Influence of Theatrical Art on Children: Theater Schools

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Abstract

The report examines the ideas of theater in the education and their application in Bulgarian school practice. The main concepts, stages, approaches, structure and characteristics of the theater as a method of study are clarified. The theater school is considered as a factor for development and support of education. Issues related to the phenomenology of the process of creating a spectacle that integrates the ideas of theater into education are discussed. Ideas from practice are used.

Keywords: theater, theater school, education, schools, children.

1. Introduction

In its classical style, the school is a boring place for children born in a dynamic, rapidly developing and high-tech world. The children of modern times strive to escape from our “ordinary” reality. The desire to rediscover, the pursuit of uniqueness and extreme experiments bring a lasting impression on all spheres of human existence, including the upbringing and education of the younger generation. The different worldview, the different aesthetic needs, aesthetic attitudes and tastes, form a new setting for reality, a new attitude towards reality that requires a new, flexible approach.

Realizing this, more and more schools are looking for an innovative and creative approach to their students, turning to art through its diverse methods, techniques and genres. The school institution has the task of providing the necessary knowledge to its students, but also an important and responsible task is to support young people with confidence in themselves as individuals and members within a society. Promoting a broad range of skills and interests, supporting individual potentials, stimulating the creativity of the personality is the most responsible task for the school.

The art of theater is a powerful tool in the development of the personality. His specificity is based on the unification of different arts genres – literature, singing, choreography, stage combat, stage design, costume photography, wigs and makeup, and the acquisition of various means of expression in order to provoke and intensify the participation of the children. The theater finds successful application in education through its attractiveness, skillfully engaging actors and audiences, emotionally engaging them in an active experience, as a result of which it achieves the impact on the attitudes of viewers and participants, which remains unattainable for traditional education.
2. Exposition

2.1 *The role of art in the education process*

The concept of education includes self-education and training. There arises the need to introduce effective modern learning practices that enliven the school to provide dynamic learning based on experience, emotions, imagination and experience. Lack of motivation among students is a serious problem in the learning process. Children develop a negative attitude towards the learning process, not responding to their interests and learning to learn. Ideas for education and learning through art in the educational process have a positive attitude among pedagogues as a very innovative and successful means of overcoming contradictions, lack of interest, lack of concentration.

This reform pedagogical solution places particular emphasis on making art a key component of school education and provides good practice.

Aesthetic education includes within itself the ability to accurately perceive, properly understand, appreciate, and creatively create the beautiful in life, and nature. One of the forms of public consciousness and education in which expressions of aesthetic views of man are the art. Its main feature is that it reflects the world in artistic images. The artistic image is a “mediator” between art and the rest of the world, with its help not only the artistic communication, but also the ideas that reach it through man. In its original form, the image is born in the creative process as a result of the absorption and processing of things from reality in the artist’s mind (Todorova, 2013: 22-25).

2.2 *Theater as a method of learning: Theater in education or “educational theater”?*

Theater and art in general have specific capabilities to influence and shape the childhood personality. At its core is the game. The child, as well as the professional actor, enters the world of art through the game. The art of theater develops intelligence, sensitivity, imagination. High artistic perception takes place on a broad sensory, emotional and intellectual basis. The man of art works with all his spiritual nature. The theater acts not only visually, but on the whole human being, synthesizing from all perceptions, thoughts, experiences, feelings and imagination.

The intervention of art in the educational process justifies the need to thoroughly study the inner world of the child-student, his desires, participation, interests and aspirations. Putting the personality of the child at the center of its pedagogical and creative concept, the art helps to create a natural, healthy, benevolent environment in the school that responds to childhood, curiosity, the need for freedom of development, individual approach to each child, harmony balance in the relationship between teacher and student. Here comes the acute problem of seeking new approaches and methodologies for training, education and impact on students. Methods and techniques inherent in art, called theater, can greatly help us find the right solution to the approach to children. The readiness or maturity to practice a child’s art is considered from a psychological, sociological and pedagogical point of view. They reflect the functional fitness of the child to be actively involved in the creative process. The aim of creative learning is to achieve a trinity – physical, mental and social development of the child’s personality.

By combining the pedagogical method, the psychological workload and impact, the possibilities for sociological knowledge of art, its methodology and dimensions, the theatrical art assists in the acquisition of experience (knowledge, skills, attitudes, ways of knowledge), the systems of intellectual, moral, aesthetic, values and relationships in order to form certain qualities and traits of the human character and the overall development of the personality. We find a
symbiosis between the scientific part and the practice that guarantees the social realization, professional integration and personal development of the child.

Art plays a major role in creating innovative school practices based on constructive theories of learning, according to which knowledge is not passively taught to students but is actively engineered by each learner in the process. They are based on the idea of “knowledge and experience”, not seen as elements within the capabilities of the individual teacher, but as a process shared between the learner, the environment and the activity in which the learner participates.

In this sense, the theater in education is seen by many authors as one of the most effective practices that have found its undeniable application in school education. This is because it proves to be extremely adaptable to different learning contents appropriate to different educational units on the one hand and extremely influential on the child’s psyche, emotionality and reflexivity on the other. Here are the opinions of authors on the subject, distinguishing the types of theater, their methods and results on the children.

According to Prof. Radka Vasileva – Sofia University “Kliment Ohridski” “model”, the Educational Theater model was launched as a game model but also as a stage presentation of knowledge followed by a continuing learning process that supports students’ desire and efforts to achieve a pre-defined goal. The stage format draws inspiration from the puppet show of the classical theater and television to some extent, creating attractive characters who enter into bright, quickly resolving conflict situations to prepare the viewer for participation (Vasileva, 2019).

Planning, organizing and realizing an educational and dramatic project in the classroom requires the teacher to have pedagogical mastery and competence, an opportunity and a desire for transformation, to enter into the role of the “creative facilitator who, from the processes of typical attitudes in which students often enter, actions and interactions in new and emerging game reality and improvisations” (Vasileva, 2014: 18). “The training performance is a model by observing who is learning the educational content, as well as a smart for a desirable behavior” (Vasileva, 2014: 36).

“The usual case is the development of a scenario or story-project that outlines the main story line. In the classroom you can present as a drama story everything you teach – scientific phenomena ..., natural and social phenomena, historical and personal relationships” (Vasileva, 2012: 1150).

Prof. Evgenia St. Ivanova examines the American pedagogue Viola Spolin, who, without any professional stage experience, opens the method of K. S. Stanislavsky, on the basis of which he creates an original improvisation school. Seeking an approach to children to organize pedagogical games and entertainment, she managed to connect the basic principles of his system and his attitude to the main mechanisms in the creative process with the specific requirements of child psychology. Thus, Spolin naturally masters the objective laws of improvisation. Later, on this basis, she built a sophisticated methodology for educating and mastering actor mastery. The positive results of V. Spolin’s experiment are a proof of the universality of the system and its relevance to children of different ages (Ivanova, 2019).

“The theatrical manifestations of every nation undergo a different development, they have a different content that crystallizes in different forms; accentuate or ignore one or other element, overestimate or underestimate one or the other method. They stimulate a different approach to the creative process itself. But naturally at their core there is always a universal, universal human content” ... It is not by chance that Peter Brook establishes the “grammar” of acting in the “Stanislavsky Great System” (Brook, 1978: 8).

Methods of teaching performing art and its application to children have different direction, impact and purpose. The result that the Educational Theater seeks, for example, is that all pupils in a school class learn a lesson from the school curriculum. The tools used to influence
and educate pupils resemble the elements of the theater, but in no way introduce the child to the essence of the theater.

There is also the so-called “School Theater” project, extra-curricular activities of pupils in which theater education is envisaged. Typically, these hours are led by a teacher from the school, most often a teacher of philosophy, literature, or school psychologist. The training ends with a public display to students from the respective school. “School Theater” does not claim quality product. There is no character of a specialized theater school. The idea of this type of projects and formations is to consolidate children’s free time.

Every art has a theory, an established pedagogical approach, exercises, and so on. For example, music. Her theory is quite accurate and the musician has everything to develop his technique. There is an abundance of exercises available to him, training for all the qualities required by his art. He knows precisely that the element of his art is the sound. He knows the sound ranges he needs to work with, knows what he needs to do for his perfection. It is so in all arts. Why the theater makes an exception? Why do we question his seriousness? Why do we teach students do not apply the true theory of this art, its principles and its laws? Why do we use it as a method of impact if we have doubts about the authenticity of its methods and their actual application to children?

2.3 “The System” by K. S. Stanislavsky

The purpose of this publication is to present to the general public the experience, role and method of teaching students in theater schools through the art of the theater, by Konstantin Sergejevich Stanislavsky’s “System” (1863-1938). The system on which the real live theater is based is the basis for the development of stage art during the twentieth century. Konstantin S. Stanislavsky leaves a bright trail in the history of the theater with his activities as a director, actor and pedagogue. His innovative theatrical visions and methods of work are still popular not only in Russia but also around the world. He dedicates his life to creating a “sensible, moral and publicly accessible theater”. Even today, the works left by the Russian theater are at the heart of modern theatrical pedagogy. Stanislavsky’s system belongs to the “school of experience” – this is in general the direction of his theatrical, pedagogical and scientific activity.

Its method is intended for professional actors, but the search for the optimal creative state of the actor by analogy with some specific features of the child raises the issue of the real relevance of the method to children. He believes that in every normal child there are certain potential theatrical talents and assumes that if the actor’s creative potential naturally passes through childhood “faith and naivety”, this “faith and naivety” could awaken the creative process in the child. If there is anyone to develop and guide it. His approach to theater as an analogue and natural manifestation of life is also available in childhood. Thus, a stage of attention, concentration, observation, auditory memory, etc., which Stanislavsky offers, are quite applicable in working with children. His work is aimed at revealing the organic nature of acting, justifying and affirming specific theatrical means to achieve artistic righteousness / truth, credibility / on stage. In fact, Stanislavsky’s system is a way to educate us to look at the world around us as a scene and on the stage as a real world. And the role of the theatrical pedagogue is above all to discover and remove the concrete obstacles on the way to this goal, to break the thought processes, to free the imagination, the impressiveness and the creative potential in their precise direction. In fact, we should not seek and create a special theater system for children. The laws and principles of the theater are one. Only the forms, the degree and the means for their manifestation can be different depending on the aesthetic concepts and goals. These laws, in the most condensed, consistent and conceivable form, can be found in the Stanislavsky system. His approach to theater and the natural manifestation of life is also available in childhood.
In this sense, when the teacher decides to use the methods of theater in his pedagogical work, it would be correct to actually learn the basics and principles of this art, to introduce the students to the complexity and the mission of this fine matter.

In his quest, Stanislavsky tries to discover the laws of true stage living.

It creates a system of approaches that educate professional actors. Develops principles and exercises through which participants develop their techniques – concentration, voice, physical skills, emotional memory, observation, text analysis. All this has the purpose to create the role of the actor, to reveal in it the life of the human spirit and naturally to embody it on stage in a fine artistic form.

The mechanism through which the child enters an imaginary game space is also used in the theatrical art. The most valuable thing in our creativity is the ability to find in every role, above all, the living person, to find yourself. This is the principle of living righteousness. This is the principle of any realistic art. “The artist needs a strong imagination, childish naivety and loyalty, an artistic sense of righteousness, and credible in his soul and body” (Stanislavsky, 1976: 334). The artist must have a sense of righteousness, truthfulness, and humanity in general.

The second principle of Stanislavsky’s system is the principle of the ideological activity of the art – the overpass. The superset includes the author’s conceptual activity, through the active line of heroes to achieve their goals. Stanislavsky defines the sole basis of our art – the action. Everything that does not lead to reaching the goal, to the overprotection – is superfluous. The third principle is so-called method of physical action – psychophysical actions. According to Stanislavsky, these two countries must always be seen in a single process as a complete psychophysical act. The proper conduct of physical actions, through their logic and consistency, penetrates the intricate and deepest feelings and experiences of the actor. “The main secret in mastering the role lies first and foremost in studying the physical behavior of the image” (Toporkov, 1952: 71). When one acts expediently, the physical action distracts the psychic and vice versa, the psychic generates the physical. Stanislavsky’s requirements for the actor are not “to play”, “to portray”. Cannot play feeling, state or mood. All this must be implied by “the whole nervous organization of the actor”. Not mechanical reproduction, external ostentation, but physical actions to unlock the psychological nuances. There are no physical actions without demands, aspirations and tasks. Based on the personality of the actor, the director must direct his temperament in the right direction. Good emotional memory and intuition help to recall certain memories and experiences so essential to the actor.

The fourth principle of “The Sytemata” is that every action must be subject to the requirements of organic, called the Method of Emotional Memory. There must be nothing mechanical and artificial in acting. The actor’s work is to be truthful, real. Finding the real measure is difficult in our profession. For an actor to be organic on stage, he must “live, live” his role during the performance. Stanislavsky provoked the actors to use their own memories to express emotion.

The fifth principle in the creative process of acting, according to K. Stanislavsky, is the principle of reincarnation. The creation of stage image through the organic creative reincarnation of the actor in this image. “It is necessary to achieve by the actors a living organic incarnation of the image, to achieve this quality when on the stage are not actors but living people” (Toporkov, 1952: 71). The magical “if” of Stanislavsky, is from real to imaginary life. The meaning of the word “if ...” is revealed in the actor’s ability to put himself in the given circumstances of the role. Creativity begins from the moment when the magical creative “if” appears in the artist’s soul and imagination. “The stage is righteousness, what the artist sincerely believes – even an obvious lie, must become in the theater of righteousness so that it may be an art” (Stanislavsky, 1976: 334).

The Word – “The Artist’s Word is not just a sound but an animator of images. Therefore, speaking verbally on the stage, speak not so much as the eye as the eye” (Stanislavsky,
Words and intonations are the result of the actor’s thoughts. The task of the actor’s verbal action is to infect his partner with his views. The word in this Stanislavsky method calls the last, higher degree of the actor’s impact on the viewer. It is a complex set of a whole range of physical actions of the artist. Through the word the heroes are most exposed, communicate and fight each other. Stanislavsky called it “verbal action”. If the word loses its working force, the purpose of influencing someone, winning one or another battle, it becomes a despicable talk. “Therefore, he must clearly see what he is talking about to ask his partner to see and see in detail with the inner eye a painting you have painted” (Toporkov, 1952: 64).

3. Theatrical school – The experiment

The creation and development of theatrical schools is one possible experience and experiment for fruitful impact on learners, and even on the school institution itself. The child is subject to a variety of spiritual diversity, but it communicates with art only in a particular cultural environment. That is why it is extremely important that the place and work of the art he encounters should bear such an artistic design that will show him the uniqueness and uniqueness of the artistic experience.

The emergence of theater schools in Bulgaria is precisely this cultural environment that attempts to reform and support the school through new methods and approaches. Schools, of course, have a wishful, not binding character. These are experimental cultural centers in which children of different ages, with artistic theatrical talents, entertain. The enmity of the schools stems from contacts with famous artists, directors and theatrical pedagogues. Their pervasive, convincing speeches, the demonstration of their own mastery, the care of the students that extends beyond the walls of the theater – everything taken together cannot have a huge impact on the future young actors, the development of their natural abilities, the formation position, opinion and attitude, etc. Under the beneficial influence of the theatrical pedagogue, children acquire greater confidence in their talents, humility, politeness, sympathy, develop their emotions, imagination, enrich their vocabulary, interpret and study classical and modern texts, autobiographies of famous poets, playwrights, directors and published works, develop a sense of rhythm, concentration, and observation. They have a different look than the one we have before.

I have the honor and the privilege to work in the first private theater in Southwest Bulgaria – DT, Prof. Encho Halachev and the accompanying theatrical schools – Kresna. Simitli, Blagoevgrad – three age groups / 1-4 grade; 5-9 grade; 10-12 grade. We created a cultural organization (2010) as an alternative to the state and municipal theater on the territory of Blagoevgrad Municipality. Our goal was to empower young, independent artists, a scene and an opportunity for expression.

Working hard to attract viewers, we have come to the realization that the audience is “created and grown”. So we set up a theater school “Er small” (2011), where more than 60 children were trained. Students from these schools acquire the basic laws, methods and techniques in acting, training on the so-called “System” by Konstantin Sergejevitch Stanislavsky. As an inseparable component of the development of pupils in the theater schools, elective disciplines and teachers are included, providing theoretical and historical knowledge and practical skills in the field of music, fine arts, psychology, philosophy, aesthetics, mythology and religion, as well as professional skills in dancing, stage and cascade, acrobatic techniques, preparation for casting, make-up and wigs, musical and light environment, dramatization, stage design, costume design, etc. I cannot hide that the beginning was difficult, even impossible, until we started talking in one language. Over time, the children gained confidence, experience, character, stage ethics, reflexivity, and so on. The most important quality they developed was a sense of duty to the theater. They became like-minded, an audience, a barometer of quality, a family in the theater.
Among the most important stages in the theater school is the imposition of a constructive model – children play children. The main idea is for children to recreate roles, regardless of the external characteristics of the characters, ethnicity, religion and age. In this way, they present their attitude and understanding to them, while not inflicting childlike violence in trying to “live” a role. Every year, children end the theater season with public display, or so-called performance in front of the audience. The ultimate product is always well-groomed: costumes, decor, make-up, lighting, musical environments. Ticket price from BGN 5 to BGN 7 with the funds collected from the shows, trips are organized at the theatrical festivals in Bulgaria or distributed for a next performance – for décor or costumes. Every premiere is an event both in the theater and in the school. Her activities are monitored by the public with great interest due to the true, dedicated and enormous love of the children to the theater. This is a great responsibility we take on ourselves – to satisfy the spiritual interests of people who come to buy a ticket. “What great ideas, what great thoughts should we bring to them!” (Toporkov, 1952: 153).

The views of the theatrical school cover a broader understanding of the theatrical education, which prepares not only future artists and filmmakers, admirers and connoisseurs of the theater, but also well-educated and educated personalities. The children go through the whole stage of creating a performance: theory, choice of dramatic text, rehearsals, decor, costumes, ticket sales, press conferences, technical rehearsal, make-up, premiere, theatrical salon layout. The art of theater has the task of being a means of preparing children for their social role in an increasingly unstable and aggressive world. Theatrical schools perform important functions – enlightening, educative, cognitive, and socially organizing. They help young people develop confidence in themselves as individuals and members of different groups within society.

4. Results

The methods and techniques presented by K. Stanislavsky in Chapter 2.2.3. are applicable in the training of professional artists. However, since the active approach is close and inherent to children, our desire and motivation to apply and verify them in experimental pedagogical training, under the theatrical school, has led to success. We have made nine shows based on methodology. Rehearsal period of performances – one year. Repertoire: “Snow White and the Dwarves”, “Aladdin and the Magic Lamp”, “Ne se gasi tui shto ne gasne”, a Compilation by Bulgarian Authors, “Romeo and Juliet” – William Shakespeare, “Revizor” – N. V. Gogol, “Proposal” and “Bear” – by A. P. Chhehov, “Chekhov Stories”, “Dvuboy” – Ivan Vazov, “The House of Bernarda Alba” – F. G. Lorca.

My observations in the theater show a new quality of work. It is getting more and more thorough, thorough, purposeful and effective. Each rehearsal is accompanied by new discoveries, accumulations and sharing. Children are increasingly developing their acting faith, observation, communication, stage speech, working line and role characteristics, sincerity and righteousness in the behavior of the stage. We have made a lot of effort to build and develop further insight, stubbornness, imagination, a true evaluation and selection of “on” and “out of” scenes that give young actors active material to uncover in the fullest possible detail and clarity all the typical traits of the future image and deep penetration of the author’s idea. As a result, children have gained readership, are interested in different literature, looking for ideas for future performances and roles. Looking at the lives of the children outside the walls of the theater and talking to their teachers, I realized that their success at school was very good or excellent, combined with personal motivation to participate in creative projects and school holidays, participation in debates, festivals languages, competitions, etc. Not a small number of our alumni are already acting students at the National Academy of Theater and Film Arts.

Theater is a powerful engine in literature classes. By encouraging children in the school to read a variety of books, to get acquainted with the author’s curriculum, the literature
classes at school are becoming favorites. Teacher told me that the analysis that makes a child from a school in an hour of literature is extremely detailed, analytical, effective and consistent. Works are compared, references and interpretations are made, even spontaneous artistic outbursts on the part of children. Debating, shaping positions and questions about the hero’s action line (What? Why? How? Where? If?)

Gradual upbringing and training through the methods of K. Stanislavsky schools created informal leaders in classrooms. These children possess a user, taste, measure, attitude, aesthetics, ethics, and need of art. The ability to organize around themselves an artistic atmosphere, to bring in their classmates. We fulfill the main task set in the theater school – the necessity and interest of communicating the child with artwork. We have created conditions for the inclusion of the children to the believers, the living, not the tangled “profession of the artist”. The fourth theatrical school created a theatrical publication that does not care about “the cheap and the banal”. We created people with a sense of truth.

5. Conclusion

Everything that can be conceived as mixed can be turned into laws and principles in the theater to be new, to play fake, mechanically, demonstrating different techniques, which can be fun and light performances. We can! But what will be the purpose of such a spectacle? To distract the audience? Does it make sense to work a man in the theater, to teach such a craft to his disciples in the name of that? They have false searches and trends in art, which are written with the exact term of the new word, which are put in danger based on realistic art, but they cannot do so. Formalism is a temporary phenomenon. The theater today all becomes easy to digest. In particular, my impressions of the cover art of the theatrical picture, which is the main activity of the persons, must be done. Children with a glance at a nanoparticle, with ease and with bad guys or with school schools, are in a hurry to cope with the problems that only occur to the surface. And man today and the world that is not found and lives, faces all more and more complex challenges. I would not like to give specific examples of performance that I have seen, but there is a great deal of hasty, unthinkable performances, not a few of them. School and theatrical, and those that meet the requirements for introduction of preserved animals are foreseen. Teachers must discover conscious paths of subconscious creation. It is required to introduce all the social, psychological and sociological prerequisites and how to interact with his or her psyche. I suppose knowledge of the processes and mechanisms in the emotional, intellectual and social assembly of the child. The true creative imagination, creativity and compatibility can be achieved only by teachers who aspire to the truth of their theater, method and fruitfulness. I do not underestimate the children, their qualities and their abilities. We all learn from them. In support of my thesis is the whole “Theatrical System” by K. Stanislavsky. We do not deal with children who cannot benefit from them without enjoying access to content and credibility without publishing publicly and without script, without a theatrical costume, etc. I am not deprived of the real pleasures, the essence of the stage art. This difficult task lies on us. This is our sacred obligation, our duty before art.

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