

## **THEATER AND SPORT AT SCHOOL: THE BODY AND EMOTIONS IN THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT**

### **TEATRO E SPORT A SCUOLA: IL CORPO E LE EMOZIONI NEL CONTESTO EDUCATIVO**

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#### **Abstract**

The contribution stems from the intention to give voice to the complex and innovative interdisciplinary dialogue that arises from the fusion of sports practices with theatrical ones within the school environment. Theater, sport and school have numerous points of contact. The sense of discipline, the awareness of one's own limits and strengths, respect for oneself and for the other, the consideration of diversity as an inestimable wealth are the founding values of these different but similar worlds. The object of the research-action conducted is the role that theatrical-motor practice can have in the educational process as a valid teaching tool, capable of enhancing both teaching and learning. The study aims to contribute to the construction of a school that can cultivate talents and train citizens of the future who are physically and emotionally aware and able to relate to all forms of diversity of which existence is made.

Il contributo nasce dall'intenzione di dare voce al complesso e innovativo dialogo interdisciplinare che si origina dalla fusione delle pratiche sportive con quelle teatrali all'interno dell'ambiente scolastico. Teatro, sport e scuola presentano numerosi punti di contatto. Il senso della disciplina, la consapevolezza dei propri limiti e punti forza, il rispetto per sé stessi e per l'altro, la considerazione della diversità come ricchezza inestimabile sono valori fondanti di questi mondi diversi, ma affini. Oggetto della ricerca-azione condotta è il ruolo che la pratica teatrale-motoria può avere nel processo educativo come valido strumento didattico, capace di potenziare sia l'insegnamento sia l'apprendimento. Lo studio ha lo scopo di contribuire alla costruzione di una realtà scolastica in grado di coltivare talenti e formare cittadini del futuro fisicamente ed emotivamente consapevoli e capaci di relazionarsi con ogni forma di diversità di cui è fatta l'esistenza.

#### **Key-words**

Sport, Theater, School.  
Sport, Teatro, Scuola

#### **Introduction**

«Sport and theater are very similar because they are two forms of expression where you have a role» said the great actor and director Carmelo Bene. Starting from the illustrious quotation of the Master of the Italian theater, it is possible to trace a history of relationships and contacts

between these two worlds that can appear very distant from each other and then, in reality, turn out to be incredibly close. Bene defines them first of all as two «forms of expression», underlining the importance of the shared purpose of transmitting a message, an emotion, a state of mind. Considering the etymology, the word «expression» contains in itself all the urgency, the necessity, the strength with which one needs to externalize what one feels internally. The Latin verb «exprimere» - formed by «ex» (particle meaning «out») and «to press» - in its most ancient and crude meaning, stands for «squeeze out», even if the figurative meaning of «manifest, enunciate, externalize». This desire for necessity moves the threads of both areas and opens the way to the need for spectacularity that characterizes them. In this regard, Bene in his 1998 conversation with Enrico Ghezzi, stated: «Of football, and of sport in general, I am only interested in how much sport itself exceeds, not the routine, not the hard game, no matter whether it is a zone or a sport. man, I'm not interested in the goal itself, nor the fans nor the result: I'm only interested in the acts, the extraordinary gestures» (Bene, Ghezzi, 2019). Bene creates a strong relationship between the essence of sport (especially football) and the sense of theater, explaining that football comes out of the show - therefore from what he defines «hated representation» - and becomes true theater, only when the player frees himself from schemes and tactics and evades the rules. And he explained «the act, the immediate, resembles the 'actor machine' that I coined and which I practice on stage ... When one is in the act, one enters the inhuman or, at least, one approaches. In the excess of sport, you can see beyond fatigue and "portage". The act is not in the present, it is a suspension of it: the "logos" falls, the concept falls, the thought falls. This is the theater» (Bene, Ghezzi, 2019). This interesting insight collects the profound meaning from which this contribution moves, which gives voice to the desire to deepen the link between the sporting and theatrical worlds and to understand not only how they can enter into a greater relationship, but also how they can bring about a significant improvement. within educational institutions. The existence of defined roles and related tasks, the presence of an audience (sometimes adoring, sometimes not), the intertwining of the relational dynamics that are established between the individual and the group (between coach and players, between director and actors, between teacher and pupils) are just some of the elements that belong transversally to the three areas. From a formative, educational and inclusive point of view, the sharing of their respective founding values such as the sense of discipline, the awareness of one's own limits and strengths, respect for oneself and for others, consideration of diversity as an inestimable wealth. The intention is to intertwine these affinities and to make these parallel realities dialogue but never opposed and in any case destined to meet very often. This contribution is therefore configured as a food for thought for a research-action that aims to identify and deepen the role that theatrical-motor practice can have in the educational process as a valid teaching tool, capable of strengthening both teaching and learning. The study is the basis for future research with the aim of contributing to the construction of a school reality capable of cultivating talents and forming physically and emotionally aware citizens of the future, balanced in the face of the countless challenges of life and able to relate to all forms of diversity of which existence is made up.

### **1. Sport, theater and education: the ancient origins**

The relationship between sport, theater and education has very remote origins. Ancient civilizations attached great importance to the educational role that sports and theatrical activities had in the growth of the youngest. Physical activity was considered part of the society's culture, a duty even more than a pleasure.

Theater and sport, the tragic and the Olympic spirit, are two of the numerous and precious treasures that our society has inherited from classical civilizations. Both have their roots in rituality and have, since their origins, a fundamental civil function.

The Greeks spoke of «kalokagathìa»: this term is the substantivization of the couple of adjectives «kalòs kài agathòs» which literally means “beautiful and good” and represents the ideal of man's physical and moral perfection. With the term *καλός* we referred not only to what is beautiful due to its sensitive aspect, but also to that beauty that is connected to moral behavior and therefore to what is good (*ἀγαθός*) (Barrotta, 2015). The "kalokagathia" is therefore considered the object of the education of the excellent man. According to the Greek philosopher Plato «Whoever dedicates himself to scientific research or to some other intense intellectual activity, must also give his body its movement, practicing gymnastics, while whoever devotes himself with care to shaping the body, must provide in return for the 'animates his movements, resorting to music and everything related to philosophy, if he wants to be defined, rightly and rightly, both beautiful and good» (Plato, 2003). The idea that body and soul can grow and develop together characterizes the school and education model proposed by Aristotle in his *Politics*. In this work he argues that gymnastics develops courage. However, it must be tempered by the study of music, to avoid that it ends up in excess and that is that courage becomes aggression. In addition to the power of the influence of music, however, the ancient Greeks had also intuited the paideutic value of the theater, closely connected to it. In fact, they considered this art to be a powerful communicative tool capable of touching the viewers intimately, to the point of influencing moods and thoughts and, therefore, capable of conveying all kinds of values and messages. It was always the Greek philosopher Aristotle who was the first to connect art (in particular, musical art and dramatic art) with the concept of catharsis (from the Greek *κάθαρσις*, "purification"). He, in his *Poetics*, defined tragedy as "mimesis of a serious and accomplished action in itself which, through a series of cases that arouse pity and terror, has the effect of relieving and purifying the soul of such passions" . The great thinker of Stagira argued that the purpose of the drama is to purify the audience through the artistic stimulation of certain emotions so that the pathos represented acts as a relief for personal passions (Strozzi, 2020).

This close correlation between interiority and exteriority can also be found in Roman culture, as the wise Latin proverb «mens sana in corpore sano» testifies. This well-known sentence is taken from a verse by Juvenal (*Sat. X, 356*): «Orandum est ut sit mens sana in corpore sano» («we must ask the gods that the mind be healthy in the healthy body»). According to the Roman poet and rhetorician, man should aspire to only two goods: health of the soul and health of the body. And these should be the only requests to be made to the divinity who, he emphasizes, knows what man needs more than man himself. Therefore, ancient wisdom handed down an extremely modern and current truth. It teaches us that well-being is the result of the serene coexistence between external and internal factors. And it pushes us to a more careful consideration of sporting and artistic activities as preparatory to psychophysical balance. Knowing, listening and managing body and mind, with all its load of thoughts and emotions, is the key to finding a balance useful for success in life. The acquisition of this awareness can and must begin at school, from an early age. The theatrical-motor practice fits perfectly into the ideological furrow traced by this tradition and is absolutely in line with the educational and cultural purposes of the scholastic institution and is configured as an alternative teaching tool of great pedagogical value, capable of responding to the most diverse needs of the students.

## **2. Sports Theater**

Theater and Sport have numerous points of contact that it is interesting to deepen in order to better understand the effective potential that this interdisciplinary dialogue can develop. Over the course of history there has been a path of evolution and continuous recall between the two worlds which has resulted in the construction of considerable affinities and mutual contamination.

Here are some of the points of contact between the artistic and sporting environments:

- **Specific time:** generally sporting or artistic events take place on a holiday (or in any case in non-working time slots) and are linked to seasonal and cyclical rhythms (think of the deadlines of Championships and Cups or the Olympic four-year period, theater seasons or at the Biennials of theater and cinema). The duration of the event is defined by precise start and end signals. In the theater, for example, it can be delimited by the opening and closing of the curtain or by the lowering and switching on of the lights in the hall. While the duration of the sporting competition can be marked at the beginning by the pistol shot in athletics, by crossing the finish line or by the referee's whistle.

- **Delimited space:** stadiums and theaters have always been an integral part of the landscape of our cities. This is because since ancient times the necessary coexistence of those who act as those who assist has led to the need to design and build special spaces. Both entertainment and sport, in fact, even if they can be practiced without spectators (and the Covid-19 pandemic was the most evident and also the most difficult demonstration of this) have as a fundamental ingredient the coexistence of the public in the place and in the moment. where the event takes place. New technologies (such as radio, TV, internet, etc.) allow us to follow mediated events, in which the fruition takes place through a technological filter. However, the live continues to maintain a more authentic flavor, a different energy capable of producing effects on the performance itself.

- **Asymmetry between those who act and those who assist:** athletes and actors arrive at the event after a long preparation (by now the training of many actors recalls the training of athletes in many respects). However, it is in the type of outcome to which the preparation leads that there is the big difference between sport and theater. The final outcome of an artistic representation is substantially preordained, predictable and often already known. Even if the viewer knows the plot and conclusion of the show perfectly, he does not lose his enthusiasm, but rather, he can appreciate the variations, improvisations and different interpretations. In a sporting event, however, the final outcome must always be unpredictable as knowing in advance the result of a performance deprives it of the charm of uncertainty and the thrill of surprise that characterize it.

«Given therefore the proximity between sport and entertainment, it is not surprising to discover intersections between one and the other: thus there are more spectacular sports and more sporting forms of entertainment» (Ponte di Pino, 2008).

### **3. The theatrical-motor practice at school**

This theoretical reflection on the affinities between Theater and Sport finds its full realization in the application of the following practical, experimental and experiential part of fundamental importance. Reference is now made, in fact, to a set of motor and theatrical activities, capable of involving mind and body. These have been proposed over time to mixed groups of students of various age groups and school orders, from infancy to upper secondary school. However, they can also be configured as simple suggestions to enrich the set of tools available to the teacher / educator. The exercises indicated can be considered as integrations of daily teaching practice but also as activities to be carried out at school during extra-curricular hours. They can be simplified or complicated depending on the creativity of the teacher and the inclinations of the students. They can be reformulated according to age or the characteristics of the group to be involved. Tools and materials used can be found in the classroom. This does not exclude that some workshop moments can be carried out inside gyms, in direct contact with tools, times and movements, exercises and the dynamics of sport that can be freely intertwined with

theatrical transposition and with a work of synthesis and abstraction. What is important for the success of the exercises are creativity, empathy and a spirit of collaboration.

For illustrative and demonstrative purposes, two activities aimed at two different age groups can be mentioned.

«Invisible strings» is a theatrical-motor activity that originates from the great tradition of mime and marionettes / puppets. Stimulating mainly the visual and body language, it is particularly suitable for children aged 3 to 10 (but in reality it can be carried out, *mutatis mutandis*, even by more adults). It is a role playing game and takes place in pairs: the first character is the "puppeteer" and the second is the "puppet". Theater is often thought to be primarily word, spoken or written. In the collective imagination, the practice of acting is linked to the classic script to be brought to the stage, to the excerpts to be represented on the set in front of a camera, to the monologue to be interpreted in front of an audience. Therefore, when it comes to theatrical practice aimed at children, it is considered almost an impossible challenge. It is good to keep in mind, however, that reducing this art to the theater-word binomial is limiting. Moreover, verbal language is not the only form of communication for adults and it is not even for children. Communication, in fact, can take place in different ways: verbal (the content transmitted through the use of words), para-verbal (the way of transmitting the content) and non-verbal (mimicry and posture). Each of these channels follows its own line of development, but with times that can be very different from child to child (Devescovi, 2012). Having children attend a theater course or accompany them to see theatrical performances is very important for their growth. In fact, theatrical art stimulates the imagination and amplifies the sensitivity of children, but also opens them to diversity, develops their empathy and improves the perception of their body in space (Giusti, 2004). This activity essentially focuses on visual and body language (Decroux, 2018). It requires few tools to perform: just a few ribbons and a chair. It takes place in pairs: the first child takes on the role of the puppeteer and the second takes on the role of the puppet. The puppeteer, pulling some ribbons tied delicately to the puppet's wrists and ankles, makes him perform some simple movements. The puppet, sitting in a relaxed and inanimate way on a chair, follows the puppeteer's commands, following his gestures. It will then be necessary to perform the activity by eliminating the ribbons: the children will repeat the exercise by mimicking what was done the first time, moving however "invisible threads" and thus working in the abstract. The power of gestures and coordination will make possible in the eyes of children a real magic that always amazes and is also very fun to perform and exciting to observe. It would be preferable to introduce this activity through the narration of a story (such as, for example, the tale of Pinocchio) or by explaining and showing children what puppets and puppets are and what they are for. In this way it contributes to enriching the linguistic vocabulary and the knowledge base of the children. It must also be considered that puppets have great potential as educational tools to be used with children. They are transitional objects, that is, capable of acting as mediators between "the self" and "not self" and of broadening the channels of communication, expression and socialization. It is also advisable to accompany the moment of the performance with a light background music: in this way, not only is it possible to avoid feeding the children's performance anxiety, but it offers them a sound reference to follow in slow and slow performance. sweet of the movements. The exercise aims to strengthen the capacity for imitation, imagination, abstraction and the expressive potential of the young pupils, improving concentration and coordination and promoting empathy. It is also useful to encourage interaction with each other and the processes of socialization, enhance attention, strengthen knowledge and the management of emotions, stimulate creativity and bodily expression.

«From paper to the stage» is an activity that combines teamwork, creative writing, theatrical improvisation and bodily expression. Due to the level of complexity it is particularly suitable



for students aged 11 to 18. It is an activity that starts from the creation of a story on paper to arrive at its dramatization on stage. It starts, in fact, with an exercise in collective creative writing, very fun and easy to do. Each student writes a word on a note (completely chosen at will), which he inserts inside a container. Each child, then, must extract a word and formulate a sentence that contains it, taking care to link it to the one formulated immediately before. The goal is to develop, sentence by sentence, a real story written by several hands. The set of sentences, therefore, will not only originate from the drawn words, but will give life to a story, the result of the creative contribution of each participant. The next phase consists of the passage from the text to the stage, through the practice of theatrical improvisation. After having drawn up a canvas and identified the characters, with the guidance of the teacher, you can reach the dramatization of the story, according to the "subject acting" technique. This allows the actors to stay on stage without a real script to repeat, but inventing dialogues and twists on the spot. Each student must characterize his character from a physical and psychological point of view: he must attribute character peculiarities (sad, happy, in love, irascible, etc.) and physical characteristics (gait, posture, tone of voice). In order to play your character correctly it is necessary to remember what setting you wanted to give from the beginning. At this point we talk about identification, which is considered an efficient work tool, useful for improving performance and being able to express feelings and emotions through the body in an automatic and probably authentic way. The actor is not the character, but in the time interval of the performance, he experiences his own emotions that he transmits through the body. In this regard, it must be remembered that the movements of the actor on the stage have mainly two functions. The first is to achieve goals, such as walking to move or bending over to pick up something. The second is to express moods and this is the most complex to achieve, because in the theater communicating a feeling is not a private fact, but a professional fact. The study of the gestures and corporeality of the characters is an evident testimony of how much theatrical and motor activity are in strong connection. This is because external behavior is inevitably a reflection of what is going on inside. Each character and each scene can also be characterized through the use of props made at the moment, with the material available in the surrounding environment. The participatory creation of an "actor's suitcase" can also be interesting. We make a collection of the most varied objects that will be stored in a container, a trunk, a suitcase. These objects from time to time will become part of the disguise useful to immerse yourself in the role of the character you want to represent. The activity becomes particularly fun the more imagination is used, for example in the use of objects to which a totally different function is attributed to the real one (for example, a hat can become a bowl and vice versa; a ladle can become a microphone, and so on...). In addition to taking care of the scenic movements functional to the acting, it is also possible to create small dancing moments or real choreographies that can enrich the representation, thus bringing it closer to a sort of musical. This activity is particularly stimulating and rewarding for the students both from a personal point of view and from a relational point of view. This is because each participant becomes an active part of a team mechanism in which everyone collaborates in the creation of an unpublished story and makes it possible to transpose it, from the world of words to that of the characters, from the world of fantasy to that of reality. The main objective is to "create with the mind and with the body", or to elaborate a story with the related characters through a game of drawing and extracting random words, and then bring them to the stage, defining physical characteristics and attitudes, dialogues, scenes and movements. This exercise aims to build a link between what is produced by the mind and achieved with the body, emphasizing the fact that what is outside is always in relation (more or less peaceful or conflictual) with what is inside. The final result is a choral show characterized by a strong stage presence, rhythm and energy.

## Conclusions

The practice of motor theater in schools can facilitate the achievement of important goals (short-term and long-term) related to the educational and educational success and inclusion of all students, such as:

- respect for the rules, for others and for oneself;
- strengthening of the psychophysical, emotional, linguistic and relational aspects;
- improvement of the use of verbal and non-verbal languages and of body communication;
- development of self-knowledge, self-awareness, self-control and self-esteem;
- enhancement of creativity and critical thinking skills;
- consolidation of the capacity for socialization, collaboration and mutual acceptance;
- facilitating social inclusion and integration between different realities, conditions and cultures;
- prevention of discomfort and school dropout phenomena.

It should be noted that these practices do not necessarily have a competitive or spectacular purpose. Not everyone has the same skills, just as not everyone likes to expose themselves to the judgment of others. However, it is essential that everyone has the opportunity to learn how to get out of their comfort zone in the context of everyday school life. The proposed activities are simply ideas to make daily school life more stimulating, promote cohesion of the class group and improve the teacher-student relationship. Although it has been stated that the final representation is not the purpose of the described practices, this does not mean that the idea must necessarily be excluded. After all, Theater and Sport share the need for showmanship, which is often also a means of gratification and satisfaction in the school environment. It is possible, in fact, to organize "open-door lessons" (to begin to overcome the fear of the judgment of others and acquire greater awareness in front of an audience, even of relatives and friends) or a final performance / essay that highlights the points of strength of each student making him aware of overcoming his own limits and proud of his theatrical and motor, physical and emotional progress.

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