THEATRE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE
AS A METHOD TO EMPOWER
MEXICAN YOUTH

By
Marcela A. Rodriguez Gonzalez

An Abstract
Of a Library Paper submitted in partial fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

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Theatre has always been concerned with change: it seeks to transform individuals and communities. Practitioners around the world have been working to raise problems and generate questions about which type of changes does a society need. Today, Mexican society is experiencing a problem with youth. They are getting involved in crime, which leads them to go to jail at an early age. Part of their rehabilitation program in youth prison includes theatre workshops, where they explore theatrical techniques to express themselves. However, Mexican youth do not have a prevention program that helps them to reexamine their life choices. With the techniques developed by Paulo Freire and his conscientization, Augusto Boal and his Theatre of the Oppressed, and Jorge Correa and his Prison Theatre, Theatre for Social Change can be used to empower Mexican youth.
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“Anxious to teach the spectator a quite definite practical attitude, directed towards changing the world, it must begin by making him adopt in the theatre a quite different attitude from what he is used to”.

(Bertolt Brecht, 1933: Notes to Die Mutter)

INTRODUCTION

Modern theatre has been strongly influenced by Bertolt Brecht’s ideas on his Epic Theatre. He is one of the most important theorist and artist in the history of theatre by developing theatre as a forum for social and ideological causes. Theatre practitioners around the world have found many ways of applying Brecht’s Epic Theatre. One of these styles is Theatre for Social Change, which has been designed to provide oppressed societies a safe space to explore solutions to their problems.

Today, Mexican society is experiencing a problem with youth. They are getting involved in crime, which leads them to go to jail at an early age. Part of their rehabilitation program in youth prison includes theatre workshops, where they explore theatrical techniques to express themselves. However, Mexican youth do not have a prevention program that helps them to reexamine their life choices. If they had the correct tools to make decisions, they could avoid going to prison. If theatre has the power to change an individual’s life as part of a rehabilitation program, the solution to prevent youth committing crimes might be found in Theatre for Social Change techniques.
THE REALITY OF MEXICAN YOUTH

In Mexico, the percentage of violent crimes where young people are victims and perpetrators is increasing. Mexican youth have several factors that led them to become criminals and offenders, but also victims. Mexico’s war against criminal groups declared by former President Felipe Calderon started in 2006 and has left thousands of homicides. With the war between Mexican government and the cartel, a new war between criminal groups emerged. With it, the recruiting of young people, in some cases forced, to perpetrate drug lord’s crimes.

In 2013, the Ministry of the Interior in Mexico warned that young people were the most vulnerable part of the population exposed to crime, because they have become the main victims and main aggressors.

According to the Mexican newspaper, *El Economista*, between 2000 and 2010, young people around 10 and 29 years old committed 38.2% of homicides in Mexico. Also, 43.4% of the total number of youth homicides occurred between 2008 and 2010, and what is more terrifying is that 33.5% of these crimes were committed by youth aged 25 or less. The Ministry of the Interior recognized that the lack of job opportunities and unemployment have become important factors in the development of crime and violence in Mexico (*Jóvenes, el sector más expuesto al crimen, El Economista*).

Another factor of youth being involved in crime is the lack of educational opportunities. School dropout can be a risk factor because youth can consider crime as an alternative for easy money. Sometimes their low literacy skills and lack of social, educational and economic opportunities make them feel socially excluded and that leads them to commit aspirational crimes. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), an aspirational crime
occurs when the insecurity in a determined region has a multidimensional explanation that affects jobs and the inequality of social mobility. Different combinations of all the socioeconomic factors in specific contexts produce vulnerability environments that limit the possibilities for social development. In these vulnerable areas and in the context of economic growth based on consumption, individuals are willing to challenge the legitimate order and choose the criminal path as lifestyle. The crimes youth commit to have a better life are known as aspirational crimes, because the young offender robs citizens or perpetrate any other type of crime in an effort to earn money and look for a better social level.

These factors are not the only ones to explain youth involvement in crime. Many times, they do not have a choice and they get involved in criminal organizations where drug cartels have more power than the government. In Mexico, organized crime has managed to escalate to an extent where it has corrupted the system and has used violence to recruit people and fight rival organizations. Minors are now used by the cartel to traffic drugs, carry out some small illegal operations, or work as hitmen, which is the term used to refer to a person who kills others for money. Since they do not work nor study, it is cheaper for drug organizations to recruit minors and hire them. Usually youth involved in crime often face lighter sentences than an adult.

According to studies quoted in the World Bank Analysis, criminal organizations have been the cause for the increased violence in Mexico, especially violence that has to do with drug trafficking on the Northern Border of the country, where youth homicides happen regularly in Chihuahua, Sinaloa and Baja California. The State of Mexico and Guerrero have high violence rates too, even though they are southern states. The use of firearms in all those states has tripled from 2007 to 2010 (Mexican Youth: Authors and Victims of Violence, The World Bank).
Youth passed to be victims from being the aggressors and it seems to be a new alarming trend for men between 18 to 25 years. Certainly a child that grows up in poverty, without access to quality education, and with limited opportunities, can easily be caught in a circle of violence. However, if Mexican society paid attention to youth and developed programs to assist them, they could reach a better future not only for themselves, but also for the people in their environment.

The government plays a significant role in the development of a country and its society, creating opportunities for youth so as to avoid getting involved in crime. “It is very important for the government to work in the prevention side –to continue preventing that these numbers grow, and that youth get involved in criminal activities and be part of the statistics that we have seen” (Carbonari 54).

The current Mexican President, Enrique Peña Nieto, presented in 12 February 2013 the National Program for the Social Prevention of Crime and Violence, which originally had nine Ministries helping Mexico to prevent youth crime. Now, in 2015, Peña Nieto’s plan and his nine Ministries have not achieved the goal. Instead of creating social programs for adolescences to help them to grow and develop in a healthy society, youth still lack jobs and educational opportunities. The government represses freedom of expression and the youth are afraid to share their public opinion.

A significant demonstration of repression and lack of opportunities for youth is the murder of forty-three students from Ayotzinapa, Guerrero in Mexico. On 26 September 2014, the police of Guerrero attacked one hundred students from the Escuela Normal Rural Isidro Burgos. That night three students and three witnesses were killed and forty-three students disappeared. The next day, the tortured body of a fourth student was found and his facial skin and eyes were
Two days after the attack, Guerrero State authorities arrested twenty-two municipal police officers of Iguala because of their connection with the Guerreros Unidos drug cartel during the attack to the students. When the media questioned Iguala’s mayor, Jose Luis Abarca, he denied any wrong doing. A few weeks later, people speculated that Abarca ordered the attack of the students to keep them away from an event he and his wife were hosting to promote their political ambitions. After the Governor of Guerrero, Angel Aguirre, ordered Abarca to present himself to the authorities, Abarca disappeared and was found by the police almost two months later. With the arrest of Abarca, the police continued investigating the case and found mass graves in solitary hills outside of Iguala. The Government grew concerned because the bodies in those graves were not of the students but other people who remained identified. While the government was relieved by not finding the remains of the forty-three missing students, Mexican society felt indignation because not finding the students in those clandestine graves did not mean they were safe. It only meant there were several unsolved crimes by the government.

After Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto announced the Ayotzinapa case in public as a priority for his country, thousands of people from different states took to Mexico’s most important avenues and streets to protest against the government. The Mexican Attorney General, Jesus Murillo Karam, presented mayor Jose Luis Abarca and his wife as the responsible for the attack and disappearance of the students. Some alleged Guerreros Unidos cartel leaders were captured, but the bodies of the forty-three students were not found.
One year after the attack, the reputation of President Enrique Peña Nieto has been worldwide seriously damaged. Only one of the missing students has been clearly identified and the investigation of the government is ongoing. The government’s handling of the problem outraged Mexicans. It became apparent the system was corrupted and the Mayor of Iguala apparently had links to drug cartels and the disappearance of the forty-three students of Ayotzinapa. The Mexican media has favored President Peña Nieto, who despite the request of Mexicans, has not resigned from his charge. This terrible event is just one demonstration of how the Mexican Government and organized crime can work together –hopefully in few cases- to control and oppress society.

THEATRE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Since ancient times theatre has been used to entertain and teach society. Theatre has always been concerned with change: it seeks to transform individuals and communities. Practitioners around the world have been working to raise problems and generate questions about whom or what needs to be changed, why should it be changed and which type of changes does a society need so that moral, political and social values are challenged in their communities.

According to Robert Landy, Theatre for Social Change is an applied art form with specific objectives, ethics and values where theatre praxis is in the service of personal and collective change (Landy xvii).

Theatre for Social Change is all the efforts within a community to enhance a social justice agenda. “It is eclectic in its attention to pedagogical, social/political and psychological change” (Landy xxi). Theatre for Social Change seeks to inform and transform its participants
and viewers in a more conscious way than conventional drama, because one of its main purposes is to address an important social issue.

Theatre for Social Change is interactive and it brings the spectator directly into action, where spectators become *spectactors*, because they get involved, take roles and have the power to alter a dramatic action. This type of theatre helps ordinary people to learn how to act, not by becoming an actor, but by showing them they are ready and prepared to take action in the world. “Interactive theatre is meant to be used as a means of social critique, and it is important to most practitioners that it be used in this way” (Terry 116).

To generate Theatre for Social Change, a society needs conscientization, where people raise questions about their circumstances and expose the mechanisms of oppression. Paulo Freire brought the conscientization concept in art for the first time.

**PAULO FREIRE**

Paulo Freire was born on 19 September 1921 in Brazil, and his “theoretical examination of political, social, economic, and educational inequalities illuminated a light for those living on the margins, facilitating a voice, a language, and a transformative way for a more just society” (Kirylo xxi).

Freire was born in a middle-class family where his parents made the best to give him and his siblings a good life. He attended private schools and his hunger of knowledge could be seen by all of his professors. As he was growing up, he discovered that the memorization method was a major part of the instructional process in school, and people able to memorize information were
related to intelligence. Freire was not good at memorizing concepts and felt ignorant. His professors thought he had learning difficulties, even though he always knew he was doing better than many of his classmates.

Definitely, his first years helped him to shape the foundation of his thinking. His youth was spent part time with people of his social class: privileged people who had the same opportunities; while at other times, he was aware of those who were poor and hungry. After his father died, he experienced hunger and poverty. At eleven years old, he captured the meaning of compassion, and he vowed to do anything he could do to alleviate hunger in the world (Kyrilo 10). Through the struggles of his own family he was able to observe the hard work, sacrifices, and abuse of the less fortunate. He learned to respect those who are in positions of vulnerability and weakness.

In 1941 he completed a pre-law program at school, which led him to attend the School of Law of Recife in Brazil a few years later. His professors noted his ability to teach his classmates and, one of his professors, Dr. Araújo, invited him to formally teach at Colégio Oswaldo Cruz when he was just 19 years old. “We make ourselves educators, we develop ourselves as educators permanently, in the practice and through reflecting upon the practice” (Freire, Pedagogy of the City 53).

In 1947 he evolved a method of work with illiterate adults where he used the word conscientization. For Freire, conscientization is “the process of developing a critical awareness of one’s social reality through reflection and action. Action is fundamental because it is the process of changing the reality. Paulo Freire says that we all acquire social myths which have a
dominant tendency, and so learning is a critical process which depends upon uncovering real problems and actual needs.” (Concepts used by Paulo Freire, Freire Institute).

Freire became professor of History and Philosophy of Education in the University of Recife in Brazil. During the 1960’s he was involved in education movements dealing with massive illiteracy. With the popularity of his experiments and methods, the movement was extended under the patronage of the federal government.

In 1964, all Brazilian states planned the establishment of cultural circles to reach two million of illiterates. Freire planned to apply his literacy campaign to cover the entire country. The campaign made Brazilian government worried, because they looked at Freire as a thread to their political ambitions. “Conservatives were rather nervous with the possibilities of those who would become literate as a result of Freire’s literacy program. That is, by law, only those who were considered literate were allowed to vote, which were the overwhelming majority represented by the elite, landowners, and those of the conservative classes” (Kyrilo 52-53). With a new potential number of literate voters educated through Freire’s ideas, the upper classes felt their interest threatened by the possibility of a change in the government.

On 30 March 1964, Freire received a phone call from one of his assistants urging him to return to Brasilia, the capital of Brazil. He was discharged from his job and all his materials for the literacy campaign were confiscated. Freire voluntarily went to the police and, by June 1964, he was under house arrest because the Brazilian regime considered that his teaching methods were subversive. He was subjected to a series of interrogations and was accused of being a communist, a traitor to Christ, and to the people of Brazil.
“Freire spent a total of seventy-five days in jail, where he spent time ‘thinking things over’. In fact, incarceration confirmed his thesis that if social change were to occur, it would have to resurrect from the masses” (Kyrilo 54).

While in prison, he began his first major work *Education as the Practice of Freedom* (which he later completed while he was on exile in Chile). After his stay in prison, he was taken to Rio de Janeiro for further interrogation by the military police, and tired of the threats, he thought he was not going to be able to continue his work the way it had to be done. Freire found refuge in the Bolivian Embassy of Brazil and was placed under a list as a pro-communist and anti-United States. He ended up going on exile in October 1964 to Chile. While he was on exile, others used his teaching methods and new ideas, which allowed him to present seminars on his work. In 1968 while still in Chile, he published his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which was the result of his experiences in Brazil and Chile.

In 1970 he was a Visiting Professor at the Center for the Study of Development and Social Change at Harvard University. Afterwards, he spent the next nine years in Switzerland applying his education methods. In 1979 he was allowed to return to Brazil and became Secretary of Education in Sao Paulo in 1988.

Freire’s work has influenced people working in community development, education, health and other fields. He developed an approach to education that links the identification of issues to positive action for change. “It is necessary that the weakness of the powerless is transformed into a force capable of announcing justice” (Freire, *Pedagogy of the Heart* 36). His work leads us to think how we can reach the society around us. For Freire, the educational process is never neutral: people can be passive recipients of knowledge or they can engage to
become active participants. In Paulo Freire’s approach it is essential that people link knowledge to action, so they can actively work to change their societies.

**AUGUSTO BOAL**

To fully understand and comprehend theatre used for social change, we have to know the work of one of the most important and influential contemporary theatre practitioners: Augusto Boal. His ideas of empowerment have been considered crucial to self-development; his point of view is that theatre should be used to serve those who are oppressed so “they can express themselves and so that, by using this new language they can also discover new concepts” (Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* 121).

Augusto Boal, who was familiar with Freire’s work, took some of the ideas of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to develop *Theatre of the Oppressed*, which has been used by many social activists to awake society from their oppressions.

For Augusto Boal theatre was more than an artistic form. “All theatre is necessarily political, because all the activities of man are political and theatre is one of them. Those who try to separate theatre from politics try to lead us into error- and this is a political attitude. I also offer some proof that theatre is a weapon, a very efficient weapon. For this reason one must fight for it. For this reason the ruling classes strive to take permanent hold of the theatre and utilize it as a tool for domination. In so doing, they change the very concept of what ‘theatre’ is. But theatre can also be a weapon for liberation. For that, it is necessary to create appropriate theatrical forms. Change is imperative” (Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* ix).
Augusto Boal was born in 1931 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. His father, José Augusto Boal, was an exiled man from Portugal after refusing involvement in the First World War. He married his fiancée, Albertina Pinto, and never went back to their home country (Babbage 4).

In Boal’s earliest years of life, Brazil was under the dictatorship of Getulio Vargas, and his family was economically stable. Boal fell in love with theatre when he was just ten years old. On his childhood literary works he commented: “When I read a story and did not like it, I would rewrite it” (Boal, Hamlet 89). That thought became his philosophy to develop the Theatre of the Oppressed, in which everything is always open to interrogation.

In 1948 Boal began his studies at the National School of Chemistry, University of Brazil to gratify his father but he never abandoned his theatrical ambitions. Most of the time he was doing duties as the director of the school’s cultural department, which gave him free tickets for Brazil’s local theaters, where he had the opportunity to meet playwrights, directors and actors not only from his country but others as well.

In 1952, Boal’s went to the United States to study chemistry and theatre at Columbia University. “New York was attractive to Boal because it presented the opportunity to study playwriting with drama critic, historian and artist-producer John Gassner, whom he greatly admired” (Babbage 5). While in New York, Boal had the opportunity to see different productions and develop cultural programs and connections with highly regarded artists from Brazil who were in America.

In 1955, after finishing his degree at Columbia, he was asked to return to Brazil to work with the Arena Theatre in Sao Paulo as a director and playwright.
Boal’s ideas made him a cultural activist, but the armed forces in Brazil saw him as a threat for the dictatorship. In 1964 he produced a show of protest songs, which made him appear as an anarchist who defied the government. One night, after he finished a performance in the Arena of Sao Paulo he was kidnapped off the street, tortured and arrested.

In 1973, Boal was exiled to Argentina, where Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* influenced him. He developed his own techniques based on the concept that theatre is a way of life in which everybody can take part. With all his ideas, he published his text *Theatre of the Oppressed*, where he set out his view that drama must be liberated from the influence of Aristotle’s *Poetics*. With the separation between theatre and politics, theatre could effectively be used as an instrument for government oppression.

After publishing *Theatre of the Oppressed*, he self-exiled himself to Europe, and while in Paris, he continued teaching his revolutionary approach to theatre. By 1981 he organized the first International Festival of the Theatre of the Oppressed. In 1986 Boal was finally able to return to Brazil, after the removal of the dictatorship. He established the Center for the Theatre of the Oppressed in Rio de Janeiro and formed some of companies of community-based performance.

In 1992, Boal was invited to be the speaker for the National Conference of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education in Georgia, USA, which has international connections to Europe, Canada, South America, Australia, Asia and Africa. His workshops and conferences inspired the participants to approach their communities using the techniques he taught. Traveling worldwide, Boal made his processes and techniques available to as many people as he could reach.
In 2008, Boal returned to North America for the last time, where he gave workshops at the University of New Orleans and his son, Julian Boal, collaborated with him in the session. After many conferences around the world, Boal started to feel tired, and in 2009 feared that his leukemia, which went into remission four years earlier, was becoming stronger, so he returned to Brazil. In 2 May 2009, his son Julian sent a short message: “My father is gone, he went away sleeping” (A Brief Biography of Augusto Boal, Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed).

Augusto Boal left an international impact for those who look to make a social change using theatrical techniques. His classic text Theatre of the Oppressed was written in the repressive political climate of Brazil in 1970. Theatre of the Oppressed theories have been applied, adapted and reinvented by practitioners all over the world in hospitals, schools, prisons, theatre companies and political protests.

For Augusto Boal, theatre is “the art of looking at ourselves. The Theatre of the Oppressed is theatre in his most archaic application of the word. In this usage, all human beings are Actors (they Act!) and Spectators (they observe!). They are Spect-Actors” (Boal, Games for Actors xxx). His ideas to create the Theatre of the Oppressed grew out of a determined battle to make a social change where theatrical language is the most essential human language, because everything an actor does, we all do in our daily lives. The only difference between an actor and a normal person is that actors are conscious of using the language of theatre.
THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED

“Theatre of the Oppressed makes frequent reference to Brecht’s proposal for an Epic Theatre; Brecht’s political themes and anti-illusionist, ‘critical’ production style have found renewed expression in Boal’s practice” (Babbage 6).

The Theatre of the Oppressed has its basis in three main categories: Invisible Theatre, Image Theatre and Forum Theatre, and they can be applied according to the goal of each theatrical event.

Invisible Theatre is a public theatre that involves the public as participants in the action without knowing it; they are what Boal called ‘spect-actors’, the active spectators of a piece of theatre. This theatre does not take place in an auditorium or other theatrical context. It takes action with an audience that does not know it is an audience, and does not know the events are not real even though they are presented in real life.

To make Invisible Theatre happen, a group of actors rehearse a scene they will perform in an appropriate public space. The scene has an unexpected subversion of normal behavior within a particular society and usually the audience reacts to the incidents in the scene, especially because another actor, part of the audience, expresses extreme and opposite reactions to the events of the performed scene. Invisible Theatre is a way of using theatre to create debate so the audience questions social issues in a public forum and they take up any position they desire.

“Invisible Theatre almost always comes up against an important problem; safety. Invisible Theatre offers scenes of fiction. But without the mitigating effects of the rites of conventional theatre, this fiction becomes reality. Invisible Theatre is not realism; it is reality” (Boal, Games for Actors 15).
Image Theatre consists in a series of exercises designed to uncover essential truths about societies and cultures without spoken language. The participants make static images of their lives, feelings, experiences or oppressions and a group of participants suggest titles or themes for them. Then, the individual creates three-dimensional images under the titles previously suggested by the group, using only their bodies. With this technique, an image is the starting point for an action, which is revealed in a process where the individuals discover the direction or intention innate in them (Boal, Games for Actors xix). The goal of Image Theatre is to get an image that represents a consensus between the participants. When all the participants agree about an image, that one becomes the Real Image, which portrays the image of the reality of the world in which the participants are living. After the agreement of the Real Image, the spect-actors are asked to create the Ideal Image, which is the image of ideality of how the world should be, a world where there is no oppression.

For Boal, images can be closer to our true feelings because people are able to discover subconscious ones that they did not know existed in their minds. Image Theatre can be universal no matter which culture, nationality or race the techniques are applied to.

Forum Theatre is the last category of Theatre of the Oppressed. In Forum Theatre a problem is shown in an unsolved form where the audience can suggest a solution. In this type of theatre the problem is always a symptom of the oppression, involves a visible group of oppressors and a protagonist who is oppressed.

“Forum Theatre is a sort of fight or game, and like all forms of game or fight there are rules. They can be modified but they still exist, to ensure that all the players are involved in the
same enterprise, and to facilitate the generation of serious and fruitful discussion” (Boal, *Games for Actors* 18).

In this type of game, actors and spect-actors will be victims of the oppression under consideration, which is why they are able to give a solution to the problem presented. To perform this game, a scene, known as the model, is shown. It is then shown again speeded up and follows the same course until a member of the audience shouts: “Stop”, to take the place of the protagonist to defeat the oppressors. The objective of this game is to make the spect-actors bring the play a different end where oppression is broken, even though the real actors do their possible to keep the play as its original ending (where oppressors win). Forum Theatre can be used anywhere where there is a community that is experiencing any type of oppression and it shows the audience to be the protagonists of their own lives.

“Theatre of the Oppressed is about acting, rather than talking, questioning rather than giving answers, analyzing rather than accepting” (Boal, *Games for Actors* xxiv). For Augusto Boal acting is not just doing a performance; acting means to take action in certain situations. With the background and development of *Theatre of the Oppressed* and both definitions of acting in his mind, Boal wrote the book *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, which includes numerous exercises that can be played by performers and non-performers. Many of the games in the book are original, invented by Boal to be used for life-changing purposes. As the most important element of theatre is the human body of a performer, the book focuses in physical movements, distances and relations where all games should be done with understanding.

“Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it” (Boal, *Games for Actors* xxxi).
The first step to change something we do not like is to think about it. Theatre of the Oppressed offers no solution but awareness and options to change a certain situation. Theatre for Social Change practitioners must keep in mind that oppression means something different in each country. Boal always believed that people are afraid by their inner demons of fear and self-doubt. This causes people not to realize they have options to change their life situations. With Boal’s ideas, practitioners around the world have applied social change oriented theatre forms to help oppressed and vulnerable communities. “Theatre is a weapon, and it is the people who should wield it” (Boal, Theatre of the Oppressed 122).

**TYPES OF THEATRE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE**

Social Change Theatre forms are an important genre within the larger field of theatre. These forms of interactive theatre are concerned with the potential for change. They are group developed, rarely fully scripted and always addressing an important social issue. Practitioners’ objective for this type of theatre is to make the audience think and react so they get involved, take roles and alter a dramatic action.

The beauty in this type of theatre is that ordinary people learn how to act, and not in the sense of becoming actors. They become actors in the sense that, when they finish the activity they are participating, they are better prepared to take action in the real world. For that to happen, every practitioner has to be aware of the different types of Theatre for Social Change.

In speaking about theatre in social action, the focus has to be in community organizations, with the recognition that such organizations serve to enhance or to restrict the quality of life of the people in that community. There have been cases where theatre is used as a
way to make money through the exploitation of other cultures or communities to serve the own aesthetic and economic ends. In other cases, a performance makes people to be aware of the existence of other cultures and it gets available to wider audiences.

In Theatre for Social Change, the cultural qualities of a globalized world provide a cross-cultural experience that makes its study richer. In Theatre of the Oppressed, for example, Boal took several cultures in consideration to study how a community can be reached. According to Landy, globalization has helped to spread the cultural life of communities worldwide, since performing arts are visible in social media. On sites such as Facebook, global communities become visible. Using YouTube, anybody can make available a dramatic action to the whole world. “With the new technologies people participate dramatically in global communities by logging onto their computers. In doing so, they engage in a virtual community even as they are isolated from actual ones. In many ways this state of affairs is antithetical to the more social, political and therapeutic purposes of drama and theatre, as it represents engagement through disengagement. And yet these dramas serve a purpose in the lives of the players, not too dissimilar from that of actual dramas - to take meaningful, often risky action into a mysterious world in the hope of discovering something new” (Landy 122).

Theatre for Social Change is a type of Applied Theatre. The field is diverse and needs to be defined for its full comprehension. The Central School of Speech and Drama in London defines Applied Theatre as: ‘intervention, communication, development, empowerment and expression when working with individuals or specific communities’ while the definition of the University of Manchester is that ‘Applied Theatre refers to the practice of theatre and drama in non-traditional settings. It refers to theatre practice that engages with areas of social and cultural
policy such as public health, education, criminal justice, heritage site interpretation and development’ (Landy 131).

Some forms of drama in social action are used by organizations to provide theatre opportunities for education, therapy and rehabilitation. In using Theatre for Social Change, Applied Theatre artists look to create performances for the common good of a community.


Robert Landy added to that list Action Theatre, Bibliodrama, Engaged Theatre, Ethnodrama, Grassroots Theatre, Playback Theatre, Social Theatre and Sociodrama.

Applied Theatre seeks to raise awareness about what an individual can do to make the world a better place. It concerns ordinary people and their local problems to effect changes in the communities outside a theatrical discourse. In Applied Theatre there is no audience but participants who are seeking for change in their communities.

**APPLIED THEATRE AND MEXICO**

Mexican Government is aware that the country is facing a problem in its society. On one hand, youth want opportunities, employments and a better life so they can contribute their country, but they cannot afford an education and they become oppressed by the government. On the other hand, young men and women who do not have the opportunity to even finish
elementary school; they do not want to continue their education and that leads them to become criminals.

The former President Felipe Calderon Hinojosa was well aware of the increasing crime rates as his government designed *PRONAPRED*, the National Program to Prevent Crime, which was the result of the publication of the General Law to Prevent Social Violence and Crime in January 2012. The objective of this plan was to address risk factors linked to violence and crime and the program names some actions to achieve it. However, it does not explain how to reach the goal.

With the change of the governments between 2012 and 2013, the plan was intended to take action with the current President Enrique Peña Nieto. Although the government budgeted around two thousand five hundred million pesos for the plan to be developed during 2013 and 2014, most of the population did not even know the government had a plan to prevent crime and help youth (*Qué es el Programa Nacional de Prevención del Delito, México Evalúa*).

In Chapter II of the General Law to Prevent Social Violence and Crime, Article Six states that the prevention of crime would include social, communitarian and psychosocial scope, while in Article Seven, it states that the programs would include ones that eradicate marginalization and exclusion of the society through the promotion of sports and cultural activities, but again, they do not mention concretely what those activities are (*Ley General para la Prevención Social de la Violencia y la Delincuencia, Secretaria de Hacienda y Crédito Público*).

The government is aware that education would create better citizens; and with better citizens, the country will have a better understanding of the issues that are affecting Mexico. This might be the reason as to why the government does not seem to pay attention to social problems,
since an educated society can be a threat to the government ambitions. In fact, the past year Mexican society has protested in several ways against the government. Because of the oppression of the government, many activists have been arrested for showing their beliefs.

Currently, the Mexican penitentiary system has the CERESO (Social Rehabilitation Center) and CEFERESOS (Social Rehabilitation Federal Center), which were created in 1905 and specifically for adults. The social rehabilitation centers include school education, sports and cultural activities as part of their programs to help inmates in their process and life in prison.

Mexico has had an oppressive government in the past. In many cases they blame young people to be anarchists and perpetuate youth crimes. During 1970’s, the rate of crimes perpetrated by youth was increasing and the government found a way to charge young offenders in a different way than adult criminals.

In 1974, and under the government of the former Mexican president Luis Echeverria, a new type of prison was created. It was described in the Law of Guardianship Councils for Young Offenders in Federal Territory. Even though that law was created in 1974, it is still ruling the country without any changes.

In Article One of the Law of Councils for Young Offenders, it is established that “the Youth Council aims to promote social readjustment of those under eighteen who violated criminal laws or police regulations by studying the personality, the extension of corrective measures and the protection and surveillance at treatment” (Law of Guardianship Councils for Young Offenders in Federal Territory, Asamblea Legislativa del Distrito Federal).

This council does similar activities than prisons for adults but with more lenient judgments; instead of having a judge, young offenders have a counselor. Instead of having
penalties, they have corrective measures, which include teaching professions to the young inmates so they can find a decent job. They learn sports, crafts and develop cultural activities hoping that, at the end of the sentence, they can be better citizens. Critics speculate if such measurements for youth really work, since in most of the cases, after they end their sentence they return to the criminal life.

In an article written for the Mexican newspaper *El Informador*, Martin Barron Cruz, a professor and investigator of Criminal Sciences, states his beliefs that Mexican Youth Councils do not really help youth because they try to change the personality and behavior of the inmates with tools that are not adequate for them. Barron Cruz thinks that “councils are prisons and the conditions in which young people live are not the most appropriate to achieve these objectives.” In fact, according to UNICEF in Latin America, Mexico is the only country that has Youth Councils, and their system is unconstitutional in the Rights of the Child. (*Los Tutelares, más Perjudiciales que Benéficos, El Informador*).

As it has been studied, theatre has a strong power to change communities, their behaviors and ways of thinking. It is not a secret that theatre in prisons has been present around history for years and Robert Landy is well aware of it.

In the book *Theatre for Change*, Landy cites examples of how Applied Theatre has been used in prisons. Applied Theatre can be used to teach inmates or to punish them. “Throughout history there are tens of thousands of examples of public executions of prisoners, a bizarre and moralistic form of performance that combined the producer’s needs for justice, moral education and brutal control, with the public’s need for revenge, catharsis and spectacle” (Landy 151). In cases such as North Korea, public executions are a way of Applied Theatre to control the local
community and teach them a lesson. Using Applied Theatre to scare people does not accomplish the objective of Brecht or Boal, who looked for a performance that provoked criticism and ended injustice.

In 1957, the Herbert Blau production of Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* was presented to 1400 inmates at San Quentin Prison in California. Later, it was produced at Florida State Prison, where the director Sidney Homan, realized that the audience of inmates identified with the characters on the theme of waiting. *Waiting for Godot* has become a tradition in several prisons around America. Theatre can change people; theatre was able to change inmates.

There are plenty of examples of how theatre has been used to change people’s behavior in prisons in the United States. Landy illustrates the case of Rick Cluchey, an ex-offender influenced by *Waiting for Godot* in the San Quentin Drama Workshop. Now, after going through the workshops and experiencing change, Cluchey is able to help incarcerated people develop social skills, self-confidence and good attitudes.

The main goal of theatre in prisons is to build critical communities, raise consciousness of oppressive conditions and to work toward change.

**JORGE CORREA FUENTES AND PRISON THEATRE IN MEXICO**

Today, several countries such as Germany, Spain, Italy, and Argentina have developed their own Penitentiary Theatre in their efforts to rehabilitate inmates. Mexico has its own Penitentiary Theatre, founded by Jorge Correa Fuentes, and was named the Father of Prison Theatre by UNESCO.
Jorge Correa Fuentes graduated from Centro de Arte Escénico Instituto Andrés Soler in Mexico City. In 1983, he had his first contact with penitentiaries, when he assumed the position of Technical Director of Mexican Prisons. Two years later he was asked to resign his position for being an actor. However, thanks to an earthquake in 1985, several files were lost and he remained in his position as a director. In 1989 he became the Director of Prevention and Social Rehabilitation of the Ministry of the Interior, where he implemented and promoted poetry and theatre contests.

Over the years, several playwrights and theatre practitioners have followed the steps of Correa Fuentes to promote Prison Theatre. He is one of the few theatre producers who have managed to bring together members of rival drug cartels to make plays without any conflict inside of prison. With more than 35 years that endorse his career, Correa Fuentes has taught theatre workshops in almost every prison in Mexico in which inmates act for plays in a method called STRAP (Rehabilitation and Preventive Care Theatre System), which he developed.

Correa Fuentes argues that his workshops do not seek to create actors but to transform the individual through a theatrical experience. “Theatre helps them in everything. At first, the inmate needs to communicate. They have situations of abuse, perhaps innocence, the same fate; they do not even know why they are there. Maybe they just wanted a candy or they were bad standing in a corner or because someone made them being there. It is very difficult, but theatre is a way in which they can express their situations in terms of a full theatrical activity, because the inmates read a lot too. I have always being interested in the position that to form, someone has to be informed and what better medium than theatre to inform.” (Jorge Correa, Padre del Teatro Penitenciario, Cartelera de Teatro).
CONCLUSION

Correa Fuentes has been able to transform the lives of Mexican inmates and develop a method that can also be used as prevention. However, he is not the only one that believes in Theatre for Social Change. Paulo Freire created dialectical relationships between text, teachers and students through a pedagogy based in conscientization, a term we have discussed earlier where there is an understanding of social conditions through the development of a critical consciousness. This occurs through repeated dialogue between the oppressed and the oppressor.

Augusto Boal applied the same methodology to theatre in performance, seeking to question and overcome oppression. In developing Forum Theatre, he wanted to provoke audience members out of their safe passivity as viewers. Boal’s theatre concerns several kinds of oppression: social, personal and political. Boal presented a practice of specific theatre games that was grounded in theory that paid homage to his mentor, Freire.

The influence of Augusto Boal, Paulo Freire and Jorge Correa Fuentes, made possible for theatre practitioners to choose between plenty of options and tools to create Theatre for Social Change in their communities. In cases like Mexico, their techniques could be used not only as a corrective method during prison, but also as a prevention method. Freire designed a campaign in Brazil to help and teach the illiterate. Boal developed their games for actors and non-actors in the Theatre of the Oppressed. Jorge Correa Fuentes has developed his technique of Prison Theater.

If the Mexican government supported young people, they could design and create a theater company that visited the country’s vulnerable areas where children and youth do not have access to education. With this idea, the social-change oriented theatre company could develop an
education campaign that teaches Mexican youth through staging and plays, and also gives them reading workshops in which they can be aware of the reality facing their country. In that way they could be educated to overcome any method of oppression by their communities and the problems they face every day.
Works Consulted


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