

Morally literate: Forging communities of moral sensitivity and care through Theatre Pedagogy

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Abstract

This article presents the fundamental aspects of theatre as an art form as well as a pedagogical approach and analyzes the way they shape learning in educational settings. It, then, focuses on key features of moral literacy explaining how young learners must learn to think in the context of moral education. At the last section the article explores how Theatre Pedagogy practices can be conducive to moral literacy. It is argued that a number of aspects of multi-faceted Theatre Pedagogy, such as corporeality, experiential and playful inquiry, the aesthetic and semiotic dimension and its participatory nature among others, have a strong impact on moral understanding and should be integrated in youth's moral education.

Keywords: theatre pedagogy – moral literacy – experiential inquiry - ethical reasoning – care

Introduction

Since the art of theatre as an educational practice was integrated in school life a wide range of possibilities have arisen. The term "Theatre Pedagogy" itself hosts a number of practices – mostly derived from theatre in education and dramatic inquiry - and covers diverse aims, methods and techniques. This paper claims a linkage of Theatre Pedagogy with moral education. At the first two sections of the article, an analysis of theatre as an art form and as a pedagogical approach along with its educational benefits is attempted. A third one follows, outlining the concept of moral literacy. At the last section, it is suggested that Theatre Pedagogy is morally-bound mainly because of the nature of its practice. It is also explained that, providing the facilitator is aware that he is a moral agent and makes relevant facilitating choices,

Theatre Pedagogy can become an enabling factor for shaping moral thinking and moulding characters with a caring mentality.

Appraising the educational value of theatre's specific features

The art of theatre lies between action and spectacle. A performative event is characterized by multiple realities that cause its transition from a mere event to a meaningful experience. What underlies it is a number of functions, namely modes of experiencing, which bring it forth as a highly educative form of art.

Theatre is deeply associated with knowledge and as an art form of a representational and a performative nature offers diverse ways of letting the spectator access it. If theatre is considered to be "an encounter of the eternal in the elucidation of the instant" (Badiou, 2008), then viewing staged action can be an encounter with the great issues of humanity brought into question. The engaged

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spectator who reflects on this action gains insight on such issues. Knowledge can be gained so long as the spectator remains an active thinker, since knowledge lies between belief and truth (Kornhaber, 2019). On the one hand, beliefs come into being most of the times involuntarily and are frequently contingent on nonconscious factors (Alcock, 2018). Truth, on the other hand is of an external nature, lies out there, irrespective of our will to completely handle it. Active spectating, thus, brings into dialogue maintained beliefs, that is past experienced property deeply ingrained into memory and emotionally invested, with an external stimulus, which serves as a situated and contextualized truth, meaning the performative event. Actively engaging in thinking about what is staged means also seeking for "truth". But theorizing on truth in relation to theatre can be really challenging, either because there is a restrictive sense of the concept or because it is renounced as something that it would be meaningless to deal with due to its perplexity or elusiveness. From a phenomenological point of view, spectating discovers "truth" through bodyliness, perceiving and understanding dramatic action through the senses, which turn it to a lived experience (Garner, 1994). In the long term, this sensory experience is conducive to developing awareness. Phenomenologically, there is an ongoing dialogue between individual conscience and reality as far as lived experience is concerned; and theatre constitutes a set of perspectives (Rayner, 1994) which supports the spectator to carry through this dialogue. In this sense, theatre is not simply a representation of reality but a part of it (States, 1985). With liveness and bodyliness being its overarching qualities, it creates a space that extends between selfhood and sense of responsibility, isolation and sympathy, and these are considered by Levinas to be a moral matter of existential importance (Fortier, 2021). Thus, amidst this created space, acting explores the disguised "truth" of theatrical roles, which can eventually be anybody's "truth". Furthermore, theatre is a semiotic apprenticeship both for actors and spectators. It serves not only as a field of representation, thus rendering on stage what is "out there" as accurately as possible, but also as a field of signification, making a

transition from reproducing reality to producing a new reality, an idiosyncratically nuanced one. Signification in theatre is achieved through theatricality, a unique form of generating meaning by employing an ensemble of signifiers, that is vehicles of sense-making, human as well as material ones (De, n.a.). Rather than describing and explaining, theater employs ostension, displaying things, which according to Eco is "the most basic instance of performance" (Eco, 1977). As soon as they enter into the theatrical condition, a number of aspects, such as the acting body's physicality, props, sound, light, costume and scenographic atmosphere, become a communicative situation semiotically encoded and functioning as a multilayered construct of notions. Therefore, it is the artistic circumstance that gives materiality in theatre its expanding capacity to generate meaning (Schmid, 2008), turning the sensorial and the perceivable to meaningful, intensifying it semiotically. What is more, materiality and sociolinguistic elements of the text interrelate with cultural context (Alexandroff, 2014), all of which are additional sources of information that affect the spectator's meaning making process. Apart from what is signified and denoted by choices made on the materiality, the sociolinguistic features, the expressive modality and the specific atmosphere of a performative event, there are further aspects connoted, extending its semiotic potential. In effect, whatever accounts for a "theatrical sign" has the potential to acquire further meanings, pertinent to the existing ideologies as well as moral and social values of the community that the actors and the spectators share (Elam, 2005).

The semiotic potential of the aforementioned features creates the conditions for alternative ways of conveying meaning, too. For there is a rhetorical dimension in theatre, a devised manner of communicating the message, part of which is aided by the semiotic intentionality of the performative event, hidden behind the textual and aesthetic choices dictated by its creators. Selected practices in enacting a performative event as distinct from others constitute a certain rhetorical mode and a contrived assertion that channels the spectators' inquiries and interpretative attempts to certain orientations instead of others (Worthen, 1992).

Theatre, thus, is considered to be a communicative act and its rhetorical potential lies in aesthetic choices and their related semiotic functions as well as in discourse and its style of delivery, where the addressee, the audience, plays its own part in meaning making. It is, therefore, to be noted that the paralinguistic elements of a performative event have a strong rhetorical impact supplementing the linguistic ones (Furlong, 2020). Both the theatrical and the rhetorical act share their polysemic universe with their recipients employing textual and non-textual elements. While, on the one hand, it can be said that a rhetorical speech is characterized by performativity and theatricality, mainly by means of physicality – the facial expressions and gestural code of the speaker's body - and situatedness, on the other hand theatre constitutes a rhetorical act, since it addresses an audience with an intention to conveying a message. In effect, a performative event comprises the three fundamental elements of rhetoric, *logos* *pathos* *ethos*, either denoted or connoted, namely three modes of persuading for its "truth", which are disguised as the claims and assertions, the emotional appeal and feelings induced in the audience by a theatrical character as well as his or her moral status. Apart from discourse, paralinguistic aspects constitute implicit argumentative lines, reinforcing the rhetorical nature and impact of theatre on audiences. Theatrical roles and characters represent different perspectives and the paralinguistic line of implicit argumentation employed makes them even more clearly stated. Additionally, taking into consideration that the body is a locus of cultural inscription (Chavez, 2018), the spectator receives information in terms of the characters' beliefs, attitudes and values and, by extension, in terms of mentality and affectivity in particular sociopolitical contexts. Since physicality acquires rhetorical qualities when developing a situated type of argumentation (Selzer & Crowley, 1999), it reflects a rhetoricity of the cultural milieu it belongs, being thus highly informative in relation to intellectual, affective, moral and sociopolitical aspects.

In addition, both acting and spectating in theatre are embodied. Corporeality and the aesthetic dimension of theatre play a significant role in this. We live life by acting and reacting, we try to un-

derstand it through constructing and deconstructing the world, looking for patterns, formations, shapes and lines in matter and in human behavior, too. Life is perpetually in motion, even if this is not always readily perceptible, and so is thought, which grasps meaning and attributes it verbally in an effort to tackle constant change. Motion in space leads to actions that change things and people, reshaping thought and reality. Action, thus, moulds perception and bodies convey the intentions of this action, they interact socially aided by emotions and they are embedded to scenes which serve as settings for action, enclosing the stories of our life (Tversky, 2019). A body improvising in space engages in an exploration which includes proprioceptive and kinesthetic qualities as well as tactile imagination. And it is the brain that explores the physical logic through kinetic patterns, the dynamic interrelationship between movement and stillness, the sensorial connection between the body/brain and materiality as well as the interpersonal, utilizing imaginative engagement (East, n.a.). The body is the initial origin of meaning, since it supplies the brain with experiential input through the senses and the brain creates multiple maps of physical experience. It seems, indeed, that the body and the brain are mutually linked in a reciprocal function, in such a manner that meaning is rooted to our ability to act and that is why nothing considered as intelligent could possibly be disembodied (Blakeslee & Blakeslee, 2008). This multidimensional mapping includes the internal and external state of the body and the sensations arising from each one as well as a sense derived from the peripersonal space around it, including objects and even the cultural context. This multi-mapping of the brain with the assistance of the body connects interoceptive with emotional awareness leading directly to empathetic understanding of intentionality (Bersley, 2018).

The body/brain connection, particularly, facilitates approaching characters in theatre uniting sensory perception with linguistic processings, motive and abstract thought. Embodiment and tactile experience in theatre offer an alternative access to language and they turn out to be tremendously revealing with regard to character, since information emanating from a vast range of aspects

such as texture, amount of space around the character, temperature, weight and pressure to name a few, shapes the character's manner of thinking, feeling, decoding and understanding reality, acting and reacting. Especially in what pertains to grasping reality, the powerful connection among body, language and meaning plays a crucial role in theatre. According to Grady, there is a special type of metaphorical mapping in the brain called "primary metaphors", that derives directly from human, daily, embodied experience and is universal (Grady, 1997). It is, hence, the case that the concepts become tangible and felt and, consequently, experientially understood, so that, for instance, affection is understood as a sense of warmth, difficulty as a sense of burden or obstacle ahead, understanding itself as a sense of grasping something tightly and so on. It is argued that this primary character of metaphorically decoding reality is due to the fact that the fundamental source of information lies in the sensorimotor system of our body (Gibbs, 2005). But it is not only about acting that embodiment is significant. Spectating is also embodied and there is research evidence that proves how activated is a spectator's brain. When spectating, a set of cells called mirror neurons is activated regarding both action and emotion. Mirror neurons run simulations of the others' actions, emotions and intentions, modelling them in the brain and giving us the opportunity to experience them as we observe them, before even consciously processing them (Kemp, 2012). This way, either as audience observing theatrical action or as acting beings working with other partners in a group, the mirror neuron system enables us to decode a character's reality and empathize with him or her, a somehow humanizing quality of theatre and its embodied nature.

**Artfully thinking, aesthetically learning:
The underpinning educational philosophy
of Theatre Pedagogy**

This article focuses on the educational version of theatre. Put another way, this study is interested in a form of theatrical practice where action is not onstage but mainly offstage and unrehearsed, in any occasion of the learning process and in any

suited place that it can be developed for educational purposes, inside or outside of a classroom by means of improvisational spontaneity and, on occasion, guided by techniques. As the aforementioned aspects of the art of theatre diffuse into its educational version, theatre becomes a pedagogically valuable area of study, whose special features and benefits are analyzed by the discipline of Theatre Pedagogy.

Integrated into an educational setting theatre takes diverse forms. Modalities of practice are proposed by various theoreticians and practitioners according to necessities, objectives and professional mentality, focusing thus on process, knowledge, psychological needs and, occasionally, even on sociopolitical imperatives. Therefore, when referring to Theatre Pedagogy, a number of practices are implied, such as theatre in education, dramatic inquiry, process drama, inquiry drama (Papadopoulos, 2010) among many others.

Although the focal point is different in each practice and respective theoretical underpinning, Theatre Pedagogy draws upon the aspects mentioned above and ends up to encompass an overall set of characteristic qualities, which could be considered as principles, too. More specifically, the following features are intrinsic to Theatre Pedagogy:

- *Experientiality and Active Learning:* Theatre Pedagogy is largely based on a fundamental condition: acting as if really experiencing. It is purely experiential insofar as it involves active participation (Kindelan, 2010), the engagement of the participants as acting beings as well as motivated spectators. Activity, in general, does not leave a deep pedagogical imprint just because it takes place; it is experience that affects us in a long-lasting way (Wasserman, 2007). Embodiment in theatre demands that we actively engage in dramatic action, demonstrating a sense of agency, which requires a responsiveness that shapes one another reciprocally (Saxton & Miller, 2022). Active learning is predominantly experiential learning, since it is aligned with the learning by doing principle, or rather, in Theatre Pedagogy, learning by acting and actively spectating. Role play, improvising and

many other techniques turn out to be highly illuminating as they activate learners on an intellectual, moral, sociopolitical level (Anderson & Dunn, 2013).

□ *Aesthetic Quality of Learning:* In the context of Theatre Pedagogy acting and spectating are realized in a multisensory environment, where physical expression and the symbolic nature of props are of primary importance. Dramatic action assumes an aesthetic quality and becomes something more than fun activity and expression, turning into an aesthetic experience. The latter constitutes a two-fold experience. It offers the spectator a potential to collect empirical data and form perceptions through sensations, originating from a structured system of signifiers, as well as to move further into the realm of transcendental knowledge, as Kant suggested, where interpretation and meaning making processes lie (Pavis, 2016). This aesthetic dimension introduces itself in the course of play and it gives form that expresses human feeling symbolically (Langer, 1977), transcending actuality with the contribution of imagination. In drama, aesthetic experience begins in play, achieved in this back-and-forth movement between reality and fantasy (McCaslin, 2005), where real objects transform into imaginary ones and action is a reenactment of a simulated reality. Aesthetic learning is a way of knowing (Eisner, 2002) and so is the case in Theatre Pedagogy, where corporeality and materiality end up having a highly cognitive impact both on acting and spectating.

□ *Inquiry-based Pedagogy:* Practices, methods and approaches in Theatre Pedagogy are inquiry-oriented. Even though there is no perfect match in the way inquiry takes place in Theatre Pedagogy in terms of inquiry-based learning methodology, they both share common features. In Theatre Pedagogy there is a propensity to encourage wondering and problematizing situations in the form of scenarios requiring inquiry in an experiential, dramatic frame. Albeit stylistically diversified, approaches of Theatre Pedagogy are always thought-provoking for those who engage in

such a collaborative, reflective and creative inquiry. Posing questions plays a pivotal role in initiating and maintaining inquiry (Kidman & Casinader, 2017), leading subsequently to discovering “truth” and building knowledge through experience. Correspondingly, as an originally inquiry-bound type of learning, a mindset of appreciating the heuristic value of open-ended answers is developed (Kai Wah Chu et al., 2017) by participants in dramatic activity. What is more, incorporating dramatic conventions the appropriate time can deepen inquiry (Fraser et al., 2012). In short, in Theatre Pedagogy inquiry is a student-driven process within which facilitators create a framework only for the students to take charge of their experiential, socially constructed learning.

□ *Playfulness:* Approaching knowledge through play means establishing a positive psychosocial environment among learners. Learning in the context of Theatre Pedagogy lays the foundation for constructing knowledge in an intrinsically motivated manner (Hanrahan & Banerjee, 2017). This is due to playfulness, which creates optimal conditions for authentic and zestful participation, nurturing an environment of voluntary engagement. Neurobiology offers ample evidence that play experiences in a younger age correlate with play-induced plasticity in the brain (Siviy, 2016) and are conducive to creating a mental stance of resilience and adaptive responsiveness to an ever-changing reality on an emotional, a social and a cognitive level (Vanderschuren & Trezza, 2014). As practices falling within the scope of Theatre Pedagogy are considered as play-based pedagogies, thus lying in the middle ground between free expression and teacher-guided activity, they provide children benefits that connect learning with positive emotional states. Since emotion facilitates rational thought (Immordino & Damasio, 2007), dramatic engagement in a guided playful circumstance becomes a fertile ground for a receptive mental state, especially because it invokes joy, an enabling factor for higher order cognitive functions (Liu et al., 2017).

□ *Creativity and Imagination:* In this study,

creativity, a rather ambiguous concept, is mostly associated with imagination. More particularly, learning in the context of Theatre Pedagogy lays the foundation for constructing knowledge creatively. A number of key elements are responsible for this, such as cognitive flexibility and mind shifting, divergence from the conventional and openness to new insights (McCammon et al., 2011). It is through creative imagination that children playfully rehearse for real life in Theatre Pedagogy, hypothesize through scenarios and make leaps of thought, boosting understanding in unconventional ways. Dramatic engagement activates imagining alternative possibilities by experiencing reality through the lenses of others (Saunders & Ewing, 2022). It is especially the learning potential of imagination in Theatre Pedagogy that offers a wide range of possibilities for the learner to acquire knowledge, familiarizing him pluralistically with intellectual, emotional, social and moral perspectives.

□ *Sense of Collectivity and Participatory Learning:* Learning in the context of Theatre Pedagogy takes place in groups, where a communal and participatory logic is promoted through teamwork. In this regard, the art of theatre assumes the form of a collective exploration into human experience based on interconnectedness, while aiming at building a common future as well as promoting the idea that “the transformation of the other begins with the transformation of the self” (Pammenter, 2018). Through taking diverse roles and reflection on multiple characters, theatre takes a more sociopolitical role by dialogizing otherness, nurturing respect and inclusivity and educating for cultural citizenship (McGuinn et al., 2022). Heterogeneity into a group of children working through dramatic expression familiarizes them with otherness. The children, thus, end up developing a strong sense of community spirit by means of shared inquiry, celebrating diversity and appreciating the creative power of difference.

□ *Emotional and Existential Awareness:* Theatre Pedagogy provides a safe ground for its

participants to explore what it is like to be human, living among other humans. Without leaving aside radical changes in social life and without denying the way even human nature itself is gradually altering and being reformulated due to the invasion of technology, Theatre Pedagogy provides appealing and effective tools for delving into the human condition. Since it employs the emotional and the fictional aspect, it constitutes a tool to vicariously explore human nature, turning empathy an embodied feature (van de Water, 2021). Neuroscientific evidence confirms that what is learnt through emotion remains encrypted, until action brings it into consciousness in the context of artistic creation (Damasio, 2010). It is, therefore, the case that in Theatre Pedagogy the path of emotional engagement is followed in order to reach empathy. Apart from contributing to forming self-concept and assisting self-transformation (Ma & Subbiondo, 2021), dramatic engagement fosters critical empathy (Prentki, 2023). From this point of view, Theatre Pedagogy serves as an art of becoming, giving the opportunity to its participants to step into the position of others and immerse themselves into their personal reality, only to encourage them afterwards to distance themselves from all these, so as to reflect on the self and on the others, engaging reasoning, morality, awareness etc.

All in all, reflecting on the ethos and the educational resonance of Theatre Pedagogy includes understanding the pedagogical impact of its aesthetic realm. As it derives from an art form, that of theatre, encompassing a whole set of varied practices, its pedagogical value emanates from its aesthetic properties and the manner in which they are transferred to the learner. Considering the aforementioned, the modes of experiencing, generally, in the art of theatre as well as the constituent elements of Theatre Pedagogy which derive from practice underpin the educational philosophy of the latter, shaping its theoretical scope and its role in the curriculum, too.

Hence, it can be argued that Theatre Pedagogy practices develop in a middle epistemological

ground between the fundamental precepts of constructivism and social constructivism. Whilst human agency is recognized as crucial for symbolically constructing its understanding of reality (Dagar & Yadav, 2016), at the same time it makes room for this understanding to occur in the flow of sociocultural process, in the shared context of human association (Dudley-Marling, 2012). As Theatre Pedagogy fosters two of the most significant educational goals, “the development of the person and the shaping of the citizen” (Kitcher, 2023) through playful yet systematized interaction, it aligns with the imperatives of social pedagogy. The teacher-facilitator develops a narrative that places the emphasis for the learner upon recognizing diversity (Gallagher, 2016), familiarizing him with the diverse forms of cultural capital, most part of which, according to Bourdieu, is in an embodied state (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). As a result, in Theatre Pedagogy there develops a habitus, both for the teacher-facilitator and for the learner, informed by both personal narrative and sociocultural milieu, free expression and intentional structuring, critical positioning and intuitive understanding. It can also be argued that practice and consequent learning in Theatre Pedagogy lies somewhere between Gadamer’s and Habermas’s hermeneutic positions. On the one hand, they maintain a dialogue with tradition within the past and the present time and, on the other hand, they aim at a more idealized form of the world with a view to creating an emancipatory future state (Atkinson, 2002).

Apart from its great impact on social learning and citizenship education, Theatre Pedagogy is highly conducive to the learner’s cognitive growth. Works of art can communicate knowledge and implicit claims without argumentation and analysis (Carroll, 2003), and this authentic experimental code is thought provoking, dealing with conceptual knowledge while tapping into percipience and insight. In Theatre Pedagogy there exists an artistic type of understanding, a way of getting to know about the outer and the inner world that is not merely aesthetic or expressive but purely cognitive. This cognitive aspect of art, the fact that it can convey knowledge about the self and the world, goes back to Hegel and N. Goodman (Graham, 2005)

and, in this respect, it is imagination that takes over instead of evidence as happens in science, mediating knowledge and multiplying it through openness to its relativistic perspective. Moreover, Theatre Pedagogy educates emotion as it brings to dialogue emotional release and plain conceptualization about human feeling (Koopman, 2010), turning learning into experience that promotes emotional self-knowledge and effective management of interpersonal communication. Since virtues of artistic activity interweave with intellectual and ethical virtues (Goldie, 2008), Theatre Pedagogy as a multidimensional artistic activity is connected with a number of virtues and, consequently, with human well-being.

Educating for moral literacy

Literacy seems to be a complex concept, constantly being shaped by local and global aspects, social and cultural context, epistemic theory, time and necessity. Because of its dependence on so many factors, at times it takes multiple forms, so that it has become essential to refer to the term “multiliteracies”. In general, literacy is deemed to be a human right, yet Knoblauch tracked down four different perspectives in defining literacy: the functionalist emphasizing skills, the cultural focusing on cultural heritage, a third one with an emphasis on personal growth and the critical one which puts the stress on critical examination (Keefe & Copeland, 2011). In the 21st century multiliteracies sum up all the possible modalities of literacy, especially due to the rise of information technology and digital culture, including a broad range of literacies such as the critical, the visual, the emotional, the numerical, the ethical, the information literacy etc. (Pilgrim & Martinez, 2013). However, being literate is not just having acquired a set of skills, even if these are varied. It is more than that; being literate means having a repertoire of capabilities (Fellows & Oakley, 2019), a potential to extend further than using acquired skills, thus turning skill to implementing and composing, shaping attitude and critical awareness, deepening the understanding of the purpose and value of praxis.

Among these diverse forms of literacy, moral literacy involves a great deal of exercising and taping

into ethical considerations. Morality itself is an elusive concept. It is not something on which one can acquire special expertise nor is moral truth something that can be found based on scientific evidence (McGinn, 1992). Rather, morality is “an informal public system that applies to all rational persons, including not only behaviour that affects the others but also the kind of behaviour affecting a person himself (Gert, 2005). It is shaped by one’s unceasing effort to cope with matters of moral nature, making up his own mind after scrutiny and care, considering criteria. Albeit somewhat hard to grasp and define, there have been various ways of approaching it philosophically. Yet, morality is definitely related to character, belief and value system as well as to the formation of judgement, all of which influence the way one comes to see things and is moved to act (Herman, 2007). Above all else, morality must be “a matter of consulting reason”, an effort to promote reason as a guide to one’s conduct (Rachels, 1999). Along with this arises a caring for being conscientious, the specific quality of the moral agent to take into consideration arguments from opposing views, to impartially examine the implications for other people’s interest and to willingly revise former convictions, when proved to be stereotypical or unsound.

Connecting morality and ethical concern with education and its pedagogical aims, there emerges a distinct type of literacy, moral literacy. The term “literacy” reflects two facts: first, that it requires complex skills and abilities, the acquisition of which renders a person more or less competent in dealing with moral matters and, second, that it is a learnt situation, a process that takes time as it constitutes an educational move, aiming at the systematic cultivation of behaviour and approach to life. Being morally literate involves developing a sense of what we stand for as members of human society and moral beings (Jenlink, 2014), putting complicated reality into dialogue with the question of ‘how things ought to be’. Moral positioning lies somewhere between our personal quest for inner meaning and the outer context of interpersonal commitments (Cooper, 1994) and requires a set of objective standards and criteria, so that evaluation can be made in the best possible way. These standards pertain to setting aside prejudice

and biased thinking, disputability, that is disputing the veracity of claims, fairness and justification among others (Clifford, 2011). Becoming morally literate in an educational setting means to examine issues addressing their ethical aspects. The latter also interrelates moral literacy with what Sterling referred to as ‘deep sustainability learning’ (Sterling, 2008), connecting it with contemporary crucial issues, which requires from the learner to commence posing ontological questions about existence as it remains entangled in multiple ways of experiencing and knowing (Wals, 2017). Problematizing the sustainability of contemporary life and thinking on the moral standing of humanity in front of age-old concerns (Yamada et al., 2022), is an updated version of an apprenticeship in moral literacy. A morally literate person, thus, develops dispositions on which he can count in the face of dilemmas and hard decision-making (Yacek et al., 2023), demonstrating a readiness to examine the means towards the ends, securing thus a fair, worthwhile manner of living life.

Moral literacy comprises three fundamental elements. It could not be considered complete unless it includes all the following: education for ethics sensitivity, moral reasoning skills and moral imagination (Tuana, 2007). Moral sensitivity is about a person’s ability to recognize ethical features in issues and situations (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2005; Tanner & Christen, 2014; Reynolds & Miller, 2015). In examining issues from an ethical point of view, a morally sensitive person develops a supplemental ability, that of judging the moral intensity of a certain situation, namely the extent to which something is seriously harmful, so as to be in a position to adjust responses in an appropriate manner. Moral reasoning may both be conscious and deliberate as well as unconscious and automatic, it interplays with emotion and it is integral to moral judgement (May & Kumar, 2019). The skills which derive from ethical reasoning play a significant role in thinking for oneself as well as in moral discourse, that is deliberation on moral issues with others. It is defined as “transitions in thought in accordance with endorsed moral principles (Adler, 2008) and it involves the assessment of values and validity of facts relevant to considered ethical situations as well as other skills, such

as understanding the framework in which ethical situations should be examined. It has been found that moral reasoning enables societal change (Killen & Dahl, 2021), while it is conducted better, when people express arguments in groups (Mercier, 2011). Ethical reasoning skills are implicated in detecting dissent, plurality of opinions and misunderstandings, guiding the learner to handle effectively unreflected emotions which can easily cause judgement go off course (Mayer, 2023). The third fundamental element, moral imagination, is considered to be a blend of reason and emotion, ending up to envisioned possibilities. The fact that one is able to identify a moral issue or develop reasoning on this does not necessarily lead to emotional investment or empathic responses, and thus not to ethical commitment and agency. Moral imagination refers to a person's ability to imaginatively think about potential scenarios into which a given situation might evolve and the potential help or harm they may entail (Johnson, 1993). Yet, it is not a purely cognitive process but it also includes affective abilities, mingling critical reflection with moral emotions. The former refers to the intention of scrutinizing beliefs as well as the sociocultural context that shape them (Abowitz, 2007) while the latter refers to experiencing in relation to others and feeling, empathically, a sense of attentiveness to their own needs. Moral imagination is most of all envisioning the ideal version of things by transcending established views and devising alternatives (Bolotin Joseph, 2019), seeing further beyond what we currently perceive as reality, transforming the existing to what the future may gestate.

Enacting the human condition

A group of young learners being dramatically engaged in a theatre pedagogy workshop is an inquiring community learning in terms of experience. Among other benefits, Theatre Pedagogy offers an opportunity for the younger to acquire a vocabulary relevant to human morality by means of both acting and spectating. Reflection on what is enacted and observed is a prerequisite so that this vocabulary extends its use in the field of moral literacy. Arguably, Theatre Pedagogy and its multimodal pertaining practices serve as an apprentice-

ship in moral issues, as it provides creative space for moral judgement to flourish. Exposing the human condition through dramatic engagement and demonstrating fashions of confronting dilemmas and problems of moral nature works preparatively for children and future adulthood.

It seems that today's youth is exposed to abundant visual stimuli, images, digital and multimodal texts, whose rapid alternation leaves no room for deeper processing. Thus, it is on the superficial level of information that this abundance of stimuli remains, when little chance is given for pausing on crucial points and thinking through things. Contemporary research shows that, while young people are not morally uninterested, they exhibit moral sensitivity situationally, with a lack of consistency (Flores & James, 2013). This finding shows that, although young people are concerned, to some extent, about issues of moral nature, they do not engage in examining them as a result of education and an acquired moral stance.

Consolidating a consistent inquiring attitude towards moral matters is not at all an easy task. However, it would make it more likely if such matters were systematically examined in structured pedagogical contexts, as these proposed by the multimodal practices of Theatre Pedagogy. Taking youth's moral concerns into account and approaching them through experiential moral inquiry increases the chances of fostering an embedded attitude of exhibiting moral sensitivity. Since Kohlberg stressed the fact that young people's morality is influenced by interaction with others (Kohlberg, 1976), interacting with peers in the context of dramatic engagement would, arguably, create a fertile ground for the youth in order to become morally literate. It is about a space where playfulness reaches the point of simulating prospective realities as well as negotiating meaning and boundaries. This interaction encompasses the facilitator, who provably exerts influence on children and the formation of their character (See, 2018) through role modelling, but in this case, also with the style of facilitation he or she adopts, acting as a moral agent. Orientating inquiry towards moral issues - thematically drawing on young people's questions or on other resources from content taught across the curriculum - adopting a facilitating mentality

receptive to deliberation and establishing a caring atmosphere for respectful sharing and truth-seeking, makes the facilitator a crucial factor of students' moral education. A child, engaged in play, experiments and familiarizes itself with multiple languages which become accessible through creative exploration and highly illuminating as to how the world is as well as how it might be (Edmiston, 2008). That is why Theatre Pedagogy can be an ethical pedagogy, because playfulness gives the opportunity to the facilitator to observe and facilitate imaginary persons and creatures that populate children's imaginary worlds and, even better, encourage them to express ethical evaluations through dialogues and philosophical explorations in authentic contexts.

Along with playfulness comes imagination, another dimension which makes Theatre Pedagogy an appropriate place to foster moral literacy. Engaging students in imaginary scenarios that simulate real life is a morally educative experience, because our moral sensibilities are more finely honed by the narrative element and the contextualized particularity of fictional circumstance (Hagberg, 2021). Role play in fictional worlds means accessing could-have-happened situations, seeing and feeling how it could possibly be, experimenting with potential outcomes of reacting or handling these situations in a safe context. In this regard, imagination grafts moral consideration with judgmental flexibility, as it offers a wide range of ethical criteria to examine, giving thus the opportunity to move towards an ideal standard, an internal or external moral exemplar, according to which moral intention is shaped, having an impact on decision-making (Moberg & Seabright, 2000). In circumstances of moral deliberation, the end is not already pre-established so that thinking can be easily directed to examining the most efficient way to realizing it. In such cases, one may resort to thinking through imagination, attempting mental simulation in order to examine all available courses of action and finally resolve pending indeterminacy. In terms of simulation semantics, reasoning and conceptualization are treated as experiential simulations, where concept is considered to be a skill for constructing representations tailored to the needs of situated action (Barsalou, 2003). Given that con-

ceptual simulations involve perceptual, sensory and motor simulations evoking at the same time emotions emerging from the experiences being simulated as well as other socio-cultural and aesthetic dimensions of what is experienced, they have a dynamic and action-oriented nature. This is also the case with problem-solving, where the construction of conceptual simulations is necessary to proceed with the reasoning process, as well as with moral deliberation, both of which encompass a wealth of solutions. Open-endedness makes moral deliberation complex, in order that it is best assisted by imagination, which takes the form of deliberative simulation, where inquiry is made into all possible versions of experience. While investigating meaning in a state of affairs by means of language, other factors are implicated such as the enactment of perception, bodily activity and feeling (Bergen, 2012), and the same holds true for imagined scenes. Imaginative simulations correlate with meaning-making and problem-solving processes. This, in turn, interconnects with moral deliberation, "a process of cognitive-conative-affective simulation" which allows us, by means of imaginative projection, to try out diverse courses of action along with emotional responses (Johnson, 2014). These simulations bring to the surface the train of thought, the impulses and the values in conflict when examining a state of affairs, and this simulative enactment can lead to resolving a morally problematic situation. Bringing moral imagination into the experiential field of Theatre Pedagogy can, consequently, reinforce its effect in young learners' moral literacy, since embodiment joins forces with the cognitive and the affective aspect, and the imaginative is coupled and co-examined with the sensorial, enlarging the image of moral cases and making the sense derived from experience more particular.

Participatory, embodied and aesthetically nuanced practices, as those constituting Theatre Pedagogy, are conducive to strengthening the reasoning skills of young learners and, thus, shaping their moral judgement. The collective character of a group attending a drama workshop, for instance, ensures plurality in viewpoints, moral perspective taking and constructively dealing with dissent. As moral reasoning can develop upon a basis of

unfolding arguments and counterarguments, its transferring in the context of a community, including the multiplicity of voices and character traits, reinforces reasoning in moral discourse. Improvising hypothetical conflicts and exchanging arguments in a moral encounter increases the chances for the students to advance to assessing validity of utterances and claims; the adequacy and reliability of evidence; questioning the credibility of sources; examining values; recognizing fallacies and tracing bias; challenging initial assumptions; recontextualizing argumentation in different frameworks; viewing from various angles and considering diverse arguing points that offer alternative perspectives. Improvised verbal and non-verbal expression work as a conceptual universe replete with meaning encoded in linguistic, bodily and material terms. Among the varying kinds of interaction - linguistic, social, emotional, sensorial - non-verbality extends the reasoning potential further. The aforementioned reasoning skills are not exercised only verbally, through plain discussion, but in the realm of the aesthetic, where semiotic cues abound, diffusing morally charged information, either through corporeality or the meaningful use of props. Indeed, moral thinking directly connects with aesthetic perception (Abowitz, 2007), while the aesthetic dimension has a direct engagement with the affective and the emotional aspect of moral development (Carr, 2013). Being verbally implicated in a moral reasoning process through dramatic engagement is certainly found to be effective (Freebody, 2010), yet non-verbality plays a pivotal role refining and enhancing reasoning, as it may relate body posture with character and intentionality, position in space with disposition towards one or another opinion, tone of voice, facial expression and gesturing with emotions, theater props with insinuation, finally the explicit with the implicit.

Embarking on the experiential journey of Theatre Pedagogy involves sensitizing students to human moral nature. But raising their moral awareness does not only mean enabling them to detect, analyze and weigh moral matters but also adopting a caring attitude towards them. Caring to contemplate on moral matters and to resolve them means caring for living in fairness, in a more virtuous and

humane manner. This is why moral deliberation in the experiential frame of Theatre Pedagogy relates to character education, by examining character traits and human morality through dramatic engagement in roles. The caring mentality cultivated by Theatre pedagogy involves delving into thinking and feeling in diverse types of human character as well as being playfully initiated in moral action. The latter refers to the transition from thinking to acting morally (Lickona et al., 2002), and is present in the dramatic enactments of negotiated moral issues. Acting as if grappling with morally contested issues leads young learners to gaining practical understanding of values and adopting valuational criteria for their judgements. It seems that all dramatic action serves the moral growth of the participants, either because they learn to care for human beings so that they live their life fulfilled in fair terms or because they learn to care about ideas on moral conduct and the application of core values on a daily basis. The accumulated experience from the enactment of moral life ends up in realizing each one's individual conception of what is good, the others' conceptions of what is good and how tightly these are connected with the good of society (Hong & Hong, 2022). It is, thus, contended that Theatre Pedagogy is a caring pedagogy, thereby humanizing thinking and acting, that shapes caring thinkers with empathic responses. These caring thinkers are shaped by enacted moral experiences, being more inclined to draw upon this repository of knowledge when having to face moral issues, caring for moral maturation itself as an idea, and finally, being more interested in acting caringly for humanity as members of the society.

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