forum theatre meets philosophy for/with children: physically exploring challenging situations in the community of philosophical inquiry

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abstract
This paper introduces Augusto Boal's theatre practices, specifically forum theatre, to the Philosophy for/with Children [P4wC] movement. By connecting Boal's pedagogy with P4wC, we show how forum theatre techniques can empower child-participants to physically engage in Communities of Philosophical Inquiry [CPIs] centered on challenging situations that they experience. To do this, we introduce and summarize aspects of Boal's pedagogy, including his theoretical insights and methodological frameworks, with extensive reference to his book *Theatre of the Oppressed*. We follow with a discussion of some of the connections between the Theatre of the Oppressed movement and P4wC; specifically, we look at these movement's similar conceptions of the relationship between self and community, and the similar methodological role of both stimuli and facilitators. We end by laying out several ways in which theatre practitioners and educators have used forum theatre with children, and suggest how P4wC facilitators might utilize Boal's methods within CPI. We argue that Boal's work offers methodological tools and theoretical insights that can supplement the P4wC movement by creating more physical, creative and inclusive spaces for philosophical engagement. Ultimately, we contend that the unification of these two movements has much to contribute to the ongoing development of pedagogical practices in P4wC. Thus, we call for more research regarding Boal's methods, as well as other participatory theatre practices, in the practice of CPI.

keywords: forum theatre; philosophy for/with children; theatre of the oppressed; physicality; theatre education.

el teatro-foro se encuentra con la filosofía para/con niños: exploración corporal de situaciones difíciles en la comunidad de investigación filosófica

resumen
Este artículo introduce las prácticas teatrales de Augusto Boal, específicamente las del teatro-foro, en el movimiento de Filosofía para/con Niños [Fp/cN]. Al conectar la pedagogía de Boal con la Fp/cN, mostramos cómo las técnicas del teatro-foro pueden dar a los niños-participantes el poder de involucrarse en Comunidades de Investigación Filosófica [CIFs] centradas en situaciones difíciles que experimentan. Para hacer esto, introducimos y compendiamos algunos

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aspectos de la pedagogía de Boal, incluyendo sus perspectivas teóricas y marcos metodológicos, con extensas referencias a su libro *Teatro del Oprimido*. Continuamos con una discusión de algunas de las conexiones entre el movimiento del Teatro del Oprimido y Fp/cN; específicamente, observamos las concepciones similares que ambos movimientos tienen respecto de la relación entre uno mismo y la comunidad, y el rol metodológico similar que juegan estímulos y facilitadores. Cerramos con una presentación de varias maneras en que practicantes teatrales y educadores han usado el teatro-foro con niños y niñas, y sugerimos cómo los facilitadores de Fp/cN podrían utilizar los métodos de Boal en la CIF. Esperamos generar la impresión de que el trabajo de Boal ofrece herramientas metodológicas y perspectivas teóricas que pueden suplementar el movimiento de Fp/cN a los fines de crear espacios más corporales, creativos e inclusivos para el trabajo filosófico. Por último, alegamos que la unidad de estos dos movimientos tiene mucho más para aportar al actual desarrollo de prácticas pedagógicas en Fp/cN. Por lo tanto, hacemos una llamada a multiplicar las investigaciones acerca de los métodos de Boal y otras prácticas teatrales participativas en la CIF.

palabras clave: teatro-foro; filosofía para/con niños; teatro del oprimido; corporalidad; educación teatral.

teatro fórum encontra com a filosofia para / com crianças: explorando fisicamente situações desafiadoras na comunidade de investigação filosófica

resumo

Este artigo apresenta as práticas teatrais de Augusto Boal, especificamente o teatro fórum, ao movimento Filosofia para/com Crianças FpcC. Ao conectar a pedagogia de Boal com FpcC, mostramos como as técnicas de teatro-fórum podem capacitar crianças participantes a se envolver fisicamente em Comunidades de Investigação Filosófica [CIFs] centradas em situações desafiadoras que elas vivenciam. Para fazer isso, apresentamos e resumimos aspectos da pedagogia de Boal, incluindo seus insights teóricos e estruturas metodológicas, com extensa referência a seu livro Teatro do Oprimido. Seguimos com uma discussão sobre algumas das conexões entre o movimento *Teatro do Oprimido* e o FpcC; especificamente, olhamos para as concepções semelhantes que ambos movimentos tem entre o eu e a comunidade, e o papel metodológico semelhante de estímulos e facilitadores. Terminamos expondo várias maneiras pelas quais os profissionais de teatro e educadores usaram o teatro fórum com crianças e sugerimos como os facilitadores do FpcC podem utilizar os métodos de Boal dentro da CIF. Argumentamos que o trabalho de Boal oferece ferramentas metodológicas e percepções teóricas que podem complementar o movimento FpcC, criando espaços mais corporais, criativos e inclusivos para o envolvimento filosófico. Por fim, afirmamos que a unificação desses dois movimentos tem muito a contribuir para o desenvolvimento contínuo das práticas pedagógicas no FpcC. Assim, fazemos um chamado por mais pesquisas sobre os métodos de Boal, bem como outras práticas de teatro participativo, na prática do CPI.

palavras-chave: fórum de teatro; filosofia para / com crianças; teatro do oprimido; corporalidade; educação teatral.

forum theatre meets philosophy for/with children: physically exploring challenging situations in the community of philosophical inquiry

The Community of Philosophical Inquiry [CPI]—championed by Matthew Lipman and the Philosophy for/with Children [P4wC] movement—aims to empower children-participants to question and engage in meaningful, philosophically-motivated dialogues. While these simple aims are well known by P4wC theorists and practitioners, the structures and approaches used to achieve these goals vary. The way in which facilitators develop and expand upon Lipman's ideas leave the CPI with seemingly endless pedagogical possibilities to achieve the aforementioned goals, yet also endless ways in which to improve and develop these original ideas.

It is one such pedagogical approach that this paper will discuss: the use of theatre—specifically Augusto Boal's anti-oppression theatre project, described in his book *Theatre of the Oppressed*—as a way to inspire physical and creative engagement in the CPI. The possibilities of employing theatre practices in philosophy education have not been overlooked by P4wC researchers: D'Olimpio and Teschers, in their paper "Playing with Philosophy: Gestures, Performance, P4C and an Art of Living", argue compellingly for the inclusion of drama education in the CPI (D'Olimpio & Teschers, 2015); Reason, in his paper "thinking theatre: enhancing children's theatrical experiences through philosophical enquiry" describes his research on P4wC theatrical spaces (Reason, 2008). There are fleeting references to Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed in P4wC related articles (Hall, 2003, p. 152; de Bruyn, 2018, p. 57), however we have not yet seen a paper that explicates the theoretical and methodological connections between these two movements.

As such, this paper will aim at analyzing the relationship between Boal's theatre practices and theories—specifically forum theatre—and the CPI. By placing these two pedagogies in conversation, we hope to achieve several things. First, we hope to introduce Boal's pedagogy—including his theoretical insights and methodological frameworks—to those unfamiliar with his influential work, which spans both theatre, literacy and social empowerment education. Second, we hope to highlight the

theoretical and methodological similarities that exist between Boal's and Lipman's projects. While these movements are not identical, and it is not our goal to argue such, they share many commonalities that suggest the CPI, and P4wC in general, can learn from forum theatre and Boal's greater Theatre of the Oppressed movement. Third, we will exemplify the various ways a facilitator might use Boal's techniques to structure CPIs. To conclude, we will highlight how forum theatre offers a unique way for children-participants in the CPI to engage physically in philosophical discussions surrounding challenging situations. Furthermore, we will suggest some areas of further research pertaining to this novel discussion of two empowering pedagogies.

theatre of the oppressed: contextualizing boal's project

Before we establish the relationships between the Philosophy for/with Children movement and the Theatre of the Oppressed movement, we ought to explore the socio-historical, theoretical and methodological structures that underlie Augusto Boal's theatre pedagogy. Thus, in this section we will briefly summarize Boal's arguments in his book *Theatre of the Oppressed*, presenting them as he does so as to contextualize his movement by understanding his theory.

socio-historical and theoretical context of the theatre of the oppressed movement

Boal wrote his seminal piece, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, in 1974 while fleeing from his home country of Brazil. This theatre project stemmed from Boal's own experience, prior to exile, as a playwright and director at the Arena Theatre in Brazil—a theatre company known for its socio-political commentary inspiring revolutionary views against the military dictatorship at the time—as well as his work in Argentina and Peru where he was exiled (Babbage, 2018, p. 16). While Boal traveled with the Arena theatre company in the early 1960s, he met Paolo Freire who greatly influenced his thinking and shaped the development of his Theatre of the Oppressed pedagogy. Just as Freire pointed to the problematic hierarchical relationship within educational systems between the teacher-subject and the student-object, Boal pointed to a similar dynamic

within theatre and media, where spectators are objects while the actors remain subjects (Babbage, 2018, p. 17). When exiled, Boal continued to develop his theatre praxis by supporting Peru's national literacy campaign implemented in 1973 through teaching two types of literacy: first, the literacy described by Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that empowers oppressed individuals—in this case rural, illiterate populations in Peru—to read and write in both their native tongue and the predominant language of Spanish (Freire, 2000; Boal, 2008, p. 96); and second, a "literacy in all possible languages, especially the artistic ones, such as theatre, photography, puppetry, films, journalism, etc.", which is developed by participating in and understanding media (Boal, 2008, pp. 96–97). To achieve these literacy goals, Boal highlights the importance of theatre as a tool to inspire active participation in the face of oppressive structures, which he identifies in both the Aristotelian theatre tradition and modern-day media, as well as in socio-economic and political systems that disenfranchise and neglect communities.[3]

Within Theatre of the Oppressed, Boal describes oppressive structures in theatre by grafting fundamental Hegelian/Marxist dichotomies—oppressor/oppressed and subject/object—onto theatrical binaries, such as the actor/spectator and protagonist/masses. Boal argues that in traditional theatre—one that he identifies within Aristotle's Poetics—the actors are "the people who act" as protagonists and subjects within the story, while the spectators are rendered passive objects, simply the "people who watch" the spectacle unravel (Boal, 2008, p. 95). Thus, the audience is reduced to a mere object of the subject's—the actor's and the protagonist's—emotions shown in various forms of media, may it be on stage, on screen, or on paper (Boal, 2008, p. 84). Boal condemns the subordination of the audience to the protagonist, calling this a "delegation of power" where "the spectator assumes a 'passive' attitude, delegating

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[3] Oppression is a highly contested and complex word. Boal essentially works with two different types of oppression: first, a more classical understanding of socio-economic and political oppression—the sort of oppressions faced by those people Boal and Freire taught; and second, the specific theatrical oppression that Boal establishes in his book, the oppression we go on to describe throughout this paper. Our use of the term oppression in this section merely reflects Boal's use of it. Later in this paper, we suggest an alternative word to use within the P4wC context.

his ability to act" and thus only feels empathy as dictated by the spectacle produced by the protagonists (Boal, 2008, p. 84). Boal identifies this as a form of oppression for it leaves audiences to passively accept the emotions of the actors and embody them as their own.

This oppressive theatrical structure of emotional subjugation has significant socio-political implications. Boal contends that Aristotle's system of tragedy maintains social and political order by pacifying the audience, and thus limiting action outside of the theatre space: "[i]t is necessary to make sure that [the masses] remain, if not uniformly satisfied, at least uniformly passive [...] How to achieve this? Through the many forms of repression: politics, bureaucracy, habits, customs - and Greek tragedy" (Boal, 2008, p. 21). Boal argues that some forms of media—such as film, TV programs, books and theatre performances—perpetuate the Aristotelian theatre tradition by employing a plot-structure that first displays socio-political vices (as deemed by the predominant social order), as well as the consequences of such wrongdoings. The spectating audience, as a result of feeling emotions as dictated by the protagonists, then feel a sense of satisfaction with the resolved social order—a feeling that Aristotle calls "catharsis" (Boal, 2008, p. 23). This catharsis ultimately promotes a passive and oppressive social order, and a world of disengagement, where the masses are intended to follow the dominant understanding of ethics, politics and social order, rather than encouraging society to actively participate in media or challenge the socio-political spheres that directly affect their lives (Boal, 2008, pp. 95, 120).

Ultimately, Boal intends to combat the spectator passivity propagated by mainstream media through his participatory theatre techniques. Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed movement aims to "change the people – 'spectators', passive beings in the theatrical phenomenon – into subjects, into actors, transformers of the dramatic action" (Boal, 2008, p. 97). The movement endeavors to teach individuals to participate in media, such as theatre performances, which, in turn, empowers these people to engage in "real action"—action embedded in the socio-political spheres within their communities:

> [T]he *poetics of the oppressed* focuses on the action itself: the spectator delegates no power to the character (or actor) either to act or to think in his place; on the contrary, he himself assumes the protagonic role, changes the dramatic action, tries out solutions, discusses plans for change – in short, trains himself for real action. (Boal, 2008, p. 98)

In response and direct opposition to oppressive media that Boal identifies with Aristotle's Poetics, he develops the "*poetics of the oppressed*" and theatre techniques that encourage audience participation.[4] Boal wishes to break down "walls" between the subject of the narrative and the spectating object, which he argues Aristotle and traditional media perpetuate in order to divide the oppressed peoples from their own emotions, and ultimately, from sources of power (Boal, 2008, p. 95). Boal also recognizes the inextricable connection between the relationships an audience sets up with media they engage with and the relationships the same audience establishes in the real-world; and furthermore, by developing the "*poetics of the oppressed*", he makes a moral argument that we should not follow theatre practices which encourage passivity in media and the real-world.

To encourage engagement in media, Boal created several theatre techniques that teach, and thus empower audiences to actively participate in their lives. These techniques range from warm-up theatre exercises that aim to "undo" participant's body structures so that they can prepare to act as characters other than themselves (Boal, 2008, p. 104), to fully developed theatre forms with their own methods, such as image theatre (p. 112), forum theatre (p. 117), newspaper theatre (p. 121) and invisible

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[4] Some have argued that Boal's argument (the same argument we have summarized) might be seen as a negation of Aristotle argument, thus leaving Boal's claims as the positive argument by comparison: "Boal, like Brecht, first constructs – and then demolishes – the "Aristotle" he needs in order to suit his own rhetorical purposes" (Dwyer, 2005, p. 365). Paul Dwyer questions the rhetorical nature of Boal's argument. It is not, ultimately, our intent to argue for or against the correctness of either Boal's or Aristotle's logic, but rather to establish the socio-theoretical framework by which Boal defends his theatre method. Indeed, Dwyer also argues that "this critique of Aristotle can only really make sense (and here it makes good sense) when the theatrical and political context in which Boal was writing is kept very closely in mind" and that Boal "provides a compelling account of the struggle to make theatre a tool for progressive social change under a regime as brutal and coercive as the military dictatorship that took control of Brazil after the coups of 1964 and 1968" (Dwyer, 2005, pp. 365–366). As such, it is our goal to acknowledge the contexts in which Boal constructed his movement, so as to fully understand the social implications his theories and methods have and can have, such as with children. We do believe, however, that critiques of Boal's theories, especially as they apply to P4wC, should be explored in future research.

theatre (p. 122). While all of these theater techniques have their own merits and potentials to support Communities of Philosophical Inquiry within the Philosophy for/with Children movement, we will focus specifically on the connections between forum theatre and P4wC.

forum theatre's methodological structure

Forum theatre is one of several Theatre of the Oppressed techniques which encourage audience members to actively participate in oppressive and challenging situations. Most generally, forum theatre is a practice in which audience members create, discuss, act in and revise enactments of real-life oppressive or challenging situations based on personal experiences, with the ultimate aim of understanding and resolving the oppression. These situations usually involve a power imbalance in which a protagonist character, or group of characters, is faced with some oppressive or challenging force, either created by an antagonist(s) or a socio-political system. In this subsection, we will outline forum theatre's methodological structure, discuss the effect of forum theatre on active participation, as well as highlight the various contexts in which it has been used to empower participants.

Boalian theatre practices tend to begin with warm-up exercises, and forum theatre is no exception. The facilitator of the forum theatre experience—known as the "Joker"—leads these warm-up exercises that develop active and creative engagement: they enable participants to work out and "undo" their muscular structures so that they can better physically "'interpret' characters different from [them]sel[ves]" and "play" these characters (Boal, 2008, pp. 104, 107). Boal presents an array of warm-up games, one vivid example being "hypnosis" where "...one puts his hand a few centimetres from the nose of his partner, who must keep this distance: the first one starts to move his hand in all directions, up and down, from left to right, slowly or faster, while the other moves his body in order to maintain the same distance between his nose and his partner's hand" (Boal, 2008, p. 105). In one of his other books, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, Boal characterizes this exercise as enabling participants to "use 'certain'

forgotten muscles in [their] body", which can prepare them to interpret and act as other people (Boal, 1992, p. 63).

Following the warm-up exercises, participants engage in dialogue around personal socio-political challenges—experiences of oppression—and begin role-playing and discussing these challenges as well as potential solutions. Participants begin by sharing stories "containing a political or social problem of difficult solution" that they may experience or encounter in their lives (Boal, 2008, p. 117). These challenging situations, identified and discussed by the participants, structure an initial performance of a socio-political problem, a problem which will lead to action and discussion during the remainder of the forum theatre performance. Several rounds of acting ensue. The first round is enacted by the performance organizers and showcases the socio-political problem. During this round the spectators are encouraged to think about and understand the characters' actions, attempting to formulate potential solutions to the socio-political problem (Boal, 2008, p. 117). After voicing these ideas in discussions following the initial performance, the participants then have a chance to act as the characters they have observed; the skit is performed multiple times over, but with the added element where participants can intervene at any time by yelling "stop" and can replace, or alternatively direct any actor, to take the scenario "in the direction that seems to him most appropriate" in an attempt to resolve the problem displayed (Boal, 2008, p. 117). Boal may not stipulate who should be replaced in the performance, but other theatre practitioners suggest that participants should substitute the protagonist—the character who experiences the oppression or challenge—while the other actors, such as the antagonist oppressor and any bystanders, "will attempt to remain true to the original model" and their character personalities, as established in the initial skit (Hammond, 2015, pp. 4–5). Considering the difficulty of the problem(s) enacted, the participant interventions will likely fall short of a solution, and thus this process of intervention and problem solving continues and undergoes many iterations so that "the audience, the people, have the opportunity to try out all their ideas, to rehearse all the possibilities and to verify them in practice, that is, in theatrical practice"

(Boal, 2008, p. 119). Furthermore, the audience is also given the opportunity to "hot-seat character[s]" (Hammond, 2015, p. 4); the "Joker" can help stop the action and enable participants to ask the characters to explain the motivations behind their actions (Boal, 2008, p. 163). Because the audience does not merely spectate, forum theatre transforms spectators into "spec-actors"; these "spec-actors" not only create the premise underlying the performance, but they are also invited to shape the performance by acting in the skit—usually as the protagonist—themselves, as well as by investigating character's deeper feelings and intentions. This reconfigured relationship between the spectators and the actors, which breaks down the walls that traditionally separate them, creates an environment for active and creative participation within the space of the theatre performance, as opposed to one of passive viewership that traditional theatre may perpetuate.

The reimagined spectator-actor relationship within forum theatre also empowers people to actively engage in other aspects of their lives. This theatre practice avoids the "cathartical effect" responsible for passive viewership in traditional theatre and passive (non-)engagement with social and political spheres: "[h]ere the cathartical effect is entirely removed… Forum theatre, as well as these other forms of people's theatre, instead of taking something away from the spectator, evoke in him a desire to practise in reality the act he has rehearsed in the theatre" (Boal, 2008, p. 120). In this theatre experience, "spec-actors" are urged to critically engage and creatively act in the performance, which serves as practice for action in challenging and oppressive situations that they may experience in their everyday lives.[5] The reiterative nature of

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[5] Boal often indicates that forum theatre and other Theatre of the Oppressed techniques serve as a "*rehearsal of revolution*" to challenge structures of power (Boal, 2008, p. 119). We also find Boal's Marxist influence in other aspects of his language—such as "oppressor" and "oppressed"—as well as through the examples he employs—such as revolting against oppressive corporate structures. Ultimately, Boal presents his techniques as a people's theatre: the people could, on the one hand, use his theatre techniques to practice revolting against oppressive socio-political structures, for instance by practicing using bombs and organizing strikes (Boal, 2008, p. 119); on the other hand, the people could also use this theatre to express themselves in educational settings (Boal, 2008, p. 97). In other words, Boal's use of the word "revolutionary" reflects the varying ways groups of people wish to liberate themselves, ranging from attempting to overcome the hierarchies in factory work, to gaining literacy and critical media skills. We propose the use of Boal's techniques within P4wC with Lipman's specific "revolutionary"

forum theatre not only exposes "spec-actors" to failure when acting against oppression, but also shows them that there is not one "correct path" or way to deal with oppression, although there may be better paths than others (Boal, 2008, p. 119). These notions highlight that problem solving is a process that involves active and persistent engagement with the situation at hand. Forum theatre's intentional structure reveals the power of theatre in transforming everyday life; this practice teaches people how to actively participate in theatre and other forms of media, and by doing so equips these same people with skills to be active citizens in their communities.

To further highlight forum theatre's methodological structure, we will present an example of a forum theatre performance as recounted by Boal in *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Boal describes a problem: a young man has an exploitative boss, one that demands his factory labourers work 12-hour days. When presented in front of "spec-actors", several proposals were enacted: one was to overload the machines in the factory so the workers could rest while repairs were made, another was to throw a bomb at the machine, another was to strike, and another was to form a union. All of these suggestions were enacted by the participants who then discussed and assessed the successes and failures that each proposal produced in the performance of the real-world scenario (Boal, 2008, pp. 117–118). While some of these discussions questioned the success of each option as performed, others focused on how these enactments would pan out in the real-world. Forum theatre practitioners recognize how some performances of challenging situations may at times diverge from reality and instead produce a scene that the audience and "Joker" may deem as "'magical' rather than 'real'" (Gourd & Gourd, 2011, p. 410). For instance, in the bomb scenario, the man "soon realised that he did not know how to manufacture a bomb nor even how to throw it" (Boal, 2008, p. 119). By being forced to enact one's idea, it becomes clearer if the

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educational goals in mind, those being childhood agency, critical and creative thinking, and ethical judgement. And yet, we also acknowledge that Theatre of the Oppressed can also inspire more violent and politically motivated revolutions, and that this very well might have been one of Boal's other goals. As such, the implications of Boal's revolutionary language on Lipman's democratic understanding of education ought to be explored further in its own paper—like how Walter Kohan assesses the similarities and difference between Lipman and Paolo Freire's political assumptions and motivations (Kohan, 2018).

proposal is actually possible in the real-world or if it is mere fantastical "magic". Furthermore, Boal describes how the solution involving the formation of a small union was "judged to be the best by the participants", implying that after each round of enactments the "spec-actors" discuss the quality of the interventions and evaluate their "realness" to the real world (Boal, 2008, p. 119). Thus, not only do participants assess the proposals as they transpired in the performance of the real-world scenario, but they go further to evaluate their likelihood of success or failure in the real-world itself.

While Theatre of the Oppressed techniques were originally implemented to support disenfranchised communities in South America, this movement, and especially forum theatre, have since been used to support other communities in other contexts. Forum theatre has been used for social activism and urban planning purposes, such as to give a voice to homeless communities in the public spaces they occupy (Hamel, 2015) as well as to listen to communities impacted by gentrification (Chan & Chan, 2015). It has also been used to foster inclusive design practices for telecommunication systems, specifically for elderly users with low technological literacy (Rice et al., 2007). Medical schools and professional development programs for healthcare providers also employ forum theatre to help practitioners develop professionalism with clients as well as practice supporting and diagnosing patients (Brett-MacLean et al., 2012). Increasingly, forum theatre is used in educational settings both with teachers and students; this interactive theatre technique can help budding teachers practice classroom management and develop self-reflection skills to question their own biases (Desai, 2017), while it can also support students in dealing with challenges such as bullying (Gourd & Gourd, 2011). In his book *Forum Theatre for Children: Enhancing Social, Emotional and Creative Development*, Nick Hammond describes the process of using Boal's forum theatre with children and, by detailing students' experiences with the technique, shows how transformative and empowering this process can be.

Despite the potential of using forum theatre with children, there has been little attention drawn to Theatre of the Oppressed or forum theatre in the Philosophy

for/with Children literature, with only fleeting references connecting Boal's pedagogy and P4wC (Hall, 2003, p. 152; de Bruyn, 2018, p. 57). In the following section, we will discuss the connections between the Theatre of the Oppressed and Philosophy for/with Children movements, and how the use of forum theatre in particular can support Communities of Philosophical Inquiry and increase their physical and creative engagement capacities.

the connections between philosophy for/with children and theatre of the oppressed

At the core of both Boal's and Lipman's projects lies a similar understanding of how people replicate communicative strategies they are exposed to. In *Thinking in Education*, Lipman describes the process by which "children internalize — replicate in their own thinking — the processes of communication they discover in their families" (Lipman, 1992, p. 52). The child, while learning to speak and think, communicates with herself in the same way as those that make up their immediate familial communities communicate with each other. Lipman impresses the importance of respecting the influence that structures of community, and external modes of communication, have on individuals' internal ways of thinking. Thus, the format of the community of inquiry honors the community's effect upon individual thinking habits: when students in the social CPI question each other, the individual internalizes the habit of questioning themselves; when "members point out possible consequences of one another's ideas", each member internalizes a habit of anticipating "possible consequences of their own ideas" (Lipman, 1992, p. 52). By supporting inquiry, dialogue, respect for others, and democratic equality, the forum created in CPIs fosters both healthy educated social conditions, and, on the other hand, fosters healthy critical dialogue within the self. Just as the CPI enhances participation in classrooms to foster internalized habits of thought found in inquiring communities, Boal developed theatre techniques—including forum theatre—to foster a new relationship with media, one that founds itself on active participation in communities that enhance individual thought and action. Both Boal and Lipman recognize the power of outside modes of communication on internalized

ways of thinking and acting, and thus structure their respective methodologies for more active participation and other positive outcomes.

Additionally, the structures of Boal's theatre practices and the CPI both center on *relevant* stimuli to motivate active participation in inquiry. For Lipman, the "offering of a text" is an essential part of the CPI, where there is some stimulus that can be read, interpreted, reflected upon and discussed (Lipman, 1992, p. 241). We recognize that CPIs can cover a myriad of topics—after all, Matthew Lipman hoped for philosophical discussions to play a prominent role in all aspects of school curricula (Lipman, 1992, p. 142). Yet, there is an ever pervasive attitude, in books and essays about P4wC, that certain CPI discussions ought to relate to the lives of those in the community, which is achieved by using relevant stimuli (Lipman et al., 1980, p. 90; Gregory, 2007, p. 64; Gardner, 2017, p. 4). Lipman details some topics that members of inquiry are likely to discuss, which differs depending on the background of participants: "[f]or schoolchildren, what is in doubt [in the CPI] may be friends and grades; for adult citizens, it may be inflation and the environment" (Lipman, 1992, p. 144). As established in the previous section, Boal's theatre method encourages the audience to identify oppressive and challenging situations that they themselves face, and then to design and enact that situation which relates to their lives to help them explore possible responses and resolutions. Here, we see that both movements emphasize the relatedness of discussions to participant's lives, which is dependent on the content of the stimulus used. The use of stimuli in CPIs, which allows for dialogical discussion to begin, and a "variety of settlements or verdicts" to be explored (Lipman, 1992, p. 144), is congruent with the forum theatre process that explores various solutions to challenges. Furthermore, both movements use stimuli to empower participants to explore and try out a variety of possible responses to a situation without prescribing a correct path or answer to the stimuli presented. Stimuli in forum theatre creates a space for "sepc-actors" to relate to—and become agents in—the performative action, just as stimuli in CPIs actively engage students in philosophical ideas pertaining to their own lives.

A final major methodological similarity, in both forum theatre and P4wC, is in the role of the facilitator. Facilitators in both movements support a performative and dialogical structure that fosters an environment for critical reflection and creative engagement with the content presented. The facilitator in forum theatre and other Theatre of the Oppressed performances—also known as the "Joker"—helps to maintain the "structure of the performance" primarily by explaining themes in the performance, which adds clarity to the action and inspires spectators to reflect (Boal, 2008, pp. 161–162). CPI facilitators in the P4wC context similarly "help the participants keep track of how the dialogue progresses" while also serving as a "model… for good dialogue moves (cognitive and social)" (Gregory, 2007, p. 61). Yet, the facilitators in both movements must not merely guide proceedings or model critical thinking and creative engagement, they must also engage with audience members, or the community of learners, to inspire participation. In order to empower the "spec-actors" to actively participate, Boal notes that the "Joker" must be "a contemporary and neighbour of the spectator" (Boal, 2008, p. 152); by being connected to audience members more than to the other characters on stage, the "Joker" avoids replicating the dichotomies of character/spectator and subject/object perpetuated by traditional theatre practices and instead motivates participation. While there are differing methods and approaches to facilitating a CPI, several P4wC theorists believe that in a CPI the role of facilitator distributes throughout the group so that "the children are on equal footing with the adult" as "co-inquirers" (Hall, 2003, p. 141). As a consequence of actively diffusing power, the community of inquiry gets "better at self-management" and guiding the dialogical discussion together (Gregory, 2007, p. 61). In the Theatre of the Oppressed and P4wC movements, the facilitators take on a similar role as models of personal critical reflection and social engagement, as well as diffusers of power to participants in the performance/discussion.

Through the combination of structuring methodologies to support the relationship between self and community, using relevant stimuli to motivate inquiry, and having facilitators embolden members to actively participate in proceedings, both

movements ultimately endeavor to prepare their participants for active participation in their own lives. Lipman describes the CPI as a preparation for life: "[h]ow better to prepare students for life than by enabling them to participate in deliberative communities that deal with matters that the students themselves consider important?" (Lipman, 1992, p. 240). As we have established in the previous section, Boal's rehearsal-theatre empowers participants to practice for real world action in challenging situations they may experience or witness, transforming these former spectators into "spec-actors" (Boal, 2008, p. 120).

examples of forum theatre with children in the community of philosophical inquiry

Despite originally being rooted in what we might consider adult experiences, educators have used Theatre of the Oppressed, and specifically forum theatre techniques, to explore challenging situations with children-participants. One such educator and social theatre practitioner we can turn to is Nick Hammond. When using forum theatre with children, Hammond makes some subtle terminological departures from Boal with respect to the concepts of "oppressor" and "oppression" that are ingrained in the Theatre of the Oppressed movement. Hammond states:

> [t]he terms 'oppression' and 'oppressed' are complex and can have very negative connotations, so oppression and oppressor are better referred to as 'challenge' and 'challenger'. We can readily accept that people will experience challenges in their lives, but it can be more difficult to accept that one's actions might be oppressive. (Hammond, 2015, p. 4).

Furthermore, using the words "oppression" and "oppressed" with children, to characterize *all* the situations they explore in a forum theatre performance, may oversimplify what these concepts mean by ignoring the gravity of these terms. For these reasons, we have chosen to use Hammond's terminology of describing forum theatre situations with children as "challenging" — rather than as "oppressive" — and of describing the antagonist as a "challenger" — not as an "oppressor".

Theatre practitioners and educators have also developed different strategies to work *with* children to develop forum theatre performances. Hammond, for instance,

organizes workshops with children so that they can devise forum theatre stimuli themselves. In these workshops, the children first familiarize themselves with each other through games, then discuss challenging situations they have experienced, which the children then used to devise forum theatre stimuli that are eventually presented in performance for their peers to explore (Hammond, 2015, pp. 11–12). Other educators, such as Karen and Tina Gourd, take a slightly different approach to developing forum theatre stimuli with children: once sending out a survey to students with the primary question "[w]hat are your concerns related to bullying?", these educators then worked with students to develop several scenes to be explored with a larger audience of peers in a forum theatre format (Gourd & Gourd, 2011, p. 410). While these two ways of engaging students to create stimuli may be more time-intensive than a regular CPI, by empowering children to create their own scenes the performance will explicitly relate to their lives and can be more engaging. Hammond outlines an alternative to this time-intensive method that involves facilitators using pre-designed stimuli with children, which, on the one hand, "may resonate with the audience and be linked to curriculum objectives", yet, on the other hand, may lack a "context-specific" nature that enhances engagement (Hammond, 2015, p. 11).

We will now look at the types of situations that tend to be explored through forum theatre with children to get a sense of the possibilities of introducing forum theatre in CPIs. In *Forum Theatre for Children: Enhancing Social, Emotional and Creative Development*, Hammond outlines several scenarios that children created for forum theatre performances. One situation involves a student who, having just transitioned to middle school from elementary school, feels lost and as a result experiences being bullied by an older, unsympathetic student. Another situation, which also deals with the theme of isolation and trying to fit in, concerns a new student wanting to join a friend-group but feeling rejected by that group's leader (Hammond, 2015, p. 12). Educators Karen and Tina Gourd also implemented a forum theatre project in a school setting in which students created a scenario—the "Rumour Mill"—showcasing a situation where a student who overhears a harmful rumour about their own friend

struggles with how to support her friend and as a result inadvertently hurts them (Gourd & Gourd, 2011, p. 411). While these scenarios explored themes of isolation, fitting in, abandonment and rumour spreading, we have identified a range of other topics that can also be covered, which include harmful teasing, peer pressuring, stealing, copying/cheating, coercion (e.g. forced to do someone else's homework, or hand yours in as theirs), social media bullying, sibling rivalry/bullying and unfair treatment by teachers. Furthermore, systemic problems can also be addressed through forum theatre, such as sexism and racism.

We also want to propose another more spontaneous way of integrating forum theatre in the CPI, particularly by expanding upon common stimuli such as children's books. We will introduce this method by referencing Trudy Ludwig's children's book about bullying titled *Just Kidding*. In her children's book *Just Kidding*, Trudy Ludwig identifies a problem. She tells the story of a young person named D.J. who experiences frequent hurtful teasing at the hands of a "friend" named Vince. When D.J. tells Vince that these teases hurt him, Vince responds with the titular "just kidding", a claim which nullifies and invalidates D.J.'s hurt feelings. This story identifies two problems at the heart of this relationship. First, power dynamics become instituted and maintained by the bully; D.J. can say very little to this claim that Vince's bullying was "just a joke" and thus feels helpless in the face of this verbal abuse. Second, the book identifies a misunderstanding of what teasing looks like; Vince clearly believes that if something is "just a joke" then it cannot be hurtful, which we might see as a clear misunderstanding of the impacts of teasing. As the book progresses, Ludwig not only identifies different types of teasing (examples being mocking clothing, ostracizing others from groups, downplaying others' achievements, etc.), but also forwards some ways for children to approach these hurtful teases by disrupting these established power relationships (Ludwig, 2012). The book has been used as a powerful stimulus for CPI discussion for obvious reasons: it identifies the grey area in deciding what a tease is and what is a hurtful remark, it identifies the challenge of responding to these hurtful comments, and it identifies some ways to overcome these challenges.

Furthermore, the story relates to children-participants, most of whom have probably experienced some amount of hurtful teasing in their lives.

While the book works very well as a stimulus in the CPI setting, it also connects well with the goals established by Boal. Again, the content relates to the participants' lives (if not directly, at least thematically), and there appears to be some grey area in the text which allows for a variety of responses to core problems. Yet, Boal would want the participants to enact this problem, rather than simply reading the text and talking about it. He, we argue, would want the participants to actually step into the problem and experiment with potential solutions to the challenge, essentially rehearsing for future action. In the following bullet points, we propose several ways facilitators can incorporate aspects of the forum theatre method to expand upon children's books and other stimuli, using the book *Just Kidding* as an example:

- One way to incorporate Boal's method is by trying out different ideas brought up within the CPI based on a children's book or other stimuli. If we assume, like Maughn Rollins Gregory does, that an aspect of the CPI discussion should be towards solutions or potential actions (Gregory, 2007, p. 62), the facilitator of the CPI could encourage students to act out discussed solutions in a quick little skit. For example: participants might be discussing how D.J. should respond on the school bus when Vince says "just kidding!" after teasing him for "wearing P.J.'s" (Ludwig, 2012, p. 13). A participant might propose that D.J. move away from the challenger Vince and ignore the teasing, a solution which many children are familiar with. The facilitator might ask for this student to act it out with another student. As they attempt to ignore the tease, the student might find it difficult to endure the repeated line "D.J.'s wearing P.J.'s!". When the scene ends, a discussion of the success of this method and the philosophical implications of ignoring the teasing might commence, much like it would during the forum theatre performance. While children might settle on this as a good solution while discussing the problem, they might find some weakness with these solutions when actually attempting what they propose (much like with Boal's bomb-thrower example). Additionally, through iterations of discussions and role-playing, children might discover new solutions to problems by physically embodying characters. In enacting a short skit—or several iterations of the skit with differing solutions—to experiment with

the ideas proposed, the children gain realistic context with respect to their philosophical discussion.

- To avoid Boal's criticized "cathartical effect", facilitators might encourage students to re-enact the resolution of a story. In *Just Kidding*, the resolution comes when D.J. diffuses one of Vince's teases aimed at another student. He does this by taking Vince's tease aimed at the person sitting next to himself—"Hey, Bed Head!"—and making light of it—"Cool 'do" responds D.J., as he proceeds to mess up his own hair and makes a funny face (Ludwig, 2012, p. 23). To avoid simply leaving participants thinking that this is *the* solution, the facilitator might have participants act out this scene in different ways, and then discuss the different merits of each response. This round of acting and experimentation could lead to discussion of how these various solutions might affect each of the characters, or how they actually solve the problem. They might also lead to questions related to bystanders and how these onlookers can diffuse challenging situations as well.

- Finally, the story may be used to catalyze discussions of students' own experiences. An instance of bullying pertinent to the participants own lives', which comes up in discussing *Just Kidding*, could be enacted and discussed. This would look like the methods used by Hammond and Gourd and Gourd, in which educators directly incorporate forum theatre in the CPI.

These methods of encouraging students to actively participate in stimuli through physical responses, rather than just verbal responses, can diversify the CPI format by allowing new ways of physical engagement with philosophical ideas related to participants' lives. Furthermore, this rehearsal of action can prepare participants for real life action more so than merely discussing possible responses. Coincidentally, Ludwig herself acknowledges the power of role-play in her book. In *Just Kidding*, D.J.'s father actually engages D.J. in role-play, so as to practice responding to bullying and to be better prepared in the face of this challenge (Ludwig, 2012, p. 19). Here, Ludwig hints at the power of physical practice, in addition to discussion, in preparing for actually acting in the world: as a result of role-playing with his father and brother, D.J. feels more confident when he responds to the bully, helping to diffuse a harmful challenge directed at his friend (Ludwig, 2012, p. 23). Ultimately, these methods—be

them spontaneous, informal inclusions of role-play during a CPI, or complete forum theatre projects that originate fully from children's experiences—provide new ways of bringing philosophical and physical engagement to the lives of participants.

physical engagement through forum theatre—a conclusion

In this paper, we have explained the contexts and structures of Augusto Boal's forum theatre pedagogy, drawn connections between Boal's forum theatre and CPIs in P4wC, and finally illustrated examples of using forum theatre in the CPI. In presenting these methods, and their underlying theories, side by side, we have shown that forum theatre offers new and *physical* ways for children to participate in the CPI, particularly when inquiry focuses on challenging situations that participants experience. To conclude, we will suggest how the implementation of Boal's forum theatre can augment the CPI, as well as propose some areas for future research regarding the use of interactive theatre techniques, such as those developed by Boal, in philosophical discussions with children.

Most simply, we see the addition of forum theatre to the CPI as a new way to encourage active physical engagement with challenging situations and philosophical problems, which can increase the accessibility of philosophy education. Although our proposed incorporation of Boalian theatre techniques in the CPI—specifically those which discuss challenging situations—is new to P4wC literature, other philosophy educators both outside and inside P4wC discourses have previously outlined the benefits of physicality in philosophical inquiry. Erica Preston-Roedder describes what improvisational theatre can bring to philosophical inquiry with children, focusing on how embracing physicality, instead of suppressing bodily urges to move about,[6] can supplement philosophy education (Preston-Roedder, 2020, p. 8). She claims that simultaneous mental and physical engagement with philosophy through theatre

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[6] The structures within typical philosophical education may at times perpetuate the notion that the body, and physical action, is a burden to philosophical inquiry: for instance, the separation of stretch breaks and snack time from discussion circles insinuates that physical needs are exterior to intellectual philosophical pursuits (Preston-Roedder, 2020, p. 8).

techniques not only helps children focus and "*deepen* engagement" with philosophical problems, but also empowers them to "engag[e] one's body directly with philosophical problems", for instance by having participants enact a stimulus for discussion, which is similar to the emphasis Boal places on physical engagement in the forum theatre format (Preston-Roedder, 2020, pp. 8–9). Furthermore, by enabling physical engagement with philosophy through theatre, the possible ways of engaging in inquiry are diversified, which makes philosophy more inclusive to children-participants. In an anecdotal example, Preston-Roedder explains that an educator colleague and friend questioned her on her creation of a philosophy discussion club for elementary school children, citing problematic philosophical traditions that prioritize skills valued in traditional classroom settings "e.g., the ability to sit still, to express themselves verbally, to have confidence in their ideas, etc." (Preston-Roedder, 2020, p. 13). Preston-Roedder embraced her colleague's critiques and found ways of diversifying and physicalizing the discussion within the club, a practice which makes philosophy accessible to students who desire to share their thoughts in physical and non-verbal ways. While Preston-Roedder does not mention Boal's forum theatre, we see the integration of Boal's reiterative role-playing technique in the P4wC movement as a response to her call, and our call, for physical engagement in philosophy education.

Within the P4wC movement, D'Olimpio and Teschers also establish the need for physicality and playfulness in philosophy inquiry. They claim that "P4C highlights not just rational or critical thinking skills, but also includes playfulness, creativity and empathetic engagement with others that, along with critical thinking, gives rise to decent citizens and democratic human beings" (D'Olimpio & Teschers, 2015, p. 4). D'Olimpio and Teschers also claim, much like Boal and Preston-Roedder, that "role-play" and other performance techniques are ways that creative engagement can work "alongside the critical and caring thinking" in philosophical inquiry (D'Olimpio & Teschers, 2015, p. 5). Despite mentioning role-play situations in the P4wC context, D'Olimpio and Teschers somewhat limit the possibilities of this technique by stating it serve as a stimulus that comes *before* the CPI, while we, on the other hand, believe it

can serve as a stimulus *before* as well as *during* the CPI, and furthermore can be engaged with in a reiterative manner, not just as a single-use practice (D'Olimpio & Teschers, 2015, p. 6). Clearly, there are ambitions to include theatre practices in philosophy education and specifically in P4wC; we show here that Boal's forum theatre in particular can augment CPIs, but also that this technique, and those like it, embraces physicalized engagement with challenging situations.

We have outlined how forum theatre could ultimately enhance the P4wC movement by physicalizing engagement in the CPI; yet, we also see other ways in which forum theatre can augment the CPI, and philosophy education in general, which we want to pose for further study. We wonder if forum theatre, mainly through the physical engagement with challenging situations that it inspires, might also inspire children-participants to act in the real-world, and thus inculcate a type of agency. Boal clearly hopes that his method will inspire real-world action; might the CPI, in utilizing some of his theater methods, inspire the same sort of real-world action? Within the P4wC movement, Maughn Rollins Gregory already calls for a testing of solutions within the CPI—what he refers to as "hypotheses"—in a "variety of discursive contexts, especially outside the classroom", which he hopes are eventually "implemented" through action in the real-world (Gregory, 2007, pp. 73–74). He goes on to say that the application of philosophical findings in real-world contexts is a "necessary stage of philosophical practice understood as an art of living" (Gregory, 2007, p. 74). Might the sort of practice that students gain by enacting and discussing challenging situations in the forum theatre/CPI structure, help them enact these ideas in the real-world, and thus instill a sense of agency—a sense that one has the power to shape their life while also having an awareness of their actions—that Gregory seems to call an "art of living"? Preliminarily, we do believe that forum theatre in the CPI could impact student-participants thoughts and actions in the real-world, particularly those related to challenging and oppressive situations; however, the extent to which this theatre method contributes to agency and an "art of living" requires further research.

Another goal of the Theatre of the Oppressed movement, as we articulated in

the first section of the paper, is to connect the audience to their own emotions by encouraging active engagement in the emotions shown in the performance. Boal develops his theatre pedagogy to create "good empathy" that "does not prevent understanding and, on the contrary, needs understanding…", which reflects his later claim that "[l]earning is an emotional experience, and there is no reason to avoid such emotion" (Boal, 2008, p. 85). Thus, we wonder how the incorporation of forum theatre in the CPI may contribute to how P4wC practices emotional and empathic pedagogy and encourages caring thinking. While Matthew Schertz asserts that the "Community of Inquiry does not support empathic pedagogy. When Community of Inquiry exists, it *is* empathic pedagogy" (Schertz, 2007, p. 197), we still wonder how the CPI currently creates a space for emotional engagement and how forum theatre might enhance, or change, this sort of emotional engagement.

Ultimately, this discussion of forum theatre in the CPI presents numerous avenues for further research regarding how physical participation in challenging problems, which forum theatre promotes, develops agency, emotional literacy and empathy. Our goal with this paper, however, has been much more simple. We hope to have shown that Boal, as a compassionate educator and theatre practitioner, has methodological tools and theoretical insights that can supplement the P4wC movement, specifically with regards to physical engagement in philosophical inquiry.

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