

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION AND PHYSICAL THEATER: DIDACTIC- EDUCATIONAL ACTION THROUGH ART AND CORPOREITY

COMUNICAZIONE NON VERBALE E TEATRO FISICO: L'AZIONE DIDATTICO- EDUCATIVA ATTRAVERSO L'ARTE E LA CORPOREITÀ

Davide Di Palma

University of Naples "Parthenope"
davide.dipalma@uniparthenope.it

Abstract

Education and theatrical art are two realities that have common purposes: in fact, through activities that stimulate the development of creativity, they place the individual at the center of a mechanism that allows them to learn to express themselves at their best; therefore, the educational process and the theatrical experience have something coessential that concerns their almost analogous structure. In fact, a significant node of the pedagogical experience concerns precisely the ambivalent link between theater and individual training. For this reason, the intent of this article - which proposes a pedagogically oriented "physical" theater experience carried out in a school context - is to provide a contribution that further enhances the design of laboratory experiences centered on the link between education and theater.

L'educazione e l'arte teatrale sono due realtà che possiedono finalità comuni: infatti, attraverso attività che vanno a stimolare lo sviluppo della creatività, pongono l'individuo al centro di un meccanismo che gli consente di imparare ad esprimersi al meglio; pertanto, il processo educativo e l'esperienza teatrale hanno qualcosa di coessenziale che riguarda proprio la loro struttura pressoché analoga. Infatti, un nodo significativo dell'esperienza pedagogica riguarda proprio il legame ambivalente tra teatro e formazione individuale. Per tali motivi, l'intento del presente articolo – che propone un'esperienza di teatro "fisico" a orientamento pedagogico realizzata in un contesto scolastico – vuole essere quello di fornire un contributo che valorizzi maggiormente la progettazione di esperienze laboratoriali centrate sul nesso tra educazione e teatro.

Keywords

School, Education, Theater, Corporeity, Movement

Scuola, Educazione, Teatro, Corporeità, Movimento

Introduction

"The whole world is a stage, and men are nothing but actors who have their entrances and their exits," said William Shakespeare. Making theater is a practice that contributes to self-knowledge and training, enhancing one's cognitive, affective, relational resources and the expression of personal creativity. I often hear phrases such as: "I would love to, but I don't have the courage", "I couldn't ever do it because I'm ashamed", "I'm shy" and so on.

It happens, however, that some of these "shy" begin to attend theatrical laboratories and in a short time come to overcome the stage "panic" and acquire a remarkable ease, which is often accompanied by the desire to repeat the experience. On the contrary, people who are commonly considered "extroverted", "exhibitionist" or simply "daring", when they tread the scene find themselves fragile, inadequate or exaggerated. Many great actors have confessed their shyness, their difficulty in feeling at the center of attention and it was precisely these sides of the personality that pushed them to accept the challenge, starting to practice the activity that most exposes us to the gaze of others (Antonacci, Mancino & Guerra, 2013; Callery, 2015; Carlomagno, 2020). In reality, each of us "acts" every day and it is not possible to exempt ourselves from this daily representation: every day we talk, move and communicate in front of an audience; for example, when we discuss with our children, we talk to the boss, we relate to our spouse, we present ourselves at a job interview or We face an exam, we always move in a certain way, we adopt a specific tone of voice, we use a more or less correct diction, we use pauses, we gesticulate and, therefore, in summary we communicate with the other through a whole series of codes of verbal and non-verbal communication, often automatically and / or unconsciously (Di Rago, 2008; Fichera, 2017). Making theatre helps to make us aware of our means of expression and the effects they cause in the interlocutor. Theatre is a self-evident discovery. The goal is not to change our ways of being and communicating, but to be aware of them and to learn to make our weaknesses strengths (Carlomagno, 2020; Fichera, 2017; Maciuc, 2009). The art of acting is very complex, and perhaps not everyone can become a great actor, but all those who practice theatrical activity undergo an exploration of themselves that is both physical and mental. The theater involves in the depths because it forces to declare oneself, to throw off the mask, to play on the border between being and appearing, to get involved, and in this sense it can be therapeutic, it can constitute a moment of individual liberation and strengthening of self-esteem. Theatre is an instrument of knowledge, a place of deep relationships, in which the encounter with the other is implemented by interpreting its part, living history physically and mentally (Nicholson & Bond, 2017). Leaving aside the expressions school-theater and theatrical pedagogy that identify the schools that train the theater and their specific pedagogy, there are many names with which in literature and in the language of the school the theatrical activities carried out to-from-to-for school are designated. We do not want to refer to the nomenclature of the various forms of theatre (theatre of the absurd, theatre of the oppressed, etc.), but rather to the forms that the relationship between the world of theatre, with its techniques, its professionals, its fascinating evanescence, and the world of school has assumed (Guner & Guner, 2012). We list and describe in a nutshell the main terms still used today. Let's start with theatrical animation, an expression now historically connoted, because it identifies a type of activity developed in the school from the late sixties and throughout the seventies, with the aim of «promoting a new form of teaching that saw the school as a place where teachers and learners could grow together; Educational institutions not as an inevitable evil, but as a place where students were lucky enough to increase their knowledge. The aim was not necessarily to achieve a "act" or a performance in front of an audience of parents and relatives, but rather to improve harmony, overcome the negativity linked to the school environment, pursue new teaching strategies" (Carlomagno, 2020). Children's Theatre is the form of theatre created by professional companies and aimed at children and adolescents,

with a specific psycho-pedagogical intent, which can also include forms of "tireless and widespread laboratory activity" with pupils and students. School Theatre identifies the activities of staging operas by pupils or students. These may be works by classical authors, original works or adaptations written by pupils or students themselves. Often these shows are presented at the numerous festivals that present the works of the schools to both a scholastic and a wider audience. The expression "theater laboratory" is very widespread, which includes all the activities that take place during the hours dedicated to the experimentation of theatrical techniques and that do not necessarily have as their purpose the staging of an opera, but which very often also identify the preparatory activities leading to the final show, which would be defined more properly as School Theatre. Finally, the juxtaposition of the terms theatre and education is proposed, which represents "the current diction to indicate, as a whole, all those activities related to the theatre and achievable in the educational field and addressed to both teachers and pupils" (Oliva, 1999; Pontremoli, 2005; Redington, 2016), from the laboratory theatrical, the viewing of a play dealing with a topic that is discussed at school, the staging of an opera, the history of theatre lessons, the use of dramatization for learning a foreign language and so on.

1. The physical theatre

The definition of "physical theatre" has only recently come into common use. The inventors of this terminology were those actors educated in non-traditional schools who were quite tired of being considered only "mimes"; therefore, with "physical theatre" they intended to describe adequately. The phenomenon of the word used in association with mime, pantomime and/or masks: a theater of movement, in which the use of gesture, movement and action are privileged. As a result, new productions appeared in which mime was subordinate to the word but in them the true meaning and value of non-verbal communication began to re-emerge: the art of theater that contains masks, acrobatics, circus skills, commedia dell'arte, dance theater ... all those theatrical styles tiring from the point of view of physical training and interpretation, were now used in non-traditional and non-historical ways, combining and "redefining" their image (Daraklitsa, 2017; Giraldo, 2019). In an effort to give a precise meaning to the essence of "physical theatre", much emphasis is given to the fact that everything is "a physical phenomenon in the first place and foremost" but, above all, the term is becoming a concept which indicates only a particular style of theatre: to inscribe it as a style would be an injustice because "physical theatre". " is an all-encompassing and very eclectic concept of its nature. If one wishes to study theatre as a physical discipline, it would be necessary to return to the traditions and study of the physical nature of the different theatrical styles that have developed over the ages and: among these, mime and pantomime are certainly fundamental and constitute the real starting point (Sassen, 2015). As improvisation and games are the foundations of any serious pedagogy, mime is the initial discipline for body control, since it teaches a concrete body language that must be interpreted and expressed in a theatrical way. Mimic is to be one with something and, therefore, to understand better: s and for example a person handles axis all day of the bricks, it would happen that at a given moment he no longer knows what he is handling because it becomes an automatism but if he is asked to mimic how to handle a brick, he will be able to rediscover the essence of this object, its weight and its volume. This phenomenon is of great interest in the pedagogical field: mimicking allows the rediscovery of the thing in its authenticity. The act of mimicking is in this case knowledge. Every real artist is a mime: if the artist is able to give an organicity to a work performed, it is because he manages to live the sensory impressions of the subject in such a deep and in-depth way that he can essentialize them within himself and, according to this point of view, then reproduces it giving

life to a new creation. Ultimately, the definition of "physical theatre" can therefore be used to describe an approach to the theatrical arts that integrates the physical qualities of the different styles and forms of representation by using and emphasizing the physical elements of the body and its relationship in the space of representation: These particular physical characteristics and styles of each are actively "mimed" and interpreted through the analysis of movement, gestures and character (Carlomagno, 2020; Giraldo, 2019). The physical aspects of the character and stage (scenery, lighting, etc.) are understood and considered in relation to the control of space and action in a given place. The general aim is to make concrete a method to direct (take care of the direction and staging) and act with clear, precise, tangible rules and with a vocabulary that establishes a link between psychological processes, movement and speech (Mari, 2007). Such an internship allows the actor to better physically hold and translate these processes giving them meaning and value, and at the same time act out an eventful and visually interesting scene. In this context, the possibilities of expression are not unconditionally bound to the word and to the considered interpretation of verses; Thus the actor becomes a "creator-improviser" not just an interpreter of someone else's words. Physical theatre, therefore, it can be said, becomes a way of describing an active process of creating movement theatre, in whatever style, in whatever tradition one wishes to give prominence.

2. Characteristics of the experimental activity

In the research path, 20 secondary schools in the province of Naples were involved, with an experimental group of 250 boys who experimented with physical theatre and a control group of as many 250 children who, on the other hand, did not participate in this activity: the two groups had an average age of 12,5 years (experimental group) and 13 years (control group) with an equally uniform gender distribution (respectively: 35% males and 65% females; 40% males and 60% females).

Description of the experimental activity

The teacher, in agreement with the owner of the experimental project, elaborates a story from which the "canvas" is subsequently obtained: it is a particular theatrical text that summarizes the story and divides it into scenes of which it indicates the characters and facts, but not the jokes that are instead of the actors directly on stage, so they may vary from time to time.

For an effective development of the stories, at the first meeting guidelines were immediately provided that the students internalized and repeated constantly before each start of the weekly activity:

- Giving a first general reading and appreciating the story as a whole: opening what is the first impression that the text as a whole conveys is very important because it is the way in which the spectators will enjoy the show; whether or none of them will go into depth in the analysis of the text or the psychology of the individual character;
- Reread the canvas carefully, this time focusing on the sensations that your character generates and understanding how it evolves in the course of the story;
- Examine the points where the character exposes himself most and where his psychology or role in the story can be fully appreciated, emphasizing with voice and gestures in order to open his soul to himself and to the audience;
- Contextualize the story: an aspect closely linked to the previous one, it is an additional step that allows you to penetrate even more into the soul of your character or, wondering what he is thinking about and what pushed him to behave in that way.

Towel 1: The hotel
<i>A novel is written set in a fantastic hotel, populated by travelers of different origins. Meetings and stories about the past of the guests and the hotel are developed. This global simulation can be carried out focusing exclusively on literary fantasy, but also be used in a more practical, even professionalizing direction. In this case, students will be prepared to write all kinds of texts practiced in a hotel and recite situations of interaction between guests and staff.</i>
Towel 2: The palace
<i>A novel is written set in a fantastic hotel, populated by travelers of different origins. Meetings and stories about the past of the guests and the hotel are developed. This global simulation can be carried out focusing exclusively on literary fantasy, but also be used in a more practical, even professionalizing direction. In this case, students will be prepared to write all kinds of texts practiced in a hotel and recite situations of interaction between guests and staff.</i>
Towel 3: The island
<i>On a ship many characters travel to distant lands. The ship sinks. The castaways land on a fantastic island. This theme allows you to stage different situations of oral interaction, including group discussions. As far as writing is concerned, on the other hand, it lends itself to producing naturalistic, geographical, historical, anthropological and regulatory texts. Individual and group drawings and graphic representations also easily placed among the activities. The conductor must be careful, however, to try to avoid the most obvious and banal stereotypes; for this purpose literary texts are helpful, to invite to richer and more articulated speeches and texts.</i>

Table 1: Some tea towels used during theatrical activities

3. Evaluation

The questionnaire that has been chosen to be administered is a review of the life skills *assessment tool* and consists of 13 questions that focus on the practical value of life skills and verify the development and maintenance of all (or almost) the transversal benefits related to the practice of theatrical activity.

The questionnaire presents three possibilities of response articulated in the following modalities and with the following score:

- 1) I agree = 3 points;
- 2) I agree enough = 1.5 points;
- 3) I disagree = 0 points.

<i>Life Skills</i>	<i>Benefit question</i>
Self-awareness	He knows himself through the awareness of his strengths, weaknesses, emotions, needs, desires and preferences.
Goal setting	Develop an action plan aimed at motivating and guiding yourself or a group towards achieving a goal.
Goal ladder	He makes a lineup of actions to achieve the goal.

Decision Making	It makes effective decisions even under time pressure, evaluating the objectives and consequences of multiple alternatives of action.
Problem solving	Solves emerging problems in a relevant and effective way
Positive thinking	He has a mental attitude that generates positive expectations and facilitates the pursuit of goals.
Self-talk	"He dialogues with himself ", telling himself that he can do it (intrinsic motivation).
Emotional regulation	Regulates emotions, positive and negative.
Stress management	It manages school and domestic stress in a profitable way.
Creative thinking	Find creative solutions relevant to a given context.
Effective relationships	It creates and maintains important relationships but is also able to break off inadequate relationships.
Communication competence	He manages effective communication, managing to balance assertiveness in dialogue (he speaks in a safe and convincing way as well as engaging but not arrogant) and listening to the other, using verbal and non-verbal channels of communication with harmony.
Empathy	Ability to empathize with another person and feel the same emotions (without being carried away).

Table 2: Areas explored by the revised life skills assessment tool

The boys were left independently to read the instructions on their own and then proceed to compile. In any case, if difficulties had emerged in understanding some questions, it would have been possible to specify and clarify the doubts, but be careful not to guide the examiner in the answer: it is in fact allowed to explain any unfamiliar word using simpler ones without attributing positive or negative connotations because there are no right or wrong answers; In addition, it is important that the test is completed in full without forgetting any item, so it is necessary to carefully check that all the answers have been given, inviting the boy to complete the missing questions if there were omissions: the time spent in the compilation reflects the commitment invested and, therefore, it is important to take into account if this is too short because it could reflect lack of interest and superficiality as well as a time excessive could indicate an exaggerated concern in trying to provide the right answer. Since the data were processed anonymously, the students reported only gender, age and class.

4. Results and discussion

EXPERIMENTAL GROUP		
<i>LIFE SKILLS</i>	<i>BEFORE</i>	<i>AFTER</i>
Self-awareness	525	600
Goal setting	487,5	562,5
Goal ladder	487,5	562,5
Decision making	450	562,5
Problem solving	450	562,5
Positive thinking	487,5	600
Self-talk	487,5	600
Emotional regulation	450	562,5
Stress management	450	562,5
Creative thinking	525	562,5
Effective relationships	487,5	600
Communication competence	487,5	600
Empathy	525	600

Table 3: Experimental Group Results

CONTROL GROUP		
<i>LIFE SKILLS</i>	<i>BEFORE</i>	<i>AFTER</i>
Self-awareness	487,5	487,5
Goal setting	225	562,5
Goal ladder	225	412,5
Decision making	375	412,5
Problem solving	281,25	525
Positive thinking	300	562,5
Self-talk	187,5	562,5
Emotional regulation	225	337,5
Stress management	112,5	337,5

Creative thinking	375	612,5
Effective relationships	262,5	525
Communication competence	225	562,5
Empathy	412,5	562,5

Table 4: Control Group results

From the results of the questionnaire completed by the teachers of the classes participating in the physical theater project, it is clear that before the start of the activity, there were no statistically significant differences between the scores of the two groups, which, on the other hand, is well evident in the data recorded at the end of the experimentation: therefore, the administration of the aforementioned questionnaire – to evaluate the psychological, relational and learning benefits – proved to be particularly suitable because it allowed to highlight the correlation of these constructs. In particular, it is possible to highlight the fact that in both groups there was a general positive variation with regard to the items taken into consideration but in the sample that took part in the theater project, the difference was certainly more significant. Some possible criticalities of the present study could lie in the small sample, in the choice of teachers to whom to administer the questionnaire (sometimes the same teacher is tenured in more than two classes), in not using standardized and scientifically validated questionnaires as in the state of the art of research we have not yet reached the preparation of a uniform evaluation method in the specific school environment the level of education to which the project is addressed.

5. Concluding didactic-pedagogical considerations

In the light of the above, it is clear that talking about education and talking about theatre means calling into play two dimensions that are deeply linked for more than one reason. First of all, theatre offers an extraordinary opportunity to educate to an authentic emotional life, that is, that inner condition that takes the individual and dominates him without this being able to somehow control it (Maciuc, 2009). As Aristotle teaches, however, the correct way to live the passions is the "purified" one, that is, by escaping from their absolute lordship and, therefore, becoming active: since the passion is "purified" a typology permeated with thought and the latter being the highest form of activity, it follows that a passion is not just a state of mind but also and above all reflection and awareness; therefore, the purpose of the theater, whether you practice it or attend the performance, is precisely to educate to live passion not as an experience woven of simple emotions but as a dimension in which knowledge becomes deeper, things take on a relevance that usually escapes and the human condition presents itself in its essential and even tragic form. Again Aristotle teaches us that for these reasons poetry, especially that of the theater, is more philosophical than history, that is, it serves more to know who man really is, beyond his always different historical events: these, in fact, change, but human nature is always the same, it does not change, and at the theater we learn what are the dangers that are always in front of it. Emotion, therefore, is the first educational dimension of theater, since educating means different things, but also and above all orienting, teaching the right relief of things: even comedies, which have at their base a comedy that arouses laughter, always leave a bitter

aftertaste because the comic situation represented. It always alludes to political and social issues that are anything but light. The formative value of an education to a reflective and not purely emotional passion is enormous for us, today, in a culture dominated, instead, by the exaltation of emotions sought and consumed as the only meaning of life. Young people, in particular, are huge consumers of emotions, who live, however, mostly in a completely passive, formless way: from this prevailing emotionalism the theater can, within certain limits, save them. But the educational value of theater is not only this. Being educated also means acquiring a sense of measure and harmony: Plato is the privileged point of reference, who introduces the concept of "harmony" which in Greek means "to adapt": therefore, harmony is etymologically the "good interlocking", the "good connection between the parts"; By understanding theatre, one learns the profound meaning of harmony because one realizes that representation succeeds to the extent that everyone falls not only into their own part but also and above all into the part of the others. A good actor must therefore be extraordinarily empathetic: one too many pauses, an obsession pronounced in advance, an uncoordinated response to the action and accent of others ruin the representation (Carlomagno, 2020; Daraklitsa, 2017).

In the Italian language the adjective "theatrical" has taken on the meaning of "excessive", "without measure", while the term "protagonist" means the one who excels over the others: these two terms, deriving from the lexicon of the theater, have taken on a meaning very far from the true theatrical spirit. Passion/reflection and sense of harmony/measure are, therefore, the first two fundamental elements to underline when it comes to the educational value of making theater; To these is added a third, which concerns movement: a theatrical text should never be simply recited but interpreted and, therefore, the word should be given the right emphasis through body language ... All this can be summed up in the term "expressiveness" (Chivandikwa & Makumbirofa, 2008; Cowart, 2013; Sassen, 2015). In "routine" schooling, that is, in the school of canonical and traditional subjects, expressiveness is very little valued: it is accepted that a student rattles off the contents with a flat tone, a tone that does not change whether we are talking about the Dynamic or whether we are talking about the French Revolution. All this cancels the body of the word of which the great sophist-rhetorician Gorgias spoke, when he affirmed that the prodigy of the word lies precisely in having a small body that produces incredibly powerful effects: the expressive word is powerful while the word without expressiveness is trivial or, even worse, an indication of lack of authentic thought and assimilation of what is said. Theatre, therefore, educates to speak with awareness, conviction and expression, even and above all outside the theatrical scene (Chivandikwa & Makumbirofa, 2008; Fichera, 2017). A fourth educational element connected with theatrical practice is the sense of the inexorability of error: it even speaks of a "pedagogy of error", because from understanding the mistakes made one can learn a lot; the mistakes, however, are not all on the same level because there are some (and, fortunately, they are in the clear majority) that, once committed, they can be corrected but there are situations in which you cannot afford to make mistakes, because a mistake would have irreparable consequences. Theatre also makes us understand this, leading to a serious and scrupulous preparation since one's own work and that of others are closely intertwined: each one is responsible not only for himself, but also for others. Making theater, therefore (and this is the fifth emphasis on the educational value of this practice) is also the promotion of dynamics of deeper socialization and work with others becomes a feeling of deep cohesion, of a deep belonging to a group that does not cancel the personality of individuals but allows its correct expression. It is easy to understand how theatre can be an opportunity, in a group-class, to correct dynamics of rivalry and exclusion, promoting cohesion and inclusion: it is no coincidence that pedagogists underline how precious dramaturgical-theatrical activity is (Carlomagno, 2020; Chivandikwa & Makumbirofa, 2008; Cowart, 2013). To conclude, summing up: doing theater at school does not mean suspending the customary practice of teaching subjects but activating moments of learning, awareness and

socialization that are absolutely complementary to the "traditional" school, as we take care of aspects of the growth of the person that this, for structural reasons, does not find a way to fully exploit.

References

- Antonacci, F., Mancino, E., & Guerra, M. (2013). *Dietro le quinte: pratiche e teorie nell'incontro tra educazione e teatro. Dietro le quinte*, 0-0.
- Callery, D. (2015). *Through the body: A practical guide to physical theatre*. Routledge.
- Carlomagno, N. (2020). Le potenzialità didattiche delle arti sceniche. *Education Sciences & Society-Open Access*, 11(1).
- Chivandikwa, N., & Makumbirofa, R. (2008). *Theatre, Life Skills and Participatory Learning*.
- Cowart, T. S. (2013). *Former students' perceptions of how theatre impacted life skills and psychological needs*. Liberty University.
- Daraklitsa, E. (2017). Il risveglio dei sensi nel corpo dell'attore. *Uno sguardo al teatro fisico della Grecia contemporanea. Itinera*, (13).
- Di Rago, R. (2008). *Emozionalità e teatro. Di pancia, di testa, di cuore*. Franco Angeli Editore, Milano, pag. 55.
- Fichera, A. (2017). *Educazione e teatro*. Youcanprint.
- Giraldo, M. (2019). *Grotowski e le azioni fisiche. Per una dialettica tra teatro ed educazione fisica. Formazione, lavoro, persona*, 3.
- Guner, H., & Guner, H. N. (2012). Theatre for education. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 51, 328-332.
- Maciuc, I. (2009). Education through Theatre: Saving a Place of the Theatre in High/Middle School. In *El Siglo de Oro antes y después de "El Arte Nuevo": nuevos enfoques desde una perspectiva pluridisciplinaria* (pp. 112-120).
- Nicholson, H., & Bond, E. (2017). *Theatre and education*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Oliva, G. (1999). *Il teatro nella scuola. Aspetti educativi e didattici* (pp. 1-192). LED.
- Pontremoli, A. P. M. (2005). *Teoria e tecniche del teatro educativo e sociale* (pp. I-VIII). UTET libreria.
- Redington, C. (2016). *Can theatre teach?: An historical and evaluative analysis of theatre in education*. Elsevier.
- Sassen, R. (2015). *Physical Theatre. The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary South African Theatre*, 77-92.