

THE ROLE OF OTHER:
AN EXPLORATION OF A FACILITATOR'S ROLE IN
PLAYBUILDING WITH ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED
ADOLESCENT WOMEN

by

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ABSTRACT

During the Fall 2007 semester, I facilitated the devising of a new play with students from a school located in St. Louis, Missouri. As an employee of a mid-America prominent regional theatre company, the organization partnering with the school on this project, I was hired as the teaching artist who oversaw the students' playwriting. Both the school and the regional theatre company hoped my being there would assist the girls in writing a play that connected to their *Top 20 Teens* curriculum as well as demonstrate the high standards that are expected of them by their school's administration. This is the second year that the school and the regional theatre company partnered on this project, and they discovered last year that the play's use of language and character development suffered due to hands off directing. Neither organization wanted this to happen again and decided that a facilitator needed to work with the girls throughout the entire playwriting process rather than allow the students free reign in hopes that they were challenged to make different decisions from last year's play.

The school's student population stems from communities deemed economically disadvantaged, and my role in this project proved challenging due to the fact that I am not from the same population as the students. As a white, middle class female working in an inner city environment, I seem to be endowed with a modicum of perceived power, whether or not I agree with it or want it. In my experience, I have noticed a dynamic permeated by uneasiness due to past, and current, tensions between whites and other races. As a Caucasian entering an inner city environment, I felt like the obvious minority. Resulting from these situations, I assume the role of "other" when entering populations that differ from my own. In the case of the school, I felt

my role as “other” increased due to working in an all-female environment with participants drawn from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

My role as “other” sparked the following questions for me: How do I facilitate this project as an “other,” and how does this crucial, racial and socio-economic role affect the construction of my sessions with the participants? I was interested in documenting how I perceived this role relative to my participants and the partnering organization during my facilitation and in my conclusions after the project was completed. During my facilitation, I kept a journal that served as a self-action study during all of my sessions with the girls. The “in the moment” writings allowed me to capture those times when my role as “other” directly affected my approach to the facilitating of the playbuilding and the choices I made during the project. Afterward, I developed a conclusion section that was written a few months after the project had ended.

I wanted to determine how my perception of “other” shifted, if at all, while I facilitated the project and after I had the time to reflect on the project. I discovered that my perception of “other” did change as I went through this project. During the study, I found myself aware of this shift, but noticed my awareness of power and privilege increased when I had time to reflect on the project months after it had ended. I discovered that I can be “other” in some instances while this role may not be apparent to my participants. My thesis documents how being “other” guided my choices as a facilitator, as well as when it did not seem to be the basis of my decision-making. From this study, I concluded that my being different racially and socio-economically led me to place an unnecessary filter over my work with the playbuilding project which caused me to have many challenges as a white teaching artist working in an inner city setting.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This project consisted of assisting a class of eleven eighth grade girls with the creation of a new play. The school focuses on an alternative approach for girls that come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Their approach to education is considered faith based and infuses activities focused on female social development for the students. This is the second year that the school has incorporated a playwriting project in their eighth grade curriculum. After last year's play written by the eighth grade class, the administration of the school encouraged a new approach to the facilitation of the project. This new approach included increased guidance from the facilitator rather than allowing the students to compose whatever they wanted, the method applied during last year's project.

I stepped in as the facilitator for the school's eighth grade play development project aware that I would be working with an all female student population deemed economically disadvantaged and situated within an inner city setting. This caused me to consider what role I portrayed in the project. As a middle class Caucasian female in my mid-twenties, I assumed that I automatically possessed power and privilege based on my recognized veneer. For example, I felt the girls might not wish to discuss issues that affect them because, as a white person, I might not understand their situation. This made me wonder how I would be perceived by the school's student population, and how this would shape my facilitation of this project. My guiding questions throughout this project were: how do I facilitate this project as "other," and how does this racial identity affect the construction of my sessions with girls?

The regional theatre company, the organization where I was employed as the teaching artist for this project, and the school came together to create goals for the playwriting program. The regional theatre company wanted to achieve stronger connections to inner city communities through programming, such as this one, while providing an opportunity for underserved populations to gain more exposure to the arts. The school's hope for the partnership emphasized the quality extra curriculum programs for their students. The school also wished for the play development program to connect to their character building curriculum. Extra curriculum activities are included in the student's day, and the school tries to incorporate other partnering organizations with their school in order to provide more opportunities for their students. This was the school's second year of participation with the regional theatre company on this project.

Last year, the eighth grade English teacher, who is no longer with the school, facilitated the project. This instructor's approach to the play development process permitted the girls to have free reign over their project. The instructor wanted to limit the regional theatre company to overseeing the direction of the play while allowing the girls to control the writing. The instructor provided a few edits but gave full ownership to the girls. An eighth grade class of about fifteen girls was split into two smaller groups. Both groups wrote a play around the theme of body image, and each play had a different outcome. One play had an outcome wherein the protagonist did not gain her major want or need by the end of the play. The other play's ending portrayed the protagonist as achieving her wants and needs, but the transition as to how the outcomes came about was never fully developed in either play.

The collaborators from the regional theatre company and the school this year wished to achieve different results with the play. Many discussions revolved around how to facilitate this

project with more guidance while allowing the girls some ownership. Both the players from the regional theatre company and the administration of the school felt the quality of last year's play suffered because the girls were not offered enough direction nor did they gain much understanding of what it means to write a play. My supervisor at the regional theatre company wished the play included more development toward the outcomes, but last year's eighth grade class was given complete control over the project and anything that made it to the page in writing stayed in their script. Besides the lack of plot development, the play's language remained another concern of both my supervisor and the school's administration. The play's language was filled with slang and did not emulate the English skills expected for the school's eighth grade students. The mix of language choices, including slang and improper English- along with an undeveloped plot- led to the desired changes with this year's eighth grade play project.

My role was to facilitate this project while making sure the participants used non-derogatory language and also avoided racial slurs. The students of the school's chosen topic would be derived either from their history or literature curriculum. The students met with me for a weekly forty-five minute session, and these meetings lasted for about six weeks until they doubled up as the students transitioned from writing the play to rehearsals. In sharing my process of facilitating this project, I documented moments when my status as "other" seemed particularly relevant to the school's playbuilding project. My thesis aims to provide insight on a topic that proves relevant for many teaching artists working in an inner city environment. In my past experiences, I have observed that many teaching artists and facilitators are perceived to have power and privilege based upon the manner in which they are viewed by their participants. This occurrence continues to fascinate me as I enter environments where my being a Caucasian

female defines me as the given minority. I felt driven to gain an understanding of how my status as “other” affected me when working with the school’s student population, a group consisting of economically disadvantaged women.

As I was solely desirous of understanding my role as “other” during this project, I chose to document this as a self-action study, which followed my process “in the moment.” I wanted to notate the moments when “other” appeared to consciously drive my decisions as well as those moments when it did not seem to be an issue. Thereafter, I wanted to know how my overall perception of my status changed after the project was over, and to that end, I waited a few months to arrive at and document my conclusion. I was interested to see if my view of being “other” while facilitating this project changed upon careful introspection after the project ended.

My thesis is set forth in the following order: a literature review whereby I researched other perspectives of teaching artists working in differing population from their own, the self-action study consisting of a planning and reflection section for each session I met with the eighth grade girls from the school, and my conclusion which was written after the project ended. My guiding questions for this project remain: How would I facilitate this project as an “other,” and how does this racial identity affect the construction of my sessions with the participants?

As I traveled through this process, I wanted to see how my perception as “other” shifted and affected the evaluation of my personal outcome. I wanted the conclusions I arrived at about my status as “other” to provide me insight into my work as a teacher who will continue to work in inner city environments. The documentation of this work remains an honest account, and although I tried not to be biased during this process, it was admittedly difficult for me to do so. I wrote this study aware that my experience could be utterly different from that of another

facilitator working in a similar environment. My subject position caused me to weave many held beliefs into this project including the preconceived notion that it remains difficult for white teachers to work with students who are racially and socio-economically different due to the conflicts that are still present between both racial groups. However, I feel that more discussion about processes where the teaching artists and the participants are racially and socio-economically different will allow us to become more aware of how our decisions may be shaped due to our racial identity.

I do not presume to say that everything comes down to race and/or socio-economic status, but rather that it proves important to consider when working in climates that differ from our own. I feel that our society continues to allow race and socio-economic status to influence various decisions, especially with our current political situation where many have issues with an African American campaigning to become a presidential nominee. Racial and socio-economic issues may be ever-present in current events, but I also see this in the classrooms I work in where I am the minority and my status as “other” seems amplified. I feel that I need to address issues of being “other” so that I can enhance my understanding of my role as a teacher when working with racially and socio-economically different populations. It proves challenging to me when I feel a need to consider the race and socio-economic status of my students before making decisions affecting how I may facilitate an activity, but at the same time wonder how my choices could celebrate these identifying factors. My thesis discusses the pendulum of emotions and self-consciousness I am caught up in as I evaluate when race and/or socio-economic status needs to be considered, or when it matters not, and how being “other” influences these decisions.

CHAPTER TWO: MY ROLE AS FACILITATOR

As a facilitator, I feel that I bring a lot to the table. This was not the first time I facilitated the devising of new work with a group of young people. Since I had experienced this process before, I felt as though this was an opportunity to practice my approach to play devising with young people. My style incorporates a lot of artistic mediums in an effort to tap into my participants' various learning styles. I find that this helps the people with whom I work adapt different ways to enter writing, and it further helps me learn more about my participants' interests. I also have a lot of experience writing plays myself through the study of playwriting on a college level, some of which has been produced in the past. This knowledge allowed me to share vocabulary and experience with my students and I was grateful to assist the school's eighth grade girls.

Although I had a lot to give the girls, I honestly knew very little about the shape my work with the school would assume. Addressing my fears with this project already made it difficult for me to make certain decisions about this project. I pondered again and again how I might begin this project in a way that might make the girls feel safe and willing to participate. When my supervisor from the regional theatre company approached me about this project, I was immediately interested because I would be facilitating a process aimed at creating a student generated work. However, uncertainty--bordering on fear-- arose because I felt incapable of communicating with a population deemed economically disadvantaged because I come from such a different place from a socio-economic standpoint.

I have always worked with a mixed student population consisting of all genders and various economic levels. Knowing that I was working with all female students deemed by the

school as “economically disadvantaged” made me a little nervous. My trepidation was born of the assumptions I attached to this label. Those assumptions included the notion that these young women came from poverty in inner city environments while barely achieving the academic standards that are expected of this age group. Furthermore, my assumptions stemmed from my upbringing in a family that always strove to help those less fortunate. I was open to my assumptions becoming misconceptions, but the groups I have worked with in the past were never labeled as something so specific as “economically disadvantaged,” which I feel should not matter. Nevertheless, my lack of knowledge of this population has caused me to question my ability in working with them.

At the same time, perhaps I was focusing too intently on the girls being “economically disadvantaged” and needed to realize that the obvious can be clouded by scrutiny. In this vein, I was cognizant of precautions I may have needed to take in order to better communicate with the girls. As a potential female role model for these girls, I believed I needed to be extra careful as to my personal methodology during these sessions. My facilitation style tends to be quite relaxed, and I thought I might need to tighten my approach for the school because of my fears attached to race and socio-economic status when working in an inner city environment. At the same time, I questioned how my status as “other” altered my style and caused me to step out of my comfort zone when facilitating this project with the girls. I did not wish to deviate from my norm during these sessions, but I needed to find a balance between being comfortable and allowing myself to connect with the girls even if it took me to an uncomfortable place. The fact is that my background differs quite drastically from these girls, and the palpable fear of offending them existed.

As I concentrated more deeply on my role as a facilitator, I felt an unwelcome division among the school's students that I admit came from me because I worried about my inability to fully understand "where the girls were coming from" affecting my facilitation of the project in a negative way. I feared being viewed by the girls as a rich white girl who would never understand them. As I tried to conjure up potential ways to begin this project, I found myself second-guessing many of my ideas. I railed against offending a group that I am largely ignorant about while wondering about my capacity, as "other," to get to know them well. I wanted to allow the girls free reign over the topic they chose to write about while guiding them through the process. Admittedly, I hoped their topic did not wrap around something in their home environment about which I had no knowledge because I wanted to be as valuable a resource for them as possible.

My reason for hesitancy regarding a topic from the girls' home environment becomes clear when I realize that I feared they might think I was insensitive. For example, if the girls wanted to write about what it means to be economically disadvantaged, how could I guide them, and what could I possibly parallel in my own white middle class upbringing? I was afraid that I was entering this situation with an assumption about these girls, and I did not want the girls to sense this about me, especially if my perception was askew or false. In any case, I felt that this project did not depend on my knowledge or lack thereof, and the last thing I wanted to do was interfere with their ideas despite my lack of comfort at the moment. I wanted the eighth grade girls to be empowered by their ideas and never feel that they needed to shy away from being themselves because I may not understand their worldview. For instance, they may not label themselves "economically disadvantaged" though they are deemed such on some arbitrary scale.

Rather, they may feel that they have a life filled with luxuries as to their own scale, but when I look at them, I may see a group of women who have undeniably faced a lot of financial hardship. I did not want to misrepresent them in my mind, and it became increasingly difficult for me to abandon my own assumptions and definitions of “economically disadvantaged.”

CHAPTER THREE: UNDERSTANDING OTHER

Roots of Other

Before discussing my role as “other,” I feel it proves important to understand the roots of “other” before applying my own definition of the term. “Other” stems from border theory and generally refers to those who lack power due to the boundaries they are working against. In *Of Borders and Thresholds: Theatre History, Practice and Theory*, Michal Kobialka, Professor of History/Literature at the University of Minnesota, discussed “other” in terms of marginalized groups as described in border theory. He states:

Recent theories and practices presented by the so-called marginalized groups...have been engaged in meticulous and systematic analyses of coercive and disciplining modes of representation by producing a space from which the “other” subject could speak. (10)

What Kobialka professes in his use of the term “other” is that based on the boundary one may be working against, they may be viewed as the weaker participant. For example, I could view the girls from the school as “other” because the borderline that separates us is that fact they are from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and I am not. However, I could also be “other” in the fact that my being white causes me to be a minority in their group, and when looking at me and the girls with a boundary based on race and socio-economic status, I am the one in the “marginalized” group due to being the minority. I am “other” because as a white person, I do not

have as much power when I am outnumbered by the different races and socio-economic backgrounds represented in the girls.

Despite Kobialka's research in how "other" is defined in relation to border theory, I take on a different meaning of this status. I agree that boundaries/borders can define our roles, but I also feel that being "other" comes from a state of mind. For example, I may be on the same side of the border with the girls when it comes to gender but I still feel like "other" because of my racial identity in the classroom. My racial identity causes me to have a lot of fear when discussing social issues with the girls because I do not come from a racial group often associated with being "economically disadvantaged." This provokes a lot of white fear in me because I feel guilty being associated with a group that often oppresses those from other races and socio-economic backgrounds. For example, the girls focused their project on the Civil Rights Movement, a period of history when many whites oppressed and victimized those who were not white. I feel guilty discussing this because as a white person I come from the same group of people who participated in such acts of hate, and it makes me feel uncomfortable discussing the Civil Rights Movement with non-whites for fear of being associated with those who committed the hate crimes. These feelings sparking from white fear and guilt also emphasized my status as "other" because I do not understand what it feels like to be oppressed due to race or a socio-economic status. I based my feelings on "other" solely on race and the notion of "economically disadvantaged," and I was curious as to how this state of mind affects my facilitation of the play development project.

My Role as Other versus Outsider

For this study, I focused on myself as “other” due to my feelings based on preconceived notions that stemmed from being racially and socio-economically different. I entered this project as a minority and defined myself as “other” based on this marginalized racial identity I had when I compared myself to the eighth grade girls from the school. As a white person, I may be perceived as having more power, and thus never associated as “other,” but considering my state of mind as being from the weaker race when seen as a minority compared to the girls, I am left taking on the role of “other.” Although I label myself as “other,” I feel it proves important to discuss how my racial identity also causes me to be an outsider. There are times when I interchange my role as “other” to that of an “outsider.” When I do this, I do not intend to equate both roles as meaning the same thing, but I discovered that things that I thought classified me as “other” really made an “outsider.” Being “other” clouded my perception during certain situations with the girls, and I noticed that I started labeling all moments where my role differed as being a part of “other.”

When I started researching my role as “other,” I searched for information around perceptions based on race and socio-economic status. Since I defined being “other” around my state of mind due to being racially and socio-economically different, it became difficult for me to separate what placed me in this role and what made me an outsider. For example, my background has always been defined as middle class, and I feel like an outsider when it comes to working with those who are considered economically disadvantaged. However, before realizing that I felt like an outsider, I analyzed my feelings based on “other.” This proved challenging when it came to discussing how being “other” shaped my facilitation of the play development

project with the girls. I discovered that I had to be clear as to what made me “other,” and what made me an “outsider.”

When I discuss my status as “other,” I will be discussing how being a white middle class female affects my role in the play development project. Being “other” is something that I will always be because I cannot change the fact that I am a white female. Being “outsider” is a temporary status because this role can be changed by me or by someone else. For example, I may be an outsider to the school because I am a new teaching artist but as I get accustomed to the environment, this role may go away. I may be “other” when working with the girls because as a white person I am the minority, but this never changes nor can be controlled because I cannot all of a sudden be from a different a race or socio-economic status.

Despite my role as “other” stemming from race and socio-economics, my initial inquiry of this started when I heard that the girls I would be working with are from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Race came into play when I immediately jumped to conclusions about the racial backgrounds associated with being economically disadvantages and assumed that most of the girls would not be white. As a facilitator who will be working closely with these girls, I felt the need to gain an understanding not only of what “economically disadvantaged” means to me but to the school as well. As to the school, the economically disadvantaged are placed in the column listing a family income at a certain amount that qualifies them to receive funding for privatized education. However, when I attempt to research such information as would explain the girls’ socio-economic background, I am confronted with an insight into their racial background instead. According to a brochure from the school about their student

population, the racial background of their students is “89% African American, 4% Latino, 4% Caucasian and 3% Other” (Case Study 3).

The racial breakdown of the school’s students in stark print reaffirmed my thoughts as to whom I may be working with, and that I will likely be a very visible minority. When I heard that students from the school are considered “economically disadvantaged,” I immediately thought about the group in racial terms and just as immediately jumped to the conclusion that the majority of the group would probably be African American. I was surprised at my closed mind and apparent ideas about race and socio-economic backgrounds.

Questions I Hoped to Answer

In noting my perceptions about being different from my students from both a racial and socio-economic standpoint, I concluded that being “other” affected the journey of this project. I sculpted my facilitation along my views and sensitivity towards the participants, and based on my notion of being different. As “other,” I found myself striving to be sensitive with a group because of the lack of privileges they have due to the populations’ background. In considering the harsh realities of white privilege, I want to know how much being “other” guides my decisions. Although privilege appears negative due to the injustices surrounding it, could any positives exist with being a very specific, privileged “other?” And what outcomes will I discover?

As I begin sharing my study, the main question that continued to boil was how my role of “other” influenced my facilitation of this project? My paper did not examine the girls, but rather contained a self-action study on my role as facilitator. I hoped that by doing this I would be able to shed light on the facilitation of inner city-based drama residencies that are lead by those who

do not stem from such communities. I did not intend to arrive at conclusive answers, but hoped to share my thinking process through the journey while I continue to weigh the impact of my role as “other.” I discovered that being “other” did shape my facilitation and caused me to second guess many of my ideas for fear of offending the girls. In the chapters ahead I will discuss more specifically how being “other” shaped my facilitation and impacted the play development project with the school’s eighth grade girls.

CHAPTER FOUR: GAINING OTHER PERSPECTIVES

All of my questions led me to search for other case studies and research by teaching artists working in similar environments where they were in the minority in relation to their participants. I used research to help me build my own concepts of “other” during my journey through the school’s play development process. Before beginning my facilitation of the school’s project, my concept of “other” referred to being an outsider based on race and socio-economic status. My focus on race and socio-economic status is based in my preconceived notions of the school’s eighth grade girls, and I hoped to be able to formulate new ideas around this role rather than locking onto my initial perceptions.

I focused my research on devising new works with young people, particularly middle school aged participants. I also wanted to expand my perspective on the use of drama in inner city-based communities to discover whether other teaching artists or facilitators shared similar experiences of “other” whereby they fell into this role due to being racially and/or socio-economically different from their participants. A further aim was to learn about other residencies with economically disadvantaged populations to find out if the facilitators on those projects felt like “other” and how they dealt with attachment to that role. As I share the research I found, I examine how each piece informs my notion of “other” as well as how it may influence the facilitation of the project. At this point of my journey, I wanted my research to remedy my fears about being “other” and provide me with a foundation by which I could connect with my student population.

My research provided me a sampling of literature that exemplifies the type of work I would be doing while shedding light on a few approaches toward finding commonalities with

populations wherein another may identify themselves as “other.” I found excitement in that my project underlined more and more the fact that teaching artists and facilitators continue to write about their work within inner city-based communities. I also gained insight around devising new work with young people. I felt satisfied and supported to know about other approaches and experiences in my field, and I was thus buoyed by the work that I had chosen. Knowing that other teaching artists wished to share and record their work mitigates the idea of working in unfamiliar settings.

In *Performing Democracy: International Perspectives on Urban Based Performance*, edited by Susan C. Haedicke and Tobin Nellhaus, I found many perspectives on devising work with specific populations including those in inner city-based environments. The book contains a collection of articles written by teaching artists who use the arts to engage specific communities. One of the articles addressed the notion of being an outsider to the community with whom she worked. In *The Children of Tomorrow: Seattle Public Theatre’s Work with Homeless Youth*, E.J. Westlake, Assistant Professor of Theatre at the University of Michigan, writes about a project facilitated by teaching artists from the Seattle Public Theatre. The aim of the project was to work with homeless youth, and within the first few paragraphs of the essay Westlake comments on the notion of being an outsider, stating, “Initially, I wanted to examine how the facilitators’ status as ‘outsiders’ in the community of homeless youth would effect the workshop and performance” (Westlake 67).

Westlake’s inquiry as to how facilitators as outsiders would affect the direction of the Seattle Public Theatre project proved relevant to my own interests about being “other.” Although “outsider” and “other” are different, the notion of trying to connect to a group that

remains dissimilar correlated to my inquiry on how my status may shape my facilitation of the play development project with the girls from the school. As “other,” it can prove tricky to find commonalities with the school’s student population just as being an outsider in the case of Westlake’s article also provided challenges to connecting with the participants. In Westlake’s expressed concerns about the influence of outsiders, she states: “In my own view I saw community-based theatre projects led largely by straight, white men, whereas the communities themselves, especially the homeless youth, were anything but” (67). When considering my own questions concerning “other,” I discovered that many Caucasian teaching artists facilitate projects where they are the minority. Having absorbed a widening perspective on being an outsider in terms of race and socio-economic status, I started delving into Westlake’s article for ideas as to how to address this issue when facilitating as “other.”

Westlake’s article addressed ways to overcome the outsider role as a drama facilitator. Through the use of techniques stemming from Augusto Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Westlake and the other teaching artists searched for commonalities between themselves and the group. Although the article about Seattle Public Theatre’s project was mainly about facilitators as outsiders in relation to their participants, it nevertheless became important to illuminate connections with their community of participants. The Seattle Public Theatre worked to find a common link to their participant population of homeless youth, emphasizing their ability to communicate with their participants without being insensitive. In the following quotation, Westlake gives us a sense of the way in which facilitators from Seattle Public Theatre used techniques from Augusto Boal to address their concerns around insensitivity to their participants while simultaneously gaining a deeper understanding of the homeless youths’ preoccupations:

The facilitators (also) used image theatre to help the participants understand how to interpret the stories of others and visualize solutions. Rather than presenting a metanarrative, which ultimately everyone would have to reject as not being relevant to their lives, Boal's theatre created an opportunity for dialogue.

(Westlake 74)

The dialogue that arose as a result of these activities gave the Seattle Public Theatre's facilitators a chance to learn about their participants. Based on Westlake's account of the project with the homeless youth, the facilitators became more sensitive to the needs of their participants. This sensitivity got a lot of mileage in that the Seattle Public Theatre facilitators used their discoveries relative to the homeless participants as a way to create a safe environment for them. Westlake concludes that finding common ground allowed the audience to connect to the homeless youth participants rather than feeling distant from them, she states:

The third level of the process of building temporary communities involves a transformation in the community outside of the theater, where the work resonates beyond the performance event. While one can theorize that the group of the "general audience" of the event may feel less removed from the group of "homeless youth," there are other more tangible effects of the workshop and performance. (Westlake 78)

Since the homeless youth participants felt safe exploring issues that relate to them while considering that not all experiences are a result of their status, the "general audience," was allowed to find commonalities.

When considering Westlake's observations about what happened in the project with Seattle's homeless youth, I envisioned myself employing Boal's techniques to help me connect with my students. I do not purport to rid myself of my status as "other," for solid reality promptly sinks that possibility, but I considered how I might find commonalities with the girls from the school so that I will better communicate with them. I also want to establish a safe environment for the girls, and the ideas shared in Westlake's article about the use of techniques from Augusto Boal may prove useful during the play development process. Using Boal's techniques of both image and Forum Theatre with the intention of exploring common threads among groups makes sense to me when trying to find ways to alleviate my status as "other." Although Westlake addressed being an outsider, I find that I can also employ Boal's techniques when considering "other" because finding commonalities can lighten the boundary between me and the participants.

Another aspect of common ground that Westlake discusses when working with the homeless youth population is how sensitivity towards the participants can also influence the direction of a project. The sensitivity that Westlake discovered she had and needed for the homeless youth population she worked with shaped the Seattle Public Theatre's decision about the activities they chose to facilitate. For example, Westlake used Boal to find similarities among the group and the facilitators so the workshop that the border between these two groups became less defined. In the following excerpt, we get a sense of how Westlake utilized Forum Theatre to mitigate the outsider roles:

Although originally used for somewhat homogeneous populations, Forum Theatre enables participants and audience members to bring their diverse experiences to bear, closing the gap between actor and audience. In the words of Boal it enables people to 'reassume their protagonistic function in the theatre and society.' The facilitators from SPT use this form to build a temporary community by empowering the participants to take responsibility of the workshop, providing an environment within which the participants feel safe to share their stories, helping the participants see commonalities in their stories as well as helping them acknowledge and value individual differences. (Westlake 69)

Westlake's observation of Forum Theatre conveyed that it allowed the group to address their differences in a safe environment while trying to find similarities. Forum Theatre allows the participants to address specific moments from a created image. For example, participants create a frozen picture of a bully picking on a child. The bully character is removed from the image leaving only the child character positioned low to the ground with the appearance of emotional hurt. One by one, others around the picture approach the frozen character and communicate something that empowers the child character to rise up. If anything is said that does not boost the child, or empower the one being oppressed, then they resume their original position.

When I considered using the above example about Forum Theatre with the girls from the school, I thought about how it could connect us as a group. We would all have the same purpose within the realm of the activity: to solve a character's oppression. In the case of the child and the bully, the participants needed to solve the oppression by communicating empowering words to the child character. Since I am trying to connect the school's character building curriculum to

the residency, I feel that using Forum Theatre would prove useful because the activities revolve around empowerment. For example, in order to solve the oppression of child, positive words are an essential component of communication. This scenario could be brought into the school by having the girls solve an oppression that relates to them by substituting the character of the child with that of a middle school student. At the time of this research, the girls were learning character building skills and Boal's techniques could give them more ways to explore this.

I also needed to connect the girls' character building lessons to their play by creating a plot that focuses around these social development skills. The idea of being "other" probably relates to their character building curriculum in that everybody feels like an outsider at some point in their life. As much as I focus on my being "other," there may be times when one of the girls also feels this way. I believe that Forum Theatre provides a useful tool in my devising project with the girls because it will allow them to fully engage with the moment of a situation while releasing all notions of being an outsider. It appears that in the case of Westlake's project, Boal's techniques allowed for the creation of common ground between the facilitators and the participants. Westlake states that the use of Boal's techniques such as Forum Theatre "enabled the group to overcome the outsider/insider division" (68). Westlake's revelation influenced me to consider Boal's work in planning my journey with the school's eighth grade girls.

Westlake's approach also influenced me to consult additional perspectives as to how others have used August Boal's techniques in community engagement with specific populations. Michael Rohd's book *Theatre for Community and Conflict and Dialogue: The Hope is Vital Training Manual*, includes activities inspired by Boal's method. Although I originally set out to gain more perspective on Boal, I found myself more attracted to the advice that Rohd gives those

interested in facilitating a process similar to his *Hope is Vital* project. I was familiar with Rohd's book and found myself needing to consult it again because I was already aware of *Hope is Vital*, and wondered if I might find a bridge between his goals and mine to the school's play development project.

Rohd's perspective continues to influence my perception of "other." He advised that by being who you are, despite having differences or being an outsider, one is given a bank of strength. He states, "Your strength is your own self and your own style. Young people respond to honesty, caring, and to someone as interested in listening as in talking" (Rohd 127). The idea that young people remain drawn to those who listen made me re-consider my role as "other." My constant consideration as "other" caused me to forget these key observations that Rohd makes. It seems an obvious observation that someone who instills good listening skills and cares about the group shapes how the girls may interact with them.

Rohd's book gave me a simple reminder of things to consider when facilitating as it also provided insight into how I might address Boal's techniques with the girls. In the beginning of the project, I never anticipated that I would be considering Boal as part of my process despite having studied his techniques as a vehicle for social change. When I initially studied the Theatre of the Oppressed, I did not consider it suitable for young people because of the intensity that it could spark within the participants. I feel that a certain type of maturity is required to be able to fully engage in Boal's techniques, and Rohd seems to have found a way to adjust Boal's methods when engaging young people. I believe this major adjustment comes from omitting the word "oppression," which in my experience blasts the sound and reverberation of victimization into the ears of those not familiar with Augusto Boal.

As I turn my attention to community building and trying to connect it with the school's playwriting project, I found that focusing on being "other" was a distraction for me. In my past experiences of facilitating student generated work, I felt that my being an outsider did not negate the progress of the project but did present many obstacles around the issue of holding back. I have noticed that when a student views me as "other," according to my own views of this role, and does not fully understand my position, they tend to hold back and do not fully commit to a project. Fortunately, this has been a rare happening in my past experience, and I can actually recall just a couple of students who would not budge toward compromise. What makes this project different remains the attention that was given by the school to the fact that their students come from specific populations. It is no longer a matter of merely working with students but specifically working with students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

I wondered how I might best institute a balance between observing my place as "other" and facilitating the writing of a play. The only way I thought I could strike this balance was through the merging of the two into a singular ideal. What if the focus of the play the girls write revolves around being "other?" While I transitioned my thoughts, I consulted Will Weigler's *Strategies for Playbuilding: Helping Groups Translate Issues into Theatre*. In his book, Will Weigler offers a step-by-step approach on devising new works about specific issues with young people. I consulted Weigler's book to offer insight on an approach that was useful for the school's play ideas for the participants. I found this book to be especially useful in that many of the exercises appeared to focus on social development which needed to be a part of my residency at the school as I connected the project to their curriculum. For example, the "human knot" puts all participants in the heart of a conflict where everyone has to work together in order to untangle

him or herself (Weigler 13). Weigler states that the reason to incorporate this exercise is that the participants will “improve their ability to gauge how they are working as a group” (14).

Ultimately, having the participants process this awareness helped them to become a part of the group while encouraging positive decision making. I believe exercises such as these proved particularly useful in my project because they allowed the girls to put their social skills to the test and assessed their decision-making which remained a part of their social development curriculum.

Another perspective on a playwriting process I found was in the recent volume of *Stage of the Art* which focused on devising work with young people. One of the articles, *Eloquent Mirrors: Gender, Race, and Ethnicity in a Grade Eight’s Solo Performance* by Monica Flory, provided me with perspective on work with an eighth grade age group. The project being discussed involves a workshop with Sarah Jones, a performer who just finished a one-woman show on Broadway, in which the students would conduct interviews and use this as their source for creating characters (Flory 9).

The idea of using an interview to spark character creation intrigued me because according to the administration of the school, the girls I am working with do not seem to engage in dialogue enough. Since I connected the project to the girls’ character building curriculum, having the girls conduct interviews provided an avenue for communication which I felt reiterated their social development curriculum by having them use this skill set when connecting with others. Flory’s article provided a way to connect an activity rooted in character building to the creation of the play which remained a huge part of my residency at the school.

Another article from *Stage of the Art* discussed a project that worked with an all female ensemble. The article *Empowering Ophelia: Developing Critical Awareness of Gender Issues in Youth Theatre Rehearsals* by Gillian McNally follows the devising project from a small group of middle-school-aged students. The project that McNally, Assistant Professor of Theatre Arts and the University of Northern Colorado, facilitated was with an all female ensemble that sought to create an original play (McNally 5). I was immediately intrigued by the fact that it was an all female ensemble that experienced the devising process, and I wanted to know what McNally encountered that could possibly prepare me for my own journey.

McNally reflects on her process and shares a great deal regarding her participants embracing stereotypes and how she wanted to eliminate this focus. The idea of analyzing stereotypes seems like a useful approach for the girls. I agree with McNally in her assertion that stereotypes create a sort of danger in that the creation of characters is hindered and may not conform to common ideals. I feel stereotypes will prove important for the girls because it will give them a way of understanding certain characters and will give us a way of addressing their social development curriculum. I think that the more I push them in this direction, the more I am embracing their social development curriculum because stereotypes can lead to assumptions about people that may be false.

Through perspectives and ideas of others, I informed my project with the eighth grade girls of the school. My research suggested that I needed to address how as “other” I could still find commonality with the group. Authors such as E.J. Westlake and Michael Rohd suggest that the more I am able to find similarities with my group, the more the girls will open up to me. The girls opening up to me proved important when it came to building trust, which remained essential

to the play development project. Trust remained central to the project because if the girls did not feel safe with me as their facilitator, they would have had difficulty allowing themselves to explore various options for their play.

After looking into ideas as to ways of building trust and finding common ground, I started considering whether my project tied into Theatre for Social Change. Theatre for Social Change focuses on trying to reform its participants in some manner, big or small. Despite looking into Boal's techniques and Rohd's idea for the purpose of finding activities in which to engage the girls, I found it interesting that the first books I consulted for this project were grounded in Theatre for Social Change. As much as I wanted to find ways to discover commonalities with the girls, I felt that I wanted this project to change them as well. When I heard about last year's play at the school and how it utilized slang, which I sometimes view as the epitome of racial stereotypes, I wanted to explore ways for the girls to explore other modes of communicating in hopes that they would adopt those structures in their own lives. This was not a project solely about finding commonalities. Had it been, I do not believe this project would have had a Theatre for Social Change component. We may have reached a place of commonality through the use of activities based on Boal's methods, but when I considered this project as Theatre for Social Change, I immediately focused on how racial stereotypes could change the girls' thinking. I wondered if the girls were aware of the stereotypes associated with their race and socio-economic status and how they felt about them. These girls are constantly being challenged by the administration of the school to avoid these stereotypes, hence the pressure I received to avoid slang usage in the play, and I felt that exploring this role might provide for some social change in the girls.

When I considered this project as Theatre for Social Change and thought about my notion as “other,” I began connecting how my role with the girls may have influenced some change. The girls tied their project to the Civil Rights Movement, and as “other,” I had to facilitate discussions where my racial group was viewed as the oppressors of non-whites. The girls were cautious about this topic in the beginning because they feared offending me as I discuss further in later sections, but I wondered if the girls’ being able to overcome this trepidation with me is a sign of social change. I continued to evaluate the relation of this project and Theatre for Social Change throughout the project, and it influenced my initial research before I began facilitating the project. Knowing that my project may be connected to Theatre for Social Change, I began consulting research that was based in diversity from a drama perspective as well as from social awareness viewpoint as well.

I felt I needed increased awareness of what it means to work with diverse cultures and facilitate drama-based work. I also felt that as “other,” the more racial-based vocabulary I was able to hone in on would help me drive through moments where my status may have gotten in the way. I first consulted Sharon Grady’s *Drama and Diversity* for some insight. Sharon Grady, a tenured advocate for Theatre for Social Change, writes in her book about working with diversity on many levels whether the difference, i.e. race or culture, lies within the issue or in the group. In her chapter about racial and gender orientations, she provides some advice for instructors. Grady addresses how teachers can be more ‘culturally’ responsible:

It is time for those of us who work with young people to acknowledge and overcome our own discomfort about discussing race and work toward productive ways to act responsibly because of and despite it. This means not only

recognizing our own racial and ethnic identities, but also the racial and ethnic identities of the young people we serve. (Grady 32)

Grady's idea seems to suggest that as I take into consideration my position within the classroom, I also need to be aware of the participants as well when it comes to considering our backgrounds.

When I began considering my position from a racial standpoint and took into consideration that the girls may come from different backgrounds, I felt I needed to research what it means to be white in an inner city environment. This research proved challenging for me because as "other," I feared any discussion that victimized my race or that made my racial group appear as the oppressors. As much as I feared these discussions, I felt I needed to gain insight on a more socially aware level that discusses being white. I had consulted so many books based in theatre and drama and felt I needed to understand my issue on a socio-political level because of the dynamic I was entering at the school where the students are considered "economically disadvantaged." This search led me to the idea of white privilege.

Privilege can mean so many different things, and I think it proves important to gain a deeper understanding of how I use the term. In *White Privilege, Color, and Crime: A Personal Account* an article by Peggy McIntosh, associate director of the Wellesley Centers for Women, she explores what it means to have "white privilege." I found a connection to McIntosh as she notes that privileges "given" to specific genders also extended to other races. This circled an inner conflict of mine that I struggle to communicate. McIntosh gave me a way to address the privileges I have, not only with my gender, but with my race as well. For example, McIntosh created a list of privileges she has as a Caucasian female and considered how these may be different for people of different races. She writes, "...I can swear, or dress in secondhand

clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race [...] If I get angry and ask to speak to the ‘person in charge,’ I can be fairly sure I will be talking to a person of my race” (McIntosh 208-209). Although McIntosh created this list from her own perspective, I found myself agreeing with many of her preconceived notions about the “invisible white privileges” that seem to go unaddressed. For example, when I first met with the principal of the school, I expected her to be white. This does not mean that I do not think that the principal could not have been of another race, but the fact that I expected her to be white, even if I did so unconsciously, still underscores quite a mental leap cloaked in invisibility of my own. It is not often that that I sit down in order to quarrel and reason with myself over this very expectation.

I felt as though I walked on dangerous ground because these thoughts can be viewed as extremely offensive to many people no matter how their background is portrayed. Certainly, it remains difficult for me to speak about myself in terms of power and privilege based on my racial, economic background because I feel that labels are superficial and too weighty for their basis. However, as a Caucasian female working in an inner city environment where I am outnumbered by other racial backgrounds, there is an unseen traffic signal that flashes its importance and reminds me of the influence surrounding my role as “other.”

When I considered some of McIntosh’s conclusions, I found a connection to her research and border theory where the idea of “other” originated. She discusses borders in terms of race but seems to only suggest that a white person would understand both sides of the border if they have some sort of deep connection to non-whites, i.e. interracial relationships. However, she also seems to suggest that a white female would also understand “border crossings.” She states:

The white readers who have found the analysis most unsurprising are in general those who, through interracial relationships, cross-cultural adoptions, and other 'border crossings' are positioned so as to have double or triple perspectives, seeing both sides of lines of privilege. White women who become keenly aware of male privilege may also get, as I did, to the insights on race privilege if they are able to decenter themselves, as we have asked men to do so. (McIntosh 214)

When I first started this study, I already defined my self as "other" due to my state of mind of being the minority when I compared myself to the girls. I disagreed with McIntosh and did not believe that being a woman caused me to be more aware of both sides of the racial border. However, having interracial friendships may have caused me to better understand the position of non-whites, but only so much was ever shared with me. In my interracial friendships, I rarely questioned what it was like to be non-white, and I wondered if my lack of questioning was a result of my white privilege or my notion of "other."

My notion of "other" also caused me to pause and consider the mindsets stemming from social manipulation of my fellow teaching artists who also work with different races and socio-economic backgrounds. As much as I find myself choosing to be "other" in this situation, though I shun the position of privilege, I wonder how the girls from the school will define me. For example, I may feel like "other" because I am different racially and socio-economically but the girls from the school may perceive me as an outsider due to the privileges I have been handed and which have remained outside their realm. Truly, they may even expect that the "person in charge" will most likely be of the same race as myself.

My guiding questions remain focused on how my role as "other" affects the facilitation of the school's play development project. My research provided me with ways to reflect on being "other," while simultaneously providing suggestions as to becoming more connected with my participants. Due to the numerous times that I thought about the differences that exist between these girls and me, both racially and socio-economically, it is clear that privilege- the advantages that I have- came into play a great deal during my interaction with the girls. As much as I tried to share perspective into their worldview, the fact remained that I could never join it, and there are privileges enveloping me as a Caucasian female when placed in an environment comprised of women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. While I may largely remain a stranger to these girls, I continued considering my guiding questions, and my research suggests that I may have ways of handling this privilege and controlling how my image as "other" affected the play development project with the girls.

CHAPTER FIVE: BEGINNING THE PROCESS

The Initial Meeting

Before beginning my project, I met with the school principal and the teacher that would be in the classroom with me during the project. The first topic we discussed in the meeting was the increased facilitation of the playbuilding project. This increased facilitation remained an important aspect of the project for both the school and the theatre company because they wanted the girls to be challenged in finding topics to discuss other than those that revolve around some of their social stereotypes. The teacher in the meeting, who is also a social worker, commented that last year's play became a "sistah play" and that the administration of the school, as well as the regional theatre company, wanted to avoid this happenstance again. The administration of the school seems to hope that through the placement of additional hands facilitating the playwriting, higher standards would be attained for the girls which would pull them away from making the stereotypical choices about race and being "economically disadvantaged."

One approach they decided on in order to change last year's results was to tie the play to a core subject area. As they focused on this, they immediately thought about history, and how the girls could write a play that takes place in a period they have studied. I initially thought that the school wanted the girls to write a play that regurgitated some historical moment. The playbuilding project would not be about them using playwriting to explore something the girls battle with on a daily basis, but be focused on something they have learned and memorized in a past subject area. My intention with this project was to stimulate the girls' awareness of their

social development through the use of playwriting, so I felt concerned that focusing on a historical moment would become the project's focus.

The balance that we were able to achieve through discussing my concerns was to take a story from history that had examples of overcoming flawed social development and create a play that parallels this story. In this way, the curriculum is still the focus while allowing the students some free reign as to what they write. The project consisted of the interjection of a moment from history into the creation of an original story. The original story was allowed to take many directions. Perhaps the focus would be on an issue, or it might pertain to a single character. The possibilities are without strict limits, and I feel the process will be much more exciting and innovative due the open discussion I was fortunate to have had with the school representatives about the project's potential.

The result of this meeting for me was establishing a rapport with the administration of the school toward understanding their expectations of the project. Through previous conversations with my supervisor from the regional theatre company, I understood that last year's project drastically deviated from the direction both organizations had intended. I brought to the meeting the knowledge of this, along with my lone perspective, and this meeting allowed me to branch out and grasp the school's perspective which informed me of their goals with the project. The administration of the school wished the girls would experience more than just the writing of a play. Beyond that, they would hope that the project's process instills a method of understanding what character building means when it comes to being socially responsible teenagers.

In my discussion with the administration of the school, I discovered that the play created by last year's eighth grade class emulated stereotypes that they strive to have the girls avoid. I

gathered that the administration of the school understood and respected where these girls came from but firmly believed that their students did not have to be a product of their environment, meaning they did not have to resort to mirroring the stereotypes associated with being “economically disadvantaged.” The stereotypes created in last year’s play included characters from the ghetto who communicated with poor grammar and slang, and this seemed to alert the administration of the school that they need to readdress the purpose behind this project. The administration of the school wanted to challenge the girls to consider choices outside of their normal circumstances so that they will be encouraged to escape the stereotypical trap that is synonymous with being “economically disadvantaged.”

I was happy that our initial meeting was productive and gave me the tools by which I could whittle away at my overarching concerns. Learning that the last year’s eighth grade class from the school created a play around stereotypes stemming from economically disadvantaged backgrounds makes me wonder how the girls will perceive my socio-economic status, appearance, and race. As I tried to influence the girls to broaden their range of topic choices and the characters they write about, I wondered if the school’s students would view my role as someone who simply does not understand them. When I fostered the eighth grade girls from the school and steered them in new directions, I wonder if they would see my efforts as well meaning and good, or would I be the villain who prevents their having any fun.

Through my conversations with the administration of the school, I surmised that the students thought last year’s play was fine, and none of the teachers discussed the “real” reaction of the administration to the play with them. The “real” reaction was fairly negative and the play was viewed as inappropriate by the administration of the school due to the plot having been

centered in themes they hoped their student population would avoid. As much as I understand the concern over the play, I wonder how my role as an outsider will appear when I tell the girls that they need to consider different choices from those of last year's class. I wonder if they will believe that they detect a racial motive in me as I explain expectations for the current year's play. After all, I am in the position of a "white girl" who must tell them not to write a play that sounds "black."

First Session Planning

My residency at the school proved difficult for me to plan compared to my past residencies in which I did not feel the pressure of being such an outsider. It may be that the students I have had previously were from similar backgrounds, but not as much information was passed on to me as with my residency at the school. The more I was told about the eighth grade girls from the school, the more my role as "other" became clear to me. As I stated in my journal, "it was making my planning at the school very difficult for me because I felt that the way I communicated might be partially, or even worse, completely mistaken" (Melnik). For example, what if I addressed the girls in a way that manifested itself as condescending even though this was opposite of my intention. The thought of making the girls uncomfortable on the very first day because of my lack of knowledge of the economically disadvantaged as "other" leaves me unhappy and reticent.

My feelings aside, I focused on my goals for the first day with the girls. Most of my fears seemed to revolve around my not knowing the girls and never having even seen them. I

decided that tomorrow should focus on getting to know one another, which allowed me to gauge how well the girls work together. Once I was able to assess this, I had a better idea as to what activities to include for the next few sessions. I was also curious to see how the girls reacted to me, and whether or not their perception of my background would affect their participation. As stated from my journal, “I thought I would be able to learn a lot by having the girls play a few simple games where the concept revolves around their being open to the expression of oneself and getting our collective energy revved up” (Melnik). I thought the girls may have viewed this session as fun and games while I would be focused on how they viewed me and if this had anything to do with being different.

First Session Reflection

I decided to focus on the activities that had us moving around a lot. I wanted to know how willing the girls were to jump in and just play. This was probably the most important bit of information I needed to observe from first day because it influenced how I facilitated this project. As a facilitator, I took into consideration that I knew I tended to be a bit physical, and used activities that incorporated a lot of movement. If the girls were not willing to do this from day one, I needed to find a way to rally us to this point. In my journal I discussed how “I was really happy to see the girls jump right in” (Melnik). Before we played “name tag,” we went around the circle giving our actual name along with the pronunciation of a food that begins with the same first letter as our name. After one person did this, we each had to do the same movement while saying that person’s food and actual name together.

Also in my journal, I stated how “I noticed that I forgot about myself as “other” during the exercise, which made wonder how my participation in the activities may influence this role” (Melnik). The only times I found myself certain about myself as “other” were the moments I was able to step back and observe the girls. However, when I was engaged in the games myself, I became unaware of my status as an outsider. This later caused me to plan activities where I got to participate as well, although this proved difficult when the girls began writing their play. I needed to make sure that my participation did not detract from their ideas, especially since I had more experience than they with playwriting. I did not want this project to become about me, and I needed to consider how to strike a balance between my participating and my facilitating. This made me think about Seattle Public Theatre’s project and how through participation the facilitators were able to find commonalities with the homeless youth participants. Maybe, as “other,” my participation is about meeting them on the same level so that the power structure in the room becomes less divided, meaning that it’s less about me, a Caucasian middle class female, teaching a group of economically disadvantaged young women.

However, I was surprised to see that one of the girls is white, which remained the most puzzling aspect from the first day. As I pondered how my being “other” would shape my facilitation, I only considered that the girls would be from different racial backgrounds from my own. This pointed to an aspect of my white privilege, as I was unable or unwilling to concede that someone of my color would be a student in this class.

It frightened me how as a person with white privilege I unconsciously excluded those who are from other races to the point where I did not consider people of my own racial background to comprise an economically disadvantaged population. I know this appears closed-

mindful but my reality remains that when confronted with images of those deemed economically advantaged, I admit that I rarely, if at all, see a white person associated with this label. I am ashamed to say that I did not consider that any of the girls would be Caucasian. I never intended to be closed-minded and discovered that, as “other,” I did not consider how my own population may relate to underprivileged populations. Until the present time, being “other” has been a black and white issue for me, which only came to be noticed after discovering that one of the girls was white.

After the first day, I was left considering how as “other” I could manage to keep an open mind about my participants who may come from different backgrounds than my own. I discovered that as much as I tried to be open-minded, there were still moments when I chose, whether consciously or not, to avoid certain subjects. Race remained a tough topic for me to discuss because I feared offending due to my lack of knowledge about things that may affect racial backgrounds, while largely or entirely sparing my own.

I found myself focused more on trying to be politically correct rather than just being myself when working with people of different races and socio-economic backgrounds. I felt that as I continued going through the sessions that I need not worry about offending the girls. I desired to seek and find trust through which I could facilitate a project with participants of different races deemed “economically disadvantaged” toward achieving similar goals I would want to attain when doing a project like this with white participants. After the first day, I felt as though I was firmly adhered to a racial pendulum as I tried to decide if I should continue to swing with it, or come to a stop and ignore it altogether. It was hard for me to reach any middle ground at this point because I entered this project with a certain black and white perspective

painting my role and its relation to the girls. I was not sure if ignoring race or socio-economic status was indeed the answer but it seemed the likely decision to make in order to keep the project moving forward. I did not want to enter another session and actually find myself thrown off kilter when confronted with another person of my own white race. As “other,” I felt as though I would be the only one on the white side of the racial border, and having witnessed the flaw in such an assumption firsthand caused my thinking about race and socio-economic backgrounds to shift quite a bit.

CHAPTER SIX: DEFINING ROLES

Second Session Planning

Another area I needed to address from the first day's session was getting a sense of what the girls have studied. Toward the end of our session together, I asked the girls what periods of history they had studied. In my journal, I listed the answers I received which included "the Civil Rights Movement, the Great Depression, and Women's Rights" (Melnik). These answers did not surprise me because they seemed to match what I studied when I was their age, but I did fear some of the topics. When I heard them say "Civil Rights Movement," I comment in my journal how I immediately thought about how "I could facilitate a project around a subject where white people did so much harm to those of differing races" (Melnik).

The thought of myself being perceived as a hateful white person, like many during the Civil Rights Movement, actually crossed my mind. I needed to trust that the girls understood that open minded individuals could exist within all racial and socio-economic backgrounds rather than assume that since I am white I am automatically the sum total of those from my race who caused so much harm to those who were different. As "other," I remain fixated on how I am perceived, and even judged, as a Caucasian female, and I needed to let this go or risk causing the girls to hold back from exploring issues that they would likely be interested in such as the Civil Rights Movement. I found myself struggling a lot with white guilt because I felt sad that people from my race caused so much injustice, and I was hesitant to discuss these issues with the eighth grade girls from the school for fear of being judged as someone who oppresses non-whites.

Setting race aside, I was still working with a group that came from a much different socio-economic background from my own. I did not completely understand the girls' economic background other than what the school's mission states. From this, I continued to understand that the school reaches out to an adolescent female population stemming from situations deemed "economically disadvantaged." I tried to understand how the school made this distinction with their student body as I discovered that being "economically disadvantaged" takes on different forms and includes multiple racial backgrounds. I reflected in my journal about the possibility of "my needing to hear the girls express how they identified themselves and thus provide me insight about who they are and where they come from" (Melnik).

I discussed in my journal that I felt as though "I should bring in an activity that allowed the girls to voice their feelings so that I could better understand them, but I shied away from doing so because the process was in its infancy and I, as facilitator, was still uncomfortable with myself" (Melnik). I was still getting over my discovery of the other white girl from the last session, and I felt I needed to take gradual steps toward activities that embraced their identity so that I would be able to fully participate with immunity to surprise about something to do with the girls. It was also the second week for the girls, and they were still adjusting to their new building. I felt like the combination of all these things would make for a session filled with too much emotion that could frighten some of them away. I knew I should not be fearful of these emotions, but I did not think that I had created a safe place for the girls after the first session. We may have had a great time the first day playing games, but our work together extended much farther than this.

In considering the second section, I decided to choose the period of history for the girls to focus on based on what they have yet to study. I also needed to consider their character building curriculum. Character building remained the focus of their social development studies, and I wanted to make sure that the period of history the girls looked at exhibited this quality. I thought that the Civil Rights Movement would be interesting for them because many of them may be able to identify with the racial conflicts that took place, and they have relatives whose lives are not too distant from this time period. I thought focusing on this time period would be exciting because it would encourage the girls to communicate with their communities.

I also had a bit of selfish objective when choosing the Civil Rights Movement. I believed that the more I exposed myself to situations where understanding racial differences served as a central focus, the more likely my role as “other” would not cause me to view things through a shortened lens. I admit that working with the Civil Rights Movement remained difficult for me, but I felt that if I am going to discuss my role as “other” and share insight on my experiences that I should allow myself the opportunity to be in a situation that feels a little uncomfortable. I understood that this remained a huge risk because the fault could be mine if my holding back caused the girls to view the Civil Rights Movement only on its surface. I wanted to make sure that I encouraged the girls to consider the situations of the Civil Rights Movement beyond a white and black perspective, and to take into account how lessons from their social development curriculum enhanced their understanding of what happened during that time period.

In designing an activity around the Civil Rights Movement, I wanted to find something that would have the girls ask their families questions, but I also wanted an in-class activity that sparked dialogue. I thought a connection to their home communities might bring some

interesting perspectives and also display to the girls how what we are discussing extends beyond the classroom. For the in-class activity, I thought that if I brought in images from the Civil Rights movement that I would be able to engage the girls in a dialogue about creating a story around a period of history. I consulted the book *The Century for Young People* by Peter Jennings, for images and a brief overview of the time period for the girls to explore. I have done exercises in my past playwriting classes where we used images to provoke us to write dialogue. I decided to begin the girls' writing process in a similar way. Visuals seem to be a medium that encourages a lot of words, and I felt that this would be a safe project for the girls to engage in. So that the image idea would tie into what we had already discussed, I chose pictures that pertain to the historic movements we briefly mentioned in the class.

As I flipped through Jennings' book, I became increasingly nervous with the pictures. The honesty instilled in the moments the pictures captured seemed inappropriate for the girls to see because of their extreme violence. My reaction to the photos made me question to what extent I am well advised to be cautious. It seemed that showing a picture of people protesting would spark a lot of exciting dialogue for the girls that they could want to incorporate in their play. However, I was looking beyond the fact that it was a picture of a protest. It was a picture of African Americans protesting. The fact that I zeroed in on the racial elements frightened me because I feared the girls from black racial backgrounds might question my role as a Caucasian female against what other whites were thinking during the Civil Rights Movement. I did not like being the minority in the room, and it made my role as "other" present itself stronger than ever before. At this point in the process, I found my role as "other" caused me to hold back and not pursue what may have been an exciting opportunity. The girls may not have gone in the

direction I feared, which suggests that I need to explore some of these activities with the girls rather than assuming they will go in a direction that makes me feel uneasy.

When I looked at the potential images from the Peter Jennings' book and considered my responsibility as a facilitator behind this project, I tried to let go of my fears and take into consideration the positives of the girls creating dialogue about these pictures. It remained difficult for me to see the positive outcomes of the girls discussing these tough issues because as "other" I felt I did not have much confidence about facilitating hard/difficult decisions/choices. By hard choices, I mean making decisions that would engage the girls in conversation despite what racial or economic situation the images may depict. Again, I flipped through the Jennings book and all I felt I could choose were pictures of women who were from the same race and socio-economic status trying to fight for one cause. Because of the similarities displayed in these pictures, I felt the images showcased more peaceful scenarios rather than images rooted in conflict based on race.

In all honesty, I was excited about the images I had chosen to bring into the next class, but knew that I am holding back. Maybe my fear of being "other" dealt more with creating a safe environment for me. The girls were already comfortable with each other and have been students in the school's system of learning for a few years. Maybe my fear of being "other" stemmed from my own feelings about being an outsider. I felt like I was still being black and white about the issue as I continued swinging on the racial pendulum I described earlier. I knew I could take responsibility for my own fears, and I chose to avoid addressing the heart of issues such as the Civil Rights Movement because I did not want to highlight the privileges of white people. However, I knew that I could avoid having privilege, and I needed to find a way to use it

that did not cause me to hold back or feel like I was being viewed as someone who oppresses non-whites. I could feel my thoughts about race starting to shift, especially when I began to question what I could control. It was hard for me to realize that I cannot avoid having privilege, and I had to turn my thinking toward how I would deal with it and use it.

Second Session Reflection

I decided to speak with my host teacher about the issues I would like to address with the class around the Civil Rights Movement because I wanted to gauge from her reaction if I was making strong choices. I wanted to receive reassurance about my decision, and I thought that talking to the host teacher would surely be of help. I showed her the images that I was considering for their exercise, and she was unsure about their purpose. She favored the images of the women protesting because the other pictures appeared violent, and the girls tend to come from communities which themselves see enough roughness. However, the reasoning behind not using some of the pictures did not revolve around issues that I feared addressing. Race never even entered the conversation.

I am discovering that my over-awareness of wanting to be politically correct has caused me to settle for second choices about content/curriculum. These choices made me feel safer when addressing racial topics with the girls, but I also felt that I did not need to keep second-guessing my first choices. I discovered that the more I let my fears about race get in the way, the more I held back in allowing the girls to talk about racial-based issues. Regarding the images, it would not have been inappropriate for me to use the first set of images, and the discussion with

the host teacher encouraged me to consider the second set. However, the host teacher took into consideration that history is history and cannot be altered, so showing what actually happened would not be a negative thing, but she feared the girls writing scenes based around something violent. She commented as to how the Civil Rights Movement can still be explored, and the violence can be discussed, but the play should try to depict events that would stray away from violent images.

Ultimately, I had the girls pick a character from the first image and write a letter from that person to someone who is in the second picture. My hope with this activity was that the girls would pick up on the relationship between situations being depicted in the images to the people that are in them. I wanted to connect the idea that situations can define individuals just like they can define communities. I thought that this would be a safe way to address the girls' understanding of being defined by situations without its becoming about them. I did not want this project to be about comparing where each of the girls' situations stood, but rather a journey about understanding how each participant plays a different and important role within communities.

This activity seemed rich because I saw each girl completely engage in the writing of these letters. In my journal, I discussed how "I observed the girls going back between the two images as they tried to decide what each of the characters would discuss" (Melnik). I overheard one girl comment on how the characters would teach each other about what happened in their images. The room became quiet as the girls worked on the letters, and I saw all of them fully engaged in the activity. I commented in my journal that "this gave me a positive feeling watching the girls so focused on this activity" (Melnik). It was as though I was a part of what

was happening without having to participate. I also commented on how giving the girls an activity that excited them caused me to feel less like an outsider because of the affirmation I received from their willingness to do this activity. All of this caused me to consider if my role as “other” has only to do with my own perceptions of my role with the girls, or if it did also include their perceptions of me.

I found it interesting how I thought I had an understanding of “other” before beginning this project, and how my perception of this role continued to change. I defined my role as “other” around my lack of understanding of the girls’ economically disadvantaged status and how, as someone with white privilege, I feel disconnected from this group. After the second session, this role was less about my racial socio-economic status and more about how as a facilitator, I am “other” because I am not an eighth grader from the school participating in this project. When I considered this against my guiding questions I found that my role as “other” certainly did affect my facilitation but the reasoning behind this role changed in each class. There may be times when “other” had to do with my race as well as moments when this did not matter. As I continued to go through these sessions I observed how my role as “other” continued to shift.

The most devastating part of the second session was that we did not have time to read the letters out loud. To elaborate on this, while I did get a sense of the girls’ writing, I would have loved hearing their voices spring their words to life and feel that would have ended our session on a powerful note. Nevertheless, the girls’ excitement filled the room, and they left wishing we could have another session together before next week. It is always a good feeling when I hear so much positive feedback from my participants, but this hit me a bit deeper because I was so

worried about working with them. I learned that I needed to trust the girls a bit more and tried to put my role as “other” aside as much as possible.

Before the girls left, I gave them an assignment. I commented in my journal that “this assignment was the boldest choice I have made so far because I did not allow myself to hold back on this one, and I made sure to have the support of my host teacher before assigning it, which reaffirmed my decision even more” (Melnik). Since I knew that we would focus our play around a period of history, and one that was relatively recent, I wanted the girls to conduct interviews with their relatives. I wanted them to ask questions revolving around the past versus the present. Since the girls have not formally studied the Civil Rights Movement, I felt speaking to relatives who lived through it could prove an exciting opportunity for them because it might give them an opportunity to learn about a period of history directly from those who may have experienced it. I thought that hearing the stories from those who experienced the Civil Rights Movement rather than reading about it in a history textbook would prove infinitely more interesting for the girls. It also would allow them to discuss differing points of view involving the stories they would be drawn to collect, which I hoped would encourage them to see how people experience things in different ways. It also brought a part of them into the process without my directly saying “think about how you connect to the Civil Rights Movement, and write about it.” I wanted this process to celebrate who they are both as individuals and as a group. This remained a focus for the school, and I wanted to be fully supportive of it.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONSTRUCTING CHARACTER

Third Session Planning

As I planned for my next session with the girls, I was left wondering how the interview assignment would go for them. I was excited to see how they approached this assignment, and if this would influence their thinking when it comes to the play. As I began talking about the play with the girls, I discovered that they wanted to write something similar to that of last year's script. As stated in my journal, "it stumps me that no matter how sneaky I tried to be to sway them in another direction, they were totally wise to me" (Melnik). At this point, I believed that I should just level with them and tell them that last year's play did not embrace the standards that the school wants their students to achieve. I just hoped that in revealing this information the girls would not get discouraged or feel that I was assuming that they could not think outside of the box. In all honesty, the reaction to the play by teachers and school administration was hardly a secret. I just did not want the girls thinking that I was entering this project for the sole purpose of making sure they did not write a play modeled after the one written by last year's eighth graders.

The girls were beginning to question why I was so focused on their writing something different from last year's play because they themselves thought it was good and would like to do something similar. I felt a little awkward addressing this at the end of the second session, and commented that the work done this year should aim to be different because it was boring to keep creating the same thing. In terms of handling comments about last year's writing, which used a

lot of slang, I made certain that in their interview assignment directions I told them to make sure that the writing would be something that their teachers would approve of in terms of content and writing style. This was my backhand way of saying to please avoid writing in slang. I knew that the language of the play last year remained one of the school's biggest concerns particularly when it comes to the students' use of slang. It seemed that the issue around this was that many people did not know what some of the words meant and this appeared dangerous to the teachers and administration.

I found myself in a sticky situation when it came to the language in the girls' play. I did not have any issues with the use of slang as long as it was true to how the character would speak. Also, slang remains ingrained in today's world and is used every day. The fact that it may not be understood seemed, to me, weak reasoning to have them avoid it. In my own experience, I have worked with individuals that know when to use slang and when not to, and I thought the girls needed to learn this option rather than being told to avoid it all together. I knew I could not control this portion of their curriculum, but it certainly presented a challenge when working with an administration that could be a bit closed minded at times.

As I wrote in my journal through this play development process, "I continued to take all of these concerns into consideration as I planned my sessions with the girls, especially now that we were writing a lot more" (Melnik). I really wanted their play to be viewed highly by the administration of the school so that this process remained a part of the eighth grade curriculum. I did not think this project was in jeopardy of being eliminated from their curriculum, but the more the eighth grade play departed from the school's intentions, the more likely they may consider halting the play development project next year. It also placed a lot of added stress on me

because most of what the girls wrote was completed between our sessions. This meant that I would not know how they were handling the language of their play until I saw what they brought in for the next session. Even though I may have instructed them to use proper grammar, I could not always control it.

I thought the best way for me to address the slang issue was to have the girls read their work aloud. I needed to see how the girls approached the language first before deciding if it remained a big issue or not. If I did hear a lot of slang in their work, then we would explore other ways their characters could communicate. I challenged the girls to use other types of communicating while allowing a few of the characters to keep the slang so that it did not appear that I had something against slang as a white person hearing their work. I had to be extremely careful with the characters that I allowed to speak in slang so that they did not overpower the other voices. The school's administration objected most stringently to the fact that all the characters in last year's play spoke in slang, and I thought that a sprinkling of it here and there would be acceptable.

As I continued reflecting as "other" how I was affecting this project, I began wondering about the struggle between language and culture. In my experience, I have found that many cultures are misunderstood due to misinterpretation of their language. For example, I have worked in schools where students both white and non-white utilized slang and because someone did not know what they were saying, it was automatically assumed to be bad. The administration of the school commented that they did not understand the girls' usage of slang, and their reaction to this was to make sure it did not appear in this year's play. I found it sad that rather than to try to understand the slang, which I believe remains culturally relevant speech, they instead decided

to omit it from the process. It proved interesting to me how I faced challenges based on race during my first few sessions, and how I struggled with either making race the focus or completely ignoring it. This presented my struggle with race as a black and white issue, and I found it interesting how the conflicts around slang at the school seemed to be viewed the same. The question about using slang seemed just as black and white as my curiosity about focusing on race or ignoring it.

Third Session Reflection

The assignment I gave the girls concerning the interviews was to focus on asking their family about their experience during the Civil Rights Movement. For some reason, the assignment transformed a bit throughout the week as the girls discussed it with each other. Since they did not have me there to answer any questions, I was not really surprised. However, as I stated in my journal, “I was thoroughly astonished that all the girls had interviews consisting of conversations surrounding what happened when their parents got in trouble when they were teenagers” (Melnik). I heard interviews about being punished, and not much about growing up in a different decade. The girls claimed that they did not understand my directions and the assignment was unclear to them. I felt like my only option was to work with what the girls brought in, but I really do not want them to write a play about punishment.

The girls shared their work, and I listened to many stories about people getting spanked. Every time one of the girls mentioned that a family member got spanked for doing something wrong, it set the girls in a whirl. All of the girls would start interrupting each other to tell about what their parents would do to them. As I described in my journal, “one girl said that if she went

to a certain neighborhood and her dad found out, that she would get an ‘automatic whooping’ (Melnik). I remembered her commenting that there was a boy she liked who lived there, but her family did not like her going to his house.

Immediately following her story, some of the other girls wanted to know what would happen to me if I misbehaved. I did not know how to handle this situation. I just told them that I would get in trouble, but they wanted to know specifics. I did not want to go in this direction because I did not feel this topic was appropriate for us to be discussing. As the girls started to compare punishments, I heard them decide which one was better or worse as to its evaluation. I was nervous about them jumping to conclusions about being punished, especially when they began asking my opinion about it. I tried to change the subject, but another girl commented that a lot of people were hit during the Civil Rights Movement.

As I state in my journal, “this comment struck me as strange” (Melnik). It was an unfortunate fact that many people were hurt during the Civil Rights Movement, and I wondered if this was the connection they made for the assignment. When the girls thought about the Civil Rights Movement, do they think about punishment? In my journal I describe how “I heard some of the African American girls comment in the group about how white people would punish blacks that crossed the line by hitting them, or shooting them with water from a power hose. As the girls’ comments became more specific, I started feeling like “other” again” (Melnik). I found myself trying to change the subject as quickly as I could before one the girls might ask me if I knew any of the white people that were disrespectful to the blacks.

I decided to change the focus from the dialogue about punishment to discussing the Civil Rights Movement by facilitating an activity to assess what they gathered about this time period

individually. In a way, I found my white guilt guiding this decision as I really wanted to avoid the topic of how whites oppressed non-whites, but I also wanted to get away from the group conversation about punishment because I thought there were a lot more aspects that pertain to the Civil Rights Movement. I also wanted to gain a sense of the girls' awareness of these aspects by doing an activity that addressed their knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement. In my journal, I describe how "I gave each of the girls a Post-it note and instructed them to write the first word that came to mind when they heard the words 'civil rights movement'" (Melnik). After they were finished, they placed their Post-it notes on the board.

As stated from my journal, "I assembled all of the notes into a straight line which read as follows: beatings, protest, march, disagreement, color, banners, fire, and Martin Luther King" (Melnik). Their understanding of the assignment became clearer to me. Most of the words that the girls wrote suggested some sort of violence, and it made sense that the girls would have this reaction after their discussion on punishment. I was surprised to see how much the girls did know about the Civil Rights Movement since they have never formally studied it, and I was relieved that they did not just focus on the violent aspects of this time period.

When I saw the words and connected this to their interviews based on punishment, I sensed that the girls were intrigued by conflict and consequence. I remember hearing the girls make comments throughout our sessions about how one girl got in trouble at school and what happened to her and how certain girls get punished by other teachers. They also talked about what got them angry in each of their classes, which involved getting in trouble for something they did not do. It amazed me how much I was able to gather about the girls without asking specific questions, and I wondered if they knew how much of their conversations I listen to. I

also wondered if they are exploring their boundaries with these conversations to see when I might stop them in order to get their attention. The girls tended to talk quietly about these things as they worked on the activities, and I noticed that they stop talking when I would stand near them, and then continue when I walked away.

As “other” I felt that my role was reinforced when the girls pick and chose what to tell me. This was the first time I tapped into age being an influencing factor on me as an outsider. I understood that the girls did not want me, their facilitator, to hear certain things just as they would not want any teacher to hear them, but I found it interesting to connect this to the idea of “other.” I continued to be extra conscious of how the girls perceived me; even to the point where I wonder if something I would usually see as normal, like the girls masking their conversations from a teacher, as a possible effect of my skin color. It remained difficult to stay objective about how as “other” I was affected throughout my facilitation of this project, especially after feeling different influences of this role from a racial perspective to a standard student and teacher separation. I felt that my paranoia revolved around race related topics was clouding my perceptions. It surprised me how much I noticed about the session with the girls as “other” and realized I was aware of moments that I more than likely would have been oblivious to in the past. For instance, when I walked past the girls today and they immediately silenced their conversation, I found myself wondering what they were saying about me. I wondered if they were making comments about my race despite one of the students being white. It seemed strange to ponder all this, especially when I probably did not take notice of these situations in the past nor read much into them. However, as I continued to follow how as “other” I shaped the

direction of this project, I could not help but wonder if all the moments that stood out to me were due to this role even if they appeared as something rather small.

I did not enter the third session knowing what I was going to next assign. In the moment, I wanted to make sure that the girls knew they needed to approach their next assignment on their own. I also wanted to make sure that the way I assigned it did not infer that I thought the girls did a poor job on the interview assignment. In order to accomplish this, I assigned an individual-based assignment where the girls were to write a monologue that has a character pursuing an objective rather than telling a story. I wanted this assignment to demonstrate the girls' understanding of story versus action.

I asked the girls to write a monologue that had a character from the Civil Rights Movement asking their parents for something, such as permission to stay out later or go to a new place. The girls also had to have their characters use various tactics because the parent does not want them to go anywhere at all. I wanted them to think about the consequences the character may face, especially since punishment seemed to interest the girls. However, I discussed with the girls that not all consequences lead to a physical action. I also thought that the girls may have experienced asking permission for something and then needing to give reasons for why they deserved what they wanted. I thought that writing from a familiar place would help us jump head on into this project.

The other set of rules that I gave the girls concerning the assignment was that they had to keep their monologues a secret from each other. I was not sure about this choice at the time, but the girls seemed to enjoy this idea. In my journal I describe how they asked me if I should put someone in charge to make sure the girl's monologues remained a secret and tell me if someone

broke the rules. I honestly was not going to take this part of the assignment that far, but, since this idea came from the girls, I decided to give it a try. Although I only chose one, I loved how every girl raised her hand to be designated the one in charge. I decided to choose the shyest one in the group in hopes that this responsibility and position would encourage her to open up more.

As important as the writing assignments were for this project, I felt that I needed to infuse more “on our feet” activities. I did not want our sessions to only consist of sharing and writing. I wanted to bring in more exercises to explore their play in another way. I thought the more I got the girls out of their desks and interacting with each other, the more likely our play would drive away from what happened last year.

I found it imperative to keep encouraging the girls to consider different ways to use language, especially when it came to character building, but I continued to wonder how I could achieve this without it being about a white girl telling a room with an African American majority that they needed to speak differently. It proved tricky to strike a balance between the administration of the school’s wishes and the desire of the girls to write a play that emulated the work done by last year’s class. The girls did utilize slang, but I gathered that this was more a cultural norm than their trying to ignore their language curriculum. As I state from my journal, “I hesitated to enter discussions about the girls’ language and content in our play development sessions because they may see me as one of their white teachers telling them to stop ‘acting black’” (Melnik). As I continued going through the sessions, I will keep exploring these thoughts while assessing how my role as “other” shaped my facilitation of the school’s play development process.

CHAPTER EIGHT: BRINGING BACK IDENTITY

Fourth Session Planning

As I notated in my journal, “the relationship between the girls and myself, as “other,” caused me to ignore key things such as learning the girls’ names” (Melnik). As “other” I felt that getting a better handle on the girls’ names helped me address some of my fears associated with this role. My over-awareness of certain issues, specifically the girls’ race, during this project caused me to overlook important steps, such as learning names.

As I entered the fourth session and continued contemplating how to handle race, I found that constantly going back and forth on whether to focus on it or ignore it caused me to be oblivious to key things that are important for teachers to learn. Here I was entering the fourth session with the eighth grade girls of the school, and I could recall how many African American students I had as opposed to Caucasian, but I could not remember any of their names. As I commented in my journal, “I noticed that I classified the girls according to race and rarely utilized any of their names” (Melnik). Noticing this scared me because I felt like a racist paying so much attention to the racial backgrounds of these girls. I also felt that discussing the girls more in terms of race provided a wider boundary between me and the girls because it only reinforced my role as “other” when I considered how I was the minority in the classroom.

It began to frustrate me how I kept viewing the racial issues of this project from a very black and white perspective. It seemed like I was never going to encounter any middle ground decision as to race and whether it should be central, or ignored. I felt that I needed to shift my

thinking, and wondered if being “other” influenced the difficulty of this change. I had become really set in my status as “other,” but when I realized that I know more about the girls in terms of race rather than by their individual identity, I found myself reaching for solutions. I chose to ignore my status, which I know is on one end of the racial pendulum, but I felt that I needed to ignore something in order to refocus on something else. In this case, by ignoring “other” I turned my focus to the girls. I did not want to look back on my journal and never see myself address the girls by who they are, but by what they are, because in my past I have always made sure that I recognized all of my students by name as I felt it reinforced that I cared about them. To read that I only knew the girls by their racial breakdown made me feel akin to the white waitresses at the Woolworth sit-in that occurred during the Civil Rights Movement who obviously recognized race first and foremost in their minds.

In addressing the issues that I needed to solve for the next session, I began with learning their names so that I could get used to them as they started sharing their work. I believed using their names while they shared their work reinforced a sense of ownership for them, especially when it came to the girls’ script. I wanted the girls to realize how much their participation influenced the direction of the play, so that they each felt a sense of accomplishment as they drew closer to completing a full script. On a personal level, I wanted to begin reflecting about the girls individually and stop classifying them by race because I did not think knowing their racial background proved relevant in discussing how they participated in our sessions together. However, as I continued swaying on the racial pendulum that I created, I sensed its coming importance in our discussion of the Civil Rights Movement more specifically. Either way, I felt that I should absolutely be able to know their names before knowing what race they represent.

Fourth Session Reflection

My largest discovery took place during this last session with the girls. One of my goals with this session revolved around gaining a better grasp of the girls' names. When I began to play name-tag with the girls, a few of them commented on how I did not know their names. In my journal I described "overhearing a series of 'I told you so's' as the girls formed a circle for the game" (Melnik). I tried to ignore these comments and told the girls we needed to energize ourselves for their monologue work. Once I made the focus of the game about something other than learning names, the girls seemed to ease up a bit.

My avoidance in admitting that I did not know their names came from my fear of appearing like I did not care. The last thing I wanted was for the girls to see me as the white girl who does care enough to learn the black girls' names. As a white person, I lacked familiarity with some of the girls' names, which reinstated my sense of being "other." However, I felt like my role as "other" was largely in the background rather than right up front during the fourth session because I put all of my focus on the girls. This observation appeared obvious because it seemed like I should have focused on the girls at all times, but allowing my thoughts as "other" to be central caused me to facilitate the sessions differently. For example, during my last few sessions where I was aware of being "other," I struggled in making a decision because my focus centered on myself rather than the participants. However, I saw the influences of my role as "other" melt away when I allowed myself to focus on the participants.

I found myself beginning to realize that my being "other" resulted primarily from my own perceptions, and it proved difficult to ignore these thoughts as they could likely affect the project. All of my "safe" choices came from my fear that the decisions I made as a facilitator

would say something about me, or that I was saying something about the girls. I got lucky in the sense that I was working with a group of girls that were very self-sufficient and were able to fill in the blanks on their own. For example, I decided to use the pictures in an earlier session that did not focus on race because I was afraid, as a minority in the group, to bring up such issues. However, the girls still found a way to incorporate race as a topic because they knew it was central to discussing the Civil Rights Movement. The girls were a lot more open with themselves than I ever gave them credit for. It was my assuming that they would be offended that did not allow them to go deeper in earlier sessions.

When it came to deciding our plot, I used a story box to assist the girls' decision making. A story box is a device used to help create a plot line that utilizes character, setting, and descriptions. It is also something that helps a group make a decision about a plot as well as allow a facilitator some control over what is decided because they can highlight and ignore anything written in the box. The girls seemed dismayed by the story box because it was obvious that there were things I wanted them to avoid. Rather than not address the issue of last year's play, we ended up having a discussion about it. The girls thought the play done last year was really good and they wanted to model their ideas after it. In the discussion about last year's play, I did not focus on its being good or not but redirected the conversation toward writing a play that belongs to this group and allowing the play to demonstrate their potential. I was basically selling the idea of writing something completely different so that they would not end up with a play like that of last year's class with its use of slang and surface-level characters.

My avoiding any conversation about slang came from the fear of offending some of the African American girls, but it seemed important that I bring it up. The girls remained confused

about why I was trying to push them away from the ideas in the last year's play. When I explained that particular play could have used more layers and different types of language, many of the girls rolled their eyes at me. As I stated in my journal, "one of the girls responded that I was not going to allow them to have any fun, and that I do not understand them" (Melnik). I remembered that her one opinion caused a chain reaction of comments round the room causing many of them to shut me out completely.

This happened toward the end of the class, and I still wanted the girls to come up with a plot so that I could assign different sections of the play to them. I was pressed for time and had to come up with a solution quickly. The only thing I could think to do was hand over the facilitation of the story box to one of the girls because it seemed like they were more willing to listen to each other than to me. I started to erase the board, and another girl started whispering names about me. I handed my piece of chalk to another girl and told the class they had five minutes to come up with their idea. The girls looked at me with shock, but went with it.

In my journal, I describe how "all I could hear were the girls arguing about whose idea was better as well as why someone should not be involved" (Melnik). These girls made vicious comments about each other's ideas to the point where one commented about who should still be in seventh grade. I needed to find a way to calm the girls down while having them notice that their decisions in this moment were affecting the entire group. I decided to hold a silent action to get their attention, and slowly I walked back to the host teacher's desk and sat down. The girls paused and reacted to my action by sitting in their desks and staring at me. It seemed to me that they were waiting for me to yell at them.

I let an uncomfortable minute pass, and we just stared at each other. I noted in my journal how the girl who commented about things being boring, whom I have now decided must be the girls' leader because she drives every conversation with her friends, asked me if they still get to do the project. A minute prior to that, the girls were arguing but in only a flash they sat quietly concerned about their project. The girls' immediate change in tone and increased concern proved that they did want to participate in the project but they could not go about it alone. One of the girls wanted to know if I was going to continue to help them, which interested me because I thought they did not like having increased facilitation with this project. I noticed that I based this on my assumptions regarding what happened with the play last year, and I was surprised to hear that the girls wanted my help because I thought they expected to create the script on their own.

I told them that we would do the project, and asked them how we could go about things differently. As state in my journal, "one girl suggested that each of them take turns with the chalk so that we kept building off of one idea" (Melnik). The girls ended up creating a story box that was about two friends who were dared to stay one night in a haunted house. After the characters did stay the night, they were mailed a letter that read, "you're next," and any recipient of this letter had only one week to live.

I remember commenting that the play sounded too much like a horror movie and that I thought the girls could be a bit more creative. My feedback only made matters worse as the girls started attacking me with comments that made me sound like I was depriving them of their creativity. I calmed them down by telling them that parts of it could stay, but I wanted to challenge them to write something that was less cinematic.

The idea of challenging the girls while reinforcing their potential seemed to get their attention. I noted in my journal how “one girl commented that I was making them work too hard, but that it was cool” (Melnik). I remembered that this gave me a lot of relief because I have been so worried about offending the girls. I discovered today that all I needed to do was to just be completely honest with them. The girls may react in way that suggests they were annoyed, but it only lasted for a few minutes. The girls were quite reactionary at their moods have the ability to shift in any given second, which helped me avoid taking their reactions so seriously. It also encouraged me not to blame myself/my race for the girls’ reactions.

At the end of our session, we broke the play down into six scenes for the girls to tackle writing within small groups. We also decided the characters’ names so that all of us were writing about the same people. My hope was that each of the groups would write their scene while consulting each other about the flow of the play. We would not be meeting next week due to a school holiday, so the girls had about two weeks to work on the play. I hoped that the excitement from today motivated them to work on the project and that we will be really close to a first draft by the next session. I was banking on a lot to happen during the next few weeks.

CHAPTER NINE: BALANCING OTHER WITH OUTSIDER

Fifth Session Planning

The last session left me confused about how my role as “other” has shifted because it took a direction that I did not expect. I entered this project thinking my role as “other” would surround my being racially and socio-economically different from the girls. However, I discovered that being “other” can be defined in different ways, including how power shifts in the classroom.

When I handed the chalk over to one of the girls in the last session to facilitate the story box, I felt deflated at the time yet managed to remember that I had more power in this setting than I had given myself credit for. This power I speak of consisted of being in control of what was happening in the room. The girls were shocked by my action of handing things over to them because they thought they were in trouble to the point that they started asking if the project would continue. I did not expect the girls to react in this way, and it surprised me that they worried about the play development project. I did not realize how important this project was for them, which made me realize how many of my decisions were based on assumptions.

The assumptions I created remained based on my own preconceived notions of the girls being economically disadvantaged as well as racially different. It proved challenging to let myself analyze how my own preconceived notions affected my facilitation and the shape of the school’s play development project, which made it easy for me to rely on my assumptions. My assumptions have become my truths so many times during this project. I assumed that I would

be the only white person but discovered that one of my participants appeared to be of Caucasian decent, which completely threw me off guard. This realization brought to light how my privilege as a white person shapes my perception of certain groups such as those labeled as “economically disadvantaged.” I also assumed that increased facilitation would result in many conflicts during my facilitation of the girls’ project due to last year’s class having free reign over their play. This caused me to become a bit defensive about my position within this process. My defensiveness encouraged a blind notion about the girls’ want of a facilitator, which surprised me in the last session.

In sorting through all these thoughts about my assumptions, white privilege, and power, I am left taking a new stance on what “other” means. My new sense of “other” remains based around racial and socio-economic backgrounds, but I am discovering that this role can shift in more directions beyond these two aspects. I began noticing moments where I was being defined by the power structure of student and teacher as well as times when the boundaries was about age, language, and even how I was feeling during a particular session. “Other” made me a little nervous due to the racial and socio-economic role I connected to it, and I created my own perception of this status based on my fears when working with a population I have no connection with, which allowed me to explore the moments where I struggled due to this role as well as those in which I reveled in success..

However, I am seeing where my perception of “other” is becoming rooted in factors beyond race and socio-economic status. In a way, I am relieved that its status can be less about race for me, but I wonder if I would have landed on “other” had I not considered racial and socio-economic backgrounds first. This makes me consider how having white privilege may

have caused me to be closed minded at times, but may have helped me to take note of other things as well. For example, as I increased my awareness of my privilege, I noticed more and more how I changed my communication style according to the race of the person I was addressing. In my journal I described how I communicated differently with the African American girls in the play development project:

I communicated with more caution when addressing the African American girls during the play development project for fear of offending of them. I would communicate with more caution by providing a disclaimer before I spoke so that I made it clear that I was not trying to upset anyone, but I would not do this when speaking to those who were white. (Melnik)

This also had become clear to me during times when I feared discussing the Civil Rights Movement with the girls because I did not want my whiteness to communicate even a single thing that I did not intend, nor that I was speaking for all white people when I claimed things like a lot of injustice happened during that time period

As the girls started creating their play while connecting it to the Civil Rights Movement, I understood that I could control how they may perceive me in terms of race. It remained difficult to talk about a period where I felt so many people used white privilege in an unfair way. These feelings around race and privilege led me to consider starting next session with another “on our feet” activity that explored racial identity. I thought having the girls explore racial identities other than their own may have helped settle my own fears on this topic as well as provided a way for them to gain a deeper understanding of what happened during the Civil Rights Movement. This also helped the girls when it came to casting, especially if they write scenes filled with both

black and white characters. Hopefully, through exploring these other racial identities they have discovered that they do not need to be of the same race in order to play their character. At the same time, knowing that I wanted the girls to think outside of the box when deciding what roles they should play, I wondered if this was a responsible choice. I chose to blind cast the play because I did not want the one Caucasian girl in the class to be the only white character in the play.

Fifth Session Reflection

The girls focused a lot on their characters trying to place blame. I decided to use an image theatre exercise to explore how power can shift when blame becomes central to a situation. I had the girls take the first scene and make three images: a beginning, middle, and end. I knew that I also wanted the girls to explore different racial and socio-economic identities, but I decided to wait before adding this layer because I wanted to see how the girls addressed it. I noticed in their script that they had more white characters than actual white people in the room, and I was curious to see how the girls handled this.

As the girls worked together to create their images, I noticed that race never came up in their conversations. I wondered if the girls realized the racial choices they made in their script or if they consciously chose to ignore it. When I asked them about this they told me that race was not important to their play, but when I addressed that their play needs to be set during the Civil Rights Movement they seemed a little puzzled. As I stated in my journal, “one girl commented that their story could only happen during the present and that none of them had any costumes

from the 1960's" (Melnik). I discussed with them how they could adapt their story to the Civil Rights Movement, and a few girls commented that it was an OK idea while others begged me to consider keeping it in the present. I commented that it was too easy to stay in the present, and that I thought they wanted to write a play better than last years'. This immediately got them to land on setting their play during the Civil Rights Movement, but I felt a little guilty in my tactics. I felt like I needed the girls to commit to an idea because we do not have much time before they start putting this play on its feet.

I started looking more into this tactic I used, and I felt like I took advantage of the power I have as a facilitator to get them to agree with me. I also noticed that this choice happened in the moment without my weighing the pros and cons of this situation. In the last few sessions, I let my role as "other" inform my decisions, and this one had nothing to do it. I was beginning to change in the sessions as I focused more on my lesson goals rather than my perception as "other." As interested as I am in "other," I find that focusing on it held me back and that I just needed to let it go.

Knowing that I am letting "other" rest for awhile, I continued to contemplate how as an outsider I may affect the project. Although I see "other" and "outsider" as two separate things, I felt that both could influence the shape of the project. In terms of this different role, I began reflecting on being an "outsider" to the girls' ideas rather than being in the role of "other" in terms of the group's racial, socio-economic population. As an outsider to their ideas, I felt that I was able to push the girls to consider new directions to take their play without considering how my role as "other" was being perceived. The reason why I pushed them to explore these directions was not based on race but due to the lack of plot development in a few areas. For

example, blame came up a lot in their play, but I never understood the characters' reasoning behind this because it was never addressed in their dialogue.

I ended today's session assigning the girls' places where they needed to develop the script a bit more. The girls complained, saying that they had too much to do, and I told them I was not going to allow them to show a play that was not fully developed. A first draft does not seem so far away as it did a few weeks ago when we last met, but I hope the girls understand that I am not going to let them settle for mediocrity.

CHAPTER TEN: WHITE GUILT

Sixth Session Planning

Knowing that the girls had written a lot and were beginning to connect their script to the Civil Rights Movement allowed me to have more fun with this planning session. No longer did I have to wonder about when their first draft would be completed. Now I could plan activities that would hopefully enhance what they have already written. I also needed to make sure that I kept the girls engaged as much as possible since we are now starting to move to after-school hours. I thought the more group activities we do in combination with the writing helped keep the girls focused as well as allowed them to develop their characters further. My strategy was to “hot-seat” the characters to see if we could learn anything more about them. “Hot-seating” is an idea that I have taken from Jonathan Neelands and Tony Goode’s *Structuring Drama Work*. In their book, hot-seating refers to “a group, working as themselves or in role, have the opportunity to question or interview role-player(s) who remain ‘in character.’ These characters may be ‘released’ from frozen improvisations or the role may be prepared and the role-player(s) formally seated facing questioners” (Neelands 32).

I found the idea of interviewing the characters interesting because it gave the girls a chance to ask questions they may not have considered while writing. I thought bringing in this activity also helped the girls better understand how to tie their play back **to** the Civil Rights Movement. As the girls created the frozen pictures, we could “release” a character and ask them about their thoughts concerning the Civil Right Movement. This would allow the girls to

workshop together how to have their characters connect with this time period, and also clarify how to put the notion of the Civil Rights Movement into what they have already written. I wanted the girls to understand that they could keep a lot of their script and still have it set in another time period.

I also needed to keep reinforcing that the play they write would be performed before an audience. The more exercises I could bring in that utilized their script, the more likely the girls may step up the challenge. The girls were starting to enter the session thinking they were completely finished. Whenever I told the girls we were going to workshop their ideas further, they got really frustrated with me. I did not think their work was “bad,” and the more the girls understood that their work on this project goes beyond the classroom, the more they would realize that reworking their writing meant something positive. The more that I could encourage this type of thinking, the more likely the girls would keep bringing more to the project.

I continued making a conscious effort to ignore my role as “other” for the next session to see if I noticed any more changes in my facilitation from this decision. I found that the sessions have been more productive the less I considered being “other.” I thought this was due to my being more engaged in the girls’ work rather than focused on how my role affects them. I was not trying to avoid discussing “other,” but I wondered if I would gain any different insight towards my guiding questions when I chose not to focus on it.

Sixth Session Reflection

This was the first time that I held a session during after school hours. Many other activities were starting at the same time, and it was pretty chaotic. I was sent to the gym and

then back to the cafeteria, and I even had a parent volunteer join our group, which is great, but I was never told that another person would be joining us. Luckily, I knew the volunteer from a past residency, and she was aware of the type of work I did. I considered this to be a lucky occurrence because the last thing we needed was someone entering the process that was not supportive of the girls' work. Also, the volunteer was African American, and I felt like this gave me an opportunity to observe how some of the girls interacted with an adult in the room whom they could identify with from a racial standpoint.

We tried to hot-seat today, but it was hard for the girls to take it seriously. It only took one of the girls to think this activity was "dumb" to ruin it for the rest of the group. I noted in my journal that "the girl who always comments on the boring aspect of things went back to her usual ways today" (Melnik). I remembered that she commented on everyone's work with a sense of negativity that influenced the other girls to not want to participate. I noticed that when I asked the girls as a group what they thought about the activity they would tell me how much fun they found it. However, when they went off to work in their groups they had a much different reaction. The girls started commenting on how I was never going to let them write what they really wanted and how this day was "boring."

When I would walk by the groups, the girls would pretend to be working on the exercise. The minute I walked away, the groups would snap back into their original conversation consisting of all their complaints. The volunteer noticed the same trend and asked me if I wanted her to handle it. This seemed a bit strange for me. It made me wonder why I did not appear capable of handling the situation myself, and if I was being viewed as "other" by the volunteer because I was a white person trying to facilitate a room where my race remains the minority.

Once I realized that I tapped into assumptions based on race, I could not help but consider how my role as “other” shifted when another adult entered the room. At the same time, knowing that I was trying to ignore “other,” I wondered if I was just tapping into insecurities as a teaching artist. I also noticed that I was very aware of the control/authority changes during this session. I felt like I lost a little of my authority, but the volunteer never tried to take it away. I wondered if I felt like I lost some power because the volunteer, as an African American female, could address some of the girls on the same racial level where I could not because as a Caucasian female I may not fully understand some of the language that other races utilize as a cultural norm.

I ended today with the girls writing an expert monologue from the perspective of one of the characters. I did not plan for this exercise to happen today, but I needed something to fill time. I used this monologue activity to help me assess the girls understanding of how to connect the historical element to the play. So, I instructed them to incorporate language and actions that pertained to the Civil Rights Movement era in their monologues.

This surprise exercise ended up being really insightful. Each of the girls stood up and recited their monologue and it was interesting to hear how they perceived the characters. The idea was that the characters would address what they thought about the mystery letter in scene three, and who they thought was the culprit. It was wonderful to hear the variety of perspectives and that all of them did not place the blame on the same character. Some of the responses focused on characters wanting to teach a lesson. For example, in my journal I describe how one monologue written from the eyes of one of the parents said “they knew about the girls staying the night in the house and they wanted to teach them a lesson” (Melnik). The parent did not like

that the girls hung out together because they believed that other races do not mix, so they planted a letter that would cause the girls to hopefully break up.

The most surprising monologue focused on the KKK being the culprit. This character was of Caucasian decent and is a daughter of the head of the KKK unit in their home town. In my journal I described how “I found myself shocked by this monologue because it was the boldest choice any of the girls had made so far” (Melnik). It also addressed something from my racial group, which caused me to fear being perceived as connected to this group due to being white. After she read her monologue, a discussion sparked in the classroom about hate groups. The volunteer asked the girls if they felt something like the KKK still existed today. As I stated in my journal, “I was surprised by this question being asked in the classroom, and my immediate reaction was that the girls will wonder about my connection to the KKK being that I am of a Caucasian background” (Melnik). I know that sounds silly, but I fear questions about hateful acts during the Civil Rights Movement since many were committed by whites. It is in such moments as these that I feel like “other” the most because of the white guilt I feel towards the members of my race who oppressed non-whites during the Civil Rights Movement.

I discovered today that my feelings as “other” can arise beyond my control no matter how much I try to avoid it. “Other” was present for me today due to my feeling guilty as a white person to know that other people in my racial group have committed acts of hate. When I heard one of the African American students talk about the KKK, I immediately feared my position in the room as one of the few white people present. I feared getting questions that asked me why people from my racial group were a part of the KKK because I did not want to be associated with them. It continues to amaze me how much race plays into my being “other,” as well as into my

fear of certain topics. It was strange to hear comments about the KKK while standing next to an African American adult because I felt like I was being judged. Even though I am not a part of the KKK, the fact that I am also white like the members of this group sparks a lot of fear and hesitation in me. I immediately wanted to change the subject, but I felt like doing so could have been read as my feeling uncomfortable, and I did not want to be put on the spot. However, had the volunteer been out the room, I wonder if I would have followed through with changing the subject. I also wonder if I would have made this decision had the volunteer been white rather than African American.

After the girls left, I was able to speak with the volunteer about our project. This conversation served as an assessment of my work with the girls because it allowed me to receive feedback on how I was shaping the play development project. This first thing she noticed was that, even though the story takes place during the Civil Rights Movement, it was not solely about that particular event. She commented on how it was more of a story about people whose thinking was shaped by the time they were living in, and she was glad to see the girls writing about that. The volunteer saw the eighth grade play from last year and told me she was happy to see the project moving in this direction.

Another reason why I was excited about the volunteer was that I got to observe an outsider without it being me. I saw the volunteer as outsider because she has not been with us since day one. However, as a parent of a student from the school, she understood where these girls were coming from. Her role, as an outsider to our ideas, allowed me to receive some feedback on the girls' work. She commented that she was glad the girls had more guidance and that she is interested in seeing the parents' reaction because last year's play was not well

received. Her comments did not offer me anything I did not already know, but as she spoke I wondered how she perceived my role in the project from a racial standpoint. This was not a question I felt comfortable asking because I did not want the volunteer to get the wrong idea about me. My white fear caused me not to question how I am being perceived because I did not want the volunteer to think I am making this whole project a black and white issue.

I am starting to arrive at a point of believing that my status as “other” was amplified in situations where race was not balanced. Since being white caused me to be a minority in the eighth grade class at the school, I felt that this caused me to hold back as a facilitator. I arrived at this due to feelings I was afraid to express when the girls discussed the KKK. The fact that I was outnumbered racially made me feel like I could not change the subject due to my discomfort about discussing things like the KKK. They remained uncomfortable to me because I did not like to be viewed in a negative way because of my race despite the fact that the girls did not give me any reactions that suggested this. However, I discovered that if I sensed the potential for these questions to arise from the girls, I found myself hesitating to allow them to discuss these racial issues further.

I felt conflicted because race proved central to a story about the Civil Rights Movement, which was what the girls are writing about. It remained my responsibility to allow the girls to explore the issues around the Civil Rights Movement or my facilitation would become based within racial bias that I found unfair for the girls of African American descent. In connecting back to my idea about feeling as “other” when an environment was not racially balanced, I wondered if I would feel more comfortable discussing these issues if more white people were present in the room. I could assume how I would feel which provided me little insight, but as I

continued to facilitate, I would be observing how I was changing through this project. Race would remain a topic to discuss in the next few sessions as the girls continued developing their play, and I needed to remain open to their interests around the Civil Rights Movement even if it insured my discomfort.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: IGNORING OTHER

Seventh Session Planning

I continued to analyze how my role has affected this project. The more I heard about last year's project, the more I understood how a facilitator could influence the direction of a project. Regarding myself as the facilitator, I felt I have pushed the girls to consider other approaches to writing plays rather than basing everything around the present. The girls' focus on the Civil Rights Movement remained exciting because the discussions keep getting deeper each session. The girl who commented about the KKK last time very rarely shared her insight, and I was seeing many of them become willing to express their thoughts. As exciting as it was for me to witness the girls open up more during discussions, I was still left with a very uneasy feeling about conversations that highlighted the negative aspects of white people during the Civil Rights Movement. I felt a need to defend my race to the girls when they commented on white people during the Civil Rights Movement because they have only discussed moments when whites have done something bad, but the fact remained that many people of this race did participate in hateful acts during this time period. I understood and accepted this about certain people from my race, but I felt like the girls missed that some white people tried to help other blacks due to them not bringing it up.

As the girls continued to develop the play and its characters, I needed to bring in more exercises that explored racial identities even further. However, I thought I needed to connect this to today because, although the Civil Rights Movement happened during the 60's, I believed

moments of injustices based on race still occur today. I thought having the girls explore racial identities today would also bring some attention to their social development curriculum, which remained a part of this process. No matter how much validity I tried to give my choices about these activities, I still needed to remain aware of how I was changing as a facilitator.

I see my greatest changes happening due to my increased awareness of racial identity. As much as it terrified me to be in the role of “other,” as a facilitator I also gained a lot of insight. I felt that I was getting to know the school’s student population really well and the idea of them being from economically disadvantaged backgrounds became less of a worry for me. Many sessions have passed where I have not even commented in my journal on the fact “that these girls came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds” (Melnik). However, I was still hung up on how having white privilege shaped my role as a facilitator. I think my awareness of my privileges has grown, and that I will learn more about this as I continue to reflect on my process with the girls.

This next session is going to be extremely important. The girls would be going into rehearsals after the next two sessions, and I wanted to make sure they entered the process with as much of a polished script as possible. I knew a lot more would change with the girls’ script, and I hoped that as they got their play on its feet that they discovered how acting it out made it appear very different from its simply being read. It read fine on the page, but the character development in the script was too fast to be believable when someone was watching the play unfold. These were all the things we needed to address within the next session.

Seventh Session Reflection

Today seemed surprisingly productive because after last week I expected to enter today's session needing to discuss present day racial roles and comparing them to the Civil Rights Movement. However, the more I thought about the time I had left with the girls, I decided I needed to focus on facilitating the script development. I could see where as "other" my role as a facilitator has been affected when I think back on the moments where racial-based discussion caused a lot of inner tension for me. However, I thought there came a point in some processes, like one focused on the development of a new script, where "other" needs to be ignored. I felt this shift today more than I had in past sessions and directed all of my attention to the girls working on their script. I felt like I ignoring "other" was easier today because I was pressed for time. It was like I had to focus all of my attention on the script or it would not be fully developed.

In the beginning of this process I was interested in knowing how my perception of "other" during the process compared to what I gather after I have some time to reflect on this project. I had one more session with the girls where playwriting would be the main focus before they transitioned into rehearsals, and I thought I needed to focus my attention on their script. In my journal I commented how "my discussion in the last session would focus on how I facilitated the last day and may or may not include moments where I noticed how "other" affected my process" (Melnik). I did not want to enter expecting me as "other" would influence the direction of the day because I felt I needed to go into the next session with the goal of the girls completing most of their revisions.

Although time was working against me when trying to observe moments that connected with my guiding questions, I thought it would be interesting to see how my views shifted after this process. After the next session, I would be reflecting on the process as a whole and allowed myself time to take in what happened. In my journal, I stated that “it may be possible that I reflect back to a session such as this, where I ignore “other,” and discover that I was indeed affected by this role during this section” (Melnik). After this session, time remained what affected me and I needed to redirect my focus.

CHAPTER TWELVE: CASTING THE PLAY WITHOUT RACE

Eighth Session Planning

The next session would be the last playwriting session before the girls began bringing their play to life. I had put all of the pieces together including bits and pieces from their monologues, and I was really excited to hear the girls' reaction to what they wrote. This would be the first time the girls have heard their work brought together in one script. I thought the girls would be surprised at what they accomplished, and I hoped they would remain motivated to keep progressing with the project. These girls have worked really hard and have accomplished putting a script together within the first few months of being in the eighth grade, which presented a difficult challenge that they have overcome together. Writing a script remained a difficult task, especially when doing it in a group where the participants may not get along.

The biggest problem I saw with their script was with one of the major scenes in the middle of their play. This scene focused on a group of girls from different racial and socio-economic backgrounds taking on a dare to spend the night in an abandoned house. These characters were not supposed to be hanging out with each other because their parents did not accept different races hanging out together. During this scene, the characters tried to stay the night but found a letter in a floorboard in the haunted house that said "you're next," which sparked the group to start questioning who the writer of the letter was as well as placing unnecessary blame on other people. As developed as the scene may appear, the girls have not written much dialogue for this scene. The lack of dialogue caused the play to appear a bit choppy, and **it** needed to be fixed.

I thought the best way for the girls to address this scene was to improvise it together rather than sit around and write it out. I thought having the girls take on their characters and work in the moment of the scene's situation would help them find a way to develop this scene. This activity would also help me cast their play as well as get them ready for the next portion of the project.

As far as casting, it presented a bit of a challenge due to how the girls have constructed the characters. When the girls started adapting their play to take place during the Civil Rights Movement, they decided to have half of the girls be from an African American background and the other portion would be Caucasian. The girls did not make the same racial proportions as the characters in their play, which brought forth a dilemma. My dilemma revolved around whether I should blind cast the characters or if I should let the girls decide what to do.

A challenge I saw with allowing the girls to decide the cast was that they could argue over which parts they wanted. We did not have time for the girls to argue over parts, and I could best avoid this by blind casting the play. A further challenge was that girls may have only wanted to choose parts that incorporate the same racial background as themselves. I was not sure if the girls would blind cast on their own even if I tried to encourage them to do so. However, a benefit I saw to the girls choosing their roles remained that they take more ownership of their play. The girls seemed to respond better to things when it appeared it gave them more responsibility. The girls liked being in charge, and I thought giving them the choice would yield better responses from them even if it ended with some arguing. Having them drive through the conflicts around casting may have presented a great learning opportunity for the girls, but, in all honesty, we did not have much time to allot to this.

I thought the best way for me to make this decision was to be prepared for either avenue, and while I was at it, to anticipate all possible. Depending on the girls' attitudes during the next session, I would be able to choose which option would be best. My biggest fear with casting, surprisingly, did not revolve around race. I did not want the girls to argue over parts, which I thought resulted in more harm than good because casting could cause some participants to shut down completely. I had seen this happen in my past experiences where it took someone a while to want to join in after receiving a role they did not necessarily want. I worried about this happening with the girls because they had very little time to finish getting the play ready. However, with the casting dilemma ended, the girls still had a lot to get accomplished during the next month before they performed their play for the school's winter showcase.

Eighth Session Reflection

The girls entered today's session fully aware that this was going to be last time we met to work on the playwriting aspect of this project. I noted in my journal that "a couple of the girls came up to me and told me that we needed to meet more than once a week." (Melnik). When I told the girls that I had no control over this, they started to blame me for why their play was not complete. These girls felt that it was my fault that we only met once a week and that their play was going to suffer as a result. I told the girls that it was not my decision when we met, or how often, and that they have other activities during the week. What it came down to was that the girls liked coming to these sessions more than some of their other activities because they liked the challenge. During the entire project, there were some girls who commented that things were boring. This was their way to ask for more challenging activities.

The girls acted really frustrated during today's session. It seemed like they were angry with me, and I was not sure how much we were going to get accomplished. I sat on the desk and before moving to anything else I asked the girls what was going on today. They looked at me as if I was insane and told me that nothing was the matter. These girls confuse me a lot with their instant attitude changes. It amazes me how one moment things can seem like they are going poorly and then fine within the next few seconds. These first minutes of class influenced me to go with my blind casting option because I had to consider classroom management first due to the little time we had today after the girls argued with me about not getting enough time. When I told the girls what were going to do today and that I was going to cast the play almost all of their hands went up. Casting continued to be really important to them and they wanted to give me all of input possible.

I told the girls not to worry about the casting and then we moved on to working on the abandoned house scene. As the girls started working on this scene they commented that they needed to know who they were in order to work on it. In my journal I described how "at first I took this as a sly tactic in getting me to address the casting first, but then realized that the girls had a good point" (Melnik). If I went ahead and cast the play then the girls could focus on their characters as they developed the scene. When I told the girls that it was a good idea they all started interrupting each other telling me who they wanted to be in the play. Casting definitely took over the entire session.

I had so many thoughts going through my head when it came to the casting. I wondered if I should have the girls draw their role out of a hat. I almost went with that but I felt the girls could handle an approach that gave them a bit more ownership over the issue. I did not know

how I arrived at choosing the next option, but the idea really excited me. I decided to put the girls names in a hat and have them select who should be playing which character. For example, if girl “A” chose girl “B” then “A” would choose which character “B” would play. I commented in my journal how in “thinking back on this decision, I am surprised that I went with such a bold route” (Melnik). It was bold because I opened the door wide enough for the girls to start arguing. This could have ended in a disaster where the girls disagreed with each other’s choices but, to my surprise, it went really smoothly. The girls started commenting on who they thought should play which character and based these thoughts on who they thought was right for the part. Their comments about each other were really positive, which surprised me because I anticipated some of the girls getting angry at not having a say so in which part they played rather than choosing roles for someone else.

In my journal I noted that “I was surprised to see that race did not come up at all during the casting because it was an issue I was so focused on during this process” (Melnik). The girls commented that they were very content with their roles, and they started talking about costumes and planning each other’s hair and make-up for the show. I found it interesting that the last thing I discussed with the girls today was how they should wear their hair rather than how an African American person would play a character who was white. As I reflected on my process, I would be thinking about the moments where I expected race to become an issue and it did the opposite.

It felt a bit surreal for my process with the girls to be ending, but I thought it was time that I reflected on my role during this project with the girls. There were so many moments during this project where I was working outside my comfort zone, especially when it came to race. I thought my biggest change as a facilitator at this point remained my ease with working

with those of other races without feeling judged for being the white person. It proved difficult for me to process all of these thoughts now because I became aware of so much I did not know before about myself like how having white privilege influenced my decisions. My biggest curiosity up to now was to see how my perceptions of my role as “other” shifted after having some time to reflect on this role. In the moment of this project, I was able to pick up on a lot, but I expected I would find more moments during my conclusion where being “other” shaped my facilitation of this project. I knew this remained an assumption, and it was time to see where I landed with my questions rather than trying to draw conclusions.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: CONCLUSION

My decision to wait until after seeing the girls' performance before writing my conclusion of this project seemed sensible. The project was a major stepping stone for me as a facilitator, especially having never before worked with an economically disadvantaged population. When I first heard about this project, it appeared to be like any other of my playwriting projects wherein I have facilitated the creation of new work devised by a specific population. However, when I discovered that the population I was to work with this time was of the homogeneous gender arising from an economically disadvantaged background, I was rather taken aback. I dealt with moderate trepidation and was thus hindered as a facilitator in my mind before I even began. I am relieved and fortunate that the process I embarked upon ultimately rewarded me, and caused me to grow as a teaching artist. I will discuss here how my guiding questions lit the way for me as a facilitator and how examining this has caused me to enter other projects in an assured manner.

Racial Fears

I found it interesting how I consistently questioned how to deal with racial-based topics during this project. There were many moments where I was not sure whether I should best focus on race, or just ignore it, when working with the eighth grade girls from the school. I described this as swaying on a racial pendulum, and it did prove difficult for me to arrive at a proper balance between the pull of focus and the push to ignore. I kept looking at this in black and

white, when I knew that the issue involved contained a whole lot of gray. However, due to my white guilt, the challenge presented itself in capital lettering and required of me a decision: LAND ON ONE SIDE OR THE OTHER. What to do? After all, I had climbed upon the pendulum willingly and accepted the dilemma. Now I must deal with it. What I realized after looking back on the project was that I needed to trust that my participants and I could handle discussing racial issues in a responsible way. In my sessions with the girls, I now notice many times wherein I discussed my fearing that I would offend them. For example, in my second session, I wanted to facilitate a project based on images, but I feared showing honest pictures that displayed racial-based conflict due to this very real possibility of offending. However, upon further reflection on such decisions, I discovered that offending the girls did not pertain to my fears as I had believed, but that having white guilt did. I felt ashamed to be from a race that has oppressed so many different types of people.

As I recount this project, I find that most of my fear was motivated by my assumptions about race. It was an unhappy surprise just how uncomfortable I actually was around people of different races and socio-economic backgrounds despite the fact that I am friends with many people of color. This presents me with real puzzlement because I feel that being able to have friendships with those of color should mean that I am comfortable around people of different races and socio-economic backgrounds. Nevertheless, issues that bothered me extended far beyond whether or not I could mesh and meld with other racial backgrounds. Surprisingly, the core of my fears assumed the form of inferiority due to my own race, and the inevitable discussion of issues wherein white people have oppressed others of color proves dreadful for me.

I felt like I was being judged for being the white person I am during times when the girls questioned why black people during the Civil Rights Movement were treated unfairly.

As to my expressed fear of feeling inferior due to my race, I think about white privilege. As a white person, I automatically gain a lot of privilege and power just because of my race. I did not realize the power and significance of my privilege until working in an inner city environment. When I felt as though I was the resident minority, I began to question my ability to relate to minority races that are outnumbered by whites. I discovered in the process that most of my past working environments consisted of populations where whites were the majority. This even extends to all of my classroom experiences during college where there were few students of color participating in the programs through which I earned degrees. I cannot ignore the fact that when I studied abroad in Thailand, I hung with a group that was predominantly white. I am naturally at home among those of my own race, but after realizing my discomforts during the school's eighth grade play development project, I wonder how much white privilege played into this.

My suspicion is that white privilege has caused me to be oblivious to issues akin to other races. I understand what happened during the Civil Rights Movement, but most of the discussions that I have participated in regarding minority races were facilitated by white teachers talking to a majority of white students. I found the conversation about the Civil Rights Movement with the girls to go in a different direction than I expected because my dialogue about the movement was shaped by the blacks gaining respect rather than the whites overcoming intolerance. I feel that having white privilege has caused me to merely consider how my own

race has conquered their struggles in accepting others instead of considering what it must feel like to be a the victim of intolerance.

I wish I could say that I understand what it is to be the recipient of unreasoned hate such as reared its head during the Civil Rights Movement, but as a white person, I do not experience the same type of intolerance that those of color likely have. Perhaps I have imagined myself persecuted at some time or another, but my white privilege has insulated me against any harsh effects. Facilitating the school's eighth grade play development project, allowed me to be exposed to a different racial and socio-economic point of view that I feel has encouraged me to become more aware of my privileges as a white person working in inner city settings. This increased awareness influences me to consider how I can incorporate my privileges into the service of others because I think it proves unrealistic for me to say I will avoid putting them to good use. I think that white privilege can vary in worth depending on the group I am working with. For example, when I was in Orlando working with populations that spoke English as their second language, my privilege became about my being able to communicate solely in English and not the first languages of my participants. Race may have been an issue in these scenarios, but it did not come across as markedly as with the girls. In reflecting on this, I think a big reason why race became central for me when considering white privilege is owing to the school's focus on the Civil Rights Movement because this was an event that was surely defined by racial means.

Focusing the project on the Civil Rights Movement allowed me to address many of the fears I associate with race. As much as I tried to avoid conversations about white people victimizing non-whites during the Civil Rights Movement, I discovered that I needed to separate myself from these discussions. As "other," I was constantly assessing what my status meant

when facilitating this project with economically disadvantaged young women. It was hard to put my fears aside because I was constantly studying and documenting how as “other” I was influencing the project. I discovered that I had to ignore “other” in order for the girls to have conversation that fully discussed all racial issues surrounding the Civil Rights Movement. I felt as though the girls were never afforded that chance because I allowed my fears to get in the way many times throughout the process. I found that the way I facilitated issues around race-based conflicts tended to only gloss over the subject because I feared discussions that focused on white people treating non-whites poorly.

This process has made me more aware of my racial fears, and I felt like I overcame a lot during this process, but I still have a lot of growing to do. Racial fears are not only attached to the past, but have roots that exist today. We may have studied the Civil Rights Movement that occurred during the 60’s, but I feel this movement still goes on in the present, especially in our current political climate. I have read many headlines since the project ended that have questioned the role race plays in society. I have listened to conversations that questioned if the United States is ready for an African American presidential candidate. Outside of the school’s eighth grade play development project, I have noticed many issues regarding race and socio-economic status and it continues to frighten me how much intolerance exists just based on race alone.

I may have been swinging and swaying on the racial pendulum during the project, all right, and truth be told, I will be good and dizzy before all is sorted out. I am still confronted with a quandary when working in inner city communities because I consider myself a decent, caring person who desires mutual respect with others. We are travelers together through life as

we find it. My goal is to improve it through the opportunity that I have. The pendulum slows as I commit to being myself, a good person, hopefully guided in simple faith to do right. I will allow myself to be more open and confident in my work as a teaching artist. Perhaps the pendulum signals that it is time for it to stop altogether. I know that my work is centered in the empowerment of youth and working away from all oppression of them. I trust that my confident desire to reach this goal is apparent in my work when facilitating projects with all types of populations.

Reconsidering Other

When I revisited how the Civil Rights Movement shaped my facilitation of this project, I was left pondering how “other” informed my decisions during this process. I was “other” to the rest of the group, not just racially, but socio-economically as well. However, as I facilitated the project, I discovered moments where “other” also had to do with age, authority, and education. I entered this project only considering “other” in terms of race, but noticed that the boundaries were not always defined this way. For example, when the volunteer started helping us, I thought that because she was African American it was easier for her to communicate with the girls of her same race.

At the time, I based my feelings of inferiority around race, but as I reflected on what happened, I have discovered that this was really based in my authority as the girls’ teacher being lessened. I find it interesting how I based my status as “other” on race first, but now I am wondering if other factors justified this role instead. I have discovered that focusing so much on race caused me to be oblivious to moments where age came into play as well as differences in

education and my authoritative stance as a teacher. When I go back through my “in the moment” account of this project, I found moments where I thought something outside of race shaped my role as “other,” and as much as I wanted to go back and clarify this, I was more interested in allowing these moments to stand based on race alone. It remains downright scary to me how many times I consulted race first, but I think I needed to become aware of this as a teaching artist who continues to work in inner city environments. Now that I have a new perception of “other,” and that race does not have all to do with it, I am starting to reconsider this status. This does not mean I am reconsidering for the purpose of this project, but as I enter future projects knowing that I could be “other,” I will not be entering on any basis of race.

I was aware of “other” before I began this project, and I observed by looking back on my session planning and reflections, that this role caused me to over-analyze how to work with the school’s student population. In fact, I found myself over-analyzing my differences to such a point that I doubted discussing “black issues” such as the Civil Rights Movement was an appropriate thing for me to do. This caused me to seek advice from the host teacher and reaffirm my decisions when an African American adult volunteer became a part of the process.

In my guiding questions, I wanted to know how being “other” would shape my facilitation and the direction of the project. I feel I shaped my facilitation against my own fears as “other” when discussing issues that seemed inappropriate to me. I evaluated inappropriateness through a racial lens or through my mind as “other.” As “other” it did not seem appropriate to facilitate the development of a new play around a historical movement where the girls could begin judging things based on race. However, the fears I had of the girls became the ones that I held about myself. I feared bringing up issues surrounding the Civil

Rights Movement because as “other” I did not want my connection to that part of history to be judged due to my being white. During one of the sessions, a girl brought up the KKK, a group consisting of white people that committed many acts of hate against those of color. I was extremely uneasy during this conversation but looking back, my biggest fear was that I would be seen as a member of that group. I feared that being white caused me to be associated with despicable organizations like the KKK even if I was not singled out for such during the conversation.

In connecting these thoughts back to being “other,” I am finding that most of the reasons I was “other” were due to my having white fear. Obscure phenomenon though it may be, my white fear existed for sure and came about through lack of knowledge about the other racial populations I worked with during the school’s eighth grade play development project. Intrigue stays with me as to how having white privilege gets in the way of my learning more about other racial populations. It was not a conscious choice not to learn about them, but my privilege as a white person has made me oblivious to characteristics of other racial populations that extend beyond the color of their skin. In looking back on my project, I was overwhelmed at times by how hard I tried to be politically correct, but it was not a matter of being PC, but of being able to connect to a group without fear of being viewed as “other.” In gaining more perspectives on this, I delved into how white privilege was being discussed and wanted to see if I could find any research about the ignorance I was feeling due to my racial background.

In *Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege*, Shannon Sullivan, Professor of Philosophy, Women Studies, and African and African American Studies at Penn

State University, examines how white privilege causes obliviousness to her races. She discusses how white privilege has transformed over the years and why it needs to change:

My account of white privilege, including the judgment that it needs to be challenged and transformed, is neither timeless nor ahistorical. It admittedly and perhaps inevitably (because of my race) is grounded in white privileged values themselves: in the desire to see myself as good and to eradicate any guilt that I feel as a racially privileged person. But it also is grounded experientially in the felt need to eliminate demoralizing pain and suffering that, while not essential or timeless, stretches across different historical moments, geographical locals, and racial groups. (Sullivan 196)

I agree with Sullivan that white privilege needs to be transformed because it caused me to have a difficult time facilitating the school's eighth grade play development project when it came to linking the script to the Civil Rights Movement. My white privilege got in the way of allowing the girls of color as well as the girl who was white to fully express their thoughts about the Civil Rights Movement because I feared any judgments about people from my own racial background. However, I feel that I will be able to approach this in a different way the next time I facilitate a similar project and use my awareness of "other" and my fears as a white person to allow myself to expand my knowledge of different races and socio-economic backgrounds.

I believe the more I consciously choose to remain aware of different racial and socio-economic backgrounds, the more unlikely that I will feel like "other." I gather this from my observations in my journal when I continued to blame my lack of knowledge about the girls' background to my feeling uncomfortable. I think I was correct in highlighting my lack of

knowledge, and I feel that I can address this by making a conscious effort to gain a deeper understanding of the populations I may work with. This increased awareness can happen through my experiencing things that are important to other cultures, i.e. food, local hangouts, music etc. Up until now, most of my recreation has taken place where the majority of people are white, and I feel that the more I experience different environments where I would be the minority, the more comfortable I would be in working with a diverse population.

Discoveries as a Facilitator

The transition from “other,” to an outsider, to ideas, began with my realization of how I was holding back during my facilitation. As the girls began adapting their play to the Civil Rights Movement, I discovered that racial and socio-economic issues made me uncomfortable, which never previously phased me. During the work on the play, I felt the most like “other” and found it affected my facilitation the greatest. I found myself influencing the girls in a way where we all avoided the heart of the issue just so I felt the more comfortable. This part of the process stands out the most to me as I look back on how my role as “other” influenced my facilitation of this project.

In searching for more specific theories concerning “other” in hopes of better understanding what happened during this part of the project, I located Joseph A. DeVito’s, from Hunter College of the City University of New York, chapter on power from his textbook entitled *The Interpersonal Communication Book*. DeVito observes that power separates people in a group (323). DeVito notes that “some people are more powerful than others; some are born to power, others learn it... power is never static” (323). When I think of DeVito’s observation in

terms of “other,” I find that the times where being white affected my facilitation to the highest degree was when I exercised the most power. As a facilitator, I took advantage of deciding a session’s course according to how I felt as “other.” For example, I skimmed the surface when it came to discussing deep issues revolving the Civil Rights Movement because I did not want the girls to view me as coming from the group that caused a lot of the conflict during the 1960’s. Once I realized the effects that my being conscious of “other” had on the project, I decided not to think about it, which resulted in my ignoring race. This allowed me to take on another role as an outsider to the girls’ ideas. This status as an outsider to their ideas provided me with a more comfortable way to enter the sessions. I realized that I could not control what the girls thought of me, and that it really did not matter in the end. What mattered most remained for the girls to accomplish writing a script that could be performed before the school’s community. As an outsider to their ideas, I transitioned my focus to the girls’ play rather than the racial background of those participating in the play.

As I watched the girls perform their play, I found myself thrilled to have been a part of this process. There are so many opportunities where theatre can be a useful tool to bring communities together. I understand that many community-based projects are being facilitated, and I know I will engage in another one no matter how I may relate with the populations. As I end this project, I have begun a fellowship that focuses on bringing arts to the community. The power that the arts can have within a community continues to fascinate me, but also how much a facilitator’s role can affect the process. I have noticed that in my city, there are many initiatives to bring the arts, theatre included, to underrepresented populations. I wonder about the

facilitators who may enter those projects, and whether their journey will be similar to mine, or very different.

It remains interesting to me how focusing so much on “other” caused me to react in such a way. I never anticipated that I would hold back as much as I did, and I feel it is important to share this experience with those whose wish to work on community-based projects, no matter what population is participating. I do not deem myself an expert on “other,” but feel that I have gained a lot of knowledge on the subject. I also feel that my experience with this role may not be the same for someone else. When I connect DeVito’s notion of power with “other,” I am left thinking that much depends on the facilitator as to how this role may take shape.

Theatre for Social Change

When I first began researching other perspectives on projects that were similar to mine, I found myself researching many ideas rooted in Theatre for Social Change. I felt that my project was Theatre for Social Change because of the racial and socio-economic stereotypes I wanted the eighth grade girls from the school to reconsider when it came to them wanting to use slang in their play. In the beginning of the project, the girls wanted to create a play similar to last years’ because they thought it was good. They identified with the play because it used a language that the girls were accustomed to, but I wanted to challenge their thinking and have them consider when slang was appropriate and when it was not.

When I thought about this in terms of Theatre for Social Change, I thought I did spark some change in the girls. This change may have been small, but I do not believe it needs to be huge in order to be classified as Theatre for Social Change. I also thought that the girls changed

in ways beyond my initial goals. The girls started with each other and fewer conflicts seemed to arise after the project ended. I had recently seen the volunteer that assisted the school's eighth grade play development project and she told me that she could believe the girls were the same group they had been at the start of the school year. She told me that they have befriended girls that they used to be hateful toward and now visiting takes place between them on a regular basis.

I believe the girls did change as a result of this project. I may have wanted to build a community in the classroom which sometimes does not equate to Theatre for Social Change, but I felt that the girls' reexamining their use of language in terms of the racial stereotypes they represent remained a big change for them. I thought that using techniques based on Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed allowed the girls to question not only their character role during a racial conflict, but their roles as well. I saw these moments with the most clarity when I felt my status as "other" at its highest peak. At those times when the girls began questioning how other races oppressed each other, I noticed their thinking start to change. I may have been fearful of the girls discussing issues where whites were the oppressors, but the girls started discussing racial and socio-economic tensions beyond those based in black and white scenarios. I have heard from one of their teachers that the girls have become very interested in current events on both a domestic and international level. I never witnessed this interest during the play development project, but I wonder if this interest was sparked because of their increased awareness of the Civil Rights Movement. It proves difficult to assess Theatre for Social Change, and I remain hopeful that this project not only built a community at the school but also initiated some change in the girls.

The Road Ahead

I have started working more in inner city settings since I finished this project, and I am finding that I have undergone many changes as facilitator. My awareness of white privilege continues to grow as a result of this project, and I find myself communicating more and more with those from other races on a daily basis. During the end of this project, I began a fellowship at the Regional Arts Commission with their Community Arts Training Institute. Many of the participants in this group come from non-white racial backgrounds, and I was excited when I was partnered with an African American female for my lab project. I saw this as an opportunity to work with someone of color while understanding that my white privilege has caused me to be oblivious in the past. When deciding on the population we wanted to design our project around, I came right out and told her that I wanted more experience working in inner city environments.

Expressing my interest in inner city settings with my lab partner may have struck me as strange a few months ago, but I trusted that she would not be taken aback by my suggestion. She said that she was excited to see someone like me reach out to a population that I know very little about. This comment meant a lot to me as someone who has undergone much stress during the school's eighth grade play development project when being white instilled much fear in me. I am finding that I can use my privilege as a way to learn about other races rather than close myself off to them.

In reviewing the school's eighth grade play development project, I see that I did not allow the girls to fully realize their thoughts about the Civil Rights Movement due to my white fear as "other." However, I feel that I was successful in that I gained the strength to tackle my discomfort by increasing my awareness of the effects "other" has in certain situations. I garnered

a lot of knowledge and realizations about myself as facilitator, and I am trying to use what I learned to afford me more opportunities to work in inner city-based environments. At the end of this project, I reconsider my guiding questions: How do I facilitate this project as “other,” and how does this racial identity affect the construction of my sessions with the participants? And I discover that when I was “other,” I allowed my fears as a white person to hold me back as well as to assume things throughout the project in terms of the group without benefit of supporting evidence.

It amazes when I look back at the “in the moment” part of my study and the many times I allowed myself to assume, rather than address, concerns with the girls. I assumed the entire time that the girls viewed me as the white girl who knew nothing about them, but at the final performance the girls wondered if I was coming back and told me how much they enjoyed the project, which are things I did not expect to hear as “other.” I have discovered that it remains easy to leap headlong into conclusions about groups I know little about, and I hope as other teaching artists enter settings where they may be “other” that they use it as an opportunity to become more aware about themselves, good or bad, and about their participants. “Other” caused me to be blinded by my preconceived notions based on my white privilege, and I now enter new settings as a facilitator filled with awareness and less afraid of being different.

APPENDIX: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



April 4, 2008

Laurie Melnik
Master's student
Theatre department

Dear Researcher:

After speaking with you via phone and reviewing your Thesis, Dr. Tracy Dietz, Chair of the UCF Institutional Review Board has determined that your Master's thesis research, "The Role of Other: An Exploration of a Facilitator's Role in Playbuilding with Economically Disadvantaged Adolescent Women," does not fit the definition of human subjects research.

Therefore, IRB review is not needed. We do request that you do not mention the site or the students by name in the resultant work.

Thank you for your time in resolving this issue. Please continue to submit applications to the IRB that involve human subject activities that could potentially involve human subjects as research participants.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Joanne Muratori'.

Joanne Muratori
IRB Coordinator

Cc: IRB file

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