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# Exploring the relationship between legislative theatre and critical participatory action research

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, we argue that Legislative Theatre processes, as presented by Boal in his book *Legislative Theatre: Using Performance to Make Politics* and initially implemented in Rio de Janeiro in 90', can be considered (Critical Participatory) Action Research processes and conducted as such – depending on the approach of the process leader and their consciousness. We present the scope of Legislative Theatre as part of the techniques of the Theatre of the Oppressed, and we outline the common origins of Legislative Theatre and Action Research in the work of Freire, Boal, Moreno, and Lewin. We explore similarities and differences between their ideas to show where they are convergent and where they are not. In doing so, we aim to highlight the importance of the Action Research perspective for enhancing the work of social activists using Legislative Theatre. We consider the possible benefits and costs of such integration, and we conclude the paper with recommendations for further research.

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Legislative theatre; critical participatory action research; theatre as research; P. Freire; A. Boal; J. L. Moreno

## Introduction

The inspiration to write this paper arose from the authors' practical and theoretical struggle regarding their role as young researchers and as social activists. Our current research interests regarding the Theatre of the Oppressed and Action Research (AR), combined with the simultaneous implementation of the research and Legislative Theatre projects, led us to reflect on the methodology and our roles as researchers and activists. While experientially implementing different strategies, we wanted to confront our intuitions with the relevant theoretical frameworks.

In this paper, we aim to explore the common grounds of Legislative Theatre proposed by Augusto Boal (1998) and (Critical Participatory) Action Research. We argue that there is an inextricable connexion between them when considered through their origins, rooted in the thinking of Paulo Freire, Jacob Moreno, and Kurt Lewin, and we examine the assumptions underlying their practice. When certain theoretical assumptions are fulfilled, each Legislative Theatre process might be regarded as Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR), described in the work of Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon (2014). We will elaborate on certain benefits arising from integration of these frameworks (Grandi 2021), especially where the primary goal of the Legislative Theatre process is seen in social activism. This paper neither provides a comprehensive analysis of Boal's experiments nor

attempts to address the spectrum of AR. We will, however, analyse relevant elements for a broad understanding of the argument to consider Legislative Theatre as CPAR.

To achieve this goal, we first present our understanding of CPAR. We then outline the basics of Theatre of the Oppressed and Legislative Theatre, including examples of Legislative Theatre processes. Next, we draw on their shared roots by pointing out some of their significant thinkers, and we conclude by presenting the integration of both frameworks.

## Our understanding of critical participatory action research

We understand CPAR as being that which ‘expresses a commitment to bring together broad social analysis, the self-reflective collective self-study of practice and transformational action to improve things’, Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon (2014, 12). Important elements of CPAR include:

- the role of the relationship between education and social change;
- commitment to participation;
- commitment to revealing the disempowerment and injustice created in industrialised societies;
- the inclusion of critical friends in the research group.

Kemmis emphasises that the focus for CPAR is how to create what Orlando Fals Borda calls *vivência* (humane forms of social life) and what changes in the public sphere are needed for this goal – for this ‘re-interpretation of the practice of public discourse through the ideas of communicative action, communicative space, public spheres, and the idea of research as a social practice with new kinds of participation’, Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon (2014, 12).

While this might not yet be obvious, our argument is twofold. We consider that each Legislative Theatre event can constitute CPAR, and that Legislative Theatre is a suitable form of CPAR. Below we will suggest key features of CPAR that we consider crucial for a comparison and better understanding of the approach.

## Purposes of action research

Building upon the definition of CPAR, we consider it important to briefly present the purposes of AR for a better understanding of the AR to CPAR spectrum as proposed by Carr and Kemmis (1986). They differentiated three kinds of interest that AR projects support: technical, practical, and critical AR. Technical AR is focused on the control and improvement of participant-researcher practice from the perspective and interests of the practitioner, and while it can refer to the role of others in the practice, these others are objectified by the practitioner. Roles are asymmetrical and the results of analyses are in the hands of the practitioner. An example of such practice in the context of social activity could be a project focusing on the improvement of one’s skills as a Legislative Theatre Process Leader and this would aspire towards the improvement of one’s practice as an activist/professional.

Practical AR is also 'self-directed'; however, there is greater concern to give voice to the other participants. These participants are subjectified, and their views are included to improve both the means and the ends of the practice. While it is still the practitioner who decides about the themes and changes, the relationship is intended to be more symmetrical and reciprocal. We consider that Legislative Theatre projects without the CPAR approach – activist Legislative Theatre designed with a predefined scope and project outcomes – can often be considered practical AR. In these situations, the goal is usually to improve the practice – e.g. on education on civil rights – and there is a collaborative and deliberative element, but the main frame remains predefined or to be decided by the process leader.

Finally, Critical AR is one where two themes occur: first – there is strict reciprocity between the researcher-practitioner and the others – leading to all participants becoming 'us', as a group. All participants work and decide together on the theme and any changes. Additionally, a critical paradigm is required that links with critical theory (see, e.g. Fine and Torre 2021) to foreground the issues of power; Carr and Kemmis argue that Critical AR needs to 'explore their [participants] work and lives as socially constructed formations that may need to be transformed if their work and its consequences are irrational, unsustainable or unjust' (Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon 2014, 16, 14).

## Features of critical participatory action research

According to Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon (2014, 5) there are five types of conditions for practitioners that CPAR creates. What is important is how the researchers understand the concept of 'critical'. In the core of this approach lies the rejection of the positivist view of social research as objective, arguing instead that it is value- and theory-laden. The researcher's role and interests will influence the research design. Because CPAR rejects the notion of objectivity in favour of *critical self-reflection* and engagement in practice, this means that it is not always possible to follow the 'steps' of traditional research conventions which include background, theses, hypotheses, means of verification, conclusions, etc.

## CPAR as an approach, and the critical participatory action research spiral

In CPAR, not only may it be difficult to follow classical research conventions, but it may even not be possible to maintain the spiral of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, then replanning, acting, observing which were once considered fundamental for AR. Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon (2014) argue that it is rare in real life for AR to be that pure and separated and structured, as stages overlap, and plans change within the dynamic process. They claim that what is more important is the collaborative character and the social object of the research. Kemmis cites Schatzki's (2002, 20) belief that human coexistence and the forms thereof are central to CPAR:

a social process of collaborative learning for the sake of individual and collective self-formation, realised by groups of people who join together in changing the practices through

which they interact in a shared social world – a shared social world in which, for better or for worse, we live with the consequences of one another's actions.

The goal of CPAR is also to explore and to improve *actual* rather than *abstract* practices. It is about the 'here and now' explored in the learning process, the outcomes of which are changes in participants' sayings, doings and the way they relate to each other.

## Theatre of the oppressed and legislative theatre

Legislative Theatre is one of the branches of the Theatre of the Oppressed techniques developed over the years by Boal. Theatre of the Oppressed is an umbrella term referring both to Boal's understanding of theatre and its role in society and to a range of the Theatre of the Oppressed techniques. Boal used a metaphor of the tree to picture the relations between them. The Tree of Theatre of the Oppressed includes techniques such as Newspaper, Image, Invisible, Forum and Legislative theatre (Babbage 2018). The latter two are most relevant to this article, and we describe them further below. Soeiro (2019), suggests that we should consider Theatre of the Oppressed as a process rather than as a direct method or technique. While Legislative Theatre is primarily based on Forum Theatre, we disagree with Jackson (1997, 49) that '[t]he only difference between Forum Theatre and Legislative Theatre is that at the end of the latter, the audience is invited to suggest rules or laws or guidelines which have arisen naturally during the performance.' We consider Legislative Theatre a process – rather than an approach – as the latter could trivialise Legislative Theatre such that it becomes Forum Theatre (but 'legally oriented') aiming at promulgating, amending, or repealing laws. While the ultimate goal of Legislative Theatre is indeed a normative change, we consider law a sociological phenomenon, a social fact in the Durkheimian sense. Because we refuse to accept the strict positivist approach to law as 'law in books', we see the possible influence of Legislative Theatre reaching far beyond solely a change of bills. The possible influence of Legislative Theatre processes can be seen in individual transformation, raising social awareness, and strengthening dialogue between engaged parties – including lawmakers. While recently a rise in interest in Legislative Theatre methodology can be noticed (Bodziński-Guzik and Stożek 2023; LeoNimm, Morgan, and Rubin 2022; Tudorache 2021), Legislative Theatre can be considered as a niche interest for Theatre of the Oppressed practitioners. Boal's techniques link to AR because people experiencing oppression could not only recognise the features of oppression but also address them through theatre intervention (Etmanski 2014a). As Makepeace (2021) shows when drawing upon examples from different research projects, it is, however, not only about the possibility but also the necessity of accessing such methods for social research purposes in particularly challenging contexts. In her example of the project exploring gender, sexuality, marriage, and the caste of young people in India, she claims it would not be possible to address certain taboo topics, such as same sex attraction using conventional social research methods.

On the other hand, she cautions that using Theatre of the Oppressed as a transformative artistic practice and not as a research methodology might require the

integration of additional research methods and finding ways to adapt or supplement existing research approaches. We agree with Etmanski (2014b) that Theatre of the Oppressed techniques can be used at various moments and stages of the research practice. Additionally, Legislative Theatre itself, as created by Boal, is a complex process, going beyond just the Forum Theatre experience, and drawing upon additional forms of data input and multiple expertise through a series of stages. Integrating Legislative Theatre and CPAR can help to limit the tendency or risk of stepping too far aside from Boal's original goals and his critical and political agenda (see Howe, Boal, and Soeiro 2019).

For Boal (1998, 16), one of the main themes of Legislative Theatre is that it is 'making theatre as politics rather than merely making political theatre'. The main idea of Legislative Theatre remains in line with Forum Theatre. A play – a story created by the concerned group facing particular oppression – is created and presented to the audience, preferably facing the same problems (Boal 1998, 213; Makepeace 2021). The staging is facilitated by the Joker – purposely named like this by Boal to underline the role of 'difficultiation' and problematisation (Jackson 1995). The role of the Joker is to provoke collective thinking and deliberation but also to maintain Theatre of the Oppressed principles, the event structure and the participants' safety. Additionally, what seems particularly important for the Legislative Theatre joker's role is to test with the audience the societal relevance of the problems depicted in the play or raised during the session (Boal 1998, 46). While finding common ground for dialogue about the featured oppression is important for Theatre of the Oppressed as a whole, for Legislative Theatre, it is essential to tackle systemic rather than individual or interpersonal oppression (Tudorache 2021, 77).

Once the play has been presented for the first time the 'intervention' part begins, where the members of the audience – empowered by Boal as *spect-actors* – can stop the play and intervene by replacing the protagonist and changing the plot of the play. It is not entirely clear if for Boal, in Legislative Theatre, like in Forum Theatre, the tritagonists – subsidiary characters – can be replaced. As Tudorache (2021) convincingly points out, in Legislative Theatre it is only the protagonist that can be replaced due to the depiction of the (oppression of the) legal system. While we acknowledge her argumentation, we strongly argue for wide audience engagement, which in certain settings can result in replacing other (than a protagonist) characters. The intervention part is followed by a *foruming* part, where the audience and the actors deliberate on the changes made.

What strongly differentiates Legislative Theatre from Forum Theatre is the presence of the so-called 'metabolic cell' – or experts. While Boal's (1998, 93) description of the composition of the metabolic cell is quite vague as consisting of 'general administration ... the legislative assessors ... and one occasional and changing constituency ... those interested in the particular subject', we argue that its role should allow analyses and draft proposals for legislation. We largely agree with the suggestion that the metabolic cell should include three individuals (roles): a legislative expert experienced in drafting legal proposals, a lawyer experienced in the issue of concern and an activist concerned in the issues (Pekarna Magdalenske mreže 2018 YouTube). However, we need to distinguish between two types of legislative theatre: one with, and one without the legislator (see Boal 1998, 113). As explained above, our understanding of legal change goes beyond a simple amendment of bills (see LeoNimm, Morgan, and Rubin 2022; Pratt and Johnston

2007, 109; Tudorache). We appreciate that it may seem kind of magical thinking that a Legislative Theatre session can lead directly to legislative change (although Boal was unusual in managing to pass 13 local bills during his term as a Brazilian city councillor). Therefore, we do not aim to focus on the composition of the metabolic cell, but rather on its role. During the play and *foruming*, the role of the metabolic cell is to record and reflect on the proposals raised – and, preferably, to point out during the discussion, the issues listed below. The metabolic cell's task is, using Boal's own organic metaphor (Boal 1998, 93), to separate the redundant from the useful; in simple words, to assess the ideas generated during the *foruming* participative discussion against the legal context.

We consider the role of the metabolic cell within the context of a particular play; however, as Legislative Theatre can (and should) be considered a wider process, an approach to this role is to consider a wider input of multiple Legislative Theatre sessions, as we will describe below. After the play and *foruming* session, the metabolising cell shall present the proposal raised by the audience, pointing out the following:

- (1) Existing laws – to make the audience aware of them – and analyse possible pitfalls – which can be, for example, the lack of awareness of their existence, or issues on the implementation level;
- (2) Proposal of new laws that can improve the situation presented;
- (3) Amendments or derogations of existing laws which are the cause of the unjust situation.

Finally, an element of voting on the proposals should take place – to choose the preferred way of action – and to give a democratic mandate to the proposals chosen.

Two more aspects are important when it comes to describing and understanding the original Legislative Theatre project – as a process rather than a single event. The first one is the context in which it was implemented (when Boal was a legislator). The other addresses the subsidiary methods and techniques, such as Chamber in the Square – a theatricalised debate on issues of concern, shaped as a kind of parliamentary session and generating a source of information about social problems and the role of the metabolising cell within the cabinet.

The chance to try Legislative Theatre came to Boal as something of a surprise, as he was elected a *vereador* (city councillor) for the city of Rio de Janeiro in 1993. When elected, Boal organised his office using a budget to fund the work of jokers who would work with different engaged groups on their problems using Legislative Theatre and creating reports and summaries. The metabolising cell was a part of his cabinet that would analyse those issues and propose feedback. Based on that, the group would further develop the ideas.

We highlight two crucial issues when it comes to considering the connexion between Legislative Theatre and CPAR. Firstly, Boal only successfully implemented his Legislative Theatre when in a position of power, and secondly, Legislative Theatre as described by Boal is a process and as such requires a system in which to operate, rather than be considered a technique that can be instrumentally applied to every problematic situation. We are strongly convinced that the lack of these two considerations in the current implementations of Legislative Theatre is one of the reasons for their failures or under-performance. At the same time, we believe that integrating a CPAR perspective into

Legislative Theatre processes can help to partially overcome these obstacles, by including both power and systemic context. It is important to stress that there are additional, possible social advantages of implementing ‘imperfect’ Legislative Theatre – such as individual changes, reflection, and learning – that do not require an actual change of a legal regulations. However, while we consider Theatre of the Oppressed to be a transformative experience for an individual, we claim that the impact can be deepened and strengthened by the integration we discussed herein.

We suggest that some of Legislative Theatre’s current approaches and implementations either neglect or omit some elements of Boal’s initial idea or tend to synthesise it in a somewhat limited time by including elements of the metabolising cell and voting into a single staging. Using time-saving and cost-effective solutions is understandable; however, in the end, each process shall be assessed against its goals and aims. Legislative Theatre aims to change oppressive law through ideas generated by a theatrical experience based on the abovementioned techniques of the Theatre of the Oppressed. To illustrate our understanding of Legislative Theatre we offer the following examples.

In 2020, the Legislative Theatre was used to devise the recommendations for the Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2021–2026 in Greater Manchester. The artists and social activists with ‘experience of accessing homelessness services’ created a spectacle and performed three shows concerning that topic. As the organisers claim, ‘proposals resulted in a shortlist of policy recommendations that informed the Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2021–2026’ (Manchester 2021).

The second implementation comes from the extensive work of TONYC which is based in New York and started its work on Legislative Theatre in 2013. It is one of the leading organisations in Legislative Theatre, with numerous shows on immigration, access to housing and minority rights. In its first Legislative Theatre process, the group of actors from community organisations that supported the LGBTQ youth homeless population of New York City created the spectacle about the difficulties of youth of colour that were ‘kicked out of their homes for their gender identity or sexual orientation.’ The Legislative Theatre experience inspired several policymakers of New York to either establish new initiatives focused on recognising youth homeless LGBTQ needs or support new legislation (Kelly-Golfman 2018).

## Exploring common roots between legislative theatre and critical participatory action research

The thinking of Freire, Moreno, and Lewin is fundamental to both Theatre of the Oppressed and AR. The relatedness and complementarity of these contributions inspired us to consider possible integrations of Legislative Theatre and CPAR.

### Freire’s project for social transformation

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* ([1970] 2018), Freire elaborates on the concept of critical education introducing multiple concepts, such as *conscientização* (consciousness raising), praxis, dialogue, ‘banking’ education and his understanding of the oppression-oppressed-oppressor triad. The central idea relating Theatre of the Oppressed and Legislative Theatre is the concept of banking education. Banking education may be considered as false

dialogue – the state of ‘depositing’ ideas from the teacher (who possesses and controls what constitutes as knowledge) to the empty vessels of students’ minds. Banking education is a one-direction, top-down relationship in which the student is treated as an object as opposed to a reciprocal, equal relationship of mutual learning in critical education, i.e. pedagogy that leads to liberation (Freire 2018, 72). Banking education is what prevents *conscientização* and helps the oppressors maintain the status quo (2018, 74). Oppression is ‘[a]ny situation in which “A” objectively exploits “B” or hinders his and her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person’ (Freire 2018, 55). Freire’s pedagogical goal is the liberation that can happen only by the transformation of the oppressed. It is only the oppressed that can liberate both themselves and the oppressors. Freire warns that it cannot happen by overcoming the oppression through putting the previous oppressors into the position of the oppressed, and nor can it happen by seeking only individual liberation and becoming an oppressor of other oppressed people. Revolutionary actions must lead to freedoms of which the oppressed and the oppressors were hitherto afraid. This is because the oppressors are internalised within the oppressed – so the oppressed imagine freedom as being in the position of power. Therefore, the pedagogy of the oppressed must be participatory and forged *between* the oppressed and their oppressors, leading to humanisation and freedom for all (2018, 46–48).

Freire and his ideas are considered influential in shaping CPAR (Campos and Anderson 2021; Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon 2014, 11; Schugurensky 2014). At least two main benefits can be discerned as a result of this influence; these are, firstly, Freire’s literacy programmes (Campos and Anderson 2021; Schugurensky 2014) and, secondly, contributing the participatory and emancipatory dimension of Freire’s praxis to Lewin’s approach (Herr, and Anderson 2015). One of Freire’s famous achievements was his literacy programmes across Brazil, where he practised the approach later described in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He adapted the horizontal, dialogical approach by using the language of the participants as a starting point, rather than imposing a fixed curriculum (Campos and Anderson 2021; Schugurensky 2014). This approach has also shaped Boal’s approach. For Freire, literacy was a door to political participation.

Freirean concepts strengthen both the participatory and critical emancipatory dimension of AR as they stress both the necessity to include the participants as subjects as well as the issue of power. His praxis (combining reflection and action) is also the very core principle of AR that combines knowledge generation with action. Therefore, we suggest that while Freire’s legacy is primarily attributed to aspects of PAR, they can also be related to Legislative Theatre as CPAR.

This becomes more apparent if we consider the three axes of Freire’s project for social transformation: 1) humanisation as the direction and goal; 2) education as means; and, 3) politics as the recognition of power dynamics. As Schugurensky (2014, 369) claims:

we can also find a connection between Freire’s educational efforts towards the development of a critical consciousness, which comes in part from the capacity to establish relationships among facts and in part from the capacities to establish such relationships as developed through research activities.

We have not addressed all the possible reflections and links with respect to Freire and AR, as our goal was to present the scope of Freire’s ideas and the links with AR which we consider develops the relationship between CPAR and Legislative Theatre.

Freire's ideas inspired the Theatre of the Oppressed concept (Babbage 2018; Boal 1998, 129; Pratt and Johnston 2007, 104). The most obvious influence which is often overlooked is the semantic link between theatre and pedagogy of the oppressed. Both concepts focus on the state of the oppression faced by the individuals. For Boal, the concept of banking education was crucial in developing his methods. The idea of turning spectator into *spect-actor* reflected his aim of turning the person as an object into a person as a subject (Freire [1970] Babbage 2018; Freire 2018).

Apart from friendship, what linked Boal's ideas with Freire was the ALFIN project, launched in Peru against illiteracy. Boal was responsible for the theatrical part of the project and became hugely influenced by illiteracy. The project was largely based on Freirean achievements and its pedagogic principles heavily influenced Boal's practice (Babbage 2018; Boal 1979, 120–156). The project was also driven by the need for *conscientização*. First of all, ALFIN aimed to make all types of expression equal, both artistic and verbal. Secondly, it underlined the need for dialogue between 'trainer' and participant – sharing the knowledge and learning from each other. It reversed Boal's previous top-down approach of participants being enlightened by theatre activists.

Freire's assumptions and ideas about the education process underpin Theatre of the Oppressed techniques. What is brought by the participants is critically worked upon – not only during the show but during the whole process. There is no didactic teacher in Theatre of the Oppressed. Ultimately the goal is to seek change, to release blockages and to act.

## **Legislative theatre, critical participatory action research and the work of Moreno**

Moreno's concept of psychodrama involves therapy using theatre as method in the process, and sociometry. It is also worth mentioning sociodrama, which prioritises the group's concerns over those of individual group members, as is the case with psychodrama (Giacomucci 2021, 291). As Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon (2014) explain, while the invention of AR is ascribed to Lewin, Lewin himself drew on the concepts of Moreno. However, according to Josef Gunz (1996, 146), Moreno's approach could not have been fully accepted by Lewin and other members of the scientific community because it was 'permeated with a religious touch'. As Gunz suggests, accepting Moreno as a founder of AR requires understanding it 'as part of sociology dealing with the integration and participation of people in the process of social change' (146). Gunz claims that Moreno's influence emphasises the importance of leaving participants space to co-create the research space, the goals and the means, and by doing so also avoiding passivity as they became subjects rather than objects of the research.

Boal distanced himself from the influence of Moreno practice; however, links relating to Boal's theatre and therapy seemed to be strengthened in his *Rainbow of Desire* (Boal 1995; Landy 2008, 86–7). Boal declared himself rather ambiguous as to Moreno's practice (Taussig and Schechner 1994, 26). Or to be more precise, he distanced himself from the catharsis which in his understanding was the one Moreno sought in his type of theatre – a dynamic one. For Aristotle, catharsis was a form of purification – releasing negative emotions by observing the fictitious characters in a play. For Moreno, who distinguished three types of catharsis (aesthetic, audience and action),

catharsis was a creativity generating tool that helped to find solutions to problems. Finally, for Boal, catharsis was the motivation to intervene in the play, which results in breaking the barriers to action (797, 810). Meisiek suggested that the main difference between Moreno's and Boal's approach to catharsis is aim, time and goal. While the former wants to produce a change in the society, for the latter it is the real change of society. Psychodrama considers past, present and future, while the Theatre of the Oppressed uses past as inspiration to change the future. Finally, while Moreno's methods are focused on the individual, Boal's focus is on the mechanism of oppression.). While there are some differences in the approaches, we would like to conclude by pointing out some more similarities.

Feldhendler (1994, 89) suggests that a substantial part of the psychotherapeutic community sees Boal's techniques as 'ideologically and practically related to the work of J. L. Moreno' and that they 'share a fundamental conception of theatre and its healing effects and, even further, of humankind.'. He notes that the goal of overcoming oppression for Boal comes by re-establishing dialogue (as the oppression is when dialogue becomes monologue) and relates to Moreno's aim at establishing encounter among humans. Moreno's theatre forms can be associated with those of Boal, e.g. his conflict theatre has commonalities with Forum Theatre, Living Newspaper with newspaper theatre and therapeutic theatre with 'Cop-in-the-head' techniques. While Boal's work is not considered therapy in the strict sense, it has healing potential in the socio-political area (Walsh 2013). Feldhendler suggests that Boal and Moreno recognised the same phenomena, although they named them differently. The value of spontaneity; the space where theatrical action occurs; the ability to re-create and act on the situation; the creative frame of stage and participants; and catharsis are similarly perceived by both. However, regarding the latter, Feldhendler suggest that Boal differentiates between Morenian catharsis and Theatre of the Oppressed catharsis. As Feldhendler (1994, 99) states, the action catharsis of Moreno is similar to the one described by Boal as it is:

when the protagonist of an action was transformed into the performer of himself or herself and hence triggered a deep experience of self-knowledge. Emotional blocks loosened and dissolved, previously obstructed behavioural capabilities were recovered, and new possibilities for action were induced.

We do agree that there is a connection between Moreno's and Boal's methods. While the degree to which Moreno can be considered influential for the creation of the Theatre of the Oppressed, and particular techniques can vary and remain contestable (see Babbage 2018), for practitioners it can be useful to acknowledge the similarities, whilst bearing in mind the differences, and combine them in practice – as some practitioners do, according to Giacomucci (2021).

## **Kurt Lewin and group dynamics**

Lewin's contribution to AR is frequently cited and too often focused on his status as 'the originator of Action Research' (Adelman 1993). Moving beyond that claim, we are more interested in his focus on the group phenomenon and intergroup relations, as well as his stance on the relationship between research, action, and learning. Drawing on his experiences studying factory workers, Lewin coined a triangle metaphor to illustrate

how an action is informed by previous learning, how learning needs to be based on the research, and how the research depends on the directions and problems produced by the action (Lewin 1946). This has proven to be consequential for social research. It is particularly significant when considering the common roots of Legislative Theatre and CPAR. To some extent, any Legislative Theatre or CPAR process involves research, action, and learning. However, the question of how these elements can be combined purposefully and effectively must be addressed in practical contexts.

The Theatre of the Oppressed and AR also benefited from Lewin's focus on the groups and their interaction. His systemic and empirical approach opened space for considering such elusive concepts as group dynamics. He dedicated much of his work to the research on the group phenomenon, which he understood in Gestalt terms ('the whole is greater than the sum of its parts'). Perhaps his personal background and life experiences directed his particular interest in working with disempowered minority groups. His work stressed the importance of group dynamics and behaviours in social change processes and the need to design group interventions that will support it. As we consider Legislative Theatre to be one such possible intervention, Lewin's legacy can be particularly helpful in understanding the group dynamics during Legislative Theatre, its relation to the outer world, and exploring possible meanings and consequences of both.

### **The implications for integrating legislative theatre and critical participatory action research approaches**

Thus far we have argued that Legislative Theatre and CPAR are linked through their origins, substance, and goals. The common elements include: a) commitment to social change; b) a critical approach; c) a focus on action based on reflection; d) work aimed at empowerment and fighting injustice (understood as oppression, dehumanisation, objectification); e) participatory character (in terms of engagement of those affected, and horizontal power dynamics); and f) adopting an experience/learning oriented approach.

In terms of conceptualisation, it is evident that Legislative Theatre and CPAR share common objectives. The concept of Legislative Theatre as proposed by Boal aligns with the scope and principles of CPAR. However, not every Legislative Theatre process can be considered as such. We see at least two possible reasons for this. The first reason is that Legislative Theatre is overlooked when considering research approaches and is not adopted as an AR practice. Not all Legislative Theatre or Theatre of the Oppressed practitioners are familiar with the concept of CPAR, which makes them unable to consider exploring the wider implications of drawing more fully on CPAR approaches when engaging participants. This precludes them overtly adopting CPAR rationales. The second reason is that many social projects, including those using the Theatre of the Oppressed, are designed in the manner of practical AR, and thus oriented towards the practitioner-leader's aims and goals. While the reasons for this approach can vary (including the financial constraints in terms of funders' requirements, limited research skills, or even the 'banking' educational attitude towards the participants), this can result in superficial critical reflection on the participative learning process as such. As a result, what happens is not fully analysed and researched by the participants – the elements of self-reflection and self-study can be unfulfilled.

What are, therefore, the benefits of integrating the CPAR perspective? What are the costs and how is it possible to do it? We see the potential benefits on three levels: processual, individual, and research. Adopting a CPAR perspective for Legislative Theatre can help to ensure the process is on a 'critical path' and bring it closer to its origins. Deeper ongoing reflection on what is happening can support the effectiveness of the process and can make it possible to re-plan and re-act. On the individual level, it can enhance the participants' empowerment and critical awareness – as they would be responsible not only for 'the issue at hand' but also for the whole process of research. Focus on the learning process can also improve the external outcomes – the ability to act in the real world – as expected by Boal. Finally, on the research level – or what we could call dissemination or knowledge sharing – it can help to improve the practice, and due to a more structured scope, facilitate sharing the experience and findings – as often such processes remain undisclosed and thus not available to others.

Adapting CPAR requires some knowledge about this practice, and as we pointed out earlier, to conduct Legislative Theatre, a set of Theatre of the Oppressed competences is required. The biggest challenge is therefore educational – to raise awareness and change the approach to CPAR. On the individual level it can be an effort to become familiar with CPAR principles and to conceptualise one's practice in this framework. This can be time consuming and difficult. Additionally, depending on personal attitudes, it might require critical reflection on one's own practice. Another challenge might be the participants' engagement and responsibilities towards the process. Demanding that participants fully engage in research can prove a barrier, but the theatrical ways of conducting the research process may help to overcome these barriers, and Legislative Theatre can in fact be more supportive for participants than demanding they engage with a more conventional research process that might seem intimidating to individuals with no research experience.

Finally, how should Legislative Theatre be integrated with CPAR? We believe there is no other answer than to practice and to improve our practice through CPAR. To do it, we suggest that the inclusion of another role in the Legislative Theatre process – that of 'Research leader' – is required. Our recommendation would be to engage other practitioners experienced in CPAR as 'kind guardians' or to start with self-directed types of AR and explore one's practice first. Our aim is to use CPAR approaches to critique and to develop Legislative Theatre practices, and as we hope this paper is one step towards this goal – considering Legislative Theatre as a valuable strand of CPAR.

## Conclusions

In this paper we argued that Legislative Theatre can be considered a form of CPAR. Following this, we laid out our interpretation of CPAR closest to our understanding and purpose. We have outlined the scope of Legislative Theatre as a process by presenting its elements and through highlighting Boal's initial implementation. We have indicated the possible difficulties and obstacles for current practitioners – referring to the wider scope of Boal's project and his privileged role as legislator. We have devoted much of this paper to illustrating the links between Legislative Theatre and AR through the thinking and conceptual awareness of Freire, Moreno, and Lewin which highlight the common origins

and shared assumptions. The ideas of these thinkers can be considered as influencing both the Theatre of the Oppressed and AR. Finally, we have outlined that there are indeed common grounds and axiological assumptions that justify considering Legislative Theatre an example of CPAR. We have briefly shown our reflection on the conditions, advantages, and obstacles of adopting Legislative Theatre approaches, and we maintain that, in the best AR traditions, experimenting with the practical application of Legislative Theatre approaches is the best way to further develop both our practices and critical understanding.

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