

4. EDUCATIONAL THEATRE

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Abstract: *The Educational Theatre took form in the 60' in Great Britain as a direct response to both school and theatre necessities. Since then it has been developed in many different forms and contexts taking an impressive variety of theatrical forms. The Educational Theatre facilitates the classical educational system incapable of developing behaviour patterns and demeanours concerning moral values that young people need. This new form of art has tried, since its emergence, along with solving complex issues (from the communication and community development area), to redefine the role of theatre in society, calling in question the relation between the actor and the audience, the playwright and the actor, the theatre and the state, the theatre and the present and not the least important relation between the theatre and the propaganda.*

Key words: *Educational Theatre, Theatre in Education, Theatre, Education*

*The idea of School and the idea of Theatre are nothing but the same idea. They were born together.
Jean Cocteau*

Education is the most important social phenomena in the development of civilisation and human culture. Over the years, the mechanisms, ideals, purposes and contents of education have evolved and improved according to both material and spiritual conditions and the necessities of society.

The current educational system is the product of the reforms that took place in the beginning of the XX century, when important mutation in pedagogical thinking and school practice occurred. Repulsion towards the 'old school' founded only on receptivity and on exclusive theoretical orientation of the didactic activity's content, lead to the emergence of the so called 'New School' based on experimental pedagogy. In spite of these reforms, the existent educational system was undoubtedly incapable of developing behaviour patterns and demeanours concerning moral values that young people need. The teachers' solution for complex issues, from the communication and community development area, was education by the medium of theatre.

The idea of educational theatre is not, in any case, a XX century revelation. The educational role of theatre and the role of arts in general, has been recognised since ancient times. Despite this, the connexion between theatre and school as an institution took place only in the 60', in Great Britain. The Educational Theatre concept appeared as a direct response to both school and theatre necessities and it is being developed since then in many different forms and contexts, calling in question the relation between the actor and the audience, the playwright and the actor, the theatre and the state, the theatre and the present and not the least important relation between the theatre and the propaganda.

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What does Educational Theatre mean? Anthony Jackson offers a possible definition : , *By educational theatre I refer to the variety of theatre forms that have been deployed for explicit educational ends, many of which – but by no means all – involve some active audience engagement: whether full-scale in role participation or performance culminating in a workshop or debate, as commonly found in practices as diverse as theatre in education (...)*.¹⁴⁶ The various social, cultural and artistic contexts, as well as the diversity of perspectives lead to the birth of a vast and complex theatrical phenomenon, the Educational Theatre being now present in an impressive variety of theatrical forms. Moreover, the list of terms associated with this type of work seems to be endless: *theatre of the oppressed, theatre in education, theatre in health education, outreach theatre, museum theatre, theatre in prisons, theatre for development, theatre for liberation, agit-prop, applied theatre, social theatre and interventionist theatre.*

Although there are many supporters of this genre, there are countless directors, actors, dramatists and even professors that are not excited about the collaboration between theatre and education. The question that everyone bears in mind, regardless of the category they are in, is the following: is Educational Theatre a form of art, an educational instrument, or a joint between them? The opinions concerning this matter are divided.

Many reject the idea of an educational theatre that doesn't seriously compromise the artistic values of the sixth art. The experimental playwright Howard Barker is one of the individuals that support this idea: ,*Artistic creation is so instable that a theatre seems to me last place you would go to learn something*.¹⁴⁷ He considers that Educational Theatre belongs, through its dramatic structure and aesthetic principles, to the theatrical genres which refuse the artistic exploration of complexity and ambiguity, essential elements, from his point of view, of the theatrical art. Barker claims that the theatre which puts education above the artistic act cannot be named art. Contrary to this opinion, many Educational Theatre lovers and creators consider irrelevant this issue brought in discussion by Barker. They only see in this phenomenon an effective way of developing the youngsters' personality. The educational role of theatre is more important for them than the theatrical genre's purity.

The playwright Edward Bond starts from the belief that imagination changes reality. Consequently, if the children imagine a society governed by justice, in the future, this thing will become reality. Educational Theatre is, from his point of view, an efficient way of changing the contemporary society: ,*The plays young people write, act and watch are blueprints of the world they will have to live in*.¹⁴⁸

Very few practitioners, artists and professors sustain that Educational Theatre can be art and instrument at the same time. And why could it not be this

¹⁴⁶ Jackson, Anthony (2007) – *Theatre, Education and the Making of Meanings. Art or instrument?*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, p 1

¹⁴⁷ Barker, Howard (1997) – *Arguments for a Theatre*, 3rd ed., Manchester University Press, Manchester, p 137

¹⁴⁸ Bond, Edward (1997) – *The Dramatic Child*, Methuen, London, p 91

way? In the most important contemporary study about performance and theatre, Richard Schechner identifies seven functions of the theatrical act: *, to entertain, to make something that is beautiful; to mark or change identity; to make or foster community; to heal; to teach, persuade or convince; to deal with the sacred and/or the demonic'*.¹⁴⁹ It goes without saying that, like Schechner also said, in an artistic act multiple of these functions, or even all of them can be found, and, in this case, in general, there is a main function around which the performance is built.

It is obvious that, in the Educational Theatre's case, the main function is *,to teach, persuade or convince'*, while in a musical on Broadway the objective is *,to entertain'*. What is the difference between the two of them? How can we say that the musical is theatre and a show made by children within a TIE programme is not? We can hold forth that a show in which the entertainment is brought to the fore is better or more true than an artistic act in which education is the priority? Even if the objectives are different, both theatrical forms can be considered, from my point of view, artistic creations.

Educational Theatre represents one of the most significant developments in theatre in the past fifty years, in spite of the arisen tensions between theatre as education and theatre as „art” and the reluctance of many actors, playwrights, teachers or directors. In his study about Theatre in Education Tony Jackson states *„Nevertheless Theatre in education (TIE) has arived, and has gained recognition in many quarters for the unique contribution it has made to education in those schools fortunate enough to have benefited from it”*¹⁵⁰

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¹⁴⁹ Schechner, Richard (2002) – *Performance Studies*, Routledge, London, p 37

¹⁵⁰ Jackson, Tony (1980) - *Learning through Theatre, Essays and casebooks on Theatre in Education*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, p VII