

Dramatic Problem Solving: Transforming Community Conflict through Performance in Costa Rica

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1. Introduction

This study is an examination of how Dramatic Problem Solving (DPS), an interactive theatre based facilitation was implemented in a community with the goal of structural conflict transformation at a community, interpersonal, and intrapersonal level. By incorporating action research in a study of a theatre based facilitation model, the study merges the fields of conflict resolution with performance studies. The study's focus is praxis, equally examining theory, process and outcomes. The field of facilitated conflict resolution has often focused on process (Frey, 2003; Broome, 2003; Schwarz, 2005). The field of performance has often focused on the external expression and final outcome (Schechner, 2003; Park-Fuller, 2005). By combining performance studies, theatre for social change, and facilitation, this study provides an example of transdisciplinary research that is the hallmark of both conflict analysis and resolution and performance studies.

The study took place in La Carpio, a neighborhood composed of mainly Nicaraguan immigrants, in San Jose, Costa Rica. Performance Studies provided key theoretical insights into the formation of the analysis of the DPS model. The concept of liminality, that space created during ritual and performance that is in between the present and the future (Yancey, 2009; Golden, 2009) and *communitas*, the spontaneous moment when the individual members of the group become focused on the larger needs of the group and new, unforeseen actions are created via that energy

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(Schechner, 2003), were key for applying performance theory to the conflict resolution workshop model studied.

This study provides a bridge between the structured group facilitation conflict resolution models (Lederach, 2007; Broome, 2003) and the more free-flowing, interpretive nature of the performing arts (Grady, 2004; Marin, 2005; Mitchell, 2007). This was made possible by the use of a qualitative, participatory action research model that asked participants to be both informants and agents of change (Herr & Anderson, 2006). The theatre provides a space for this change to take form in a playful, safe, facilitated space. Several studies have looked at the ways theatre and theatre based exercises can be used for conflict analysis and resolution, often in the educational setting (Pecaski Maclennan, 2008; Schroeter, 2009; Snyder, 2008). This study looks at ways issues based theatre works in the community setting for conflict resolution.

Research participants were led through the DPS process, following a series of exercises and processes to identify a problem, look at the root causes of it, design a plan of actions to transform the conflict, implement the plan, and imagine and plan next steps for an ongoing process of community action. This examination of the full action research cycle with TO groups was lacking in the research. Though recently more scholars are beginning to think about TO in an academic light (Sun, 2009; Smith, 2006; Schroeter, 2009; Pecaski Maclennan, 2008), a study that involved follow up with a structured action plan within the TO framework did not exist prior to this study.

Performance Studies is focused on understanding the ways performances create and sustain meaning in a society (Taylor, 2002). Victor Turner believed in the power of performance to create liminality. The liminal, as defined by Turner, is a space or threshold that is created by ritual and performance where the norms of culture can be changed and broken by the actors. The creative, theatre based exercises and the performances within the research described here sought to provide the participants and the community a chance to examine a conflict in a "liminal phase" (1982, 27). During these times of liminality the participants can try on new identities, new behaviors and ways of dealing with

conflicts, themselves, and others. “This intermediary space ... is where symbolic realization takes place before it is transformed into everyday life” (Feldhendler, 1994, 104).

Schechner discussed the importance of liminality in performance. Schechner’s group, as did Turner’s original ethnodrama conception, used a workshop model (1998; 2003). This performance workshop is parallel to the conflict resolution workshop models proposed by Lederach (1997) and Schwarz (2002; 2005). In these, the facilitator works to create rapport, and a space of safety, trust, and honesty where people can be open and “discuss undiscussable issues” (2002, p. 97). Schechner argued that by getting the group to this level of confidence, in a liminal space where roles and past actions are seen as changeable, the group can work to transform conflicts. The workshop works, according to Schechner, as a way, “of re-creating, at least temporarily, some of the intimacy and security of small, autonomous cultural groups ... The aim of the workshop is to construct an environment where rational, arational, and irrational behavior exist in balance ... leading to expressive, symbolic, playful, ritualized, ‘scripted’ behavior. It is my opinion that workshops are more important than most people dream of” (2003, p. 110). All of the above components, clarity, goal setting, trust, creativity, liminality, and intimacy are important aspects of the DPS workshop model.

The workshop and the liminal space created can lead to what Turner called “communitas” (1982, p. 45). It is in this space, where Schechner states that there group may experience a, “leveling of all differences” (2003, p. 128). Through the ability of the workshop and the performative to create a liminal space in which communitas can happen and new, unthought-of consensus based agreements can result in a completely different set of actions taken by the participants in their lives following this experience.

Diana Taylor’s contributions are important for this study because she focuses on two central aspects of the study, Latin American performance and the role of women in performing meaning (Taylor, 2002; 2004). Taylor delineates between the archive and the repertoire with the former being the written, archival theatre that is found on proscenium stages and the latter being that which is created in cultures through the performance of rituals, protests. Often, these are

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acts taken on by members of groups with limited agency or the oppressed. This repertoire, argued Taylor, is what allows for these groups to have a voice. Her study of women, *Holy Terrors* (2004) and their wide ranging performances of gender roles and issues showed how this type of theatre could be used to question, threaten, provoke and change. The community based efforts of people trying to bring about community change through theatre is an act of performance; is part of the repertoire. The archive is reserved for the groups in power, for those with the highest levels of agency within the culture. This study, by involving immigrant women at the grass roots, seeks a better understanding of the repertoire. It asks the questions that Taylor does. Such as, what are the everyday performances of these women? What are their roles? Through an explicit performance of them there can be a challenging of the current order, a fresh look at the conflict.

One of the strengths of theatre based facilitated problem solving model is the way performance can make physical and real what is often unspoken or hidden. Cultures depend on signs being understood by everyone in the group and not questioning them. Theatre heavily utilizes signs and gestures as a way of presenting a point. Brecht spoke of the *gestus*, “the attitudes which people adopt towards one another” (2001, p. 86), stated through bodily expression. The various masks worn by people as they move through their lives can be taken off, put on others, and examined through theatre. Theatre is “transformational, creating or incarnating in a theatre what cannot take place anywhere else” (2003, p. 186).

With the Theatre of the Oppressed, the Brazilian Augusto Boal followed the line of Brecht’s Epic Theatre (Mumford, 2009), Grotowski’s Poor Theatre (Slowiak & Cuesta, 2008), and Schechner’s Performance Group (Schechner, 2003), in the desire to create a theatre that engaged and incited the public to thought and action. This work created what Sandi Diaz has called the anti-scenario. These “anti-scenarios provoke debate among audiences and question social and political structures, helping to bring about social change” (2007, p. 4). The TO, “is a system of physical exercises, aesthetic games, image techniques and

special improvisations whose goal is to safeguard, develop and reshape this human vocation, by turning the practice of theatre into an effective tool for the comprehension of social and personal problems and the search for their solutions” (Boal, 1995, p. 15). The system includes Image Theatre, Forum Theatre, Cop in the Head, Rainbow of Desire, Invisible Theatre, and Legislative Theatre (Boal, 1979; 1995; 1998, 2006; Baiocchi, 2006).

Storytelling is another aspect of performance that was part of the DPS model studied here. Storytelling is less formal and requires less traditional acting on the part of the participants. As Byrne and Senehi suggest, storytelling is low tech, a skill that is easy to attain, “everybody gets it” (2004) Zelizer found that storytelling and performance based sharing in post-war Bosnia between Bosnians and Serbs, Christians and Muslims, led to increased understanding. Performance was seen as central to coping with large scale conflict both during the war and post-war (2003). This demonstrated the power of performance to provide for the catharsis and metaxis necessary for carrying on in situations of conflict.

DPS combined the traditional facilitation models and behaviors as described by Schwarz (2002; 2005), Justice & Jamieson (1999), and Broome (2003), with the TO facilitation model known as the Joker system (Schutzman, 2006; Bentley, 2001; Boal, 1979). The Joker system originated in the Arena Theatre of Sao Paolo, Brazil. The Joker an on stage facilitator acting as narrator, commentator, a person with the power to stop the action, take the role of any other actor, and propose immediate and unexpected changes to the scene. How the performance went depended greatly on the Joker’s interventions, knowledge, energy, connection with the group, ability to ask questions and provide relevant information. He or she would frame the issues in new ways for the public to consider (Schutzman, 2006). These are all important tasks of any group facilitator.

As Boal and others developed this work into the current system of the TO, the Joker took on the role of facilitating the entrance and exit of the spectators into the scenes during Forum Theatre performances. In this new format the power of the Joker is given over to the spectators, or in Boal’s term, the spect-actors (Schutzman, 2006; Popen,

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2006). Bentley's interviews with six of the major TO practitioners in North America revealed that they have had to adapt their practices based on the needs of the participants. The TO Joker must be flexible in the face of changing participant groups and varied social and political contexts (2001). This represented a shift from the original design to a more participant led design; an even more dialogic approach to facilitated performance.

Recent studies of TO have revealed applications of the model in varied settings. Snyder (Snyder, 2008) studied adolescents and their identities. That study focused on the specific nature of the antagonists in the lives of the participants. The participants worked to identify their personal antagonists, those that were actively working to block their progress. The study also had the participants explore their inner antagonists, the "cops in the head" from Boal's structure (Snyder, 2008, Boal, 1995). Marin (2005) worked with Latina adolescents on issues of identity. Her study was an important mirror for this study as it worked with Latinas in the US exploring their own identities through Boal's work. Her results were summed up thus, "By creating an environment for emancipatory pedagogy, the study opened up a space for the participants to critically reflect on their own perceptions of how society portrays Lateen@s as a subculture. Through praxis, a symbiotic relationship between theory and action, the young people involved in this study have awakened in themselves a critical consciousness, described by educational theorist Paulo Freire as essential for social change" (3).

Sun (2009) completed a study on the use of theatre by preschoolers to promote breast cancer education and awareness among Chinese immigrant women. The results showed that women's awareness and knowledge about the guidelines for breast cancer screening were significantly increased. This study provides insight to the present study as it demonstrates another study using theatre for breast cancer awareness. It was shown to be a highly effective tool to increase awareness of the Susan G. Komen breast health guidelines. Rollin & Gabriel (2002) applied TO in their action research project resulted in a manual for use in a sexual health education program that featured Boal's techniques,

specifically Forum Theatre. The project was used in Guinea with refugees from Sierra Leone to perform trainings for facilitators and then about sexual health for youth refugees. The study stressed the importance of the necessary health services in conjunction with the information and dialogue that comes from the play.

All of the above referenced research indicated that scholars increasingly recognize the value of theatre and performance for increased understanding and dialogue around important conflicts. Systems of oppression and structures of violence continue to be at play, especially in the squatter's community that was the setting of this study. In order for this process to be effective in the view of the participants, the issues need to be real and urgent in their lives, something in which they "have an investment, situations in which they venture their lives and their feelings, their moral and their political choices" (Boal, 1995, 16). Through connecting to issues that are of such intimate connection to the participants, and working through a dialogic relationship with the facilitator, meaningful changes can take place.

2. Research Process

The participants were residents of La Carpio, a poor, neighborhood in San Jose, Costa Rica. This burgeoning squatter's community has over 30,000 inhabitants, the majority Nicaraguan immigrants. The participants were brought together via the CRHF (Costa Rican Humanitarian Foundation, www.crhf.org). This Non-Governmental Organization has been working in La Carpio since 1997. Previous research and workshops coordinated with the CRHF using the DPS helped to enhance the level of community trust and credibility helped me gain entry and acceptance in the community.

This study employed an action research model. The researcher worked directly with the group of women in the Core Group, guiding them through the DPS model utilizing theatre techniques to analyze a group-selected issue. Together, the researcher and the participants created an interactive theatre piece to present to the community for

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their input and ideas for transformational actions. This interactive theater production was designed to help people recognize and relate to the conflict, define and name it, and create a series of steps to act on it. From the community presentation there resulted an action plan that defined steps and actions the participants committed to completing. The researcher worked with the community to ensure that follow up on the stated actions of the action plan were attempted and/or implemented. The final step saw a follow up session with the Core Group that facilitates a dialogue around the changes that were implemented, what worked, and what did not. The Re-look Core Group then began to work on a new project utilizing the DPS process to bring more change to the community.

3. Procedures

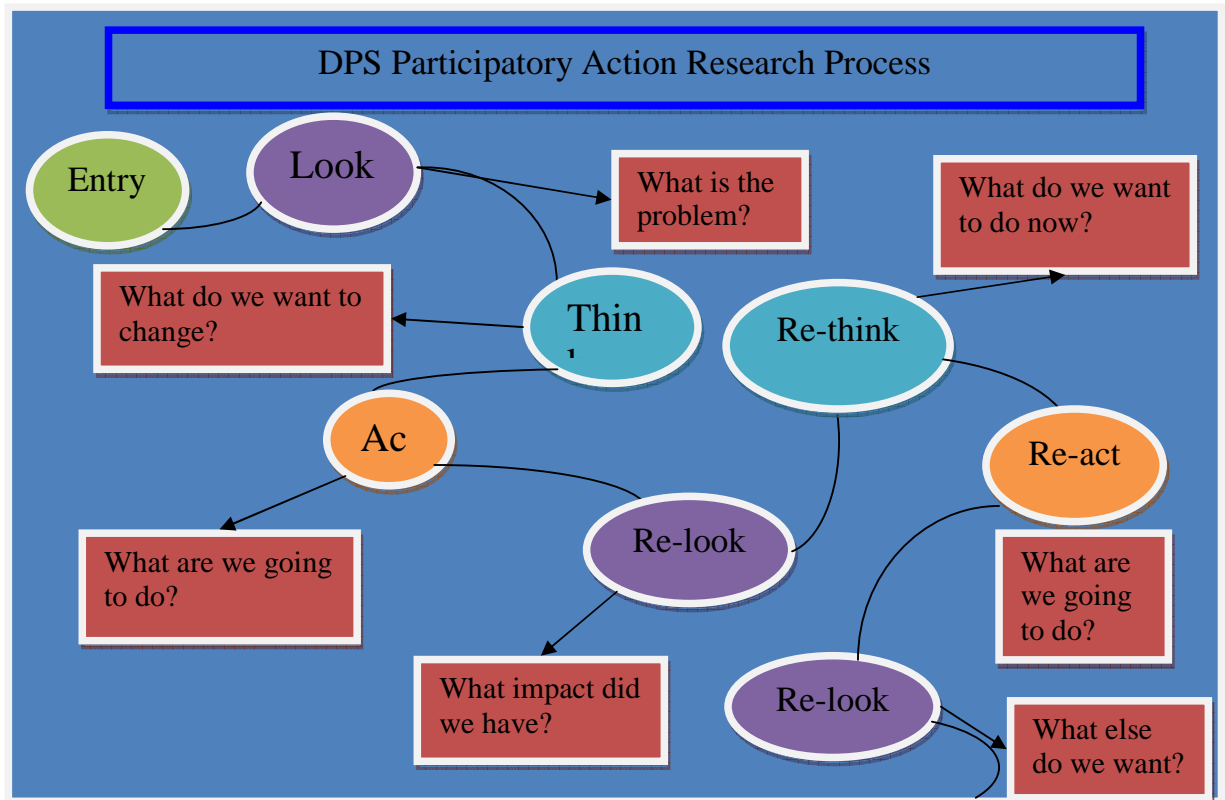
Three basic methodological foundations for the processes were employed. Those were Roger Schwarz's facilitated problems solving structure (2002), Boal's theatre of the oppressed techniques (1979; 1995, 2006), and an action research cyclical model (Stringer, 1999; Herr & Anderson, 2006).

Action research is a model of research in which the researcher directly involves the participants as researchers. The research is also always directly focused on analysis of a specific issue that directly affecting the participants. Actions that transform the problem are sought through this research methodology. The methodology is generally broken into four phases: look, think, act, rethink (Herr & Anderson, 2006; O'Connor, 2003).

In the look phase, the researcher observes what a community is like, their perceived needs and how they might be defined. This then moves into the think phase where the researcher, working directly with the participants, creates possible alternative actions that might result in positive change in the observed situation. Techniques utilized here include brainstorming, consensus building, voting, feedback gathering, and role-playing. Finally, the problem looked at and thought about is acted upon through a series of

interventions developed through the previous two phases. The participants themselves are the actors and therefore participate directly in the research while the lead researcher is there to observe, collaborate, and provide support so that there is follow through. This culminates with an analysis of the actions taken based upon the research. The method is cyclical and requires prolonged engagement with the community to see that there is continuity and a carrying out of the defined actions (Dick, 2005; Herr & Anderson, 2006).

Below is a graphic presentation of the DPS Participatory Action Research Process. The table demonstrates how the process was continually revisiting similar questions. It was cyclical but it did not necessarily come back to the same place. The overall goal was for movement and progress on an issue while still reviewing what has worked and what is now needed.



Schwarz described the use of a process for facilitated problem solving through a nine-step model. The use of this

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set framework is important for, as he states, “A group that solves complex problems using a structured approach is likely to develop a high quality solution” (2002, 221). Therefore, the DPS model utilized a structured model derived from Schwarz’s nine-step model. The nine steps are: 1. Define the Problem, 2. Establish Criteria for evaluating solutions, 3. Identify root causes, 4. Generate alternative solutions; 5. Evaluate alternative solutions; 6. Select the best solutions, 7. Develop and action plan; 8. Implement the action plan; 9. Evaluate outcomes and the process (2002; 221).

The Schwarz model fits well within the framework of action research. The nine steps can be chunked together into three phases. Proceeding through the first three steps, define the issue; think about desired outcomes; and root cause identification, is what happens during the “look” phase of the action research process. The middle three steps, generate, evaluate, and choose alternative solutions, are the “think” phase, where the group thinks about ways it can confront the issue. Finally the last three steps are the act phase, develop, implement and review the action plan, brings the cycle back to the beginning, to looking at the situation is now and thinking about creative ways to transform the conflict.

Augusto Boal stated that the, “real goal of the arsenal of the Theatre of the Oppressed is to contribute to the preparation of the future rather than waiting for it to happen” (1995, 185). With this forward looking approach to theatre, the TO has created a set of activities and theatre performance formats that work to analyze and provide solutions to the problems confronted by people living in the world. This research utilized Boal’s methods of using games that develop muscular and sensory awareness. The participants also undertook Boal’s techniques of using images and sculpting humans to create images of what emotions, issues, and conflicts look like to various participants. This results in an image theatre that can provoke people’s emotions and sensibilities in relation to a problem (O’Connor, 2003, Linds, 2006).

Improvisational theatre techniques for scene and character development are also part of the Boalian structure

(Boal, 2006; 1995; Rohd, 1998) and were incorporated into the model. These techniques, combined with the image theatre work, were used in the creation of the dramatic presentation that the participants presented to the community group in the style of theatre called, "Forum Theatre" (Schroeter, 2009). In this style of theatre, the audience is engaged by being presented with the opportunity to change the scene through their own actions. The audience has a chance, after viewing the play once, to stop the action and enter the scene to try new actions that may change the situation. The audience member is transformed from "spectator" to "spect-actor" (Boal, 2006). The audience then evaluates these proposed solutions and discussions of which interventions are the most applicable are held. The end result hoped for in Boal's techniques is that the audience member will then take home these ideas for new behaviors and apply them in his or her life. This forum theatre has "the capacity to produce different outcomes than those a public is presented with as given, rests with the theatre itself as an occasion whereby a critical presence can gather" (Martin, 2006, 28). It is in those liminal moments of critical presence, the moments of *communitas*, that the DPS process can begin to challenge people to consider new ideas (Schechner, 2003).

All three of these methodological formats have at their core the same structure, of first defining a problem, then thinking about it through varied lenses, and finally seeking to create concrete actions to change the situation. This is the focus of the model studied here, how did the merging of these three methodologies work to promote social change in this community of La Carpio, San Jose, Costa Rica.

The Core Group went through the nine steps of Schwarz's problem solving model in order to look, think, and act on issues and conflicts of importance to them. We utilized many image theatre exercises. These allowed for a non-verbal expression of feelings and knowledge about the conflicts. The process relied heavily on story telling constructs that engaged the whole group in an exploration of the conflict.

In the first sessions the group brainstormed a list of the most pressing conflicts/problems in their community. Through interactive, theatrical exercises such as "Snowball Fight", "Dueling Images", "Unpacking the Story", and "the

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Great Wind Blows” they narrowed down the issue. The group focused on the community trash problem. This was an obvious problem. La Carpio is located next door to the largest active landfill in Costa Rica (Sandoval Garcia, et.al, 2007). The company that operates the landfill provides the community with trash collection services as compensation for their presence and the daily passing of innumerable trash trucks. However, the trash service is irregular, there are no trash bins in the streets, large numbers of dogs roam the streets and tear open trash bags, strewing the rubbish everywhere. The community is located on a hill. Trash from the main road washes down on those living at the bottom of the river bank. The La Libertad community where this research took place is at the bottom of the hill.

Root causes were explored through the Boal exercise, “Two Secrets”; to uncover what was hidden. What the group found was that attitudes had as much to do with the problem as any other factor. Thus when the women named the antagonists and protagonists present in this problem, they named only themselves. Through exploration of the issue in depth and the increased self esteem built through the group building experienced, a metaxis emerged where these women could begin to look at their own behavior and be ready to change it.

A short play was created about the issue of trash in the community. The play came from the minds and experiences of the group members. They began with sculpted images and grew them into full fledged scenes. These scenes showed community members not acting in the face of the problem. Health problems and increased contamination surrounded the characters but they did nothing. The play was made, rehearsed, and ready to present to the community. This whole process, from first session to having a play ready to be presented, required 8 two-hour sessions and one extra rehearsal on the day of the performance.

The Community Group was the audience for the first play. “Theatre for a Better Future” was the title the group gave to their short play. The play was presented and was received with applause. Now the audience was asked to get out of their seats and intervene to change the problem. And they did. Three people called for a stop in the action on the

second run through. They entered with actions focused on raising awareness, taking responsibility for waking up on time, and organizing a campaign to petition the Health Department. When the intervention portion of the Forum was finished, the researcher facilitated a discussion about how people felt about the issue. They were asked to name how they felt about this problem/conflict after participating in this group performance. They listed such things as health, lack of communication, solidarity, humility, respect, love, cleaning, friendship, and an example for the community.

Based on these stated desires and the interventions seen in the forum theatre, the creation of an Action Plan for the community to deal with the trash problem was facilitated. The action plan had short, mid-range, and long term actions in it. It called for a day of cleaning, posting of signs indicating the days for trash pick up, a petition to send to the Ministry of Health was planned, and a day of education for the children of the community. The responsible people were identified and dates for implementation were agreed upon.

Over the course of the next three weeks the community completed all of the action plan steps. The petition to the Ministry of Health was signed by 106 adults. The signs announcing the trash pick ups were made and posted. A Carnival of Cleaning that included clowns, music, children's theatre, educational activities about trash, and a community clean up was held on a Sunday afternoon. Some of the older children created signs showing children cleaning up their garbage. These were laminated and posted around the center for all the children to see.

Following this success, the Core Group met again to begin the process of re-looking at the action plan and its impact. This facilitated processing session resulted in a song and a prayer about the new hopes they had for their community. One of those was for there to be more opportunity for them and their children. Another was to broaden their reach and open up the group. Gail Nystrom, director of the CRHF, had an idea to bring this group of women together with another group from the center of La Carpio, about a quarter of a mile up the hill.

The re-think phase of the action research process began. The women, inspired by Gail, were going to focus on

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breast cancer awareness. Most of these women had at one time been seasonal coffee pickers. They decided to create a play to help bring education and awareness about the breast cancer to the coffee pickers in the plantations. The play would be part of a three pronged education and health promotion project that the Foundation would bring to the plantations, including educational activities for coffee pickers' children, and free health screenings.

The process of creating a play about breast cancer began. Image Theatre and Storytelling exercises provided the foundational material. Stories about lack of education, opportunity and understanding were told. Images of children in the fields, of angry supervisors, of depression, were created. After several sessions the women asked me to write them a formal script. This was a variation from the first play, which had been rehearsed improvisation. They felt that if they were going to travel and present it that it should be a real play with a real script.

A script was written based on the stories and images. Rehearsals were carried out over the course of a month. The bulk of the directing and rehearsing was done by the women of the group. The researcher facilitated sessions only twice, once at the beginning of the month and once at the end. A date was set and the women were ready to take it on the road. The performances were also interactive, inviting the audience members to enter the scenes and change the choices made by the protagonist, creating a new outcome. Education about how to conduct self-breast examinations and breast cancer detection was shared. The children participated in the educational activities. The volunteer doctors and medical students saw many patients.

The play, *The Coffee Dance*, has now been performed many times all across Costa Rica. A grant for the project was attained from the Susan G. Komen Foundation. A documentary film was made about the process. These successes have emboldened the women to propose adapting the play to present it to other mainly Nicaraguan immigrant communities such as banana and pineapple plantation workers. They also began a new cycle of re-looking at their lives through performance. They decided to work on internal issues again. They defined the conflict to be addressed via

theatre as a lack of a name or story behind their face that was seen by the numerous volunteers that were brought briefly into their lives in La Carpio through the CRHF. They wanted to show that although they were poor women, they had a great deal of dignity. They began a new DPS process of storytelling and image theatre to create a play entitled, "The Dignity of Poverty." As of this writing the play is still not complete. However, the women of the group are committed to continuing the participatory exploration of their lives and their community's needs through performance.

4. Discussion

Three central areas of importance that emerged in the study are examined here: *communitas*, play, and action. The following is an analysis of this research in terms of each of these facets of performance as brought to light by this process and in terms of the existing literature and the contributions of the study.

Communitas

The DPS process was not searching for revolution as a goal or as an answer to a research question. However, the importance of abandoning fighting and seeking a single mind to be successful in the attainment of a goal was something that emerged in the data. The women reported anecdotally that one of the main accomplishments of the process was the lessening and even the elimination of infighting and gossiping within the group. The ritual space in the facilitation created a moment of *communitas* where they could come together and be of one mind about the success of the process.

This was especially true during the Re-Look Core Group phase. The group wanted to take on the breast cancer issue and take it outside of La Carpio. This was a great challenge to them. It challenged their existing roles and societal rules for someone in their place. It required a great deal of group focus, mutual support and recognition. Through storytelling and image theatre exercises this mutual recognition and group focus was fostered. *Communitas* was,

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however, not achieved until after the stories and images had been transferred into the script of *The Coffee Dance*. When each woman had their own part, lines and cues; then they began to see their mutual needs for support.

However, the presence of an outsider/researcher did not allow for *communitas*. To fully use the empowering nature of the liminal space created by the DPS process and theatre, they needed to be more autonomous. Due to cultural limitations they were restricted as to how much they could question the researcher's authority as the director and playwright. Therefore, a decision was made to leave the group alone to carry out the ritual of rehearsal on their own. From this emerged two things, an in-group leader in the form of Francella, one of the Re-look Core Group members, and a sense of *communitas*. The sense of being one supportive group, capable of completing this challenge, emerged. They set aside their personal differences, their disbelief in the capabilities of both themselves and their fellow participants. They recognized that this was a challenge that could only be completed through the concerted, directed effort of the entire group.

The emergence of *communitas* in this fashion is significant in that it demonstrated that the model did actually create *communitas*. However, the model can not forcefully create a spontaneous *communitas*. Elements that engender a sense of safety, unity, and a desire for change were present. But the emergence of a true spontaneous *communitas* could not nor can not be expected or predicted by the implementation of this model. It can be hoped for and its power as a vehicle for change recognized, but the DPS model does not automatically create a true *communitas*.

The core group that created the trash play, developed the action plan, and carried out the steps of the plan with enthusiasm could not be categorized as a group working from a place of *communitas*. The workshop model of conflict transformation utilized created a safe space. It led to a desire for change, a vision of a better future. It did not, however, create what emerged in the re-look core group's experience of the *Coffee Dance*.

Play

“Games for Actors and Non-Actors” (Boal, 2002) was first published in South America in the 1970s. Its title in Spanish was more extensive, “Games for Actors and Non-Actors with a Desire to Say Something Through Theatre” (Boal, 1975). Calling exercises which are designed to elicit emotions and create theatre that challenge existing power structures games speaks to the importance of play in the process. That a work of theatre is called a play in English is another reflection of this importance. Victor Turner subtitled his seminal 1979 work on ritual and theatre, “the Human Seriousness of Play” (Turner, 1979).

The Alternative to Violence Project has been using experiential games with prison inmates as the vehicle for personal development and conflict resolution since the early 1970s (www.avpinternational.org, 2009). The play creates a space, a liminal space, where you can behave differently, more like a child, and try new or old things. Break habits and create new ones in a safe space. Boal’s games work to “de-specialize the body” (1998, 49). These categories are designed to integrate different senses, touch, hearing, sight, through movement, memory, and images.

How did this playing of games translate into significant findings in this study? Is play a tool for empowerment and community change? The research would suggest this. Research field notes continually reference the laughter created by the exercises among group members. The games are fun. While having fun, the participants discovered, rediscovered, or integrated senses rarely used. The participants moved their bodies in new ways, listened attentively, limited and enhanced sight, recalled stories, shared memories, and expressed this all in images. This dynamic structure moved people out of their chairs and the limitations of verbal expression.

By doing this, the process had more democratic validity. The discussion was never dominated by one or two speakers. Everyone played the games. Everyone’s image was seen by everyone else. While laughing and playing the participants were being given a voice. The democratic nature of play translated into a more inclusive facilitation process. Women who at the outset of the process were very reticent

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and shy to speak were, by the second or third session, opening up and sharing their thoughts and opinions on the conflicts researched.

Whether or not the group would have acted as democratically, would have completed their goals, or given everyone an equal voice without play is not possible to say because play was built into the model. However, in this facilitation process, these goals of facilitation were met in an environment where play and fun were stressed.

Action

As Herr and Anderson pointed out, creating concrete action is the missing part of much action research (2006). The DPS process was created with the goal of bringing direct action to TO, which was also missing this action portion. Analysis of problems and proposed solutions without actual follow through was often encountered in both academics and TO. A pilot study of the DPS process had ended with frustration over not successfully completing the action plan. Why was direct action so difficult? Are people simply complacent? Was the facilitator solely responsible for the completion of direct actions? How does a performance-based model influence the possibility to complete direct action?

As Schwarz stated, “developing an action plan increases the likelihood of the group implementing a solution effectively and on time” (Schwarz, 2002, p. 230). The design of the model took this into account. The central focus of the community group performance was the creation of an action plan. The idea being that the direct actions proposed would have been fresh and important to the group, having just been performed and analyzed. This would be the time for the group to decide on which actions to implement. The action plan was created and it was successfully implemented.

During the second phase, an action plan was created and completed. But the action plan had more to do with creating and performing an interactive theatre piece. Following those performances there was no action plan. There was an interactive portion but no actions. This was because there was not a structure for follow up because the audience was not from the same community as the

performers. This would suggest that the model is effective in creating actions when the group is from the same community and are focused on an internal problem. The process does use the performative nature of the forum theatre to generate a call to action. The successful completion of that action requires that those that performed it and named it be able to carry it out.

In conclusion, the research demonstrated that through performance, group processes could lead to direct actions that changed participants' lives, empowering them to think in new and creative ways. The process left behind a group of people who have a framework for facilitating issues that arise in their lives. The significance of the study is that the process may be transferred to other settings, similar and dissimilar to the one presented here, so that community issues may be confronted in creative, dynamic ways.

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