EMPOWERING THE OPPRESSED THROUGH PARTICIPATORY THEATER[1]

Arvind Singhal

ARVIND SINGHAL
is professor and presidential research scholar in the school of communication studies, ohio university. he is co-author of *entertainment-education: a communication strategy for social change* (1999) and *combating aids: communication strategies in action* (2003); and co-editor of *entertainment-education and social change: history, research, and practice* (2004) and *the children of africa confront aids: from vulnerability to possibility* (2003).
(e-mail: singhal@cats.ohio.edu)

1 The present article draws upon Singhal (2001); Singhal and Rogers (2003); and was published as an earlier version (Singhal, 2004) in English. The author thanks Professor Keyan Tomaselli, Ms. Miranda Young-Jahangeer, and Mr. Mkhonzeni Gumede of the Programme in Cultural and Media Studies, University of Natal, South Africa, for sharing experiences about the Westville's Prison Theater Project in Durban and the DramAidE Project in KwaZulu-Natal Province.

RESUMEN

A partir de una revisión bibliográfica, este artículo describe el teatro participativo como medio de empoderamiento de los individuos de la audiencia para dirigir el cambio social. La importancia del foco en la participación de los oprimidos como medio de organización para el cambio social fue reconocida por académicos y personas dedicadas al teatro, especialmente por el celebrado educador brasileño, Paulo Freire, y el activista de teatro brasileño, Augusto Boal. Aquí se discute el papel del teatro participativo en el proceso de involucrar y educar a las audiencias en lo que comúnmente se denomina estrategia de eduentretenimiento.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Comunicación, cambio sociales, teatro participativo.

ABSTRACT

The present article describes participatory theater as a means of empowering audience individuals to lead social change. The focus on participation by oppressed individuals as a means of organizing for social change was recognized as important by scholars and practitioners, especially by the celebrated Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, and the Brazilian theater activist, Augusto Boal. Here we discuss the role of participatory theater in engaging and educating audiences in what is being commonly-called the entertainment-education strategy.

KEY WORDS: *Communication, social change, theater activist.*

fecha de recepción: mayo de 2004

Theater of the oppressed is a collusion of politics, art, and therapy.
Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz (1994, p. 1)

I believe that all the truly revolutionary theatrical groups should transfer people the means of production in the theater so that the people themselves may utilize them. The theater is a weapon [...] a weapon of liberation.
Augusto Boal (1979, p. ix).

The words «theater» and «prison» do not usually go together. However, in Westville Prison in Durban, South Africa, a group of Black women inmates –all convicted for murdering their partners– perform an autobiographical play for their fellow prisoners, the prison staff and representatives of the Justice Department, the South African Gender Commission, and media journalists (Young-Jahangeer, 2002). The protagonist is a «common woman» whose husband abuses her. When she seeks her parents help, they tell her that her husband's family paid lobola (bride price), and that she should put in more effort to make her marriage work. When she goes to the priest, he asks her to kneel down and pray. She goes to the police station to report her abuse. The policeman, who knows her husband from their drinking together at the shabeen (local pub), gives him a telephone call. The husband goes to the police station and beats her, while the policemen, silent colluders in the act, look on. Outraged and desperate, the woman hires an assassin to kill her husband. She is convicted for murder and sentenced to life imprisonment.

At the end of the play, the women stand and sing «emhlabeni sibuthwele ubunzima», a traditional Zulu song of endurance. Then, one-by-one, they face the audience to recite gut-wrenching personal testimonies about their physical abuse, psychological torment, and daily victimization. The Westville Prison Theatre, a project of the Department of Drama and Performance Studies at the University of Natal, is based upon Paulo Freire's (1970) liberatory pedagogy and Augusto Boal's (1979) theater of the oppressed (TO) to empower women who face «quadruple» oppression on account of their gender, race, class, and inmate status (Young-Jahangeer, 2002). Prison Theatre is not just defined by the oppressed characteristics of its creators –poor Black women prisoners– but also by the space in

which it is enacted: the prison (Barry, 2000). It gives voice to oppressed women inmates who gain in self-confidence, discover the power of social cohesion, and who use theater to question the oppressive structures underlying their present condition.

Through Prison Theatre, women inmates make visible the tortuous abuse that motivated their crime, and show the gender insensitivity of the laws under which they were tried and convicted. Prison Theater influenced local police officials, judiciary, and correctional staff to revisit the sentences imposed to women inmates, and to raise awareness about the importance of making South Africa's legal and prison system more gender sensitive. Prison Theater's power lies in its participatory, emotionally engaging, and autobiographical narrative, and in its ability to connect «oppressed» and «oppressive» structures in a non-threatening manner. Further, Prison Theater embodies a process of participation that is empowering both as a means (for the oppressed poor Black women inmates) and as an end (in terms of the structural outcomes that are generated).

Drawing upon the principles embodied in Westville's Prison Theater, the present article analyzes participatory communication practices, especially participatory theater, as an alternative application of the entertainment-education strategy. The dialogic pedagogy of the noted Brazilian educator Paulo Friere is discussed, including its application by Augusto Boal in a well-known global movement called the Theater of the Oppressed (TO). TO's techniques of the spect-actor (a spectator-turned-actor), Image Theater, Forum Theater, Invisible Theater, and Legislative Theater are analyzed, followed by a discussion of participatory theater experiences in South Africa, India, and Brazil. In this article, I argue that entertainment-education scholarship and practice can benefit by consciously incorporating dialogic, participatory processes in designing, producing, and assessing social change interventions.

PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION

The concept of participation is not new. Long before participation was purposefully advocated for social change, people had formed collectivities in order to farm, defend, and even destroy (Singhal,

2001). However, the discourse of participatory communication is relatively new. It gathered momentum in the 1970s, as discontent mounted with top-down and trickle-down communication approaches to social change (Jacobson, 1993; Uphoff, 1985). Participatory communication is defined as a dynamic, interactional, and transformative process of dialogue between people, groups, and institutions that enables people, both individually and collectively, to realize their full potential and be engaged in their own welfare (Singhal, 2001). All participation is communication-driven, but not all communication is participatory (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 1998; White & Nair, 1999). Gumucio Dagron (2001) provided a useful typology to distinguish participatory communication from other communication strategies for social change (table 1).

Table 1

Participatory versus non-participatory communication strategies

PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION	STRATEGIES	VERSUS NON-PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES
horizontal lateral communication between participants	versus	vertical top-down communication from senders to receivers
process of dialogue and democratic participation	versus	campaign to mobilize in a short-term without building capacity
long-term process of sustainable change	versus	short-term planning and quick-fix solutions
collective empowerment and decision-making	versus	individual behavior change
with the community's involvement	versus	for the community
specific in content, language, and culture	versus	massive and broad-based
people's needs are the focus	versus	donors' musts are the focus
owned by the community	versus	access determined by social political and economic factors
consciousness-raising	versus	persuasion for short-term

SOURCE: gumucio dagron (2001).

While participation comes in all shapes and sizes, participatory communication means working with and by the people, as opposed to working on or working for the people. At the risk of oversimplifying, one may contend that there are two major, but interrelated, approaches to participatory communication (Servaes, 1999). The first approach centers on the dialogic pedagogy of the noted Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. The second approach, often broadly labeled as the participatory community media approach, or the alternative communication approach, centers on the ideas of access, participation, self-determination, and self-management, sharpened during the UNESCO New World Information Order debates of the 1970s. While both sets of participative approaches have things

is common, their arenas of communicative application have been somewhat distinct. For instance, the Freirean theory of dialogic communication is more based on interpersonal and group dialogue in a community setting, and hence, has found more application in the practice of community development, literacy education, participation, and transformation. The participatory community media approach focuses on issues of public and community access to appropriate media, participation of people in message design and media production, and self-management of communication enterprises. Its applications are thus more in community radio and television, street theater and folk media, participatory video, and community informatics, Internet, and telecenters.

PAULO FREIRE'S DIALOGIC PEDAGOGY[2]

Born in 1921 in Recife, in Northeastern Brazil, Paulo Freire learned lessons about hunger and desperation as an eight-year old, when his father, a state police official, lost his job. The family savings were soon gone, and other kinship safety nets were exhausted. While his father eventually found a job and Freire's middle-class existence was restored, the powerful trumatic childhood lesson of living in poverty stayed with Freire for life.

Freire's career most important lesson came in the early 1950s when he was in charge of establishing adult literacy programs in poverty-stricken Northeastern Brazil. During an introductory seminar for illiterate and semi-illiterate adults, a wage laborer, who had listened to Freire's presentation on the benefits of learning to read and write, challenged Freire to understand the «world» in which members of the audience were living. Speaking in the local vernacular tongue, the illiterate laborer painted a highly evocative word-picture of the grinding poverty that he and his family endured, of his inability to speak like educated people, his and daily struggles against domination and exploitation.

2 For more on Paulo Freire, see the following Web-sites: http://www.paulofreire.org; http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-freir.htm; http://wwwvms.utexas.edu/~possible/freire.html; http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html

The laborer's moving story, told in his own words, influenced Freire's ideas about what education should and should not be. He realized that an educator's greatest challenge was to understand, appreciate, and respect the knowledge of people's lived experience as expressed in their vernacular tongue. He also realized that politics and pedagogy were inseparable. With experimentation and experience, Freire's pedagogical methods incorporated ideas on critical reflection, dialogue and participation, autonomy, democracy, problematization, and the crucial connection between theory and practice (Freire, 1998). Freire's empowering aproach was deemed dangerous politically by Brazil's rightwing military regime, which seized control in 1964, and he was exiled for over two decades before returning to Sao Paulo in the mid-1980s to serve as Secretary of Education for the city of Sao Paulo.

Freire is best known for his classic book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970) in which he argued that most political, educational, and communication interventions fail because they are designed by technocrats based on their personal views of reality. They seldom take into account the perspectives of those to whom these programs are directed. Freire's dialogic pedagogy emphasized the role of «teacher as learner» and the «learner as teacher», each learning from the other in a mutually transformative process (Freire & Faundez, 1989). The role of the outside facilitator is one of working with, and not for, the oppressed to organize them in their incessant struggle to regain their humanity (Singhal, 2001). True participation, according to Freire, does not involve a subject-object relationship, but rather a subject-subject relationship.

In Freirean pedagogy, there is no room for teaching «two plus two equals four». According to Freire such rote pedagogy, is dehumanizing as it views learners as empty receptacles to be «filled» with expert knowledge. Freire criticized this «banking» mode of education, in which «deposits» are made by experts. The scope of action allowed to students (or intended beneficiaries) «extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits» (Freire, 1970, p. 58). Instead, Freire advocated problem-posing as a means to represent to people what they know and think, not as a lecture, but as an involving problem. So a lesson on «two plus two» might

proceed in the following dialogic manner (Singhal, 2001):

Teacher: How many chickens do you have?

Poor farmer: Two.

Teacher: How many chickens does your neighbor have?

Poor farmer: Two.

Teacher: How many chickens does the landlord have?

Poor farmer: Oh, hundreds!

Teacher: *Why* does he have hundreds, and you have only two?

So goes the dialogic conversation that over time stimulates a process of critical reflection and awareness («conscientization») on the part of the poor farmer, creating possibilities of reflective action that did not exist before. Freire emphasized that the themes underlying dialogic pedagogy should resound with people's experiences and issues of salience to them, as opposed to well-meaning but alienating rhetoric (Freire, 1998). Once the oppressed, both individually and collectively, begin to critically reflect on their social situation, possibilities arise for them to break the «culture of silence» through the articulation of discontent and action.

FREIRE IN PRACTICE: augusto boal's theater of the oppressed[3]

Inspired by the writings and teachings of fellow countryman Paulo Freire, and his own experiences with dramatic performances, Brazilian theater director Augusto Boal developed Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), an international movement to use theater as a vehicle of participatory social change. Raised in Rio de Janeiro, Boal studied chemical engineering at Columbia University in New York, before founding the Arena Theater in Sai Paulo in the mid-1950s. TO's techniques – based on Freirean principles of dialogue, interaction, problem-posing, reflection, and conscientization – are designed to activate spectators to take control of situations, rather than passively allowing things to happen to them.

Boal coined the term «spect-actor» for the activated spectator, the audience member who takes part in the action. How did Boal

3 This section on Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed draws upon the following Web-sites: http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archive/boalintro.html

hit upon the idea of a spect-actor? In the late 1950s, when Boal was experimenting with participatory theater, audiences were invited to discuss a play at the end of the performance. In so doing, Boal realized they remained viewers and «reactors». In the 1960s Boal developed a process to facilitate audience participation, whereby developed a process whereby audience members could stop a performance and suggest different actions to the actors, who would then carry out the audience suggestions. During one of such performances, a woman in the audience was so outraged with the fact that the actor could not understand her suggestion, that she charged onto the stage, and acted out what she meant. For Boal, this defining event marked the birth of the spect-actor (not spectator). From that day, audience members were invited onto the stage. Thus, passive spectators are changed into actors who become transformers of the dramatic action. Spectators delegate no power to the actor (or character) either to act or think in their place (Boal, 1979). Rather, spectators assume a protagonist role, change the dramatic action, propose various solutions, discuss plans for change, and train themselves for social action in the real world.

The Theater of the Oppressed is a form of popular, participatory, and democratic theater of, by, and for people engaged in a struggle for liberation. Drawing upon Freire's principles, Boal's theater is necessarily political. Its main purpose is to make the unequal equal, the unjust just. Boal argued that most people are hesitant to take political action because of «cops in their heads», that is, their fear of oppressors. So Boal developed a series of theatrical «cops-in-the-head» exercises to ferret out internalized oppression (Boal, 1992). Through TO, the «cops in people's heads» are identified, and strategies for overcoming these fears are charted.

TO is basically a form of rehearsal theater designed for people who want to learn ways of fighting against oppression in their daily lives. The theatrical act by itself is a conscious intervention, a rehearsal for social action based on a collective analysis of shared problems of oppression (Boal, 1979). Boal hit upon the idea of theater as a

http://www.gn.apc.org/resurgence/issues/unwin204.htm; http://www.unomaha.edu/~pto/augusto.htm; http://cid.unomaha.edu/~pto/augusto.htm#bio

rehearsal for action by accident. One afternoon, in the early 1960s, Boal presented the struggle of Brazilian peasants in a theatrical piece using fake guns as props. When the show ended, the peasants came to Boal and said: «That was a great idea! Where are the rifles?! Let's go! You said that we were going to take over!» (http://www.-communityarts.net/readingroom/archive/boalintro.html). They thought Boal was serious about starting a revolution. Boal realized that theater was not only a portrayal of revolution, but also represented a rehearsal for revolution.

PARTICIPATORY THEATRICAL TECHNIQUES

Theater of the Oppressed utilizes the following key forms: (1) Image Theater, (2) Forum Theater, (3) Invisible Theater, and (4) Legislative Theater.

Nº 1. Image Theater

Boal believed that the means of producing theater is the human body, which is the source of sound as well as movement (Boal, 1979). To control the means of theatrical production means to control the human body. Through body control, a spectator (or passive observer) becomes an active protagonist. According to Boal (1979), human beings are so conditioned to expression through words that their bodies' expressive capabilities are underdeveloped. Boal's TO techniques include over 200 exercises and games for participants to get to know their bodies, including their possibilities and limitations (Boal, 1992). Exercises are designed to «undo» the participants' muscular structures, and to raise consciousness about how one's body structure embodies an ideology. For instance, when a peasant is called upon to act as a landlord, or a worker to act as a factory owner, or a woman to act as a policeman, not only do their physical bearings change, but their postures reflect the ideology associated with their new roles.

In Boal's technique of Image Theater, participants are only allowed to use their bodies to portray realities. No words are allowed. Image Theater begins with an arrangement of human bodies on a

stage in several poses, with various facial expressions, and using different props in order to denote a certain prevailing reality - for instance, exploitation. Participants are then asked to portray an ideal image by reconfiguring human bodies, their expressions, and the surrounding props. Finally, participants are challenged to portray a transitional image by once again reconfiguring human bodies, their expressions, and the props. In essence, participants are challenged to think through how to move from a prevailing reality to an ideal image. Various options are tried, discussed, and refined. Boal argued that the power of Image Theater lies in «making thought visible» (Boal, 1979, p. 137). By avoiding the idiom of language, communicative problems associated with denotative and connotative meanings, and encoding and decoding losses, are overcome.

Nº 2. Forum Theater

Forum Theater is a theatrical game in which a problem is shown in an unsolved form to which the audience is invited to suggest, and act out, solutions (Boal, 1992, p. xxi). Forum Theater begins with the enactment of a scene in which a protagonist (played by an actor) tries, unsuccessfully, to overcome oppression relevant to that particular audience. The joker[4] (master of ceremonies) then invites the spectators to replace the protagonist at any point in the scene where they believe an alternative action could lead to a solution. Anyone can propose a solution, but it must be done on stage. The scene is replayed numerous times with different interventions from different spectators. This results in a dialogue about the oppression, an examination of alternatives, and a rehearsal for real solutions (Boal, 1979).

For example, in the early 1970s, in Chimbote, a fishing port in Peru, Boal's technique of Forum Theater was used by workers in

4 The joker is the director/master of ceremonies in a performance. For instance, in Forum Theatre, the joker sets up the rules of the event for the audience, facilitates the spectators' replacement of the protagonist, and sums up the essence of each solution proposed in the interventions. The term derives from the joker (or wild card) in a deck of playing cards. Just as the wild card is not tied to a specific suit or value, neither is the TO joker tied to an allegiance to any one performer, spectator, or interpretation of events.

a fish meal factory to combat ruthless exploitation by the factory owner. Factory workers, in their role as spect-actors, suggested several solutions to address the oppression. The first suggestion was «Operation Turtle», that is, the workers would slow down their production; the second suggestion was to «speed up», that is, the workers would work faster in order to overload the machinery so that they could rest while it was being fixed; a third suggestion was to bomb the factory; a fourth suggestion was to go on strike (Boal, 1979). The merits of each of these suggestions were discussed, rehearsed, and all were deemed implausible. Finally, someone suggested that the workers should form a union. After a long period of deliberation, including rehearsing the union's role, this suggestion was deemed plausible.

Why were the previous suggestions discarded by the spect-actors? When the suggestion of bombing the factory was discussed, the workers realized that it would destroy their source of work. How would the bomb be manufactured? By whom? When the suggestion about going on strike was discussed, workers realized that the factory owner could easily go to the local town square and recruit other unemployed workers. Forming a workers union to gain collective bargaining power with the factory management provided them with the most appropriate means to achieve their goal.

In Forum Theater no idea is imposed. The audience has an opportunity to try out all their ideas, to rehearse all possibilities, and to verify them in theatrical practice (Boal, 1979). Forum Theater provides a way to examine all possible paths, serving as a rehearsal for practice. In so doing, it evokes the desire on part of spect-actors to practice in reality the act that they rehearsed in theater.

Nº 3. Invisible Theater

Invisible Theater is a rehearsed sequence of events that is enacted in a public, non-theatrical space with the explicit goal of capturing the attention of onlookers who do not know they are watching a planned performance. Its goal is to bring attention to a social problem for the purpose of stimulating public dialogue. Actors take responsibility for the consequences of the «show.»

Invisible Theater is both theater and real life, for although rehearsed, it happens in real time and space (Boal, 1979). It can be enacted in a restaurant, on a sidewalk, in a market, on a train, or with a line of people waiting at a bus stop. Invisible theater suddenly erupts in a place where people naturally congregate. For instance, in 1973, in a 400-person restaurant in a well-known hotel in Chiclayo, Peru[5], a protagonist actor ordered an expensive barbecue of 70 soles, loudly complained about its poor quality, and when confronted by the waiter with the bill remarked: «I am going to pay for it, but I am broke [...] So I will pay for it with labor power» (Boal, 1979, p.145). While the headwaiter was summoned, the rising din of the waiter-protagonist interaction began to catch the attention of patrons sitting at neighboring tables. When the headwaiter arrived, the protagonist offered to pay for the barbecue by working as a garbage thrower. When he asked how much money the garbage thrower in the restaurant made, a fellow actor, sitting at a neighboring table, said: «Seven soles per hour». The protagonist then exclaimed: «If I work as a garbage man, I'll have to work ten hours to pay for this barbecue, which took me ten minutes to eat. It can't be! Either you increase the salary of the garbage man, or reduce the price of the barbecue» (Boal, 1979, p. 145). Other actors, sitting in neighboring tables joined in the «public» dialogue, making visible the exploitation of the poor in affluent settings.

In Invisible Theater, while people go about their daily lives, an issue is made into a public scene. Boal knew that while people do not ordinarily want to get involved, they are always looking out the corner of their eye. By seeing a public «spectacle», people are forced to think about it. The onlookers almost always side with the oppressed, not the oppressor (Boal, 1979).

Nº 4. Legislative Theater

Boal, like Freire, was tortured and exiled for his cultural activism by the military dictatorship that governed Brazil for two decades.

5 This Invisible Theater performance was part of a Paulo Freire-inspired literacy program conducted in Peru in the early 1970s.

Both returned to Brazil in 1984 with the return to civil society, and became active in public service: Boal served as Mayor of Rio de Janeiro in the early 1990s, while Paulo Freire was the Secretary of Education in the city of Sao Paulo. Boal used theater to assess and solve people's problems. Members of his Center for the Theater of the Oppressed (CTO) went on neighborhood streets, asking people to portray the problems that they wished to change. One change involved getting the telephone booths lowered for disabled individuals.

Boal used theatre as a participatory political tool to make new laws, labeling this technique «Legislative Theater» (Boal, 1998). As Boal (quoted in http://www.gn.apc.org/resurgence/issues/unwin204.htm) noted:

> *CTO worked with nineteen groups of oppressed people. They would plays about social problems, discuss with their own communities, and dialogue with other communities [...] Out of these activities many legislative proposals came to my office. We had what we called the metabolizing cell, which was a group of actors and also lawyers. They would transform all the suggestions into proposals for new laws. I would present those proposals in the chamber like any other legislator. But the proposals for legislation would come not out of my head, but from the people.*
>
> *I presented 42 different proposals for new laws, 13 of which were approved. Thirteen laws now in existence in Rio are some of the ones which were proposed by the population [...] For instance, in Rio we passed the first Brazilian law to protect witnesses of crimes. It is a very understanding law that includes physical protection, includes witnesses transference from the place where they live to another place where they are more secure, to be given a new identity during the period of danger.*

Boal's Theater of the Oppressed, including its many formats - such as Image Theater, Forum Theater, Invisible Theater, and Legislative Theater, are directly rooted in the pedagogical and political principles espoused by Paulo Freire: The situation lived by the participants should be understood, including its root causes, and changing the situation should follow the precepts of social justice (Freire, 1970). Boal deserves tremendous credit for taking the principles of Friere's dialogic pedagogy, and enhancing it with his

own wide-ranging experiences in theater, to create an engaging «poetics of the oppressed». Boal considered Freire to be his supreme teacher. When Freire died of a heart attack in 1997, Boal said: «I am very sad. I have lost my last father. Now all I have are brothers and sisters» (Boal quoted in http://www.goucher.edu/library/wilpf/boal_bio.htm).

PARTICIPATORY THEATER: serving the oppressed

TO's techniques have been used by thousands of drama troupes over the world, and by community organizers and facilitators as participatory tools for democratizing organizations, analyzing social problems, and transforming reality through direct action[6]. TO's many disciples and variants are known variously as agit prop («agitation propaganda»), radical, alternative, and people's theater. Well-known examples include the Community Theatre Movement in Nicaragua, which in the 1970s effectively combined elements of theater, music, and dance to raise the political consciousness of campesinos (farmers), eventually overthrowing President Anastasio Somoza, Nicaragua's long-ruling dictator. In the Philippines, the People's Theater Network, a grassroots theater movement composed of over 300 regional groups, created a new breed of performing artists: The ATOR, the actor, trainer, organizer, and researcher. In South Africa, Protest Theater by the politically disenfranchized, made visible how apartheid victimized Black people (Loots, 1997).

Here we discuss applications of Freire's dialogic pedagogy, Boal's TO techniques, including their home-grown re-inventions in

6 In the United States, the Theater of the Oppressed Laboratory (TOPLAB) was founded in New York City in 1990 to provide a forum for the practice, performance, and dissemination of the techniques of TO. TOPLAB conducts on-site training workshops on theater as an organizing tool for activists in neighborhood, labor, peace, human rights, youth and community-based organizations. Its trainees used interactive theater to analyze and explore solutions to problems of oppression and power that arise in the workplace, school, and community problems connected to AIDS, substance abuse, family violence, homelessness, unemployment, racism and sexism. TO techniques are also taught at at the University of Omaha, at the Headlines Theater in Vancouver, and at the Mandala Center in Seattle, Washington.

three countries, located on three continents: South Africa, India, and Brazil.

Drama AIDS Education in South Africa

DramAidE, short for Drama AIDS Education, is a university-based[7] non-governmental organization (NGO) that uses Freire's (1970) and Boal's (1979) participatory theatrical methods and other interactive, non-judgmental, and culturally-sensitive educational methodologies to train students, teachers, nurses, caregivers, and members of churches and community-based organizations in HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and support (DramAidE, 2001). It works primarily in KwaZulu – Natal Province of South Africa, where some 35 percent of people in the 15 to 49 age group are HIV-positive. By 2002, DramAidE initiated participatory plays, workshops, and community events in over 1,000 secondary schools in KwaZulu-Natal Province, using locally expressive forms such as drama, songs, dances, and poems. DramAidE looks at health holistically, promoting a sense of pride in their bodies among the youth, and generating in them a positive self-image, self-esteem, and self-confidence (Dalrymple, 1996).

DramAidE's school-based program involves community education, plus lifeskills education targeted at secondary school students. First a DramAidE team of actor-teachers stages an AIDS play in front of the entire school. The play is followed by an intense, interactive question-and-answer session; and the students and teachers are challenged by DramAidE officials to create plays to reflect their own vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, including ways to prevent it (Dalrymple, 1996). Drama workshops are held for students and teachers that include group discussions, role-playing, and teamwork, as well, self-evaluations of the risk of contracting HIV, and culturally-acceptable strategies to address these problems. The DramAidE program culminates with an «Open Day», a community event in which students perform an HIV/AIDS play for their parents,

7 DramAidE is a collaborative venture of the University of Zululand and the University of Natal, Durban, South Africa.

teachers, local leaders, and people living with AIDS (PWAS). In a cultural context where sex is «do-able» but «untalkable», and where there is no parent-to-child or teacher-to-student communication about sex, the «Open Day» brings sexual taboos into the open (Dalrymple, 1996). Esing play as a medium of, students feel free talking about hitherto sensitive topics such as masturbation or ukusoma (non-penetrative «thigh sex»). The HIV/AIDS play is part of an all-day event which includes prayers; speeches by local leaders, headmasters, and headmistresses; and traditional Zulu songs and dances.

The goal of the DramAidE intervention in secondary schools of KwaZulu-Natal Province is to create, in a Freirean sense, a generation of «sexual subjects», who can regulate their sexual life, as opposed to being objects of desire and the sexual scripts of others (Paiva, 2000). To create sexual subjects, DramAidE's theater workshops are holistic and participatory, emphasizing improvisations and role plays, and allowing participants to rehearse different presentations of the self (Sutherland, 2002). For instance, drawing upon Boal's work, a tableau in a drama workshop may show a picture of a fierce, proud Zulu man holding a stick in his hand (Dalrymple, 1996). Behind him is a woman carrying a heavy load on her head and a baby on her back. Participants are asked to react to the picture, encouraged to change it, and provide reasons for the change. The ensuing discussion, initially, centers on the need for the man to have his hands free to protect his family; however, later the discussion moves to talking about the importance of the couple sharing the burden, including responsibilities for child care. Some participants may suggest that the man and the woman need to walk side-by-side, holding each other's hand. DramAidE's workshops are designed to stimulate critical thinking among young people, and empower the youth to learn, rehearse, and take actions to practice healthy behaviors. The gumboot dance, usually done only by men, is performed by both male and female students during the Open Day celebrations.

DramAidE's focus is not just on changing students' individual behavior through participatory theater, but also to influence the existing social norms of the community about HIV/AIDS, including

those of parents, teachers, church leaders, nurses, caregivers, and local officials. DramAidE's participatory interventions seek to catalyze a social movement of healthy lifestyles, which has room for both sexual restraint and abstinence, as well as a window to celebrate sexual healthy passions. Participating schools often initiate, at the encouragement of DramAidE officials, health promotion clubs, which establish programs for cleaning toilets, disposing of unhygienic waste, and ensuring a clean drinking water supply. Several of these youth-initiated clubs raised their own funds to purchase toilet paper, disinfectants, and gloves (Sutherland, 2002).

An evaluation of DramAidE's school-based interventions showed that participating students, including members of health promotion clubs, were less likely to engage in risky sexual behavior, more likely to behave like empowered «subjects» (as opposed to powerless «objects»), and more likely to practice behaviors that reflect gender-role equality (Sutherland, 2002). School teachers unanimously praised the participatory, experiential, entertaining, and engaging methodology employed by DramAidE: «DramAidE's approach is very good because it comes in the form of a game... We as educators are lacking in using dramatization, plays, and music [...] whereas the learners are entertained by them» (Sutherland, 2002, p. 34).

Theater for Empowerment in India[8]

Several theater groups in India use participatory approaches to raise consciousness about oppression and to empower the exploited. For instance, the late Safdar Hashmi's Jan Natya Manch (People's Theater Forum) is a street theater group that conducts plays for the poor who live in urban slums. These plays include *Gaon Se Shahar Tak* (From Village to City), a story about a small farmer who lost his land and is forced to become an industrial worker in a city; *Hatyaare* (Killers) on communalism; *Aurat* (Woman), a play that

8 The section on Badal Sircar draws upon a Web-site on Indian street theater: http://www.indiaprofile.com/religion-culture/streettheatre.htm

deals with bride burning, dowry, and wife-beating; and *Machine* which deals with capitalist oppression of the working class. During a performance of *Halla Bol* (Attack), a play about the Indian government's repression of the labor movement, Hashmi was beaten to death (Bharucha, 1990). Hashmi's life and his tragic death show the power of participatory theater in challenging the established order, and in seeking a more just future for the oppressed. It also shows that such activism often comes with high personal risks.

Another well-known street theater personality in India is Badal Sircar, a town-planner- turned-activist who pioneered the «Third Theater» movement in India. Sircar's plays are designed to conscientize an urban audience about exploitation in rural India, and to empower rural audiences to take more control of their destiny (Dutta, 1983). For instance, Sirar's play *Bhoma* dealt with the oppressive plight of wood-cutters in the Sundarbans forest region in Bengal. Like Boal, Sircar's theatrical style debunks the notion of a passive audience that views and hears from a distance. Instead, the audience's role is defined by a «stirring within» and «experiencing». Four-way communication is fostered in Sircar's performances: From performers to spectators, performers to performers, spectators to performers, and from spectators to spectators (Dutta, 1983).

In India's Tamil Nadu State, Nalamdana (meaning «Are You Well?» in Tamil) is a street theater group that implements entertainment-education interventions dealing with various aspects of health: HIV/AIDS, maternal and child health (MCH), children's rights, suicide prevention, cancer, and women's empowerment (Singhal & Rogers, 2003). A typical Nalamdana presentation takes place in the evening, in the open air of a village square or an urban slum, with several thousand audience members sitting on the ground. The performance takes place on an improvised stage, with blankets and cloths draped as a backdrop. Before the play begins, the actors announce that five individuals will be invited from the audience after the show to answer questions about the educational content. An interactive theatrical performance on HIV/AIDS is followed by questions about the means of HIV transmission. The two-hour show ends with an announcement giving the address and telephone number of nearby HIV testing and counseling centers, and brochures are distributed.

The following day, the Nalamdana actors return to the same location for a series of small group «workshops» about the educational theme of the previous evening show, in order to obtain feedback from audience members about the drama. Thus the scripts for the Nalamdana shows are continually being rewritten, with inputs from the audience members who participate in the day-after postmortems. The Nalamdana acting troupe members are constantly learning from their audiences about what they like and dislike, and their other reactions to the dramas. The Nalamdana actors say that they see their main role as conducting research, rather than just as acting. The continuing exchange with audience members keeps the acting fresh, and prevents burnout of the actors. Nalamdana prefers street theater to television or film, because this format allows the direct exchange of ideas with audience members. Over the past nine years, Nalamdana estimates that their street theater audiences total over a million people, mainly composed of audiences in urban slums and rural areas, with little formal education (those most in need of Nalamdana's HIV prevention message).

Audience members are highly involved in the street theater. From the stage, the audience looks like «a sea of eyeballs,» says R. Jeevanandham, project manager of the Nalamdana group. The actors estimate that their typical drama is about 25 percent education and 75 percent entertainment. If Nalamdana goes too heavily on the education side, they lose the involvement of their village audiences.

A scholarly journal article reporting an evaluation of Nalamdana's dramas says that they are particularly effective in correcting misconceptions about HIV/AIDS (Valente & Bharath, 1999). For instance, when a sample of the audience was asked whether mosquito bites could transmit HIV (they cannot), the rate of correct answers increased from 42 percent at pretest (before the performance) to 98 percent at posttest. Individuals with the lowest levels of formal education increased their knowledge of HIV transmission the most, as the result of Nalamdana's show. Self-reported attitudes toward people living with HIV/AIDS improved, showing that the Nalamdana drama decreased stigma.

In short, Nalamdana provides an engaging way to behavior change communication about HIV prevention, and reaches those individuals who need it most.

A Pedagogy of Prevention in Brazil

In 1990, Vera Paiva, a psychologist at the University of Sao Paulo and an expert in HIV/AIDS and gender issues, used Paulo Freire's participatory approach and Pichon Reviere's (1988) group process methodology to involve students and teachers in the low-income schools of Sao Paulo City in HIV/AIDS prevention. Based on a deep understanding of the socio-cultural dimension of risk, the goal of the intervention was to create «sexual subjects» (much like the aim of the DramAidE project in South Africa, discussed previously). A sexual subject is one who engages consciously in a negotiated sexual relationship based on cultural norms for gender relations, who was capable of articulating and practicing safe sexual practices with pleasure, in a consensual way, and who is capable of saying «no» to sex.[9]

In collaboration with students, teachers, and community members, Paiva developed a pedagogy of HIV prevention which sought to stimulate collective action and response from those directly affected by HIV, and who live in a vulnerable context (Singhal & Rogers, 2003). Face-to-face group interaction with girls and boys pointed to the importance of understanding the role of sexual subjects in various «sexual scenes», composed of the gender-power relationship between participants, their degree of affective involvement, the nature of the moment, the place, sexual norms in the culture, racial and class mores, and others (Paiva, 1995). Words such as AIDS, camisinha («little shirts» or condoms), and others were decoded, and participants proposed new words and codes for naming the body and gender rules, thus generating new realities.

9 Vera Paiva (1995, 2000) also used Freirean methods to launch community and school-based HIV prevention programs in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Paiva employed a variety of creative, engaging, and dramatic techniques to help participants formulate a pedagogy of prevention: Group discussions, role-playing, psychodrama, team work, home work, molding flour and salt paste to shape reproductive body parts and genitals, games to make condoms erotic, and art with condoms (to be comfortable in touching them with one's bare hands). To break inhibitions during role-plays, a «pillow» was placed in the middle of the room, symbolizing a sexual «subject». For example, the pillow could represent an «in-the-closet» gay or a lesbian, a virgin schoolgirl, or a bisexual schoolboy. Participants could adopt the pillow to have internal discussions with the subject, experience themselves in the place of the other, or understand their own fantasy. The pillow provided a vehicle to speak out through an imaginary character, while preserving individual privacy (Paiva, 1995).

Group processes showed that sexual inhibitions could be broken in the context of sacanagem (sexual mischief), accompanied by exaggerated sexual talk and eroticization of the context (Paiva, 1995). Condoms became easily discussable when both the boy and the girl were ready to «loosen the hinges of the bed», or «turnover the car oven», while engaging in sex. Thus the pedagogy of prevention was based on an «eroticization» of prevention.

Evaluation of Paiva's project was not based on counting the number of condoms used; but on the progress made by students, teachers, and community members in becoming «sexual subjects». They were collectively empowered to make choices, and to act them out in culturally appropriate ways.

Participatory Mass Media E-E in Brazil

A strong participatory movement in the state of Ceará in Brazil in 1997 brought artists from all contexts to join hands against AIDS. It illustrates an integration of mass media E-E with participatory approaches. This movement is the brainchild of Ranulfo Cardoso, Jr., who was greatly influenced by Paulo Freire's participatory strategy and by Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed. Beginning in Fortaleza, the capital of Ceará State, and supported by funds from the MacArthur Foundation, the *Bricantes Contra a* AIDS (Street

Artists Against AIDS) Project trained hundreds of artists in developing emotionally-powerful scripts on HIV prevention, care, and support, performing them in schools, prisons, and street markets. Cordel, a popular, rhyming, storytelling folk form in Brazil's Northeast, was co-opted for this movement. The most effective theater scripts were turned into entertainment-education radionovelas (radio soap operas), launching another movement called *Radialistas Contra a* AIDS (Radio Broadcasters Against AIDS). The most popular radio soap opera, *Radionovela da Camisinha* («Condom Radio Soap Opera») is broadcast in Ceará and in other states of Brazil.

Ceará's participatory experiences in using theater, art, and radio to promote HIV prevention and to reduce AIDS-related stigma has spread to artists from eight Brazilian States, including Rio de Janeiro, Bahia, Pernabuco, and others. The use of participatory theater, local folk media forms, and radio, which reaches 90 percent of the low-income population in Brazil represents an innovative integration of E-E approaches to HIV prevention (Singhal & Rogers, 2003).

CONCLUSIONS

Media-centered entertainment-education interventions are seldom designed, owned, and operated by the people themselves. Most media initiatives are designed and implemented by experts for a «target» audience, living little room for the dynamic dialogic pedagogy espoused by Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal. The one-way nature of mass media interventions, as also the desire of development officials to reach large audiences, relegates the relatively smaller-reach theater-based interventions to the sidelines of most development programs.

The present article argued for more consciously adding participatory theatrical practices to the entertainment-education arsenal. The dialogic pedagogy of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed techniques (for example, the «spect-actor») transform entertainment-education interventions from being a one-way «monologue» into a two-way «dialogue» between audience and

actors. Mass media-based entertainment-education initiatives should work hand-in-hand with engaging participatory theater initiatives, each supplementing the other.

As the field of entertainment-education continues to evolve, grow, and re-invent itself, participatory strategies for empowering the underdogs will increasingly find a more central place in the E-E discourse.

REFERENCES

ALINSKY, S. D. (1971). *Rules for Radicals.* New York: Vintage Books.

BARRY, E. M. (2000). Women's prisoners on the cutting edge: Development of the activist prisoners' rights movement. *Journal of Crime, Conflict, and World Order, 27*(3), 22-28.

BHARUCHA, R. (1990). Letter to the dead. *Theater, 14*, 6-9.

BOAL, A. (1979) . *The theatre of the oppressed*. New York: Urizen Books.

—— (1992). *Games for actors and non-actors*. New York: Routledge Press.

—— (1998). *Legislative theatre*. New York: Routledge Press.

CHAMBERS, R. (1999). Foreword. In S.A. White (ed.), *The art of facilitating participation* (pp. 8-10). New Delhi: Sage.

DALRYMPLE, L. (1996). The use of traditional forms in community education. *Africa Media Review, 11*, 75-91.

DramAidE (2001). *Annual report. 2000/2001*. Kwadlangezwa, South Africa: DramAidE Office, University of Zululand.

DUTTA, E. (1983). Introduction. In B. Sircar, *Three plays* (pp. 1-4). Calcutta: Seagull Books.

FRASER, C. & RESTREPO-ESTRADA, S. (1998). *Communicating for development: Human change for survival*. New York: I.B.Tauris.

FREIRE, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

FREIRE, P. (1998). *Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who dare to teach*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

FREIRE, P. & FAUNDEZ, A. (1989). *Learning to question: A pedagogy of liberation*. Geneva, World Council of Churches.

GUMUCIO DAGRON, A. (2001). *Making waves: Stories of participatory communication for social change*. New York: Rockefeller Foundation.

JACOBSON, T.L. (1993). A pragmatist account of participatory communication research for national development. *Communication Theory, 3* (3), 214-230.

LOOTS, L. (1997). Remembering protest theater in South Africa. *Critical Arts, 11*, 142-152.

PAIVA, V. (1995). Sexuality, AIDS, and gender norms among Brazilian teenagers. In Han ten Brummelheis and Gilbert Herdt (Eds.), *Culture and sexual risk: Anthropological perspectives on AIDS* (pp. 79-96). Amsterdam, Netherlands: Gordon & Breach.

PAIVA, V. (2000). *Fazendo arte com a camisinha: Sexualidades jovens em tempos de AIDS*. Sao Paulo: Summus Editorial.

PICHER, M (Ed.). What is the Theater of the Oppressed? *http://www.toplab.org/whatis.htm*.

SCHUTZMAN, M. & Cohen-Cruz, J. (Eds.) (1994). *Playing Boal: Theatre, therapy, and activism*. New York: Routledge.

SERVAES, J. (1999). *Communication for development: One world, multiple cultures*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

SINGHAL, A. (2001). *Facilitating community participation through communication*. New York: UNICEF.

SINGHAL, A. & ROGERS, E.M. (1999). *Entertainment-education: A communication strategy for social change*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

—— (2003). *Combating AIDS: Communication strategies in action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

SINGHAL, A. (2004). Entertainment-education as participatory theater: Freirean strategies for empowering the oppressed. In A. Singhal, M.J. Cody, E.M. Rogers, and M. Sabido (Eds.), *Entertainment-education and social change: History, research, and practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

SUTHERLAND, L. (2002). *DramAidE RBM project: Evaluation report*. Durban, South Africa: DramAidE Office, University of Natal.

UPHOFF, N. (1985). Fitting projects to people. In M.M. Cernea (ed.) (1985), *Putting people first: Sociological variables in rural development* (pp.369-378). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

WHITE, S.A. & NAIR, K.S. (1999). The catalyst communicator: Facilitation without fear. In S.A. White (ed.), *The art of facilitating participation* (pp. 35-51). New Delhi: Sage.

YOUNG-JEHANGEER, M. (2002, May). *Working from the inside/out: Drama as activism in Westville female prison*. Paper presented to the International Conference on Convergence: Technology, Culture, and Social Impacts, University of Natal, Durban, South Africa.

VALENTE, T.W. & BHARATH, U. (1999). An evaluation of the use of drama to communicate HIV/AIDS information. *AIDS Education and Prevention*, *11* (3), 203-211.