

PART II

DRAMA / CHOREOGRAPHY

1. CREATIVE APPROACHES TO PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Anca Doina Ciobotaru²⁹

Abstract: *The contemporary Romanian school has frequently been a matter of debate; contents, methods, strategies, manuals, authors, analytical programs – they have all been supported, debated, annulled and reconsidered. However... The Ministerial Order that has allowed, in 2012, the introduction of “Personal Development” in the curriculum has opened a path that has not yet accomplished its role of guiding students to themselves and to the optimal variant for the manifestation of their potential; this aspect has even been demonstrated by analytical programs submitted to and edited by well known publishing houses. Therefore, the present study is meant to open an efficient dialog on the necessity of a transdisciplinary and creative approach to personal development.*

Key words: *theatre techniques, personal development, communication*

1. Arguments

The rather shy approaches on structuring coherent didactic strategies focusing on “personal development” have determined us to plea for a transdisciplinary approach that is (in our opinion) the only way to come to an efficient impact. Theatre techniques, narrative or dramatic texts, and the principles of personal development can become a creative threefold basis for real and harmonious development of the students’ cognitive, emotional and physical intelligence. The concept of personal development – “self help”, as it so often appears in the specialty language across the ocean – is, first of all, a continuous process through which we can change ourselves, on a daily basis. A process that determines reaching the best variant that can come to life TODAY, and a process that is strongly tied to permanent education. It is hard to even estimate the number of books that have been written on this topic, and there are increasingly more fields that offer perspectives for approaching it; there are, obviously, pedagogy, motivational psychology, sociology – which tend to catch most of our attention. However, art can offer everyone the possibility of a creative approach.

Changing the paradigm does not imply only a creative approach and using theatre-specific techniques, but also *stepping out of the square* – which becomes concrete through the acceptance in school bibliographies (specific to the analyzed field) of works written on collateral topics, which include success-oriented education, motivational or transformational principles. Among the best

²⁹Associate Profesor PhD. Hab., „George Enescu” National University of Arts from Iași, Romania, email: ciobotaru_anca@yahoo.com

known authors, there are: Napoleon Hill, Dale Carnegie, John Maxwell. Awareness of the starting point (A) and of the aimed one (Z) will make the road possible. On the road from the idea to the creative manifestation, what matters is the process, not the end; the transformation, not the outside aim.

2. Principles and directions for action

A systemizing of the principles that have been established in writings on personal development can reveal three fundamental directions:

A) The Principle of Awareness

This principle implies awareness of three important aspects:

- Identity – Who am I?
- Knowledge – In what stage of development am I?
- Wishes – What do I wish to become?

Reinterpreting these questions leads, firstly, to the matter of self image, which can be an engine or a brake for personal development, for making the most of one's potential at a given time... "...it's not who you are, but who you think you are that keeps you stuck." (Maxwell, 2013). Nobody can reach beyond this limit; self image can be a limiting point. In fact, improving each student's self image (based on self knowledge and the wish to grow) can also contribute to diminishing the number of abuses in school communities; if the number of those who silently agree to being manipulated, humiliated, or abused (be it verbal, physical or any other type) decreases, then, certainly, there will also be a decrease of the abusers' force. Identity should not be reduced to a name; creating a context for maximizing the creative potential can generate the development of self esteem, of confidence and of an assimilated value system.

The question "What do you want to do?" turns into "What do you want to become?"; the individual is replaced by the developing personality. The apparently difficult answer can be relevant to the one who searches for it through playing; roleplaying, for instance – and not only – can offer the chance of safe experimentation, the technique being well known and frequently used. However, the less used aspect is intuition – a form of manifesting the ineffable side of our identities. Children, teenagers have the inalienable right to have an identity, but shouldn't the identity and integrity of their dreams be a priority? Modern society seems to require a change of emphasis in success-training programs; Steve Jobs has sent an alarm, in this regard: "Have the courage to follow your heart and your intuition. Somehow, they already know what you truly want to become. Anything else is secondary." (Roşoga, 2013, p. 67). The dream seen as an imprint of the Self – this is one of the ideas that can be at the basis of a creative pedagogy of personal development. Literature can be an endless source of models who have known to follow their dreams, to turn the imaginary into reality. However, the story cannot determine the child's personal development by itself, but the relation to it, to the shown/chosen model.

B) The Principle of Reflection

- It brings to attention problems such as: the chosen model/mentor, medium/circle of friends;

- It determines a re/structuring of values;
- It determines acceptance (of self and, equally, of others).

“In the same way diamonds and gold can only be found after long searches, man too can only discover the truth about himself if he looks deep inside his soul. He can realize that he is the creator of his own character, the shaper of his own life, and he can shape his own destiny, he can prove, with no mistake, that if he controls and guides his thoughts, checking the effects they have on himself and others and on his life and events, he will patiently connect cause and effect through practice and investigation. Using each experience, even the most trivial, the daily events, as a means to gain knowledge of himself, he will gain wisdom and he will understand the power they have. In this way, if he will search, he will find, and if he beats at the door, it will open. Only with patience, practice and persistence can a man enter the door of the temple of knowledge.” (Allen, 2005, p. 9). In fact, this principle follows the development of emotional intelligence, which involves self knowledge, acceptance and the organization of one’s feelings. “Through the connection of individual feelings, when there is an organization on the basis of a dominant interest, there are changes and nuances that alter the constitution of these feelings. On one side, the direction of the entire effort will have an influence on the type and the degree of these individual feelings – on the other, their interaction, when they meet during the efforts, will give them a different character that they wouldn’t have received otherwise.” (Höffding, 2007, p. 41). At this point, the fictional hero becomes the mirror of his own searches.

C) The Principle of Intentional Action

- It triggers the question: what is the first step? If it is not followed by concrete, object-focused actions, reflection will lead to inertia; it is only action that can generate creativity, transforming reflection in a stage for incubating ideas. In fact, all the great universities and colleges from the USA and the Western world are preoccupied with creating places where students can experiment, take the first step. Theatre labs, for instance, can become spaces for personal development/growth, inside which the connection between idea and action can consciously be made by starting from a fundamental question: what are you willing to give up in order to become who you are meant to be? The idea can be taken and extended both to the family and the school environment; creativity can become a lifestyle if the students are trained to experiment and to evaluate their experiments, no matter their type – technical or artistic. Identifying or setting up a place for searching inner solutions; tying this idea to the (previously mentioned) technique of using a hero’s journey as a theme for reflection, we have another solid argument for our endeavor.
- It determines a prioritization of activities, an introduction to time management.

These principles can also be found in the structure of modern pedagogical paradigms, such as “the pedagogy of alterity”, inspired by Emanuel Levinas, which focus on the spiritual dimension of personality; the idea of tolerance,

solidarity and alterity can be safely experimented through methods that create bridges between pragmatic and creative approaches.

3. Applicative Directions

Accepting the necessity of applying these principles in the structuring of a coherent program for personal development, the usage of theatre techniques becomes natural; this aspect results from the defining traits of this performing art, no matter the style to be embraced. Among them, we focus on the following:

A. Theatre is a form of metaphorical communication that facilitates the transfer of information/principles to the youth – the message on stage is openly accepted;

B. It implies creative team activities;

C. The contact with the audience determines changes in self image.

A. The connection between the members of a team or the people who participate in a dialog is an essential step towards real, efficient communication. It implies attracting a partner, offering them a mirror for the recognition of the other and the self as members of the same “tribe”. The techniques can take the shape of questions, of an invitation to imagination or of confession; playful or lyrical, they have the same purpose: breaking the dividing wall. Metaphors, parables, theatrical signs can become keys for opening minds; socio-cultural determinations can be exceeded if those who have to do it take the risk of giving up balance in order to reach harmony. Theatre people speak of the energies of performance, but isn’t energy the one that governs the dynamics of the entire universe?

If we discuss the matter of applying theatre techniques in general, we dilute an efficient and creative idea; but by giving examples of certain techniques or dramatic structures, we can come closer to the concreteness of their pedagogical dimension. In this regard, we mention storytelling, which gives the possibility of combining the impact of the parable with that of interactivity and active integration of receptors in the hero’s journey; the map of the journey can determine the assimilation of the relation between accomplishment and price, joy and sacrifice, wish and action. This way, storytelling becomes more than entertainment, turning into a way for acknowledging, for applying the principles of awareness, reflection and intentional action. The emotional road, the hero’s journey and the price of overcoming the obstacles in the story – they can all be transformed into instruments for training, for personal development. The parable has the hero facing obstacles, but also the child, who has the chance of discovering his strong side, through imaginary experience and empathy.

B. Team activities have always been an efficient training for developing leadership abilities, as well as emotional control. Daily or theatrical communication is to be based on turning from the transmission of information to the establishment of relationships, which is only possible through connecting and empathizing with the partners. Empathy also involves the intuition of their emotions; the sensibility and logic of the discourse are joined by emotion and tolerance, arisen from understanding. The compatibility of creative ideas channeled in a single stream generates the energy required not only for the

stylistic unity of a performance, but also for establishing a new level of relations, of leadership. “If reality imposed itself directly on our senses, if we were in immediate communion with things and with ourselves, I believe that art would become useless or that we would all be artists, as our souls would continuously vibrate on the same frequency with nature.” (Rusu, 1989, p. 173).

C. The contact with the audience generates feedback, response. This response, however, has to be received and analyzed; this way, it transforms into another context for reflection on the way of acting intentionally. Choosing the way to filter the feedback is an exercise in objectivity, self knowledge and, implicitly, strengthening self image. But this process is only possible if the student is assisted not only by a teacher or a theatre specialist, but also by a mentor or a coach. Obviously, the techniques they apply are different, but they are equally beneficial, according to the objectives and the subject’s level of awareness; what matters is that personal development turns from a trending concept to a concrete act.

4. Conclusions

The principles and directions of action we have mentioned allow us to sustain the necessity and efficiency of artistic techniques – theatre-specific, first of all – in personal development. In fact, what we draw your attention to is a change of paradigm, the model we have proposed being based on the imaginary experimentation with contexts that can determine reaching and using each subject’s potential, but also on the creative approach of daily challenges. External hierarchies cannot be escaped, competitions have a well-defined role in contemporary society, but self improvement is a step to success.

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