Emotions as Data in the Act of Jokering Forum Theatre

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Abstract

For three years the author has been using Forum Theatre strategies as a means of experientially exploring classroom management with preservice teachers in a post-degree BEd program. During the third year, the author undertook an arts-based action research project to examine her actions as facilitator, or *Joker*, and to explore Forum Theatre's potential for redressing oppressions in a school setting. In the analysis of one challenging session, she suggests that emotions are important data to consider when deciding how best to respond in the moment, as Joker or as classroom teacher. Noticing responses of fear, anger or shame in oneself and others may help identify oppressive practices or tacit assumptions that deserve critical attention. The sociological concept of *saving face* has relevance for classroom management and is recommended as an area for further study.

Introduction

The "Barbed Wire Scenario"

> *On the provisional stage at the front of our university classroom, education students re-enact an event of random violence that occurred about ten years ago in a grade seven classroom. The adolescent aggressor apparently experienced what Goleman (1995) calls an "emotional hijacking," a reaction that erupts before the individual can assess the pros and cons of behaving in such a manner. Mike has performed it authentically today—without any forewarning, he has taken an imaginary piece of barbed wire out of his pocket and wrapped it around the throat of the student sitting in front of him. Len, who is playing the victim, helps us both see and feel the wire with his distressed body language. As the 'teacher' in this scenario, Krista has dispatched someone to the principal's office for help, and is now attempting to talk Mike down.*

> *Mike and Len, who are good buddies in real life, effectively underplay this scene in what Boal (1995) calls the "softly-softly" mode of action. Afterwards, still frozen in the physical image of violence, they calmly answer the spectators' queries about the characters. We learn that Mike's action has nothing to do with Len per se, that in fact there is no real relationship between these two students: neither friendship nor antagonism. The anxiety of the audience is now palpable. My own discomfort has two layers: Len's and Mike's authenticity in role awakens fear in me, and I realize that I have no idea how I'd respond if the situation were real. Then I start to worry about how to facilitate the session when I have no potential answer.*

A Forum Theatre Experiment in Teacher Education

Forum Theatre (FT) is part of a large repertoire of games and exercises known as the *Theatre of the Oppressed* (TO), an interactive form of theatre developed by Brazilian director Augusto Boal. TO, and FT in particular, have been adopted for use in many community settings to explore situations of oppression, injustice, and alienation. In the field of education, FT has recently been used to explore issues of body image (Howard, 2004), homelessness (Day, 2002) and the social problems experienced by minority youth in their everyday lives (Sanders, 2004). Although FT cannot provide broad solutions to social problems, it does allow a "personal, practical investigation" of the obstacles individuals face in a particular society (Schutzman, 1994, p. 145). I believe, along with Howard (2004), Salverson (1994), and Schutzman (1994), that there can in fact be no real social change if individuals do not first examine the necessity for change in their own lives.

I chose to use Forum Theatre to study classroom management because it offered a method compatible with my belief that students should construct their own knowledge about teaching.

In addition, I was drawn to the idea of practising a critical pedagogy, but uncertain about how I might enact it in an introductory methods course. I wondered if we might use Forum Theatre to identify some of the oppressive practices in schools. Could we, for instance, critically examine the commonplace assumption that classroom management means *controlling student behaviour*?

When I first started teaching the methods course, I used case study discussion to illustrate that in problematic classroom situations there is often no simple explanation or single solution. Shulman (2004), an advocate for the use of case studies in teacher education, claims that cases are "situated in place, time *and* subject matter" and that "they take advantage of the natural power of narrative ways of knowing" (p. 464):

> Case methods thus become strategies for helping teachers to "chunk" their experience into units that can become the focus for reflective practice. They therefore can become the basis for individual teacher learning as well as a form within which communities of teachers, both local and extended, as members of visible and invisible colleges, can store, exchange and organize their experiences (p. 465).

Shulman describes these "chunks" of teacher experience as being large and complex, usually intersecting a number of theoretical and descriptive categories. Feiman-Nemser and Featherstone (1992) note that beginning teachers simply may not have the knowledge necessary to effectively solve such complex problems; case discussion may merely strengthen their concern about controlling students' behaviour.

Although cases may add to preservice teachers' knowledge about teaching as being contextual and multi-layered, they may still not effectively promote *intuitive decision-making*, the type of professional judgment one uses to respond to a situation in the heat of the moment. It is usually assumed that one will acquire this skill during the practicum itself. I wondered if Forum Theatre might help participants understand that this type of decision-making is more than the mere exercising of common sense. FT scenarios based on real-life events have an advantage over case study discussions for exploring this kind of knowledge: they present smaller "chunks" of experience; they allow the consideration of important contextual clues like body language, gesture and emotion that case studies may not be able to portray with detail or nuance; they offer the opportunity to actively test hypotheses; and they provide immediate, precise feedback for actors' strategies or *moves*, something Hogarth (2001) claims is indispensable for the development of intuitive decision-making skills.

Forum Theatre gives pre-service teachers a chance to experientially explore how they might resolve problematic classroom situations. The physicality of the scene work makes it possible to consciously access and use our tacit knowledge about how schools normally work. After many years of schooling, most of us know what to expect from teachers and students. There are stereotypical actions and reactions that we recognize as belonging to classrooms, a vocabulary of educational habits that Shapiro (1999) would consider to be a kind of "situated knowledge" (p.

79), since it is inscribed in and on the body as the subject lives through certain experiences. This embodied knowledge is just one subset of our "cultural capital," a concept popularized by Bourdieu (1986) and defined by McLaren (2007) as being *"ways of talking, acting, and socializing, as well as language practices, values, and styles of dress and behaviour"* (p. 218, original italics). Boal (1979) also recognized that we have physical habits based on our social and work experiences, a kind of "muscular alienation" (p. 127) which may in fact deform or limit our responses in concrete situations. He starts his TO workshops with exercises that awaken the senses and the expressiveness of the body, for, if we are to experience other ways of being in drama work, we need to "undo" (p. 128) our habitual ways of moving through the world.

Imagination is also an important tool to help people develop their practical, intuitive reasoning abilities (Claxton, 1996, p.55). Forum Theatre scenarios of classroom situations create a virtual world in which one can test one's strategies and decisions without dire consequences; it is a *practicum* in Schön's (1987) sense of the term:

> A practicum is a setting designed for the task of learning a practice. In a context that approximates a practice world, students learn by doing, although their doing usually falls short of real-world work. They learn by undertaking projects that simulate and simplify practice; or they take on real-world projects under close supervision. The practicum is a virtual world, relatively free of pressures, distractions, and risks of the real one, to which, nevertheless, it refers. It stands in an intermediate space between the practice world, the 'lay' world of ordinary life, and the esoteric world of the academy (p. 37).

Based on this definition, Forum Theatre may provide more of a practicum than the actual practicum that preservice teachers are required to complete as part of their programme of studies. One participant felt that our FT work was an intermediate space between the university classroom and the school setting:

> It's one thing to read a book about classroom management and intellectually think through how you would implement strategies. It's another thing to get up in front of your classmates, who you are comfortable with, and role play, and take suggestions from people on what to do, and try different things. And then it's *another* thing to actually be in the situation. And I know that when I was in the situation in *my* placement, it was like, oh my God, what the *hell* am I going to do? Now I didn't think back to Forum Theatre. But I think that unconsciously it helped. Because it upped the ante. So you don't go from text book to a real classroom. You're at least – there's an intermediate step. And I found that helpful (recorded discussion, January 4th, 2006**).**

If Forum Theatre can provide an "intermediate step" between text book knowledge and classroom action, what might the salient quality of such a step be?

In TO work, spectators are also actors, creating and modifying what happens on stage. These *spect-actors* (Boal, 1979) experience a dichotomous awareness, a doubling of the 'I' that occurs when one consciously plays a role. It may explain why actors frequently talk about the characters they play in the third person. A subject belonging to the social order we call 'reality' goes on stage to create a character, an 'other-I' who belongs to the aesthetic order called 'fiction.' The second subject is created by the actions and choices of the first subject. The actor "can see himself in the act of seeing, in the act of acting, in the act of feeling, the act of thinking. Feel himself feeling, think himself thinking" (Boal, 1995, p. 13). Boal suggests that this split awareness, or *metaxis*, is the "essence" of theatre, and that it may in fact be cultivated in our everyday lives. Perhaps such an awareness underlies what Schön (1987) has called *reflection-in-action*, that ability professionals possess to evaluate and respond to new or problematic circumstances in the present moment. Forum Theatre may provide small enough chunks of experience and a slow enough pace to allow us to notice what we think and feel as we take action. Once we become aware of how we structure our attention in a given situation, we may be in a better position to refine our reflection-in-action and improve our intuitive decision-making.

An Action Research Project: Questions, Methodology, Classroom Process
My first experiments convinced me that I needed to learn more about effectively facilitating FT. Like Conrad (2004), I believe it takes time and experience to sense the right moment to intervene, or the best question to ask. In 2005, therefore, I embarked on a self-study, and chose a programme of critical-emancipatory Action Research (McKernan, 1996) as an appropriate method to investigate the following questions:

1. How might I sensitize preservice teachers to the consequences and implications– the *backtalk* (Schön, 1987)–of their actions in a classroom setting, without imposing my own values and ideas?
2. What is the potential of this medium for identifying and transforming oppressive educational practices?

A teacher with 15 years of classroom experience observed every Forum Theatre class and met with me afterwards to discuss what I had done. I audiotaped these conversations. With the permission of the preservice teachers, I also videotaped our Forum Theatre classes, primarily to have a record of what was said and done. The tapes were not for public viewing. I also used transcripts of classroom discussions and reflective writing pieces from participants as additional data. Writing journal entries after each class led me to further questions and associations. For the protection of participants, I changed names and information that might lead to their identification. Approval for this project was granted by the St. Thomas University Ethics Council in 2005.

In the Forum Theatre classes, preservice teachers first discussed problems of classroom management they either witnessed or experienced. Besides using their own memories of being a

student in school, many of them drew on their experiences as camp counsellors, supply teachers, or volunteers in classroom settings. I asked them from the very beginning to practise using a professional discourse and not identify teachers, students or schools. They then had to present a scenario of a typical problem any teacher might face. Their scene had to end with the problem unresolved, as is customary in FT work.

The groups gave their presentations a title and recorded them on file cards, which I collected. I wrote the titles on the blackboard as a tentative programme for performance. After a short rehearsal, the scenes were played through without interruption. When the audience had determined which scenario they would first like to explore, they could, on the next playthrough, stop the action at any point and direct the actors to try something different – a tactic called *simultaneous dramaturgy* (Boal, 1979). Or, if they were feeling brave, they could take the role of teacher and attempt a response themselves.

The Education cohort consisted of 60 people divided more or less evenly between elementary and secondary streams. The population was primarily Caucasian middle class, like me; the largest minority in this cohort was a small number of francophone students of Acadian heritage. All individuals secured spots in the programme based on strong academic achievement and a solid record of volunteer work and/or teaching experience. Approximately one third of the cohort was male, with a presence in both the elementary and secondary streams. The post-degree Education programme was intensive, with students completing two years of academic work in 10 months in addition to15 weeks of practicum. There were a number of compulsory courses that all 60 students took together, which facilitated team-building. The cohort therefore gelled as a community early in the first semester. I relied on that feeling of community as the basis of our trust and sense of safety in the Forum Theatre work.

Most of the students had no drama experience whatsoever. While I encouraged everyone to take part, I left the degree of participation entirely up to the individual. I underlined that our classroom was a laboratory, that we were testing our hypotheses through action, and that any trial which did not work provided us with as much important information as those that did. As Hogarth (2001) claims, any disconfirming evidence is indispensable to a sound scientific method, a method which helps secure the validity not only of abstract theories but also the common-sense variety.

In the journal entries that students wrote after our first session, people expressed varying levels of comfort with the work:

> *At first I was a bit nervous about what we were going to do today because all I heard was that we were going to act. I felt more at ease after you explained the lesson, and I was fine doing a role play within a group. I enjoyed having the*

opportunity to see the different scenarios because they help us learn. I also liked that there were no wrong answers. It is all a learning process. We learn from each other.

I enjoyed both acting and observing and found both to be equally fun and informative.

I was not entirely comfortable during the Forum Theatre because of the video camera. I was conscious of where the camera was at all times, which distracted me from the role play.

I think giving the option to just watch rather than partake was important to help the comfort level in the class. I learned that there are multiple solutions to classroom management problems and now will remember to be open to new ideas if one approach isn't working.

I really enjoyed today's lesson. There are many times we (as teachers) have been in these situations but have not had the added help of having other teachers to help you. An experience like this is so valuable because we have 60 different perspectives to look at this one problem (all entries from October 20th, 2005).

Reconstruction of "Barbed Wire" Video and Transcript, October 25th, 2005

When transcribing the "Barbed Wire Scenario," I was startled to find that I had missed a suggestion for a potential resolution offered by a female participant during the session. I knew I had been unsettled by the scene, but this discovery confirmed to me that my ability to respond had been affected by my anxiety. The scenario was the one that most people in the class elected to explore that day, and I had reluctantly gone along with the consensus. At first I believed that my resistance was due to the fact that I could not imagine a possible solution as I had done in other scenarios. Even though I had never at any time shared my alternatives for action with the class, perhaps the simple fact of knowing what I myself might try had given me a certain security as a beginning Joker. On this occasion, however, my need for an answer was also driven by my need for security as I dealt with material that I personally found disturbing. I therefore decided to analyse the session in depth, so that I might determine what to do should similar circumstances arise in future FT work.

In the following section, I reconstruct from the transcript and video a narrative of our work on the scenario described at the beginning of this article. I attempt a thick, expressive description of our move-testing and discussion in order to give readers a feel for the kind of give and take that occurs in Forum Theatre work. In order to bring the session into focus for the reader, certain sections of our discussion have been condensed, edited, or omitted. These actions are congruent with Eisner's framework of "educational criticism" (Eisner, 1994) in which the author/critic describes an educational milieu, selecting significant qualities to support her/his idea or theme. If the description attains a certain *verisimilitude*, then the readers may in turn form their own opinions and interpretations about the actions we took, or did not take (Barone & Eisner, 2006).

The narrative is in italics. There are several "interruptions," a layer of commentary written in regular Times Roman font to highlight critical opportunities I missed as Joker.

Move-testing in the Safety of a Virtual World

In the next 'beat' of our classroom scenario, Judy jumps to her feet to assume the role of principal. She is a self-possessed young woman who has regularly spoken up during discussions in this large class. "Mrs. Lucky," she says to Krista with utter seriousness, "is there anything I can help you with here?" The class laughs in response to the irony of the name that has surfaced in the moment of improvisation. Krista, feeling helpless and speechless, merely points to the two students locked in their violent embrace. Again there is laughter.

"Mike, why are you choking Len?" says Judy, who sounds, but does not look, confident.

"I want to."

"You want to," Judy repeats. "Has Len done anything to you recently? Are you angry with him?" Because this ground has already been covered in the initial questions directed to the characters at the beginning of this session, the query sounds a little desperate.

"No."

"You're not angry with Len," Judy paraphrases. She turns to Len, and with a little ironic chuckle, asks, "How are you feeling, Len?"

In a choked stage whisper, Len gasps, "I've been better." The class laughs. Sometimes laughter in uncomfortable situations like this indicates that people are resisting taking the work seriously. Today I get the impression that the laughter has more to do with release from the unrelenting anxiety stirred in us by the scene; it is a recognition that, thankfully, there is fiction in this reality.

Julie continues her interrogation: "Mike, do you realize you are hurting Len?"

"Yup," he says, almost nonchalantly.

"Do you want to hurt Len?" she pursues.

"Not really Len."

"Not really Len. So do you think we could maybe let go of Len and figure on what's going on here?"

"No."

Now Lauren calls for a freeze of the action. She wants the principal to immediately ask Len how he is when she walks in the classroom, and to ignore Mike. If one is to judge by the rising murmur in the class, people have strong opinions about this suggestion.

Paul disagrees: "I think the situation at hand is totally about Mike, and it's not about Len. So if you address Len first, you're ignoring Mike right to his face and the situation is only going to escalate." I hear some "yeahs," and see heads nodding.

Paul earned a lot of respect from his colleagues in a previous FT scene when he found a non-confrontational resolution to junior high resistance.

Debbie sides with Lauren. "I think a lot of the time we focus too much on Mike. Mike has to realize that Len is a person and is real and has feelings, because sometimes some kids don't even think about what they're doing."

I remind them all of what Mike said in response to an earlier question: it is not Len he wants to hurt.

Nathaniel now wants to ask Mike the following questions: "Why the anger, Mike? What's going on here?" I wonder if I have set Nathaniel up with my last comment. We have already determined that Mike is not interested in discussing his 'problem.' However, I encourage Nathaniel to try it, aware that changing the person – and gender – of a character has the potential to change the direction of the action.

Melanie is in favour of this change: "It makes sense that you bring in a man, because, I mean," she waves her hand in Mike's direction, "he is the aggressor in this situation, and we are girls. But you, Nathaniel – automatically as a man, coming into the grade seven class, you have all the power? And so if you have an older male come into the room, then he can start to control the situation." Here is another word that usually surfaces in classroom management discussions: control. In this context it casts a patriarchal shadow.

Melanie was an Elementary preservice teacher with a lot of supply teaching experience. Why did she choose the word "girls" instead of "women"? Was she talking from a student's or a teacher's perspective? Why did she feel that a man in this situation would "automatically" have more power than she might? What kind of power are we actually talking about? Are there styles of classroom management that people would consider to be associated with one gender or the other? These questions might have opened up the discussion if I had thought of them at the time.

There is discussion about the pros and cons of males and females interacting with Mike in this situation. Another female student does not share Melanie's opinion. She claims that an aggressive man may in fact make things worse, whereas a female may be easier to talk to. As usual, I refrain from offering my opinion, although maybe the Joker should, at this point, play the devil's advocate. Women have the ability to be aggressive and controlling in classroom situations, whether or not the style is perceived to be a more masculine form of authority. Likewise, men are capable of connecting to students with compassion and care.

In real life, Nathaniel is an enthusiastic and personable individual. Now in role as the principal, he saunters into the virtual classroom with hands in pockets, his relaxed manner a sharp contrast to the tension of the tableau that Mike, Len and Krista have sculpted for us. "Hey Mike," he begins, "What's the problem here? You seem pretty angry. What's going on?"

Mike says laconically, "I'm just choking Len."

Nathaniel repeats the answer, as Judy did: "You're just choking Len." He briefly pauses, intently observing Mike. "Mike, did anything happen today that you want to talk about? Do you have any issues at all?"

"No." I can imagine a twelve year old Mike, having suddenly and uncontrollably lashed out, being at an uncomfortable loss to explain the situation.

Nathaniel continues, "Well, Mike, you have to understand the consequences of your actions." The word 'consequences' sets off my internal alarm. Is Nathaniel going to lose Mike? "If you do hurt Len," he continues, "do you realize what might happen beyond the school environment? There might be some legal actions. Do you care about those?"

Len breaks out of Mike's grip and calls a freeze. "I'm sorry," he says to us with exasperation, "this seems all well and good, but just like we learned in the first couple of playthroughs, you can't have a fifteen minute conversation." The class laughs. "This is supposed to be over with quick, and if it isn't, then you have a duty to protect me, and do whatever you have to do." It is true that this is a time-sensitive situation; however, the window of opportunity must be gauged by how Mike is reacting and not by any external measure. Mike has not yet escalated his response.

Nathaniel agrees with Len. He says to us, "Len makes a good point. During a presentation we had in another course, one of our guest speakers told us how he knocked out one of his students." He chuckles. "Mike is a big guy. You know, I don't think one punch will do it." The class roars with laughter. Len steps back into position and, in a strangled voice, urges Nathaniel to try something. Now, however, Mike raises the stakes; he informs us that every time Nathaniel steps closer, he will pull the wire tighter. Mike's choice for his character will make it tough for anyone to respond using force. We are faced again with the harsh reality of this fiction.

Whether or not that guest speaker/teacher successfully managed his situation with a physical response, it is a direction I do not want to pursue. Alongside my concern for the players' safety is the wish that violence not be the solution to violence.

Sheila raises her hand, which I acknowledge, but first I offer Len the chance to share his ideas and take the place of the principal or teacher.

"No, I – I kind of know what works."

Mike affirms that his group knows how the situation was resolved. It had not occurred to me that someone might already have a solution, and I am already wondering how it has affected the players' responses to their classmates' suggestions.

I turn back to Sheila. "Well," she suggests, somewhat uncertainly, "why not just – maybe try asking him if there's anything we can do or give to him to make him stop?"

Immediately I turn to John, who also had his hand raised. He believes that the only option we have for saving Len is to overpower Mike, and proposes we get as many men into that classroom as possible. A flood of comments washes Sheila's suggestion away: Carl insists that the police would be called and charges laid; Judy tells us how a lock-down in the school would ensue and how the situation might indeed end up being resolved with physical force. I cling to John's suggestion like a drowning person to driftwood and ask for male volunteers to come forward. Five of them step forward to join Nathaniel in our imaginary grade seven class; they stand in a circle, creating a noose of male faculty around Mike and Len.

No one moves or speaks on stage. The spectators silently observe the deadlock. We are choking Mike, who in turn is choking Len.

It had been a shock to transcribe Sheila's wonderful suggestion and realize that its potential had not registered with me during the class. Her alternative suggested rapport, empathy, and the possibility of a non-violent solution. It deserved a playthrough even if she were the only one who wanted to see it, because the action was so different in tone and perspective from anything we had yet done. I had in fact silenced Sheila's voice by not giving her an opportunity to try her experiment. Thankfully, the performers picked it up, their hearing perhaps sensitized by the knowledge they held about the outcome in real life. Mike later told me that when Krista had first shared the problem with the group, a resolution had been no more evident to them than it was to us.

Len again breaks free of Mike's stranglehold. He says, "I think one thing we should think about though, before it gets to this is, were all the right questions asked?"

Mike, in synch with his friend, concurs: "I think we ignored a question that was asked."

Paul objects. "But as soon as you have a weapon that comes out in the classroom, that's what you have to do."

"I know," Mike says, "but by the time it takes you to get a message to the office and get the male teachers here, one question could defuse all of this. In real life, the question was, 'What do you need?'"

Andy then fires the question at Mike: "What do you need, Mike?"

"Say <u>please</u>."

"What do you need, please?"

"Say <u>please</u>," repeats Mike.

Jeanne gets it. She asks him, "Could you <u>please</u> let go of Len?"

Mike releases Len.

The relief I experienced at the end of the scene made me aware of just how much anxiety the image of violence had stirred in me. The following journal entry, written by a male preservice teacher, indicates that I was not the only person to feel this way:

> The role play with Len and Mike was very effective. It caused an escalation of anxiety and endowed the role play with a 'real world' quality. Analyzing what questions were asked of Mike and what questions were not, showed how difficult common sense is to practice when anxiety rules (October 27th, 2005).

If Sheila's suggestion appears in retrospect to be the "commonsense" position, how is it that so few of us at the time recognized it as such? What prevented us? I cannot speak for the other participants, but in the face of what I personally felt to be an untenable and frightening situation, I believe I turned to a male voice and went with the suggestion of force because I felt on some tacit level it was the *answer*. It felt familiar; it was what I *knew*, even though it was not what I *wanted*. However, had I responded immediately to Sheila's suggestion, I may not have pursued John's idea, which enabled us to see the hopelessness of answering force with force. For me, and perhaps for others, the lesson came through the juxtaposition of the two extreme perspectives.

The Joker can be replaced by an audience member, just like any other role that is being played out in a Forum Theatre session (Schutzman, 1994, p. 150). Mike and Len, both of whom already had extensive teaching and facilitation experience, were beginning to head in that direction by acknowledging Sheila's question. Jonathan Fox, in his work as director of Playback Theatre (1986), advocates a "spontaneous leadership" (p. 112), a "power which moves from person to person according to the needs of the moment:"

> Such fluidity requires humility on the part of the director and courage on the part of the performers, for any one of them may need to take over leadership at any time. It is a philosophy which demands a highly mutual and adult respect between group members, and will not work in a context where the leader craves veneration and the members crave a guru (p. 113).

"Spontaneous leadership" in a classroom setting requires openness and vulnerability on the part of the teacher; it also requires students to give up relying on the teacher as the authority or expert, a pervasive belief within our culture (Britzman, 1991). This belief was probably active in our university classroom. One individual expressed her struggle with the "myth" in this comment about the FT work as a whole: "What was new to me were that there were different ways [of responding]. I kept waiting for you to tell us which one was the *right* one" (Discussion, January 12th, 2006). In this particular session I learned that I too was still influenced by this myth, in spite of my constructivist philosophy of teaching and learning. I was not able to tolerate the uncertainty of the situation and was feeling critical of myself because of it. As Langer (2005) points out,

> When we're hard on ourselves, it's because we have a very rigid sense of what we're supposed to be doing. We run from doubt because we feel we should know. Ironically, people want choice yet are afraid of uncertainty. But the truth is, *if there is no doubt, there is no choice*. If we recognize that doubt allows choice, we can become mindfully creative (p. 65, original italics).

Had I been more comfortable with *not knowing*, I could have invited Len or someone else to facilitate rather than try the role of principal. It would have been an appropriate action to take in a course about learning to teach.

> *Mike explains: "That's how this situation was resolved. Everybody was telling me to stop, or asking why I was angry. And the guy wasn't upset; he was just – not quite all there."*
>
> *Krista elaborates: "This story happened in my class when I was a student. Our bus driver happened to be in the building and he was the one who came in and asked the guy, 'What are you doing?' Then he kind of threatened him by saying, 'If you keep doing this, you'll get expelled, and you won't be able to come on the bus.' And they had a good relationship, the bus driver and him? He said, 'If you do this, you won't be able to travel with your friends and me.' Then he asked, 'What do you want me to do?' And as soon as he said that, the student, I guess because he was feeling threatened and just wanted an out, said, 'No one said please.'"*

The next step, had the role of Joker been adopted by someone else, might have been to have Sheila repeat her idea so that everyone could hear, and then offer her the chance to play it out. Instead, Mike and Krista gave us the real-life solution. They were possibly responding to the frustration people were feeling after our fruitless attempts to change the course of the action. However, it was a second unintentional silencing of Sheila's voice. One of the toughest things for a beginning Joker or teacher to learn is to let individuals discover their own answers. Sheila knew she was headed for some tough classes at the high school where she would be doing her first practicum, and she told me afterwards that our scenario had made her even more anxious about what she might have to face. It could have been a powerful moment for her to have tried her suggestion out in the relative safety of our class and found that it worked, particularly since she was one voice against the many.

> *No one said please. From the class, I hear murmurs and tones of insight. Tim, however, is not satisfied by the pacifist solution: "I'm just thinking, like, Mike is really choking Len. Len is bleeding. Your six seconds of questioning is up, and you have to do something to help Len, right? That's when reasonable force can mean a lot more to a judge. So what do you do to Mike?"*
>
> *"It's not a physical issue," Paul protests. "Mike is not that bad–"*
>
> *"But let's think about it!" Tim retorts. "Let's say you don't come up with the right question. You've got to do something!"*

> *Paul is adamant. "Mike doesn't want to do this," he asserts.*
>
> *Mike jumps in. "It wasn't a matter of the right question," he maintains, "but you didn't give me an out. Nobody in all your questions gave me a chance to get out. It was, what are you doing, why are you doing it, bla-bla-bla, but you never opened it up for me. Like maybe I had the resolution all along. Maybe it was the teacher the day before who told me to say please, and it pissed me off, and so I decided, I'm going to show them that they have to say please too."*

Face-Work and Emotional Attunement in Classroom Management

I later e-mailed Mike to ask what exactly he had been waiting for in the scenario. His response indicated that he was listening for a particular *quality* of response:

> *Dear Anne,*
>
> *I was not waiting for a particular question but I was waiting for a particular type of question. All the comments that the other students were making were confrontational, or they were comments trying to figure out why I was behaving in said manner. Confrontational comments like "You can get in lot of trouble for this" or "Stop it right now!" are just the kind of things that would have made my character determined. Time spent trying to figure out why I was choking the other student was wasted, because I didn't really have a reason outside my will to disrupt. I felt that the character wanted to take his disruptions to a new level, but once he elevated it, he couldn't back down. Had the "principal" or the "teacher" in the situation put the ball in my court though, I could have set the terms. I was waiting for a question that would do this. Something like, "Mike, what do you need?" or "What can we do to get you to stop?" These questions are substantially different from "Mike, why are you doing this?" I couldn't admit in front of a crowd of peers that I had no reason. Also I couldn't lose face by giving in to the demands of the authorities. In simple terms, I needed a little face.*
>
> *Hope this is helpful, Mike* (E-mail, November, 2005).

Mike's e-mail demonstrated how capable he was of imagining himself in this particular student's shoes. His prior knowledge of the resolution and his awareness of the split between Mike the character and Mike the preservice teacher allowed him to consciously listen for a "chance to get out." Neither confrontational moves nor requests for explanations offered the character the opportunity to save "a little face" with his peers, the group whose consideration would probably matter most to an adolescent in such circumstances. Mike's interpretation of the situation's dynamics in terms of face led me to wonder about its contribution to classroom interactions in general.

Face may be defined as a positive social image of the self that an individual holds and expresses in verbal and non-verbal ways during interactions. Goffman (1967) describes two orientations to

"face-work": a defensive orientation in which one is primarily concerned with preserving one's self-image, and a protective orientation in which one takes action to safeguard the self-image or reputation of others. Underlying most social interaction is a tacit understanding that each person will conduct himself or herself in such a way as to save face and to give face to others. Goffman understood that face-work was motivated by embarrassment or anticipation of embarrassment, but he focused on what happened between individuals and avoided discussing their feelings (Scheff, 1990, p. 75). Scheff points out that face-work may in fact give rise to strong emotions *within* individuals:

> When there is a real or imagined rejection on one or both sides (withdrawal, criticism, insult, defeat, etc.), and the resulting emotions are not acknowledged, the deference-emotion system may show a malign form, a *chain reaction* of shame and anger between and within the interactants (p. 76).

Nathaniel, who is a personable and enthusiastic individual, went into the *Barbed Wire* scene fully prepared to engage Mike in dialogue. When that avenue yielded no results, he introduced the idea of "consequences" which, in the heat of the moment, he described as "legal actions." Mike felt that his character would not take positively to this approach because it did not offer "an out," and it is possible to imagine how his anger and embarrassment might continue to build. In fact, in his last statement to the class, Mike created a plausible motivation for his character which suggests that anger at a perceived slight could have triggered this particular face work:

> *Like maybe I had the resolution all along. Maybe it was the teacher the day before who told me to say please, and it pissed me off, and so I decided, I'm going to show them that they have to say please too.*

We can, like Mike, imagine a fuller context to the story; we can speculate how the bus driver's empathetic response might have worked to defuse this situation. He apparently talked about consequences for the boy's violent act, but he did not speak in terms of punishment or legal charges; instead he focused on something the boy might not want to lose: the company of his buddies during the ride home after school. He then asked how he might help. If, as Goffman (1967) suggests, face-work underlies all social interactions, then it may be possible to interpret the driver's move as one which *gives face*, i.e. one which creates a path of action that allows the boy to do something to save "a little face." The boy accepted his offer, because not to do so would have jeopardized the driver's face, something he would not want to do to a "buddy." He supposedly requested that he be asked rather than told what to do. The student was looking for respect – not from the driver, whose consideration he already had, but from whomever he had been dealing with before. Furthermore, the driver did not carry the same kind of authority as the teacher. Had the boy asked the principal or teacher to say "please," it might have been interpreted as *threatening* their face, assuming that Mike's hypothetical back story were true.

The boy's positive response to the actions of the bus driver in this story illustrates how emotional attunement or "empathic intersubjectivity" can facilitate positive outcomes even in difficult situations (Scheff, 1990, p. 7). The following excerpts from journal entries that the preservice teachers wrote at the end of class communicate a beginning awareness of the importance of acknowledging emotions, although the tone of some responses suggests a continuing concern with *controlling* the class. No writing prompt was given on this particular day:

> *I think the main thing I will take away from this is the importance of getting to the root of the problem. Know as much about your students as possible; know when their moods have changed and find out why as quickly as possible before situations occur.*

> *I think that problem prevention is very important to stop classroom management problems before they start. That is why I think it is soooooo important to say hi to your students each morning to recognize how they are feeling. This can help you gauge how you approach them each day (based on their moods).*

> *Thinking back to my last observation day, one particular student arrived and the teacher could automatically tell what kind of mood he was in. She immediately asked him, "What kind of day are we going to have today?" to get him thinking about his present mood in comparison to what it should be.*

> *Useful to me: thinking the students are out of control because of something I'm NOT doing….I learnt a lot today about asking students what I can do to help* (all entries from October 25th, 2005).

When we are concerned about "losing control" of a class, we may sometimes act defensively to protect our own face while ignoring the need for safeguarding that of our students. We may be startled to find ourselves in such circumstances reacting in an authoritative manner, perhaps briefly becoming a type of teacher we do not want to be. Publicly stating potential consequences or assigning punishments may help establish or re-establish one's sense of control, but in certain contexts they are defensive moves which attempt to shame a student into complying. It therefore becomes important to understand how certain forms of discipline can generate shame, anger and fear, and to recognize these feelings when they occur so that we may seek an appropriate and humane response to students in the present moment. In turn, noticing these emotions in ourselves as we teach may help us avoid defensive reactions. The insights that the sociological concept of face-work may provide concerning the management of classroom dynamics merit further inquiry.

Feel the Fear and Find the Circuit-Breaker
Hogarth (2001) suggests that in our attempts to develop our intuitive decision-making skills, "*emotions are data* that need to be explained" (p. 232). After a discussion with my critical friend about the anxiety I experienced in this class, I began to recall memories from the time I taught in what was considered to be one of the more challenging middle schools of my home town. Before

I started that job, I had been worried about the management situations I would encounter, and was particularly fearful of having to deal with any violent students. However, once I had actually begun teaching, I never worried about someone in my class snapping or crossing a line, even though I had a number of students with volatile tempers or difficult personal circumstances. As I reflected on these memories, it occurred to me that, because I felt a *connection* to the students, I was not anxious about what might happen. Unfortunately, I did not yet have a sense of Mike and Len as individuals in this class of sixty, although I got to know them very well in the *Drama Across the Curriculum* course during the second semester. They were also adult males, which made it harder for me to deal with a drama scene that carried such a threatening physicality.

Salverson (1994) claims that it is important for us to address our own issues so we can better learn who we are. I would add that such work is essential for facilitators and teachers, if we are to help individuals deal with strong emotions and difficult moments in class. In this instance, I first had to understand that my personal history caused me to re-act with fear. Second, I needed to understand that my looking for security in the familiar role of teacher as expert was a defensive response to protect my self-image. Third, I needed to prepare strategies to try should such circumstances arise again.

The human organism has two systems for processing information: implicit and explicit (Myers, 2002; Hogarth, 2001; Berry & Dienes, 1993). The implicit system is based an unconscious processing and coordination of information from our bodies and from our environment. In our everyday lives we register sensory input, construct percepts, make associations, draw inferences and interpret what is happening to us. Much of this processing occurs with little awareness on our parts. The efficiency of this neural hard-wiring leads to habitual or automatic responses that may or may not be appropriate to present circumstances. Hogarth (2001) suggests that we use our explicit, deliberate system of thought to interrupt and question the appropriateness of our automatic reactions, thereby creating a *circuit breaker*. The commonsense idea of taking a deep breath or counting to ten when one is feeling angry is a kind of circuit breaker; one is less inclined to mindlessly act on that emotion when one pauses to evaluate the circumstances. It occurred to me that since my anxiety about potentially threatening situations was absent once I felt connected to people, connection could function as my circuit-breaker. I decided that whenever I felt anxiety or fear, I would pause to consciously acknowledge the emotion; then I would deliberately make eye contact and physically "attune" (Goleman, 1995, p. 116) to one or two individuals. It is a strategy I have since used with success.

Changes

>   *Sheila, whose suggestion I had not acknowledged, summarizes her winning strategy: "The question is not necessarily why he is doing it, but what can we do to help him that will make him stop."*

> *"It's such a high pressure situation that – to think of saying please?" Our male principal, Nathaniel, just shakes his head.*
>
> *Carl picks up Sheila's thought. He had previously talked about the necessity of laying charges in this case. "This resolution comes back to, um, showing the person that you really want to help him, because you are opening it up that kind of dialogue, right? And once you set that invitation forth, he can say, um, all you have to do is this. Whatever 'this' is."*
>
> *Donita raises her hand. "Mike is asking for help just as much as Len is in that situation. And you have to offer him help. And that's why asking him was key: you just gave Mike the chance to say, 'I need help . . .'"*

Boal sees TO as facilitating a specific kind of catharsis, a dissolving of blocks that dynamizes participants and moves them to *act*, transgressing oppressive structures (Boal, 1995; Feldhendler, 1994). Participants' comments at the end of class indicated that they were now beginning to feel empathy for Mike's character. I could have used other TO strategies to further explore the circumstances of the character's life, including what happened to him after the situation was defused. However, I had a block of my own to dissolve; I had to acknowledge my fear.

When at its most authentic, the FT work stirs up real, sometimes very intense emotions in both actors and spectators, regardless of our levels of theatrical experience. Because the emotions generated in the playing of a scene become "concrete experiences" in themselves (Feldenhendler, 1994), Forum Theatre can be a useful tool in any programme which aims to teach emotional and social skills. It can also be useful as a starting point for the practice of a critical pedagogy, helping us to notice what is actually happening in educational situations and to question things we have previously taken for granted, including emotional responses. If we can acknowledge fear, anger and shame when they occur rather than denying or repressing their existence, we may uncover actions, practices, or blocks that require our critical attention; we may also discover ways of counteracting their potentially negative effects.

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