at a time".

As we see in this example, Forum Theatre provokes understanding by enacting possible strategies to assist a group or individual investigate possible solutions to particular challenges. To activate and dynamise audience and actors to explore other personas and other ways which give more power to a character in a situation is to learn another kind of behaviour that might help overcome oppression. It doesn't say do or don't this, but it does say, 'maybe you could try this or that, but it's up to you to decide in the end'.

"We express the dreams we are able to fight for in view of the human possibility to project whatever s/he wants and thinksthat carries the embryo of possible changes steered at a more humane future" (Freire 2002: 9).

If the play's structure is not only about life in schools but about larger issues of power, then the reverse is also true – the play can become a place to develop a *what-if world* where we play in the reality of the play to rehearse for the play of reality outside the stage. In bridging the gap between social justice theory, individual agency and social transformation, forum theatre is an aesthetic learning

space where the actors and spect-actors are directing and involved in their own story. This event enables us not only to clarify where and what the central issues are, but also to experience and practice possible ways of dealing with those issues. Students come to see how individual actions impact the social situation and also how the social affects the individual. Often students recognize that in order to confront, diffuse or counteract the power of the oppressor, alliances or partnerships with others are needed. The social situation needs to be reconfigured before a shift in power relationships is possible. They come to recognize where interventions are possible in their lives and begin to explore ineffective actions and what effective interventions might look like. Rather than learning specific responses to a problem, forum encourages actors and spect-actors to explore and enact conceptions of effective actions.

This exploration of the student's reality is made possible when the space is created where students can take leadership in describing, naming, and acting upon their world.

5. TAKING ACTION TO MAKE CHANGES IN THAT REALITY

You need one person to break the pattern (Student interview).

In the spring and summer of 2006, the authors were asked by the sponsoring school board to document the impact of the program and make recommendations for possible changes. Focus groups, student interviews, teacher interviews and a student drama workshop were used to ask students and teachers reflect on the program impact, both at the retreat and back in their schools.

PERSONAL CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION

The retreat was a life changing experience. I remember every single minute. I will always remember all of it (Focus group).

Students reported that the retreat was a powerful experience. Through the trust building exercises and sharing personal stories with others, students formed emotionally close relationships. They were not afraid to share their fears, frustrations, disappointments and negative emotions. A lot of the students appreciated what they felt was a safe environment. Students felt like they could open up and be themselves – some for the first time in their lives. Possibilities for action emerged as students exposed their thoughts, feelings and fears. Students thought this happened when they saw others 'step out of the box' – "then more people are brave" (Drama workshop) and people start shedding their facades. As one student leader put it, "we did not have to be somebody we were not. We did not have to keep up a façade" (Drama workshop) or continue how they acted in school with their guard up. "When we realized that people did not care who we were on the outside, we opened up" (Drama workshop). The experience of being able to show who they truly were was an emotional experience for the students. "I

was crying after the retreat, cause you feel so secure about your feelings – that no one would judge you” (Focus group). The bonds of friendship developed at the retreat built an important support system for many students. They created a network of close friends that they stayed in touch with.

Students embraced drama as a method to learn about racism. Sharing stories of discrimination was an important part of the drama process. “I talk to people and they share stories about what happens to them and I can see they are affected by [racism]. [The stories] make you realize I have been through something like that too. You really realize that I am not the only one going through these things” (Focus group). The students reported that the Forum Theatre plays were “real” and presented them with a representation of the reality of discrimination and racism that occurs in school. Students said that it is a part of their reality that is not usually talked about anywhere else. The reality of the plays, the interventions, and discussions of the forum theatre process help to denormalize the acts of prejudice and racism that are part of students’ daily lives. Dramas are “hard hitting, during these dramas you can see how it might feel to be discriminated against” (Focus group).

At these retreats participants identified issues in their personal lives and at the school with the goal of developing their own solutions to racism. They felt they gained insight into how they could respond to racism differently. “A friend of mine used to get really mad when someone called him a racist name. [After the retreat] he deals with the situation by giving them a long lecture. Even me, I know how to talk to people now if they are being racist” (Student interview). For others, it opens their eyes to the effect their actions have had on others. “[The anti-racism program] has changed my perspective of people and how I treat them. I used to be mean to people because of the color of their skin” (Focus group). The consciousness of and action against racism continued through the student involvement in their in-school anti-racism, anti-discrimination group.

CHANGES IN SCHOOL CLIMATE

Ever since we did the play, I have seen slight changes. Before, in the cafeteria from one end to the other, you could hear people cracking the [discriminatory] jokes. Now, you hear it less (Focus group).

The experiences at the retreat served as a catalyst for developing solutions and taking action toward change through their school’s anti-racism/anti-discrimination group and activities such as forum plays. Back at school, some of the students developed and performed forum plays for their fellow students and some were able to perform forum plays for elementary schools. More than one teacher stated that the plays got a good response in the school. “Our group received a lot of positive feedback about their play from both students and teachers” (Teacher interview). Participants stated they had noticed changes in their school from students who had stopped labeling, to people who were more inclusive of those who are different, to those who had more self respect for themselves.

Students also reported that activities in their school allowed students to be more different – to be themselves, to be open and to express themselves as individuals (Focus group). The students’ cohesive anti-discrimination voice seemed to have had an impact on the other students at their school.

CHANGES IN THE COMMUNITY

The courage to act went beyond the school environment, it spilled over into the community. Many students told of the program giving them the awareness and confidence to challenge racist beliefs, expressions or actions, even of their family members including parents. One boy told of an incident where his brother used a racial slur when walking by an Aboriginal woman on the street. “I got mad and told him off. I told him it was wrong and that he shouldn’t do that” (Focus group).

The program’s school projects have gone beyond the walls of the schools as well. The plays developed by students have been performed for many community and educational groups. Thus we see that the use of drama in the program developed student voice, confidence in action, and skills in dialogical learning, while keeping the focus on the issue that brought us together – racism and discrimination. Drama enabled students to become connected to the issue, and through shared leadership with adults, come to recognize the use of drama to represent reality, and not just be seen as “play”.

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

The anti-racism program had a profound effect on the students involved. However, institutional change was harder to achieve. The degree of impact on other students in the school and on the racism and discrimination in the schools varied from school to school. A couple of schools didn’t have active anti-racism groups even though their students and staff had attended the retreat. At one school, the group wasn’t sure how to address issues of racism beyond the level of awareness. At another, students believed that one activity, a play on labeling and stereotypes that they performed, had an impact on student interactions, by reducing the derogatory comments made by students in their interactions with others, but they believed they needed to do more to have a broader impact. At yet another, both students and teachers described the school wide impact that program had had on the climate of the school, especially the integration of the ‘Alternative education’ students (those with special learning needs) into the ‘mainstream’ student body. “The program has changed our school. Now students are more open to talking to other people. Now students see Alternative education students as human, as someone they will talk to. There is more courage to stick up for one another, to say when a joke is offensive” (Focus group).

Institutional change of schools around the issue of racism and student leadership in addressing racism is a slow process. In the case of this program, although the administration of the school division is very supportive of the program, in many cases, at the school level it is not perceived to be a priority. The lack of the

program's status is evident in teacher involvement and in scheduling in the school. It is often difficult to recruit teachers as leaders for the program. Although the retreat can be a life changing experience for the students, it is can be difficult to get teachers to commit to attendance for the three days of the retreat. Often para-professionals (teacher's aides, school-community coordinators) from the school attend the retreat with students to "supervise" students. The paraprofessionals may not have the primary responsibility for the program back at the school. Despite the support of senior administration, at the school level the anti-racism program is seen as an extra-curricular activity, but lacks the status of the sports teams, choir or drama clubs. Many school anti-racism teams report difficulty finding time to meet due to scheduling conflicts with other school activities or because the anti-racism team is not the only extra-curricular responsibility of the teacher. Issues such as these prevent the program from becoming institutionalized and more fully integrated into school programming.

CHANGES IN POWER DYNAMICS

Although the impact of the anti-racism program varied from school to school, one systemic change was the leadership shown by students in the program. Students in the program were critically analyzing their school environment. They identified actions to address racism and discrimination in their schools. Students felt empowered to initiate ideas and make decisions for change in their own lives and in their schools so to some extent, decision making and problem solving around issues facing students in the school was shifting to the students, out of the hands of the administration, so to a limited extent, changed the power dynamics in the school. At the same time, we recognize that schools are hierarchical institutions where teachers are seen as the authority. Some of the teachers in the program find it hard to accept that students have the creativity and capability to come up with solutions to complex problems in their lives.

For example, one of the authors was joking⁴ facilitating a forum play where the Grade 6 boys kept intervening in the play with physical violence or shouts, swearing and insulting the person exerting power. One of the teachers we were working with came over to the joker and said, "Can't we just begin the performance by listing possible actions that the students could try out and then the students would see how these transformations work?"

This is to control, to provide a recipe of what to do and what not to do. We operate out of the assumption that what is not expressly forbidden is permissible.

The joker replied, "We don't say no, we say yes, and through the characters we explore students'-interventions. We challenge them to think of other ways to deal with the situation, keeping an opening for creativity. We let the spect-actors choose the interventions and see what transpires." But this isn't a passive form of leadership. We asked the audience, "What kind of suggestions have been made through these interventions? Is violence or swearing the only way to deal with bullies? Where do we get these ideas from? Are there any other suggestions?"

The role of the actors and the Joker is to help the spect-actors discover these alternatives.

PRAXIS ENABLING AN INTERROGATION OF THE PROGRAM

Social theory is seen as a means by which people can achieve a much clearer picture of who they are, and to examine the real meaning of their social practices as a first step in becoming different sorts of people with different sorts of social arrangements. It is intended to free people from causal relationships by getting them to have different ends...it is not the ability to work with a system efficiently, but the power to alter this system fundamentally (Fay 1987: 89).

Praxis is the action and reflection of people upon their world in order to transform it. This requires both active reflection and reflective action. In this section we will use this process to interrogate the program in terms of knowledge (of racism), power, and changes in relationships in schools. In effect, we will explore how engaging in this program has enabled us to come full circle so that we engage in praxis as we interrogate our own approach as facilitators and as adults.

INTERROGATING RACISM IN SCHOOL

In drawing from their own experience, white people will often look at times in their lives when they have been oppressed and gain empathy through this experience with those who experience racism. In our anti-racism program students create the Forum theatre play but, because it is based on their experiences, students most often present the racism expressed in the personal and social relationships amongst different student groups. This student focus is understandable because most student bodies in high school are highly stratified. Students as audience members immediately recognize and identify with the racism and discrimination amongst different student groups. This is the overt racism that is denormalized in our program. What is not presented and what students and teachers do not address is the systemic racism of school as an institution where personalized racism amongst the students is the norm and those with power in the institution turn a blind eye to this issue or, worse yet, have beliefs about white students and racialized students that result in the unequal treatment of white and racialized students. These racialized beliefs of teachers are manifested in the lack of success of racialized students, lack of support for racialized student learning, disciplinary action imposed on racialized students, and push out of racialized students (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003; Silver & Mallett, 2002; Wilson, 1991).

The anti-racism program problematizes student-student relationships and power differentials in peer interaction, but ignores one of the key relationships in schooling and learning—the teacher-student relationship. The teacher-student relationship is where institutional and societal power and authority are enacted.

In our program, we don't explore the power and authority teachers and administrators have to determine what counts as knowledge, how that knowledge will be gained by students, and who has the right to participate in their school through disciplinary action and grading. This form of racism in schools remains unproblematized.

Although our three-day workshop has not yet done problematized institutional racism, there is a space to bring this aspect of racism into the program in the forum play. One way is to add the character of a teacher who uses her authority to perpetuate racial inequity. For example a teacher could be added to a play to intervene in a racial conflict in a way that favours the white students and reinforces the existing racialized peer power structure in the school. In this way, we could begin to interrogate the power structures of the institution of schooling.

INTERROGATING POWER STRUCTURES IN SCHOOLING

Transformative education or education as the practice of freedom (Freire 1973; Hooks 1994) that counters traditional education is based on acts of knowing fused from two interrelated experiences – “the creation of an authentic Dialogue between the learners and the educators as equally knowing subjects” (Taylor 1993: 54); and “the awareness of the real concrete context of facts, that is of the social reality in which we are living” (Taylor: 54).

Freire's approach is a transitive praxis where learner is both subject and object. Through an analysis of *Banking Education*, where the teacher's relationship to the student is to pour knowledge into the 'empty' student – “knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (Freire 1970: 58). “In banking education an educator replaces self-expression with a 'deposit' that a student is expected to 'capitalize.' The more efficiently he does this, the better educated he is considered. To change the world through work, to 'proclaim' the world, to express it and to express oneself are the unique qualities of human beings. Education at any level will be more rewarding if it stimulates the development of this radical, human need for expression” (Freire 1985: 21).

Freire's solution to the teacher-student relationship challenges the one-way relationship, creating a *critical pedagogy*. This involves posing problems that enable us to continuously inquire into our relationships in the world which impacts on our notions of self in relation to others and to the social structures in which we are embedded.

The idea of “equally knowing subjects” is integral to our analysis of the program and the relationship of students to teachers. The work with students in this program has brought into focus the contradiction where the drama process, with its emphasis on stories and interactivity, puts relationships of power into question. Globally, schools are sites of power (Fay 1982) and the process of education conforms to this power. Situating the program within the schools but outside the curricular structures has enabled us to work the cracks, where the work “is a

challenge to authority, unpredictable disruption of norms, a kind of playing with fire” (Kershaw 1998: 68), but, in doing so, it has also limited the ability of the program to engage in long term change.

Herein lies the weakness of the continuation of our work: we engage students but not the teachers. In failing to reach the teachers, many may not have the view of themselves and their students as equally knowing subjects. Because teachers don't engage in an authentic exploration of racism in their lives and schools, they do not have the same awareness as the students of the context of the facts as do the students.

True dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking—...thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity – thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of risks involved (Freire 1970: 80-81).

Students identify the need for courage in confronting racism, but we fail to challenge the teachers to do the same. Working in a system of institutionalized racism, how might we explore with teachers their fears around change? In what ways can they be reflexive to examine their practices and identify possibilities for teacher actions that would confront the reproduction of racism and discrimination in their schools? How can they become collaborators with student in the creation of more equitable schools?

Freire (1998) sees the enactment of this process of a collaborative approach in education through democratic leadership. He sees the development of democracy as embracing diversity, where different truths need to be respected. He views the practice of respect for diversity (tolerance) as a virtue and as the balance between the abuse of authority and wonton permissiveness.

The act of tolerating requires a climate in which limits may be established, in which there are principles to be respected...Under an authoritarian regime, in which authority is abused, or a permissive one, in which freedom is not limited, one can hardly learn tolerance. Tolerance requires respect, discipline, and ethics. The authoritarian, filled with sexual, racial, and class prejudices, can never become tolerant without first overcoming his or her prejudices (42).

In the light of the past intolerance in schools for minority ways of being and cultural knowledge, Freire's analysis of the need for teachers to embrace tolerance becomes clear. It contextualizes the importance of respect in education for diversity as respect becomes tied to tolerance and the development of democracy. The social system established in the classrooms is where the students learn, at the micro level, the practice of freedom and responsibility needed in a diverse and democratic society and world.

STUDENTS INTERROGATING THEIR REALITY

One of the critiques we have of the program is that we haven't yet found a way to prepare students for the awareness that emerges when they return to their schools from the retreat. This is illustrated by a story that one of the Student Leaders told to a workshop with pre-service teachers following one particular retreat.

The retreat ended on a Thursday afternoon. Participants went back to their schools on the Friday. Mark, the student leader, reported that during the following weekend students were calling him, telling him how they felt in their schools after the program. Suddenly, they kept seeing instances of exclusion and were having trouble coping with their new consciousness. Mark said that it was as if they started seeing their school communities and the interactions within it with new eyes, that they were 'becoming conscious' and found it overwhelming and hard to deal with. And they were asking him what they could do with these new feelings and thoughts.

This story illustrates how during the retreat, many students experience profound personal transformation that impacts how they now see and interpret their world back at home and school. Students are prepared to act differently. But when they go back into the school, others around them may not share their views or know how to respond to the student's new perspective or how to support the student.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The interrogation of the program has clarified that more work needs to be done with teachers if the program is to become an ongoing part of the school division's programming and if we hope to challenge the institutionalized racism in schools. However, as we continue the struggle to integrate the program into the institution of schooling, we need to be careful not to ignore the power of the retreat setting or to minimize the importance of personal transformation in the lives of individual student's.

[The program] has impacted everything I am, it's the only reason I go to school, its one of the reasons I quit doing drugs and drinking and a lot of the bad things I got myself into. Its changed the way I look at things. It's one of the more positive things I have had in my life. I am actually really grateful I have had that experience (Aboriginal student interview).

Now I am not so anxious to say that I am from Afghanistan, that I am from the ESL class or I am Muslim. I used to get anxious, like oh, what would the other person be thinking? Now I know that everyone has their own rights to what they believe. Some people would say you are Muslim, you are like a terrorist. But now I am proud of who I am. There are always someone that doesn't like you or who you don't like, you just need to ignore them (Afghani student interview).

It is important in this context of thinking about the relationship of individual and global or structural change to consider what Boal (1995) says:

The smallest cells of social organization (the couple, the family, the neighbourhood, the school, the office, the factory, etc.) and equally the smallest incidents of our social life contain all the moral and political values of society, all its structures of domination and power, all its mechanisms of oppression. The great general themes are inscribed in the small personal themes and incidents...When we talk about a strictly individual case, we are also talking about the generality of similar cases.....The propagation of ideas, values, of tastes is osmosis: interpenetration (40).

Osmosis means there is an interweaving of societal values in the body, values, ideas, tastes. The role of the team building process in the program is to make the dialogue between the world outside the retreat transitive and transparent, helping these values emerge for investigation. Because the retreat is in the world, it has the values of the world within it. So we must transform ourselves to transform the world.

No one lives democracy fully, nor do they help it to grow, if, first of all, they are interrupted in their right to speak, to have a voice, to say their critical discourse, or, second, if they are not engaged, in one form or another, in the fight to defend this right, which, after all, is also the right to act (Freire 1998: 65).

A few years ago one of the authors led a Theatre of the Oppressed workshop with a group of high school students. Several months later, one of the student participants in the workshop attended a meeting of adult educators and described her experience. An audience member asked her what the effect of the theatre workshop had been on her high school experience. She replied that having gone through the workshop she realized that every time she saw a racist incident at her school she knew that even though only she saw it, there were many people at other schools 'standing behind her' and supporting any actions of intervention she might take.

Leadership in confronting oppression and racism requires the development of notions of collaborative and inter-generational leadership because systemic change most often requires the development of collective action. We can begin by having adult leaders and teachers reflect on the reality of institutional and systemic racism in their own lives and to enact democratic leadership that recognizes students as "knowers" (Gourd 2005), modeling the practice of shared and collaborative leadership.

Freire (1998) writes, "it is truly difficult to make a democracy...It is not what I say that says I am a democrat, that I am not racist or machista, but what I do" (67). To Freire, it is in the contradiction between saying and doing that we learn that we are in a challenging and ambiguous state which asks us to find a way out. Becoming consistent between saying and doing is a challenge that we feel drama helps us to overcome as it identifies contradictions and, at the same time, enables us to address them. It is this challenge that continues to inform our work in drama, youth leadership and anti-racism education.

I've had quite a few racial encounters that were unpleasant. I want a world where no one has to go through that. If joining [the program] meant I could make a contribution to a world without racism, I was willing to do it (Focus group).

NOTES

- ¹ In different parts of Canada and the United States, different terms are preferred to denote the original peoples of North America. In this chapter, as designated in the Canadian constitution, the term Aboriginal is used to be inclusive of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, who are each recognized as distinct groups.
- ² We use the capitalized Image to refer to the particular theatricalized use of bodies in frozen motion in a drama workshop. When uncapitalized, image refers to the visual concept.
- ³ Almost every time we do Image work the first response by participants to an image is – what is the person in the Image trying to say? and then the inevitably “guessing” begins. This happens even when I begin a sequence with a shaking hands exercise as I emphasize that there is no right or wrong answer. We add that the Image we show at the beginning allows everyone to “read into it” their own story. Despite these assurances, we feel the inertia and habit of “playing charades,” of “guessing” what someone is trying to say remains so ingrained that participants cannot trust to let the image be to come into its own meaning.
- ⁴ The Joker is the director/master of ceremonies of a workshop or performance. At a forum theatre performance s/he is the link between the play, the actors, and the audience. S/he explains the rules and discusses the interventions with both the characters in the play and the spect-actors from the audience who intervene in the action.

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