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METHODS FOR INTER- AND TRANSDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AND LEARNING BASED ON PAULO FREIRE

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"Act Out Loud!" – Theatre and the Body in Transformative Research Praxis

Abstract *Based on Freire's principles of transformation, the author conducted a Theatre Action Research project with girls* using methods of Theatre of the Oppressed as a main tool to collect data. Throughout the article, the author connects the necessity of rethinking power structures in academia with the importance of using body knowledge in feminist and transformative research and introduces concrete methods and experiences for the application of such a research.*

Keywords *Theatre Action Research, body knowledge, Theatre of the Oppressed, feminist research, transformation*

1. Introduction

"We can shut our mouth but not our body: it will always be speaking"
(Boal 2002: 272).

Knowledge and knowledge production are embedded in power structures and hierarchies. Particularly from decolonial and feminist perspectives science oppresses 'other' forms of knowledge and doesn't acknowledge it as a form of 'true' knowledge. This includes knowledge that does not correspond with the masculine, *white* and heteronormative standard (Hill Collins 2000; Mendel 2015), as well as knowledge that is not purely rational (Quijano 2007; Lugones 2008) – such as embodied knowledge. Against this background, it is important to raise the question of the importance of rethinking our research praxis. How can we gain equal apprecia-

tion for different forms of knowledge? What does research have to look like in order to avoid a reproduction of oppressive structures? The research project "Act Out Loud!" includes these questions in choosing Theatre Action Research (TAR) as its research approach and in using body knowledge as a key to reflect on life situations of girls* and young women* living in Vienna – and so to generate situated knowledge and open dialogue.

Here, transformative research contains one key word: 'transformative' is understood as the proccess of realising one's own situatedness (and even participation) in oppressive power structures in society, thereby developing a desire to change social reality and become active (Fritz 2017). Transformation does not only concern individual change but signifies a sustainable social change that tackles oppression (Deshler/Selener 1991) and thus becomes a philosphical paradigm in research praxis (Mertens 2009).

Concerning transformative methods, three aspects were crucial in carefully choosing my research methods. First, using the body – which is subordinated in the traditional dichotomy of body and mind – and its knowledge as a language and as an agent through which we can collect data is a good start for challenging oppression in research. Second, it is Freire who writes: "Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (Freire 2005: 72). Thus, research is something full of social interaction, curiosity and the persistence of never stopping posing new questions. And third, according to standpoint epistemologists such as Patricia Hill Collins (2000) and Sandra Harding (1991), it is essential to include knowledge from oppressed groups, since they contribute with their experiences to a holistic understanding of social power hierarchies and oppressions (Hill Collins 2000: 24ff.). Or, as bell hooks states: "Living as we did – on the edge – we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both" (hooks 2015: xvii).

The idea of focusing on the body and, as Freire advocates, doing research with each other from a marginalized standpoint, led me to my research project, where I conducted a transdisciplinary TAR (Thompson 2003) with methods of the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) created by Augusto Boal (2002, 2008).

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TO is based on and inspired by Freirian principles of action, reflection and transformative education. The body itself produces knowledge about the research partner's daily experiences and supports the partner in finding ways of taking transformative action. Hill Collins asserts that the possibility to speak for oneself and the ability to generate knowledge from one's own point of view is crucial for one's self-determination within marginalised groups (Hill Collins 2000: 35f.). The claim by Freire and Hill Collins, namely that everyone in society can and should be an intellectual and a researcher, is shared by the basic philosophy of TO: everyone is an artist and/or an actor/actress and everyone has the right to become an active change-making agent in society (Boal 2016: 68f.).

In this contribution, I will highlight the importance of scenic research and TAR, the inclusion of embodied knowledge in the research process, and its emancipatory implications for transformative and transdisciplinary research. Therefore, I will first introduce Theatre Action Research as a research approach. Second, I will elaborate Theatre of the Oppressed as a research method and underline its Freirian principles as well as its integration of body knowledge. After introducing my research project, entitled "Act Out Loud!", I will include a precise description of the methods used and further tips for its implementation. Finally, the introduced approach will be discussed with regards to transformative and transdisciplinary research.

2. Theatre Action Research (TAR) as an approach in transformative research

"Any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence" (Freire 2005: 85).

In Theatre Action Research (TAR), Thompson, influenced by Boal´s Theatre of the Oppressed, combines aspects of Participatory Action Research (PAR) with theatre as a research method. There are many different forms of and perspectives on Participatory Action Research, such as feminist participatory research (Lykes/Coquillon 2007; Gatenby/Humphries 2000; Joyappa /Miartin 1996; Maguire 2008), which, for example, acknowledges

different forms of knowledge and has a clear stance regarding the aim of research. According to Maguire it is not about describing or interpreting social realities, but about transforming them. Traditional dichotomies in conventional science such as knowledge and action or research subject and research object are abandoned, and the focus is shifted to a joint research process: "We both know some things; neither of us knows everything. Working together we will both know more, and we will both learn more about how to know" (Maguire 2008: 421).

Feminist participatory research connects to the considerations of PAR highlighted by Fals Borda (Rahman 1991; Greenwood/Levin 1998; McNiff 1988; Zuber-Skerritt 1996), who includes power structures and oppression of groups in his methodology). For Borda, knowledge should be a technique for the politicization of oppressed groups and a means to generate access to participation and articulation (Fals Borda 1991: 3f.). In this sense, it is also crucial to choose the research method according to the needs of the research partners. In its essence, the term 'participatory' means that the research partners become active researchers who themselves collect and analyse their data material (Wöhrer 2017: 28).

In this sense, theatre creates a low-threshold space in which body and language are combined and therefore an examination of actions can be more critical and detailed than a typical narration. In Theatre Action Research, the group itself has the power to examine, change and validate the images and scenes which embody their knowledge (Thompson 2003: 151f.). The first steps of TAR, according to Thompson, are to understand that bodies are constituted by many layers of learned social conventions and that they are socially constructed. Participants need to learn how to use their bodies and to get to know their own way of communicating with and through the body. Thus, the first aim in Theatre Action Research is "developing the ability to play with the ´matter of action´" (Thompson 2003: 154). The research group uses the body in motion to find their research questions, to collect data to enable the investigation of these questions, and finally, to develop proposals for change (Thompson 2003: 159f.).

The next step in TAR is to collect stories from the daily experiences of group members, to name relevant conflicts of this stories and define the research interests of the group. Starting with raw theatrical scenes, the

group develops profound versions of the collected stories over time. In this process-oriented scenic research, the knowledge of the group concerning the topic is revealed, or as Thompson puts it: "The sketch becomes the ´full account´ when the group agrees that the scene or scenes adequately demonstrate the problem, illustrate the knowledge they have of it and express the way that it affects their lives. The ´full account´ is of course still a partial one, but it is as full a version of the account as the group wish to express or are able to construct" (Thompson 2003: 162).

Within Theatre Action Research, nobody can decide which aspects are important and which are trivial for the research process. It is rather more relevant to create rich analyses of the lives of the participants. To capture the content of the stories in all their dimensions, aesthetics plays a crucial role in ensuring "that the investigation includes the non-linear, unpredictable, unsayable and visual as vital parts of the construction of the group´s knowledge of the particular issue" (Thompson 2003: 163). Thus, aesthetics gives another perspective with which to interpret the complex information generated in the research process.

In Boal´s forum theatre, Thompson sees the possibility of validating and increasing the knowledge through the interventions and ideas of a broader audience. Are the scenes developed in the research group also connected to the experiences of the spectators? Forum theatre is a possibility to collect new ideas and next steps, but at some point, TAR claims to leave the realm of theatre and implement actions in the "real" world (Thompson 2003: 164f.). Thompson emphasises the transformative potential of theatre and the need for intervention 'off-stage', but acknowledges at the same time that no matter how small the physical or mental participation in a TAR-process is, it always leaves traces which are mirrored in the embodiment of the participants:

"In undertaking an activity that uses physical, cognitive and emotional skills, ties will have been formed between the group that were not there in the first place. The simple action of smiling with somebody connects you in a shared ´real´ emotional experience. […] Being actively involved in a group process and especially one that requires you to physically play with incidents, stories and emotions, might be empowering in itself." (Thompson 2003: 169)

These words are filled with hope and encourage one to become involved in process-oriented Theatre Action Research. Particularly when working with youths (s. section 4), it is important to consider power asymmetries based on adultism[1], this being the structural privileges of adults compared to kids and youth in society. Even if my colleague and I tried to break power hierarchies in the research project, it was still us who initiated the project itself, who defined the general setting and framing of the project, and who took final decisions.

3. Theatre of the Oppressed as a Freirian method of transformative research

"Paulo Freire invented a method, his method, our method, the method which teaches the illiterate that they are perfectly literate in the languages of life, of work, of suffering, of struggle, (…)" (Boal 2005: 102).

Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) is a collection of methods of participatory theatre, which was developed by Augusto Boal in a context of repression and violence against people living in Latin America. During his exile, Boal brought his so-called 'arsenal' of methods to Europe, affirming that even in Europe oppression exists and that it needs to be abolished (Boal 2016: 68). TO is an involvement with concrete oppressive situations and a search for, and rehearsal of, new ways of action to tackle the perceived forms of oppression. The aim is to achieve concrete transformations in life, to dismantle oppression and to overcome the passivity of spectators. As stated in the introduction, in Theatre of the Oppressed, everybody has the right to take control over the creation of their own life reality (Boal 2016: 68f.). The central method is forum theatre, where scenes of conflict and oppression in daily life are shown. The audience then has the possibility to exchange for one of the protagonists on stage and try new ways of dealing with oppressive situations, to inspire and encourage each other in the fight for a more humane and just world (Boal 2016: 82f.).

When talking about TO as a method of transformative research, it is also necessary to talk about Paulo Freire´s ´Pedagogy of the Oppressed´, whose work significantly influenced Boal in his philosophy. Freire´s peda-

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gogy, as well as Boal´s theatre, highlight the importance of political activities for searching for the transformation and humanisation of the world. Neither gives up hope that change is possible, and both intersect in opening a discussion about oppression and liberation, action, reflection and transformation. As Fritz puts it: "From them one can learn, that nothing is carved in stone, that all books have yet to be written and that we must embark from where we are and go to where we could be, in the way we would like to be according to our actual capacity and abilities" (Fritz 2017: 41).

Fritz argues that, based on a deep friendship between Boal and Freire, the Pedagogy of the Oppressed can be seen as the ethical foundation of TO: it simplifies and humanises learning processes and it stands up for a radical democratisation of all kinds of processes – with the conviction that all people have knowledge (similar to Boal´s belief everyone is an artist) (Fritz 2013: 52ff.).

3.1 Freire´s critical pedagogy

The pedagogy of Freire is based on a differentiation of oppressed and oppressors, although neither often know that they are oppressed or that they act oppressively. Thus, the aim of Freire´s pedagogy is the liberation of both – the oppressed as well as the oppressors. Systematically, the oppressed are reduced to objects, who incorporate the opinion of the oppressors to such a degree that they degrade and humiliate themselves. Oppressed people follow the ideal of their oppressors in society and aim to become like them. To break this cycle of internalised oppression, Freire demands a resolution of the dichotomy of oppressed and oppressor. This is only possible if the oppressed realise their oppression, confront it critically, and act accordingly to change it (Freire´s concept of "conscientization"). Thereby, the aim is not the reversion of oppression, but the liberation of systemised oppression in general (Freire 1973: 39ff.). The right best method to reach this liberation is, according to Freire, true dialogue: through joint a mixture of reflection and action, the oppressed can experience themselves as self-efficient and creative agents that have the ability to fight for their own liberation (Freire 1973: 52ff.).

> "To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it. [...] Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection. But while to say

the true word – which is work, which is praxis – is to transform the world, saying that word is not the privilege of some few persons, but the right of everyone. […] If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings. Dialogue is thus an existential necessity." (Freire 2005: 88)

In Freire′s critical pedagogy, speaking "true words" is a praxis of transforming the world. Thus, the first step of liberation is to gain consciousness and to reflect about our own situatedness and the way in which we contribute to the maintenance of oppressive circumstances – as oppressed or oppressors – and then to engage in transformative dialogues. TO, with its activating methods, is in search of this true dialogue. The aim of the liberation process is a transformation from monologue to dialogue (Friedland 2011: 46).

The basic vocabulary of theatre is the body. To use the body as a language tool in theatre, it is crucial to know one's own body and its expressions. Through body movement, a process of liberation takes place, and a transformation from spectator to actor/actress, from witness to protagonist, is initiated. Boal describes, in four steps, how theatre transforms objects into subjects – and how we can engage as active agents in society, thus creating dialogue and transformative change. These steps require a) getting to know one's own body and understanding the power structures through which it is constructed (cf. Freire′s "conscientization"); b) using its expression as an expression of the self; c) understanding theatre as a vivid language; and d) translating relevant topics into theatrical action and starting a true dialogue about it (Boal 2016: 47). TO claims to be a philosophy of liberation: the spectators do not give the power to the actors/actresses to think in their stead, but rather liberate themselves from their passive role and start to act: they transform from spectators into spect-actors (Boal 2008: 135). Thus, a TO process is about the "conscientization" of the oppressed, the appropriation of their own truth and the words describing this truth, the engagement in a dialogue, and thereby a transformation of reality. Additionally, this requires a search for humanity, connection, error friendliness and true solidarity: "TO is about moving in close, questioning deeply, trying possible solutions, failing and sometimes succeeding, then examining actions even more carefully, always trying to get closer to what will create transformation in our flawed world" (Emert/Friedland 2011: 1).

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TO therefore seems to be an adequate research method that connects Freire´s principles of "true words", dialogue, and transformative action with critical inquiry. Since in scenic research the main data is collected through body knowledge, I am raising the question of whether "true words" must be spoken words, or if they cannot be embodied as well. This leads to an engagement with the body knowledge and its meaning in TO as a research method.

3.2 The body in the Theatre of the Oppressed

To conduct valid feminist and decolonial research, it is crucial to include knowledge marked as ´other´ (Raule 2019). Since in TO the body is the main language tool, it is body knowledge, or embodied knowledge, on which we focus in our TAR. The body is formed by oppressive structures and disciplined by material and ideological classification systems in society. The body incorporates the social order, which means social conditions of power and oppression are inscribed on it. Since, according to Howe, there is no space outside of oppression, our bodies are formed by everything we do and each surrounding we are exposed to (Howe 2019: 76f.). Depending on the social class and position, some bodies are more, some are less, controlled than others (Oyéwùmi 1998). The body stores social knowledge, an implicit knowledge that is not captured rationally or linguistically, but is rather expressed in emotions and movements (Hirschauer 2008: 977). Thus, on the one hand, every movement embodies socially learned norms. On the other hand, movements recreate this social interpretation in a performative way each time anew (Villa 2008). The body is not only oppressed and colonised – either through the active reduction of 'other' bodies in the colonies or through the subjugation of the body to the mind – but is also a space of permanent recreation, a space of creativity and liberation, and thus of transformative change (COMPA 2019). This embodied knowledge of social situations can emerge and become visible in theatre processes. In this context, scenic research gains a new relevance and TO presents an appropriate activist research method.

In Theatre of the Oppressed, the body plays an important role in enabling dialogue. Or as Freitag et al. put it: "Dialogue cannot occur without the foundation of an engaged body. We view dialogue as an extension of individual bodies communicating with one another in critical, reflexive conversation" (Freitag et al. 2011: 76).

Boal assumes that the body is mechanised through the constant repetition of body movements and reactions. The senses register, select and hierarchise sensations, and automated reactions are inscribed in muscle structures. Each movement, such as 'walking', is a complex sequence of body reactions. The senses recognise all sensations but pass them after hierarchically selecting the most important ones for the consciousness. This process of filtering is socially learned, and, as Boal puts it, results in a "mechanisation" of the body; in similar circumstances the body automatically always reacts in the same way. Therefore, Boal starts every theatre process with a so-called "de-mechanisation" – the liberation of the body from its learned automised patterns of reaction. This goes along with Freire`s "conscientication" of oppressive conditions. Through different excercises, participants learn to recognise, and later to control, their bodily reactions (Boal 2002: 29f.). Thus, the body in TO is regained, de-mechanised and becomes finally an expressive language: the revolutionary power of embodied knowledge and its language is that it cannot be silenced (Boal 2002: 272).

3.3 Image theatre for data collection in Theatre Action Research

One possible expression of this body language is Boal´s image theatre:

"In order to really *understand* a message, it is important to receive and to send it in different languages. An image is one of those many possible languages, and not the least of them" (Boal 2002: 176).

In image theatre, participants build a still image out of their bodies and those of the other participants, one that reflects the perspective on a certain topic (Boal 2008: 112). There are several different methods of dynamising (or setting in motion) those images in order to finally develop a whole theatre piece. One possible method to discover more about an image is the so-called ´inner monologue´: all the thoughts that come up in a specific position of the body should be voiced. "The body thinks", says Augusto Boal (Boal 2002: 207). Therefore, it is important to voice all the thoughts that are produced through this specific and intuitive position of the body in the image, and not the opinion of the individual in the situation. The body becomes "no more than a body thinking out loud" (Boal 2002: 207).

Since Boal´s image theatre acknowledges the body as a source of knowledge, it offers as a research method the possibility of collecting data of embodied knowledge. Verbalised inner monologue marks a first translation, which allows for the collection of written data material.

4. The research project "Act Out Loud!"

With a group of girls* from the age of 12 to 16 that come from different social backgrounds in Vienna, my colleague from our TO association in Vienna (Theater der Unterdrückten Wien, www.tdu-wien.at) and I conducted a Theatre Action Research. Since the deep-seated structure of female inferiority has a big influence on girls* that are raised in a patriarchal society, my research interest was to create more knowledge of the circumstances in which girls* in Vienna are living, which daily challenges they must overcome, and how they deal with them. The aim was to open a space where they could ask their own questions and raise their voices to speak about their own topics. Since research is never free of social interests, values and the standpoint of the researcher, it is important to mention that my position as a *white*, young, heterosexual woman gives me a particular perspective on society. On the one hand, oppressive experiences as well as theoretical studies on sexism and gender discrimination motivated me to conduct this research. On the other hand, they mark a connecting link to the research partners and to my conviction to find solutions together (Raule 2019: 9ff.).

In three months of weekly rehearsals the research partners developed a forum theatre play filled with situations of oppression that they are facing in daily life. Being embedded in a broad context of power-knowledge-relations, it is challenging to find a mode of research at equal level. Nevertheless, it is also about valuing the different resources and skills each participant contributes to the research project. Thus, my colleague and I were responsible for rehearsal rooms, fixing rehearsal times, and we contributed our knowledge of TO methods and other theatre techniques, while the research partners defined the topics they wanted to work with and shared their knowledge and experiences (Raule 2019: 41). In this way, a joint learning and research process was possible.

The play results from a process-oriented mix of action (the embodied scenic research of content) and reflection (the alignment of this content with the reality of the girls*. 'Generative themes', which were elaborated through different techniques and exercises of TO, were (Cyber-)Mobbing, the fear of being marked as 'other', invisibility as a female, homophobia and family conflicts or rather adultism. The forum theatre play "Lasst mICH SEIN!" (engl.: Let me BE ME!) was performed twice in different youth centres, where a large number of youths went on stage, tried to modify the scenes, and participated in the discussion of the topics. After finishing the performances, we met again in a group to intensively reflect on the process, celebrating and preparing a radio talk, where the girls* shared their experiences of TAR with more young people in Vienna (Raule 2019: 48ff.).

The main data material was collected in the first 10 rehearsals, where we worked in particular with image theatre and inner monologue; we also collected photographs and field notes. In a process-oriented data evaluation, I first analysed inherent conflicts and forms of oppression and their reference to society using Grounded Theory (Strauss/Corbin 1996). Second, I used photo-interpretation (Marotzky/Niesyto 2006) and thick description (Geertz 1973) to analyse pivotal moments of the rehearsal process (Raule 2019: 55ff.). Finally, I concluded that the forms of oppression the research partners are experiencing are similar to the power structures in scientific knowledge production. For example, is the fear of being marked as ´other´ (in the case of the girls* being lesbian/not heteronormative) and thus being oppressed, similar to the oppression of ´other´, not purely rational, heteronormative, *white* knowledge. However, through a positive connotation of the body as active and as a change making agent, the participative research with youth from marginalised groups and the public sharing of the learning process of the research partners, TAR can enlarge the canon of participative, transdisciplinary and feminist perspectives in science (Raule 2019: 91ff.).

5. How to conduct TAR with TO? Implementation of the method and useful excercises

First, it is important to note that the work with TO is a very context-specific one and the content in particular is always connected to the lived experiences of the research group. Scenic research can be used to work on a

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specific topic or research interest, but in combination with TAR it is important to let the research partners define their questions and the topics they want to work on. In my opinion, participation should always be voluntary and driven by participants' own questions and the motivation to search for possible change. In an enforced context (such as e.g. whole school classes), oppression is reproduced, and it is difficult (and perhaps even impossible) to find access to an honest dialogue. Especially in puberty, the body is often a place of shame and discomfort. Therefore, it is crucial to build a space of trust, where participants feel free to use their bodies in unfamiliar ways, to experiment, create and voice their own truth. This takes time and it is advisable to work continuously on the building of the group. The following exercises are chosen based on my experience in working with youth and were used in "Act Out Loud!" as well. They represent only a small introduction to many possible variations and exercises. Of course, they can be used in different contexts as well. Most of the described exercises are adaptations of Boal (2002) or Fritz (2012), and include my experiences and personal style as a facilitator.

5.1 Building the group

The first step in TAR is to find participants and a space to rehearse and work with the body. In our experience of working with groups of young people, it is beneficial to choose a low-threshold access, meaning a place the youth already know, such as e.g. youth centres or a place close to their school. The first meetings of the group should be about getting to know each other, and the methods used in TO, as well as establishing a space of error-friendliness, trust, and joy in working with the body. Also, research interests, the aim and duration of the project should be addressed, and the expectations of all participants should be clarified (Raule 2019: 48f.).

Fruit salad – a first game to get to know each other: Particularly for youths, it is often difficult for them to overcome their inhibitions in new groups and "show themselves". This game is a good first start to get to know each other and start moving: everyone sits in a circle on a chair (one chair fewer than participants), while one person stands in the middle of the circle and makes a (true!) statement about him/herself: "Who like me likes apples?". Everyone, who likes apples, must find a new chair, and the person in the middle tries to find one chair as well. A new person is now in

the middle and asks a new question. In the course of the game, more and more personal questions can be asked (Köck/Raule 2018: 36).

Stop and Go – Explore the space and establish error-friendliness: A nice way of creating a safe space is laughing together about our own errors. In "Stop and Go", we walk through the space, trying to fill it with our bodies while exploring it. Do not walk only in circles; try to change direction; be attentive; walk where there is space. When I say 'stop', everyone stops; when I say 'go' everyone resumes walking. Then we switch: when I say 'go', everyone stops, when I say 'stop', everyone starts walking. Play with it. Add more instructions like 'jump', 'say your name', and interchange them as well (Fritz 2013: 52). The aim is to make mistakes, to laugh, and to have fun. (Variation: whenever someone makes a huge mistake, this person is really 'upset' and shouts out loud, 'No!'. Enjoy playing with the frustration of your mistake.)

Blindfolded – working with different senses and trust: For many seeing people, it is a big step to go blindfolded through the space. In this exercise, one person leads the blindfolded partner through the space only by whispering his/her name. In the beginning, the leader should stay close to the partner; later, the leader can challenge the follower by changing directions and the distance between leader and follower. It is necessary to be careful of the other pairs moving through the space. To end the exercise, the leader finds the farthest place possible in the space and slowly leads the partner through the space only by whispering his/her name. As soon as the partner reaches the place, roles can be reversed. Afterwards, the pairs can interchange and discuss their experiences. (Variation of Boal´s "Noises" (Boal 2002: 116)).

In 'Act Out Loud!' those exercises helped the participants that didn´t know each other in the beginning to create trust and comfort in the group. One participant said, "Our group is just amazing. It was like fleeing my daily routine and my problems once a week. I love that we are laughing so much together" (Raule 2019, 91).

5.2 De-mechanisation and conscientisation

These exercises get the body moving and constitute a commencement of de-mechanising the body. Body work should be part of every rehearsal: it is important to relearn playing with the body, using it in the way we

want to and not in the way we learned to. Part of this process of de-mechanisation is also to understand that our bodies are formed by power structures – and that we are all part of an oppressive system, either as oppressor, oppressed or something in between.

To open and discuss the topic of oppression, two quite famous exercises are very useful: the "Colombian hypnosis" and the "Status game".

Colombian hypnosis – put the body in new positions and open the topic of oppression: Boal developed a series of exercises to discover new ways of structuring the muscles and expressing emotions and movements in order to find new ways of acting on stage as well as in life (Boal 2002: 50). One is the Colombian hypnosis, where one actor hypnotises another by holding their palm around 20 to 40 centimetres in front of the partner's face. The partner must follow the movements of the hand, always keeping the same distance. Thus, the hypnotiser can force his/her partner into uncomfortable body positions. The pace can vary, and movements through the whole space and levels are possible. The follower will use muscles which are rarely used. A de-mechanisation takes place. After a while, leader and follower change roles (Boal 2002: 51). (Variations: both are leading and following at the same time; one person leads two followers; one person leads a crowd etc.). After finishing the hypnosis, the participants create an intuitive image of how they felt in their role and place themselves in relation to their partner. To reflect upon this image, questions can be asked, such as: How did you feel in being follower/leader? Which was easier/more fun? Why? What does this situation remind you of? Where and whom do we usually follow? Do we lead? With these questions, the topic of oppression can be easily discussed in all type of groups.

Status game – embody power relations in society: Each participant draws a number between 1 and 5, that symbolises a status in society; therefore, 5 is the most powerful person in a society, 4 is upper middle class, 3 middle class, 2 lower class and 1 is the person who must fight for their own survival. Without knowing the status of the other participants, they start to improvise. It is recommended to start on a basic level, meaning to start with embodying the character while walking through the space and imagining a story (Who am I? What do I do? ...). A next step could be interacting with invisible characters (variation: without talking or only with the word "ulala"). The last step is to interact with the other characters in the space

as well. Depending on the participants' interpretation of the meaning of the specific status, diverse scenes can emerge and a discussion about hierarchies in society can take place. After improvising, the participants can form groups to build an image of power relations in society; another task could be to make an image of their daily life, where all statuses are part of the image. Particularly with youth, this exercise is a low-threshold way of discussing power relations in society (Ganguly 2017:13f.; Köck/Raule 2018: 36; Fritz 2013: 122-123).

5.3 Image theatre: a useful method to for collecting data with youth

Boal´s image theatre (Boal 2002: 174ff.) is a very useful tool with which to collect data on the topic the research group is working on, and to highlight the knowledge of the body. The body intuitively gets into a position, and thoughts of the ´thinking body´ (see above) are translated into an inner monologue. These sentences can be collected and analysed (e.g. with Grounded Theory) in a next step. There are many ways of finding images which are connected to the reality of the research group. Colombian hypnosis or the status game can inspire powerful images. For the work with a group of youths, the so-called statue dialogue proved to be successful in finding images that touch the reality of the research group (Köck/Raule 2018). In the TAR I conducted, I especially focused on intuitive body knowledge. The following example is one possible way of generating data based on intuitive body knowledge.

The participants walk through the space, I clap, the participants freeze in a body position, I clap again, and they continue walking. Now, while walking, I ask them to think about stressful or oppressive situations in their daily life. What makes you angry in this society? What do you want to change? What do these thoughts trigger in your body? (Depending on the research topic, the questions should be adapted) I clap again, they intuitively freeze, clap – they continue walking. I directly clap again – freeze – clap – walking – and clap again – freeze. Now I ask the participants to stay in this position and to feel into the position. Where do you feel tension? How are arms, legs, torso positioned? We continue working with this statue. We use the third reaction, because we know that the body has more than one possible way of reaction. The first one is the most

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common or obvious one. If we challenge our body and search for new ways of reacting, the body provides them, and we can learn new things about ourselves (Raule 2019: 77f.).

Now I ask half of the group to unfreeze and to look at the statues in the space. I invite them to intuitively choose one statue and 'answer', meaning to react with another statue. Thus, images of two or three people emerge. The group can choose one image to start working with so that the other participants can observe what happens next. Again, I ask them to feel into the body position and the relation to the other statue and invite them to give an inner monologue. These monologues give a first hint of the embodied knowledge of the situation and constitutes data that can be collected and analysed in a next step (Raule 2019: 77f.). Proceeding possible steps are to ask questions, such as: What do you want in this situation? What´s your aim? What are you afraid of? What is your biggest wish or your biggest secret? Or, to ask the other participants what they observed in this scene: Whom do they see? What kind of relation exists between the characters? Are important characters missing? If yes, add them. Another possibility is to ask the actors/actresses to make a following step or embody a movement they would like to express next in this specific situation. In any case, it is important to understand the situation and the conflict as a group, in order to enable reflection (Raule 2019: 78f.).

5.4 Reflection as an integral part of the rehearsal and the research process

After ending the rehearsal and/or the exercise, it is important to come together and reflect on what happened. What did we learn in this exercise or this image that we created? Where is the connection to our struggles in daily life? Is it oppression? What is my role in situations like this? In the process of TAR and the production of a forum theatre play, we usually work by means of loops of experimenting and reflecting. New scenes and images are created and afterwards compared with daily life experiences. Are the scenes and their conflicts realistic? Do they touch struggles the research partners are facing? In the beginning, a research group usually creates a lot of scenic content, but during the process the research topic and its connections to the important scenes emerge, which then lead to the forum theatre performance (Raule 2019: 51f.). The questions we discussed

in "Act Out Loud!" during and at the end of the rehearsals helped us to share our learning within the group and to focus on the topics the research partners really felt the need to continue working on.

6. Conclusion

The aim of Freire's pedagogy is an emancipatory transformation and an invitation to an honest dialogue based on "true words". Theatre Action Research as a research method, and the inclusion of embodied knowledge, not only allows us to challenge the dichotomous oppositional difference of Cartesian dualism in scientific knowledge production; it also opens the possibility of regaining full consciousness of the body through movement, to understand oppressive structures of society, and to reflect upon one's own situatedness in this system (Where am I oppressed? Where do I participate in maintaining oppression?) and to relearn that by dialogue, a joint solution to conflicts can be found. Thus, TAR with TO searches for active social transformation and starts by transforming the consciousness of the participants. To experience (on stage and later in real life) that everyone has the power to create, discuss and influence their own reality, is a huge step in believing in self-efficacy and in collective interventions.

Against this backdrop, Theatre Action Research can also be seen as a transdisciplinary research method, since it includes – indeed it is based on – the viewpoint of the research partners and thus avoids a purely academic stance. Transdisciplinary research aims to enable a true dialogue between academics and common knowledge, and thus fosters a holistic apprehension of a specific topic (Novy et al. 2008: 31f.). This is only possible (and reasonable) if all perspectives, and especially the perspectives of marginalised standpoints (cf. standpoint epistemology), are included. Thus, the groundings of TAR are transdisciplinary. In the conducted research the mix of Theatre Action Research with different disciplines (decolonial and feminist criticism of science, critical development studies, social sciences etc.) seemed to be crucial in order to come closer to a holistic understanding of the complexity of oppressions the research partners face and how they think about them.

However, in the canon of critical feminist and decolonial research praxis, it seems paradoxical to produce a written text in a research project that uses embodied knowledge as a main source. Written scientific notation reduces the expressiveness of embodied knowledge and a new hierarchy of knowledge is produced. To what extent do we reproduce a specific coloniality of knowledge if we feel obliged to stick to written standards of academia? In the end, written results in a TAR using embodied knowledge are nothing more than a reduction, a fraction of the knowledge the body can express and communicate. In future discussions about scientific knowledge generation, it could be negotiated as to in what way theatre plays and productions could stand as scientific results in themselves – without being translated into written texts (Raule 2019: 47f.).

Nevertheless, TAR as a research method supports a transdisciplinary and transformative production of knowledge that generates access to participation and articulation. The research is undertaken by the people themselves and in their own interest, since they are tackling the questions they are concerned with. In the "conscientization" of one′s own situatedness in social power structures, in developing the wish to change those structures and in becoming active through creating one′s own social reality, transformation becomes possible. Critical science must vouch for naming and dismantling oppressive structures. Scenic research based on body knowledge and Freire`s principles is one step in that direction. To end with the words of Denzin: "Performance is an act of intervention, a method of resistance, a form of criticism and a way of revealing agency and presence in the world" (Denzin 2010: 301).

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1   Adultism is a form of structural discrimination that dictates that "only adults are viewed as credible authorities and able to act, while youth serve as recipients of knowledge and action" (Bettencourt 2018: 2). However, critical academic discourse highlights these days the need of research with kids and youths: they are experts on their lived realities and participatory research conducted from a youth's perspective is crucial for a holistic research approach (cf. Wöhrer 2017: 49; Kellet 2010: 185-197).

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ABSTRACT *Basierend auf Freires Auseinandersetzungen zu Transformation führte die Autorin eine Theater-Aktions-Forschung mit Mädchen* durch, in der das Theater der Unterdrückten als Methode der Datensammlung verwendet wurde. In diesem Artikel verbindet die Autorin die Notwendigkeit, Machtstrukturen in der Wissenschaft zu hinterfragen mit der Wichtigkeit Körperwissen in feministischen und transformativen Forschungspraxen zu verankern. Konkrete Methoden und Erfahrungswissen werden für die Durchführung einer solchen Forschung vorgestellt und abschließend diskutiert.*

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