

# Chapter 41

## Theater School: Students as Actors and Writers for the Stage

**Maria Antonella Perrotta**  
*University of Molise, Italy*

### ABSTRACT

*The “Teatro a Scuola” (Theater School) project, directed at 14-18 year-old, Real innovation lies in the involvement of students as writers, in a collaborative theatrical storytelling. During the theater workshop the teacher in charge of the project planned and implemented with the participants experimental activity that was inserted within the Italian program. Its purpose is to stimulate participants’ creativity. It aims at to become an integral part of the activities foreseen by the school syllabus and to offer, next to the traditional learning method, a form of learning by doing. The project consists in three distinct, yet interdependent, moments: a first theoretical stage, which foresees a short series of lessons on the history of theater; a second stage dedicated to a theater workshop (elocution, lively reading, mime, song, dance etc.); and a final show, i.e. a genuine theatrical representation for the whole school and all citizens. Characteristics of innovation and experimentation of the project were that: students were not only actors but also authors and screenwriters; also, the project involved elders of the University of the Third Age (NGO)*

### INTRODUCTION

Why do theater in school? Why this work in theater should be included among the disciplines of each type of school curriculum, from childhood to high school in grade I and II? There may be many and various reasons, but not being able to give space to all, we will expose a few.

The fundamental reason why the theater should enter the school curriculum as theoretical and practical field of study lies, in my opinion, in its being a tool that allows you to research and learn and establish a relationship with your full body, with its emotions, its own being-in-relation with others, that is what is most lacking and is needed now more than ever, in our “Western”

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culture. And you have to do it at school, as kids, because knowledge of one's being is the basic psycho-physical for a full life and expression to the authentic, natural in the formation of identity.

At school students are also often subjected to a sustained effort and stress, not allowing pauses in-depth and moments of reflection, space for play and creativity. In high school, for example, the curricular subjects, except physical education, are all very theoretical and binding and during the school day the students are subjected to a workload heavy and continuous, which can sometimes cause fatigue, nervousness, stress, demoralization, depression, school dropout.

With some frequency, students, from the smallest to teenagers, reveal difficulties they are unable to overcome even with the help of teachers and have problems that cannot be dealt with and sometimes not even recognized as such.

What problems? We will cite but a few - those that have greater impact:

- Relationship problems (shyness, discomfort, difficulty interacting and relating with peers)
- Problems of stuttering, dyslexia, poor concentration and listening
- Problems of little interest and effort in performing a task and store the materials studied

Theatrical activity could help to solve most of these problems, allowing students to express their creativity, interact with peers in a positive and constructive, and overcome complex psychological blocks, work together to achieve along with all other results, reach a goal.

The theater workshop experiment has been carried out in Molise, a region in Southern Italy. Molise is the newest of all Italian regions: it split away from the former Abruzzo and Molise forty years ago and became autonomous. Together with

Valle d'Aosta and Lucania, it is also one of the smallest regions of Italy. Its economy is mainly based on agriculture (cereals, vegetables, olive trees, vineyards, fruit trees), but also on trade (national and international exportation of local agricultural products), on tourism and on the tertiary sector. Industry, however, is not very developed.

## The School

The *Liceo classico* Mario Pagano in Campobasso (Molise, Italy) has long excelled, and still does. One of his former teachers was Giovanni Gentile, a great erudite and philosopher. He later became Minister of Public Education and reorganized high school education. This very important reform remained in force until a few years ago.

The students of this *liceo* not only study literature and humanities in depth under the guidance of well-trained and scrupulous teachers, but also scientific subjects: thus, the school context, while offering some subjects - like Latin and classical Greek - which deal with mankind's illustrious past, also strives to project itself into the future by promoting innovation and the use of new computerized and digital technologies.

## Relationships with Other Institutions

Although there has not been an opportunity to collaborate with private institutions, the relations of the project with public bodies were frequent and fertile: they supported it, also economically by partly financing the 2-3 performances of the final show (a "first" and 1 or 2 further performances). Among the supporting public institutions: the Campobasso Borough and Province, the Molise Region, and obviously the school itself, which approved and inserted the theater project proposed by the teacher in its POF (*Piano dell'offerta formativa* - Learning offer plan), and also financed it in part.

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