**LaCuKnoS Theater Games**

by Cory Buxton based on [Agosto Boal’s *Theater of the Oppressed*](https://www.amazon.com/Theatre-Oppressed-Augusto-Boal-ebook/dp/B00F96A5JG/ref%3Dsr_1_1?crid=RIT7GFF181TZ&dchild=1&keywords=theater+of+the+oppressed&qid=1587080273&sprefix=theater+of+the+oppressed%2Caps%2C211&sr=8-1) & [Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor’s *Teachers Act Up!*](https://www.amazon.com/Teachers-Act-Up-Multicultural-Communities/dp/0807750735/ref%3Dsr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=Teachers+Act+Up%21%3A+Creating+Multicultural+Learning+Communities+Through+Theatre&qid=1587080217&sr=8-1)

**What are Theater Games**?

Theater games are exactly what you probably think they are. They are games that are used by theater performers and others as warm ups, as community builders and generally as a way to get into a creative mindset. There are two basic types of theater games we use in LaCuKnoS – Image Theater and Forum Theater.

In Image Theater (described first), we use our bodies to explore abstract concepts such as relationships and emotions, as well as realistic and fantastic situations.

In Forum Theater (described second), a scenario or scene, usually highlighting some kind of challenging situation or uncertainty, is acted out multiple times. During the first “scene” the action generally takes place the way it was originally experienced by the person who is bringing the scenario to the group. During the subsequent scenes (the replays), members of the audience (the 'spect-actors') can pause the action, step forward, and take the place of one of the characters, showing how they could change the situation to enable a different outcome.

**Why use theater games?**

Theatre games are flexible tools for exploring issues and building relationships. I’ve found that these theater games help to build community, strengthen group dynamics and lay the foundation for cooperative learning and for talking about potentially difficult topics. Theater games are also a great example of multimodal learning and engagement.

* **Image Theater Games**

***Game #1: Come my friends***

* **Objective:** This game examines categories of belonging, providing an opportunity for individuals to discover common experiences as well as different perspectives within the group.

**Instructions:**

1. Ask participants to think of categories in which they belong, imagining wild and varied types of categories (e.g., first-year teachers, mango lovers, Marvel comic fans, etc.).
2. Form a large circle and ask participants, one by one, to come to the middle of the circle and call out a category, saying, “Come my friends who are…” One rule is that it is everyone’s own right to identify or not identify with a category, and no one should force another person into an identity (e.g., no nudging someone saying, “Go! Go! You are a ping pong player!”).
3. Once the friends are gathered in the center, call out, “Family picture!” The group has about 10 seconds, with or without talking, to *sculpt themselves into an image that conveys what, according to their perspectives, it feels like to belong to this group.*

**Reflecting:**

How did you feel during this exercise? Was it fun? Difficult? Why?

What can this exercise teach us about groups and belonging?

***Game #2: Complete the Image***

**Objective:** Learning to see multiple possible interpretations of a given situation.

**Instructions:**

1. 2 spect-actors shake hands and freeze
2. observers discuss who these people are and what situation they are in – discuss multiple interpretations – “What do you see and hear from this image?”
3. One of the people steps away leaving the other frozen. Now what new interpretations are possible? - “Now what’s going on here? What do you see and hear from this new image?”
4. A new spect-actor steps into the scene to complete a new image. The other original participant now steps out and is replaced forming a new image.
5. Continue through multiple images.

**Reflecting:**

How did you feel during this exercise? Was it fun? Difficult? Why?

How might this exercise serve as a metaphor for teaching and learning?

***Game #3: Carnival***

**Objective:** This game explores issues of assimilation, power, erasure, domination, persuasion, and influence. Groups start with different actions and sounds and try to persuade others to join in (or buy into) the specific behavior. Each group member attempts to get others to behave the way he or she does, leaving aside their original practices. This mirrors the process through which many immigrants assimilate, transforming or erasing their perspectives and cultural practices.

**Instructions:**

1. Have participants form groups of three and number themselves “1,” “2,” and “3.”
2. Ask each individual to come up with a sound and an accompanying movement and teach them to the other two group members.
3. Call out “Number Ones!” and instruct the “1s” to perform their sound and movement, with the other members trying to make an exact imitation.
4. Call out “Number Twos!” for the “2s” to perform, and the others to imitate and learn.
5. Call out “Number Threes!” for the “3s” to perform, and the others to imitate and learn.
6. Call out “Original Movements!” and ask 1s, 2s, and 3s all to perform their own separate movements simultaneously.
7. Call out “Unify!” and ask each group member to try to get the other two to adopt his or her sound and movement.
8. When each group of 3 has unified and found a group sound and movement, call out “Groups Unify!” Each trio moves as a pod and aims to attract members of other pods to adopt their sound and movement. The object is to find out which sound/movement will unify (or dominate) the group.

**Reflecting:**

How is this activity a metaphor for broader social interactions? For what goes on in schools?

***Game #4 - Machine of Rhythms***

**Objective:** Working as a community to create something new while sharing personal and cultural interpretations of shared contexts. Develops creativity, concentration, and group cooperation.

**Instructions:**

1. The teacher provides a theme or title for the machine that will be built – these can be unrelated to content (e.g., the Rhythm of a Birthday Party) or content related (e.g., the rhythm of Westward Expansion, etc.)
2. One participant moves to the center and creates the first piece of the machine by making a noise and a simple repeatable gesture.
3. When the first participant has a rhythm a second participant must add a movement and sound that connects to the first gesture.
4. Each participant joins in with a new sound and gesture and connects to the others in some way until all participants are involved in creating the machine.

**Reflecting:**

What parts of the machine were things that you expected based on your understanding of the theme? Where there parts of the machine that were unexpected or that didn’t seem to you like they fit?

How do you think that context and culture shaped what your machine looked and sounded like? Imagine how a machine with the same theme could look and sound different in a different context with different actors.

***Game #5 - Who’s the Boss?***

**Objective:** Learning to observe carefully for small details and to practice creative problem solving

**Instructions:**

1. Participants stand in a circle.
2. One participant leaves the room.
3. Select one participant to be the boss. The boss leads all of the participants through different motions (moving hands, tapping feet, nodding heads, etc.) All other participants act as mirrors of the boss. The boss must change/add new motions frequently.
4. The player who is outside of the room returns and stands in the center of the circle. He/she must guess who the boss is. Other participants must play strategically to disguise who the boss is.
5. When the participant in the center discovers the boss, another player is chosen to leave the room and then return to guess who the new boss is.

**Reflecting:**

What strategies helped you to identify the boss?

Do people behave in similar ways in real life sometimes? In what way?

***Game #6 – Landscapes***

**Objectives:**Participants exercise their imaginations to convert their surroundings into any landscape they can imagine. They will also explore expressing emotions as they explore each new landscape.

**Instructions:**

1. As a group, brainstorm a list of landscapes. Make a column labeled “landscapes” on the board. Participants suggest landscapes while you write them on the board (e.g., the moon, a bowl of jello, the dessert, a yogurt shop). Make another column labeled “emotions” and brainstorm a list the same way (e.g., happy, scared, furious, worried).
2. One participant leaves the room for a moment.
3. The group decides on a combination of landscape + emotion (e.g., happy on the moon). All participants act as if they were in this landscape feeling this emotion. They may speak and make other sounds but should not say the name of the landscape or emotion.
4. The participant who left the room reenters, walks around amid the other participants, and guesses the landscape and emotion. When he/she guesses correctly, pick a new participant to leave the room, a new landscape + emotion combination, and play again.

**Reflecting:**

Was it easier to act out the landscape or the emotion? Why?

Think of an even sillier landscape than any your group chose. How would you act it out?

***Game #7 - Tangles & Knots***

**Objective*:*** A version of a common game of collaborative problem solving with a few new twists.

**Instructions:**

1. make circle & remember who is on your right and your left
2. spread out and walk around
3. give instructions to walk with another person who…. Has same color hair, style of shoes, color eyes, etc.
4. in groups create 3 circles, 1 big star, 4 squares
5. without moving, find and point to the person who was originally on your right and left
6. very slowly (like you are in honey) stretch your arms, move toward those people, and take their hands – this forms a tangle
7. now untangle yourselves without letting go of your neighbors’ hands

**Reflecting:**

What group characteristics are needed for the group to successfully get untangled?

* ***Game #8: What’s in a Name?***

**Objective:** This game helps us learn each other’s names while incorporating rhythm, sound, and play as a foundation for developing a sense of creative community.

**Instructions:**

1. With everyone standing in a circle, demonstrate the game action by saying your name and one thing that describes you, and make a simultaneous movement to accompany the name/adjective pair. (I’m Cory and I’m curious)
2. Ask the person on the left to do the same and so on around the circle.
3. Encourage participants to spontaneously use an adjective that starts with the same letter of their name or rhymes with their name.
4. Encourage participants to exaggerate their movements, making themselves bigger or smaller than they might otherwise be in daily life.
5. After each contribution, ask the group to echo the name/adjective/movement combination, making an exact mirror of the speaker.
6. Acting as a conductor, lead the entire group to chant each name/adjective/movement, cycling back from the beginning, creating a form of repetitive group poem.

**Reflecting:**

Did the movements and descriptors help you remember people’s names? Why do you think?

***Game #9 - Continuum***

**Objective:** Participants create a physical representation of their personalities, displaying the nuances of personality of each individual and the group as a whole. As the teacher can strategically decide which prompts to give, it provides an excellent way of getting to know your students.

**Instructions:**

1. Designate one side of the room as “strongly agree/ always” and the opposite side as “strongly disagree/ never.”
2. The teacher calls a series of prompts (e.g., I like to read for pleasure, I like to play sports, I have studied a second language before). For each prompt, participants arrange themselves in a horizontal line between the two walls according to their opinion.
3. Participants then take turns calling additional prompts, and the teacher participates in forming the line.

**Reflecting:**

Were there bigger differences or smaller differences than you thought in your classmates’ experiences and opinions?

What, if anything, surprised you?

***Game # 10 - The Pantomime ball***

**Objective:** Practice conveying meaning and emotion through action and expression.

**Instructions:**

1. Stand in a big circle.
2. Goal is to pantomime a game of catch, but that each person must change the ball, or object, into something else before passing it on.
3. The teacher begins the game. Bend over and pick up an imaginary object. Take your time with this while the students watch. Mold the imaginary object in your hands, and slowly let it take form. The pace you set and the detail you show will set the tone for how the students perform the activity.
4. The way you throw the object to the next person (anybody else in the circle) demonstrates to onlookers **what** is that size and shape object.
5. The person you throw to must catch **what you threw.** Hopefully, each participant will demonstrate an understanding of the object that was thrown to them.
6. Once the next person has the ball, she can make it what she wants. As she molds and shapes the object in her hands, pay attention to the shape, weight, texture, temperature, etc.
7. You can change it from a ball to some other object and you can also give it an emotion, etc.
8. The rest of the group should describe the ball/object after it is thrown each time.

**Reflecting:**

What made it harder or easier to guess someone’s pantomime?

What does this game tell us about ourselves and others?

***Game #11 - Racing with Chairs***

**Objective*:***This fast-paced warm up activity will fill the room with energy while participants practice teamwork.

**Instructions*:***

1. Divide group into 2-4 teams of four players each. (Numbers can be adjusted according to size of group. For a large group, play in different rounds.)
2. Line up two horizontal rows of five chairs each. (There should be one more chair in each row than the number of participants on each team.)
3. Each team member stands on a chair in their row. The last chair should be empty.
4. Each team works together to move the last chair to the front of the row of chairs.
5. When the chair arrives to the front of the row, the player in the back steps down from his/her chair and runs to the front of the row to stand on the new front chair.
6. Repeat steps 4-5 to “race” forward to the other side of the room (or designated goal line). The first team to reach the goal line, wins! (I prefer games without “losers” but this is so much fun that I include it). For longer play, teams must move to the opposite end of the room and then return back across the room to the original starting point.

**Reflecting:**

What strategies helped your team move forward successfully?

***Game #12 - The Full-Length Mirror***

**Objective:** To reflect on how we see ourselves and how others might see us.

**Instructions:**

1. Participants stand in a circle.
2. The joker carries a large mirror around the circle and stops at each person.
3. The joker asks each person to look in the mirror and describe something about how they look or what they see.
4. Depending on the size of the group, the joker should go around the circle 2 or 3 times, so that each participant needs to make more than on observation about themselves.

**Reflecting:**

Did you find this activity difficult? Why do you think this was the case?

Did you look at yourself differently the 2nd or 3rd time? Why?

How does the way we see ourselves sometimes differ from how others see us?

[**Forum Theatre**](http://dramaresource.com/strategies/forum-theatre)

(building on work that has been done with Image Theatre)

*What forum theatre is:*

A scenario or scene, usually indicating some kind of problem or conflict, is acted out twice. During the first “scene” the action generally takes place the way it was originally experienced (or imagined if fictional) by the person who is bringing the scenario to the group.

 During the second scene (the replay), members of the audience (the 'spect-actors') can pause the action, step forward, and take the place of one of the characters, showing how they could change the situation to enable a different outcome. Several alternatives may be explored by different spect-actors with the scene being rewound and replayed until there are no more alternative ideas from the spect-actors.

The strategy breaks through the barrier between performers and audience, putting them on an equal footing. It enables participants to try out courses of action that could be applicable to their everyday lives.

Task in small groups:

1. Think about a school-based scenario that someone in your group has either witnessed or experienced in the past year. This can be a situation that you participated in directly or that you observed.
2. prepare a short (2-3 minute) skit where your group will be the characters acting out this scenario.
3. Get ready to act out your scene using the Forum Theatre technique.