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The utilisation of digital drama in the educational process Enhancing the role of the student

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Using Google Arts & Culture to augment space with Vincent Van Gogh's The starry night.

Abstract

This paper is an extract from the author's doctoral thesis on digital drama and its utilisation in the educational process (Karantzouli, 2023). Through a review of international literature, the main objective is to establish that activities combining the techniques of theatre in education with new technologies and digital media can enhance the role that students can play in a student-centred educational process. The possibility of exploring the student's "identity" through the activities of the hybrid form of digital drama is analysed and finally, reference is made to the aesthetic cultivation that can be achieved for students through relevant activities. The paper aims to highlight the great potential as well as the benefits that can be achieved by raising questions and providing food for thought and discussion.

Keywords: *theatre in education, new technologies, digital media, digital drama, students, education, drama in education, identity*

Introduction

In recent years, great efforts have been made to overcome the teacher-centred approach in the educational process. The “teacher-mentor” model is changing, making learning more collaborative and turning it into a process of collective interaction (Matsagouras, 2011, pp. 309–311). Any change and renewal of curricula clearly reflects the objective of placing the student at the centre of the learning process not only in terms of acquiring knowledge, but also in terms of engaging in a process of exploration (Tzamargias & Karantzouli, 2023).

In any case, the main objective is to increase the active involvement of students in the learning process, which can be achieved both through theatre in education techniques and through the channels offered by information and communication technologies (ICT). Therefore, digital drama – as a hybrid form that seeks to combine characteristics of these different areas – can have a positive impact on the educational process, developing opportunities for expression as well as cognitive and aesthetic activities related to:

- i. observation
- ii. attention
- iii. understanding
- iv. participation
- v. action
- vi. ability to influence.

Digital drama

In the international literature, many terms have been formulated and used to describe the combination of theatre and digital technology (Masura, 2024). In particular, terms such as “computer theatre” (Pinhanez, 1996) and “screen-based performance” or “théâtre de l’image” (Hébert & Perelli-Contos, 2001) are used, where the emphasis is on the use of the screen. Giannachi (2004) also refers to “virtual theatres”, focusing on the complex function of theatrical communication and the possibility of meaningful and interactive audience participation. In addition, the term “digital performance” (Dixon, 2007) is identified, where computer technologies seem to play a primary role in performances both in terms of aesthetic and communicative functions. Broahurst (2007), on the other hand, refers to “digital practices” in an attempt to create a broader umbrella term that would “fit” all the digital practices that can be used in theatre performance (Chatzichristodoulou, 2014), including technologies of movement, interaction, robotics, AI, etc. In her research, Jamieson (2008) introduces the term “cyberformance”, which focuses on the performance that results from the use of digital media and technologies, but also on the

communication of actors located in geographically remote areas. Finally, in recent years, terms such as “cyborg theatre” (Parker-Starbuck, 2011) and “cyber theatre” (Causey, 2009) have been increasingly used, highlighting the concept of mediality through the use of computer systems not only for the creative process, but especially for the presentation and projection of theatrical performances.

Today, it would be extremely difficult to attempt a strict and fixed definition of the meaning of digital drama and theatre, since it is obvious that the potential of this hybrid form is directly dependent on the technological products, media and technologies that are developing and will continue to develop. However, in this paper the term is often used in the sense of a combination and creative synthesis of the possibilities of new technologies and digital media with the concepts of theatrical role, character, theatrical expression, action, convention, plot and conflict.

Interactivity and interaction

In the field of education, one of the key issues is to create conditions that provide more opportunities for students to take initiatives. Through their active participation they are able to create and tell stories (Jensen & Peterson, 2022, pp. 538–540), but also to acquire knowledge compatible with their individualised personal abilities (Vosniadou, 2006, pp. 31–32). Collaborative activities are perhaps the first meeting point between theatre in education and ICT. However, at a next level, digital drama activities also enhance student participation through interactive technology (Fanouraki, 2016).

The concept of interactivity, while referring to the ability of a medium to receive two-way communication, can take different forms depending on the technology used (Dixon, 2007, p. 563). We can therefore speak of “interaction with the system” through:

- **Navigation.** In this form, users choose where they want and where they are able to navigate in the cyber environment. This feature gives a sense of freedom and leaves the user with a sense of independence. This is not the case as the available options are pre-programmed. Thus “choice” and “navigation” refer to specific variations of a story. In digital drama, interaction in the form of navigation takes place at all stages, both during preparation, implementation and feedback (McNaughton et al., 2018). Students navigate the internet as they research and search for material. They create digital stories in digital storytelling environments while familiarising themselves with different digital media. In this way, navigation becomes a key tool for creating and reproducing stories. In addition, they

make digital collages, create digital repositories and, through navigation, enable audiences to participate and explore the products of theatrical expression, etc. (Georgiou, 2021).

- **Participation.** In this type of interaction, users can play a specific role through participation and the possibility to act, but also to make choices, as this is typically the case in digital game environments (Fanouraki, 2017). This form of interaction is made possible during the preparation and familiarisation of students with digital environments and during the presentation of a “digital theatre performance” on platforms such as The Sims4. In particular, there is the opportunity to create unique theatrical experiences. At the same time, the “role” function in each of the individual activities can also have a positive effect in this direction. The configuration and use of avatars as digital representatives reinforces this direction and gives new dimensions to the concept and function of the role (Hatton & Nicholls, 2018).

In addition, we can talk about “interaction with other users” through:

- **Conversation.** This form of interaction allows users to engage and interact with each other (McNaughton et al., 2018). In digital environments they are able to exchange views, to be influenced by others, but also to be influenced themselves (Zakopoulos, 2023). Distance communication platforms, as well as chat features in social media and digital gaming environments, provide opportunities for quick and easy communication, similar to those used by individuals in their daily lives and contacts with their social environment. This fact was particularly highlighted during the era of compulsory distance education, which was adopted as a measure to contain the pandemic of the new SARS-Cov2 coronavirus (Gauvin et al., 2022; Ioakimidou et al., 2021). The use of these features is dominant in the activities of digital drama, as communication is one of the main pillars of its development and implementation. It is a collaborative process that shapes the final products through interaction and two-way communication.
- **Collaboration.** Collaboration as a form of interaction refers to the possibility for a user to act together with others. The result is a change in the structure or activities of a digital application, a digital game, etc. Although this process is about changing the architecture and building a digital world or product, this form could also be approached from the perspective of digital drama. Through the appropriate digital applications, students participating in individual

activities have the opportunity to create their own characters (Hatton & Nicholls, 2018), but also their own environments in which theatrical activities can be developed. They agree and decide on specific choices, with specific goals, becoming active co-creators of the reality they experience in the school context (Raptis & Rapti, 2004, p. 251).

These two concepts, conversation and collaboration, as the cornerstones of theatre in the educational process (Fanouraki & Lakidou, 2023), seem to acquire a new dynamic through the possibilities of new technologies and the intended interaction. In the process of designing and preparing the digital action, the importance of these two functions is obvious. At the same time, the production of a final product and the possibility of sharing it are as important as they are in the process of producing a theatre performance in its traditional form (Grammatas, 2009, p. 442).

The digital representatives – Avatars

The use of digital representatives/avatars seems to enhance the active role of students in the preparation and implementation of digital drama activities (Klevjer, 2006) that require this kind of “digital presence” (Fodor, 2021). After all, an avatar is “animated” by the person on whom it depends or who created it (Rahill & Sebrechts, 2021). This allows the learner to express their purpose, thoughts, intentions and desires, to interact and cooperate through the potential representative in the relevant potential environment in which the avatar mediates instead of them (Aranzaes, 2021). The relationship between an avatar and the person who animates it (Szolin et al., 2023) could be contrasted with the actor and the character to which they give substance. At the same time, it could be seen as a “digital continuation” of the puppet or marionette. More importantly, whether the avatar is seen as a “pawn” in the hands of the student or as a means of identification, it seems to attract interest and increase the willingness to participate and engage in the particular activities that make use of it. Apart from the elements of “gamification”, the design and manipulation of an avatar allows the student to express themselves freely and uninhibitedly, free from the stress of making mistakes, to express their needs and seek opportunities for testing and experimentation (Williams et al., 2011) that are not subject to harsh criticism.

In the process of creating and developing a potential representative (avatar), students express themselves theatrically and take on roles. They become “directors” by directing their movement and “costume designers” by choosing the costume



A student using a digital face filter during an improvisation session.

and appearance. They study the role they have to create and as “actors” or “puppeteers” they look for the best way to speak and express themselves. Through digital drama activities, they “build” a character by thinking empathetically, putting themselves in their shoes and acting under the magic “if” (Hatton & Nicholls, 2018).

In addition, they can challenge students within the potential worlds and their respective environments to:

- search for material and study
- make contact
- interact with the space around them
- react to posts or actions of others
- solve puzzles
- provide solutions to more general or specific problematic situations
- learn parts of a story and become part of it
- create their own story
- create “relationships”, etc.

All of the above are also means and ways of theatrical expression, which engage students creatively, utilise the unexpected and leave space for free expression and development of final products related

to digital drama. At the same time, there seems to be a great deal of flexibility in terms of possible themes and the context in which these possibilities can be developed. The intended learning and cognitive goals of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches are thus served and reinforced.

Finally, through theatrical activities and also through the technological manipulation of the potential representative (avatar), the students unconsciously become familiar with simultaneous/parallel action at different levels. They make use of both animation codes and technological possibilities through playful and entertaining processes. According to Linderoth (2005), the realistic world (external context), the rules of the game (system context) and the impersonation of fictional characters (fictional context) are the levels on which the students interact in parallel while distinguishing between “self”, “player” and “character”. This distinction is intended to encourage reflection in order to achieve a higher level of consciousness of one’s own actions. It also helps them to perceive themselves as co-creators of the social and dramatic context in which they act, co-exist and create.

In summary, digital drama can create a fertile ground for increasing student engagement and providing more opportunities for expression and initiative, not only during the activity preparation process, but also during the implementation and feedback phases. The importance of this can be further understood if we consider the digital world in which today’s generation of learners develop and shape their interests, characteristics and capabilities on a daily basis (Lavelle, 2019; Shaw Brown, 2020). It seems that through the imaginative and creative use of both drama techniques and the possibilities of new technologies it is possible to engage participants in a learning process with playful characteristics and enticing ways, creating appropriate conditions for collaboration and the development of social skills (Reznichuk, 2021). At the same time, empathy is cultivated, through which an individual can understand their surroundings as well as themselves, with all their distinct and individualised needs and peculiarities.

Exploring student identity through digital drama activities

The use of new technologies in theatre pedagogical activities paves the way for the exploration of the student’s “self” and “identity” as a member of an “online community”. This process takes place through playful theatrical activities that are part of digital drama and can be applied in an educational context (see Cameron & Anderson, 2022).



Screenshot of Google Arts & Culture's Art Filter applied to a female student's face.

Today, it is well understood that the internet provides many opportunities for the presentation and promotion of the "self". Whether someone decides to use photographs and real information (as is usually the case in social media) or to create a digital/material representative (avatar), they are required to make certain choices about which elements of their identity they wish to highlight, which they prefer to hide and which they prefer to fabricate or invent. Observing these choices can be very useful in extracting information about the image one has of oneself and, in this case, of the students, what they believe about themselves and what they would like to possess as characteristics.

Based on this process of identity exploration in the use of theatrical activities enhanced and enriched

by technological possibilities in an educational context, Cameron and Anderson (2022) proceed to formulate and distinguish four types of "self" that can be identified at different points in the development of digital drama or, more simply, the fusion of theatre/drama and new technologies:

i. Quantified self

The "measured self" is shaped by widespread and ever-increasing web browsing, but also by people's constant permission to record their preferences and search history (Wolf, 2009). Inevitably, this leads to a corresponding quantification of the characteristics of the individual user. The "wired world" (Kustow, 2007) marks the loss of "embodiment" or the "replacement of the body" and implies the existence of a space in which people "live connected" by exchanging information, making choices and having preferences. They make up a whole personality with distinct traits, which sometimes make it possible to predict future choices and "moves". It is understood that the archiving of the data that the user generously provides to the online world will be used by large companies, such as Google, for promotional/advertising activities, but also to respond to possible requests and future needs based on the user's history.

The "quantification" of the self is a feature of modern society that students come into contact with possibly even before they start school. However, searching for information or products on online search engines is not the only means of creating such personal and individualised measurements. Everyday wearable devices, such as smart watches (Koutromanos, 2018), which can be easily used in the context of digital drama, continuously record a significant number of biological characteristics, creating a "daily archive of experiences" that can be transformed into one or more personal narratives (Lupton, 2016). More specifically, in the context of digital drama, this data can be used to create and present analogue or digital stories. These changes in pulse rate, breathing, even the recording of sleep patterns (Koutromanos & Kazakou, 2020), can be the basic quantified data on which to base the development of an entire story enriched with fictional elements or combined with those of other users/students. This data can be shared with the consent of all parties involved. In this way, students can create a "possible story" of a classmate's day or night based on this data. The cultivation of empathy is thus encouraged and a climate of cooperation is fostered through a genuine acquaintance and engagement with both the "self" and the "other". In this way they become "writers" and "researchers", gathering evidence, making combinations, creating dramatic texts, which they can then explore further through

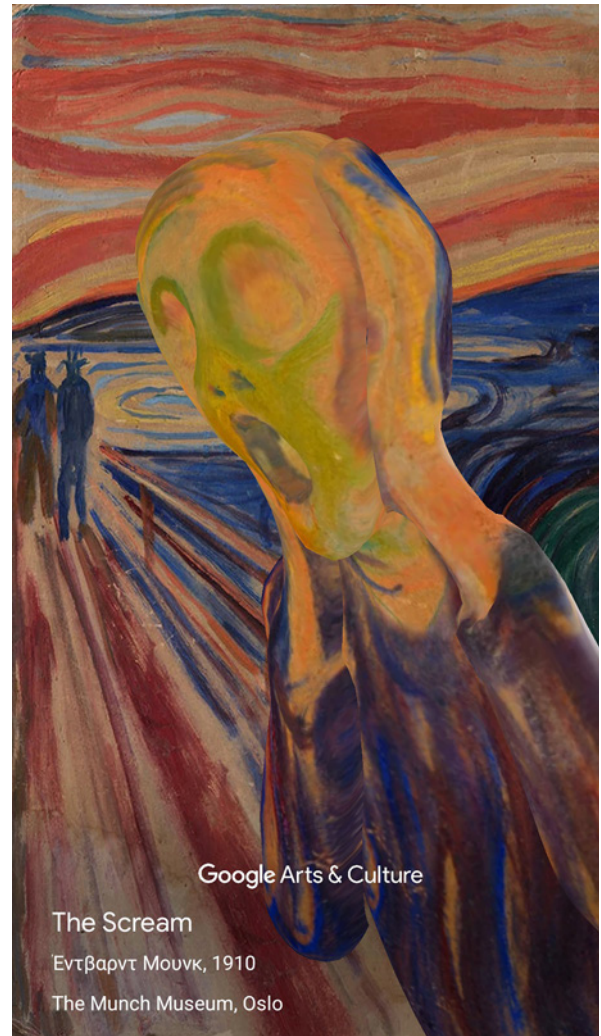
digital and analogue theatrical activities. They can even create an entire digital performance based on and following the specific data of the “quantified self”.

ii. Mediated self

The concept of “mediation” refers to the ways in which young people learn about themselves and their personalities, but also about each other. This happens as they remain constantly connected, communicating, sharing thoughts, expressing preferences, “reacting” and commenting through a particular form of “digital socialisation”. Technology in this particular perspective, as already mentioned, is perceived as a “medium” through which, in the case of digital drama, the extraction of material, the creation, sharing and promotion of new content as well as the reflection and feedback on the whole process and the final result are achieved. Part of the user’s self is thus “communicated” to other users, enabling new social constructions and facilitating the exchange of new digital realities. In this way, parallel and multiple worlds are created (Kattenbelt, 2008). Beyond the context of the group practising or using digital drama techniques and tools, this function seems to involve collaboration between schools, the exchange of materials, the joint development of activities and the production and presentation of a collaborative digital performance that actively engages geographically distant students.

Cameron and Anderson (2022), citing the work of Duncan and Hayes (2012), highlight that teachers recognise their students’ “mediated selves” – they are happy to create and communicate content in the “mediated world” – but should not be directed in an endless effort to familiarise themselves with the constantly evolving technologies and their respective media. Instead, they should explore the new forms of learning and literacy that have emerged and use them to produce new knowledge in ways that meet the specific interests and needs of today’s student population.

At this point, in an attempt to focus on the development of theatrical activities with the use and contribution of new technologies, it is worth mentioning the use of distance communication platforms as “media” for the realisation of theatrical activities (Wolverton, 2021) during the distance education imposed by the measures to limit the spread of the new SARS-Cov2 coronavirus. More specifically, Siciliano (2021, p. 5) refers to the use of the Zoom platform as a “medium” for teaching theatre in a summer camp. It could be argued that the platform was the “space” for the development of “mediated selves”. In any case, the screen seemed to allow the students to move away from the usual concerns they had or



Screenshot of Google Arts & Culture’s Art Filter applied to a female student’s face.

expressed about how to handle their hands and feet. As a result, they were able to focus on other expressive actions, perhaps gaining greater familiarity than they would have had in a shared space. It seems that they ended up creating a new image of themselves. The same may be true in the school context, as activities such as those described in the previous chapter, using distance communication platforms, can “isolate” expressive tools and lead to the meaningful exploration and discovery of new possibilities for expression.

iii. Augmented self

To explain the “augmented” self, researchers draw a parallel, or more precisely a correspondence, between the reality of the theatrical convention and the technologically augmented reality. Theatre uses both the analogue world and an imaginary representation of it, which is none other than this magical “as” or “if”. Thus, on the one hand, we have the biological humanity of actors who embody the roles with “real” features, movements, facial expressions



Screenshot of Google Arts & Culture's Art Filter applied to a student's face.

and reactions in a world that uses equally “real” objects as “signs” of certain “objects they are meant to signify” (Fischer-Lichte, 2019). Realistic and fictional elements are incorporated theatrically, made acceptable by the intended audience and attempt to tell stories and convey messages. Augmented reality, on the other hand, uses technology to add new elements and enrich the analogue world. Thus, we could formulate the view that augmented reality is able to “show” us what our analogue world would look like “if” it were enriched with some additional elements (Flavián et al., 2019). The use of real and digital elements creates a reality “like” the real one, offering both creators and users a unique hybrid experience (Garzón et al., 2019).

The use of this technology in theatrical activities in the educational process has considerable potential. However, in terms of the concept of “self”, but also from the students’ perspective, it is worth clarifying further that this technology can be an important aid in the effort to understand the “self” through theatrical activities, as students have the opportunity to move from “what they are” to “what they could be” (Cameron & Anderson, 2022, p. 521) by coming into contact with the augmented elements, but also by creating new ones. Thus, activities that use both

the concept of role and augmentative technologies, and that can be integrated in the context of digital drama can offer new experiences to students by increasing authenticity and strengthening their sense of “being” the role they are playing. In this way, they discover new reactions, new emotions and act in new circumstances, having all the elements of their analogue world, but also what augmented reality can offer. Another example that could be exploited in this particular case is the use of “filters” in various applications of smart mobile devices. The user can – by opening the front (selfie) camera and focusing on their face – retain many of its features, but enrich them with digital elements and then, seeing themselves, proceed to produce text exploring their new “character”, even composing entire monologues.

iv. Imaginative self

The process of “inventing” the self has been a matter of theatre from the very beginning of its development and is independent of technological achievements and the corresponding developments. Undoubtedly, however, reality and contact with “others” play a primary role in this personal “invention”. This means that when reality becomes “digital” and contact with “others” is mainly through technology, the “invented self” inevitably acquires a new dimension that cannot remain unaffected by the above elements. Some of the elements which, through the use of new technology, can provide details of the user’s concept of “self” include: the searches that students make, the way they express themselves, the products they create, the means they choose to communicate, the interactions and the way they communicate, the reactions and comments, the aspects of identity revealed and concealed, the characteristics of the digital representatives chosen within the online platforms and the digital representations of the user. At the same time, it could be said that such a process seems to lead to a better understanding between the students and a strengthening of their positive relationships, which in turn can play an important role in improving the classroom climate (Mpampalis & Tsoli, 2020).

Technology should be seen as a medium that can intensify and “feed” the student’s imagination, which is a key objective of any theatrical process. Theatre has always existed and can exist independently of technological developments. At the same time, however, it is an “expressor” and “designer” of reality, and it is precisely this reality that should not be sidelined, but “expressed” and “exploited” in the most appropriate and creative way. Theatre, therefore, if it is to be used either as a tool or as an autonomous area of study in contemporary education, should be triggered by and express the reality of the subject of

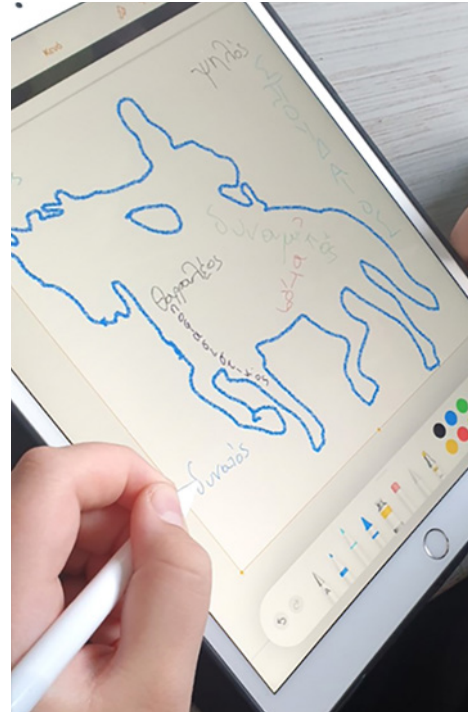
the learning process, i.e. the students themselves. In other words, it must come from their own reality and touch on their own interests, concerns and everyday experiences. Students do not come to the classroom as a “tabula rasa”. Instead, they bring with them all the elements, experiences, thoughts and judgments that have shaped their personality up to that moment. Education must therefore start from these experiences and encourage students to analyse, process, judge and revise them in a genuine process of knowledge transformation (Freire, 1976, pp. 80-97). The fusion of theatrical techniques and new technologies can support and promote this objective as it enhances expressive means, intensifies exploration, promotes expression and offers new ways of participation and creation.

Digital drama as a tool for the aesthetic cultivation of students

In addition to the pedagogical feasibility and the cognitive objectives, the aesthetic and artistic dimension of any form of theatrical expression is equally important. The “aesthetic emotion” (Grammatas, 2009, p. 448), as a fundamental concern of drama in a general context, must be of concern to those involved in the process of using digital drama in education and, in particular, it must be one of the dominant concerns that is in balance with the respective learning, pedagogical, cognitive and social purposes. Theatre is a “mediated” system of communication (Grammatas, 2015, p. 624), as the basic aesthetic lines of the dramatic text in question may still be evident and distinct, regardless of the final form that theatrical expression and its products may take. The same applies to the enhancement, enrichment and use of new technologies in the aesthetic effect of the “stage spectacle”, as well as in its communicative dimension, elements that, although reshaped and transformed, remain intact in their deeper structures (Karantzouli, 2021, pp. 165-168).

At this point, it is worth making a separate reference to the concept of “mediation” as developed by Balme (2012, pp. 247-250). More specifically, he states that this concept can be understood as:

- “The transfer of the content of a narrative from one medium to another”. From this perspective, we could speak of the concept of “adaptation” of a theatrical text, whose basic structures remain constant but are perceived in different ways. Digital drama supports this particular function, as digital media can make a significant contribution to both the production and presentation of a novel and/or play by modifying it while retaining its dominant structural and conceptual elements. The approach and transfer of a dra-



Using iPad and iPencil to “sketch the hero”.

matic text in the hybrid form of digital drama can therefore function “transversally” in this particular light.

- “A special kind of intertextuality”. This particular function further emphasises the relationship that exists between the different products produced by each digital medium in its creative use for the purpose of theatrical expression. Both in terms of aesthetic perception and content, the final products dealing with a particular dramatic text still maintain a relationship with each other in terms of their deeper meaning and structure. More specifically, the structure is not influenced by the technology and its media, but instead emerges and finds new ways of expression, as has been shown in the previous analysis.
- “The attempt to transfer aesthetic conventions and/or ways of expressing, observing and presenting the world from one medium to another”. This formulation is perhaps the most complete definition of “mediumship”. According to it, aesthetic conventions are realised through the observation, expression and presentation of the world in the different media used. Whether we are talking about an analogue theatre performance in its “traditional” form, or about the digital and/or cinematic rendering of the same dramatic text in the context of digital drama, the basic aesthetic structures and assumptions are still seeking space and expression through the different ways and means.

In terms of the aesthetic cultivation of students involved in the process of creating and using digital drama, this can be achieved in a number of ways. It is important to remember that new technologies and digital media cannot influence or change the basic structures and functions of drama and theatre. In this way, the aesthetic cultivation that takes place through this particular form of expression remains a fundamental pillar that changes in the way it is achieved and not in its essence and deeper structure. By participating in theatrical activities or by using exploratory dramatisation techniques enriched by the possibilities of new technologies and digital media, students can cultivate their aesthetics and become acquainted with different currents and their exponents.

More specifically:

- **When preparing a digital theatre event and/or performance**, it is possible to come into contact with a huge number of dramatic, literary texts and other works of art through online websites and search engines, to get to know the lives and worldviews of artists who lived and created in their own unique way in common or different eras, to study aesthetic genres and reflect on their different modes of expression, thus achieving a broader education and intellectual cultivation. They can also create categories and become “scholars”, “researchers”, “students”, “time travellers” or any other role that suits their own condition. Through the synthesis of analogue and digital reality, they will be able to create their own imaginative presentations to show their knowledge and their own aesthetic perspective on the subject they have studied. They will also have the opportunity to “put themselves in the shoes” of each artist, animating them and trying to approach their way of thinking and their particular needs of expression. At a more advanced level, with the appropriate guidance from the teacher, students can use their online communities to study, in person or at a distance, the different characteristics of dramatic genres (classical and romantic tragedy, pastoral and social drama, comedy and boulevard, satire and parody) in terms of their aesthetic and expressive dimensions. Through the above processes, they will also be able to understand and distinguish between trends such as classicism and neoclassicism or romanticism and arcadianism, etc., thus forming aesthetic criteria and gaining a deeper understanding of dramatic texts (Grammatas, 2009, pp. 449–451).
- **During the digital performance or the presentation of the digital drama activities**, students

will be able to benefit from the aesthetic culture offered by theatre as a *pammousia*, a composite of all the arts (Grammatas, 2014, pp. 13–20). In addition to pedagogical objectives, such presentations are cultural events that represent and serve additional artistic and aesthetic purposes. Again, the use of new technologies and digital media is not an exclusive purpose, nor should it be done for the sake of impression or under the pressure of a specific need. On the contrary, it can serve as a tool to strengthen theatrical codes and theatrical illusion, to contribute to the development of the particular communicative dimension of the theatrical phenomenon, but also to support the logistical infrastructure in a broader context. In any case, the reality, the interests and skills of today’s students are the factors that will lead to the use of the relevant media, always with a view to highlighting this complex cultural phenomenon. In other words: “In its different versions and expressions, depending on the social and cultural reality of each era, and on the psychology and expectations of the audience to which it is addressed each time, Theatre is a flexible means of understanding and interpreting the human journey through time” (Grammatas, 2015, p. 40).

- **During process of communication and feedback, additional aesthetic and artistic goals can be achieved.** The role context that must inevitably be maintained at every stage of the fusion of digital media and theatrical techniques can initially serve this purpose. The configuration of a digital museum/digital art exhibition through PowerPoint or digital storytelling environments or some other specialised digital environment can contribute dynamically in this direction. Students in the roles of scholars, “journalists”, “reporters”, “critics”, etc. can express their opinions, argue and justify their claims about the material and technical equipment and the organisation of the digital performance or the individual actions and can also acquire additional aesthetic criteria, make comparisons and formulate proposals.

In conclusion, the aesthetic cultivation of students is not a single teaching subject, but a broader goal that can be achieved in many ways through a variety of actions, dealing with different subjects and at different times. In this way, the process of implementing digital drama and using its techniques can develop students’ aesthetic and artistic criteria, just as it would if they were participating in an analogue theatre performance. New technologies are also emerging to support these complex functions,

providing a much easier access to a vast amount of data and information, but also the opportunity to creatively process and explore this material in an original and imaginative way.

Conclusions

The use of new technologies and digital media in the development and delivery of theatrical activities in an educational context has become an area of increasing research, study and experimentation in recent years. However, the relationship between theatre and technology is long-standing, and what really changes is the type of technology and the tools that people use each time. From the *ekkyklema*, the crane and the resonating vessels to interactive screens and AI, technology seems to seek out and facilitate the operation of theatrical codes, creating increasingly realistic experiences, without interfering with the core of the theatrical phenomenon (Baía Reis & Ashmore, 2022). At the same time, theatre and ICT are separate subjects in compulsory education, but they are also useful tools for teaching other subjects, so the combination of these two different fields is at the centre of the today's debate. The importance of this synthesis is underlined by the characteristics of the current generation of students. More than ever, they have a need for intense experiences, play, action and interaction, while living, speaking and growing up in a world dominated by technology and its products. This paper has attempted to document – through a study of the international literature from the end of the 20th century to the present day, most of which has been searched using the Google Scholar platform, subscriptions to reputable journals and university libraries – the ways in which the use of digital drama and its individual techniques can contribute to enhancing the role of contemporary students in the educational context by facilitating communication, encouraging collaboration, providing opportunities for participation and, most importantly, creating opportunities for a more meaningful understanding of the complex concept of “self” in today's technological world.

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