



Research article

Grotowski's method is positively valued by pre-adolescents and improves acceptance towards the others

Stella Conte^{*}, Gioia Cambiaggio, Ghiani Carla, Buffa Margherita

Department of Education, Psychology and Philosophy, University of Cagliari, Via Is Mirrionis, 1, 09123, Cagliari, Sardinia, Italy

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Grotowski's method
Theater workshop
SIV
Pre-adolescent
Semantic Differential
Psychology
Clinical psychology
Cognitive psychology
Personality

ABSTRACT

In this research, boys and girls were involved in a workshop on Grotowski's method. The workshop was made up of two steps: i) the subjects were required to tell a tale using their bodies and narration; ii) and, they discovered the places of Carloforte island (South-western Sardinia, Italy). The final event consisted of a rendering of the workshop. On the first day of the workshop, the SIV test was administered to each subject and re-administered on the last day of the experiment. Semantic Differential was administered after three meetings and re-administered on the last day of the experiment. After the experience, the students evaluated the workshop very positively both in general and in terms of impact and activity. Students also showed higher post-workshop scores on the SIV which is meant to measure acceptance and reception of the other.

1. Introduction

Theater performing in the classroom determines beneficial effects in the self concept (Bernstein, 1985; Walker Sydney, 2014) with a positive effect both on the individual and on the group of pairs and, last but not least on the community.

Theater can improve self-esteem, inner voice, self awareness (Boehm and Boehm, 2003). This latter research found that participants in a drama enhanced their sense of belonging to a group. Moreover, creativity develops wellbeing by activating positive emotions and problem solving processes that can be generalized to different situations. Also, creativity and innovative actions are linked to a positive mood (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010).

Concerning emotions Fouladi and Shahidi (2016) stressed the importance of creativity in tackling anxiety and depression. Noteworthy, the group is a crucial tool for testing one's own identity. Considering Theater workshop as a typical group activity, the creative process operates a positive influence not only on the group but also on the individual (Bickerstaff, 2011). In fact, this kind of work in group should stimulate a greater will to welcome the other, improve personal availability by helping the unfortunate, being prosocial and generous.

Theater helps children to express themselves and develop their creativity (McCaslin, 1984). Likewise theater enhanced empathy in children by making them act in theatrical roles. Therefore, starting from

an egocentric attitude, they understand the other person's point of view. They leap from egocentrism to altruism which is the background of the human development. As a consequence, children get used to cope with problems and find new solutions to solve them (Heinig, 1993).

The choice of a theater based on the Grotowski's method is due to the search for realism during the theater performance where emotions and actions merge with a psychological and psychotherapeutic point of view.

Before Grotowski, Stanislavsky claimed that a good performance must be realistic and genuine. The actors must believe in everything around them and in what they are doing. Thus, they can believe what is real for them (Merlin, 2003; Bussel, 2012).

The actors unable to reach these goals fall into cliché and cannot reach the depth of the human soul (Benedetti, 1982; Stanislavsky, 1990). To reach this goal they should feel and release their own emotions. Therefore, the performing actors should deal with their own feeling exclusively (Stanislavsky, 1979).

Likewise, the actors perform just themselves in different circumstances ("given circumstances") with questions such as: "if I was... what should I do?" activating their emotional memory. Hence, their emotions and feelings will sound "true" in these hypothetical circumstances (Benedetti, 1982). Again, for Stanislavsky, the actors create an alternative reality, using the "magic if" which is the core of the art of performance (Gordon, 1987).

^{*} Corresponding author.

E-mail address: stellacontecasa@gmail.com (S. Conte).

To achieve a good performance, the actors are also required to explore their own experiences in order to find similar feelings experienced by the character (Benedetti, 1982). Specifically, they need to bring life on stage respecting the nature of the stage itself (Stanislavsky, 1967; Benedetti, 1998). According to Stanislavsky, we cannot remember neither the emotions nor the feelings. We can just remember the physical actions joint to feelings and emotions (Merlin, 2007). In fact, Stanislavsky claimed it is impossible to fix feelings in the memory because they are linked to physical actions. Therefore, only the physical actions can bring back thoughts, emotions and experiences (Stanislavsky, 1979; 1980a; 1980b; Gordon, 1987).

Stanislavsky and his followers believe that there is a physical aspect in thinking and a mental aspect in action. Physical actions can be a powerful stimulus to imagination in order to reach the emotional memory. In fact, the nervous system bears the traces of all previous experiences (*i.e.* emotional memory). Since they are recorded in the mind, they are not always available, but a perceptive stimulus, such as a touch, a sound, a smell can trigger off the emotional memory (Benedetti, 1998; Merlin, 2003).

Referring to physical actions, everything is accessible to the consciousness: every single act can be reproduced as many times as desired, regardless of the mood of the artist. Innate and acquired nerve pathways link the physical actions to the emotions and to the multiple nuances of human feelings (Merlin, 2007). The physical actions evoke traces of the emotions experienced in the past, thereby making them plausible and better adapted to the “given situations” on stage (Merlin, 2008).

In this context, the link from Stanislavsky to Grotowski is “the” method of the physical actions (Alsina, 2017) which the latter developed. While Stanislavsky focused his research on character development within a story in certain circumstances told by the theatrical text, in Grotowski the actors will never look for the characters because, in their practice, the emphasis is on building a personal structure allowing them to get closer to their self-discovery. In this formative process, the actors are completely involved by paying attention to both the emotions and the body (Mitter, 1992; Richards, 1995).

Furthermore, Grotowski specified that one can only learn by doing. The movement of the body is something different from the movement depending on the goal to be achieved: the latter is action (Richards, 1995). According to Grotowski, the actors must think with their bodies. In fact, once they have set their own succession of actions in a structure, at the time of the performance, they will not have to agree with the others on what the common assembly will be and what will take place on stage. Through their own actions they will discover how to approach, step by step, a common content. Therefore, they must achieve an absolute mastery of their bodies. Hence, an actor's training will be essential through exercises specifically designed and repeated over the time. Training is crucial because the bodies of the actors must be ready for all possibilities. Noteworthy, training allows the actors to find those “signs” that will become part of the actor's score (Attisani, 2006). Moreover, the actors can reach the self awareness but they need strict discipline and technique (Richards, 1995). Hence, the actors get their bodies free by eliminating every psycho-physical hinder. The ultimate goal is to bring the actors to think with their own bodies (Artini, 1983). To achieve this, removing old habits and psychological scripts becomes crucial (Harris, 1967). In this context, the proposed exercises must combine structure and spontaneity. As a consequence, in the movements there must be shapes and body details. Through the training a certain number of details will be established to make them “perfect” and to link them to the personal impulses allowing an individual elaboration of those details *per se*. If the reaction does not come from inside the body will be artificial and rigid. Training must not be a trivial sum of exercises but a set of practices organized in order to obtain an “expressive richness” (Grotowski, 2007).

In his method, Grotowski experienced the so-called “physiological resonators”. He asked the actors to bring out the voice from their back and their necks and from their limbs. Then, in order to stimulate the voice, he asked them to choose a text and to play, sing and shout it (Richards, 1995).

Like Stanislavsky, Grotowski deals with a body memory. The task of the actor is to remove the blocks of the body memory. According to Grotowski, we can overcome ourselves if we accept ourselves as we are (Grotowski, 2012). One must overcome oneself without any opposition. It is essential to be who we are, to be in the moment that we live and to be able to meet each other. To do this, we need to remove the mask acquiring and be ourselves (Grotowski, 2007). Likewise, acquiring new knowledge and removing old habits becomes crucial (Babet and Grotowski, 2003; Grotowski, 2012). Interestingly, Berne, a psychologist researcher, believed that every individual acts are led by scripts that make our acts unaware on “the stage of life” (Harris, 1967).

Concerning these primary aspects, the Grotowski's method is thoroughly connected with Psychology.

According to Stanislavsky and Grotowski, the gestures and their texture produce the emotions and not the other way round. This concept coincides in a truly surprising way with a psychophysiological model of emotions based on actions (Ruggeri, 1988; Rapin and Segalowitz, 1992). In fact, following the James-Lange theory (James, 1950), the feelings derive from specific body modifications. Knowing these body modifications allows to reach the emotional memory and the episodes that generated the emotions recorded in the emotional memory. Such knowledge inevitably leads to a better knowledge of oneself and one's motivations and feelings.

Given this common background linking Theater and Psychology, a Grotowski theater workshop for preadolescents was carried out. As a matter of facts, the union with peers in preadolescents is crucial in the construction of self and recognition of the others. It was studied if the actor's work, carried out at school, can stimulate to experience a new benevolence to the other, thereby promoting prosociality and acceptance of the other. Furthermore, the subject should perceive the experience as “potency” as it allows a better access to the self, to one's own thoughts and emotions in an easy and direct way through the actions. Again, a positive evaluation of the experience of psychological energy (according to the semantic difference valuation) should increase. Likewise, the activity perceived by the participants in the Grotowski's method workshop should be observed. Finally, the experience should be perceived more positively when compared to other group activities.

2. Method

2.1. Subjects

This study was carried out on 74 subjects (40 males and 34 females) divided into an experimental group and controls with 38 and 36 subjects, respectively. They all attended the second year of the secondary school course of the “Don Gabriele Pagani” Institute of Carloforte, South-western Sardinia, Italy (age: mean 12.4 ± 6.0 months). Boys and girls were randomly assigned either to the experimental or to the control group. The experimental group was involved in a workshop on a Grotowski's method held by professional actors. The controls were involved in a volleyball training activity aiming to take part in a junior national competition.

All the parents of the participants signed the informed consent.

2.2. Experimental procedure

The workshop was divided into two phases. In the first phase the subjects were invited to work on the body (*i.e.* tell a story with the body); on the voice (*i.e.* tell a story with the sounds, both vocal and coming from musical instruments) and on the narration. The second phase was based on the discovery of the places of the Carloforte island. The final event was a personal rendering of the experience. The duration of the experiment was six months with three weekly meetings of 3 h each. All the subjects carried out their own activities in the school gym. On the first day, the Survey of Interpersonal Value test was administered to everyone. The same test was re-administered on the last day of the experiment. The

Semantic Differential test was administered after three days of meetings. The same test was re-administered on the last day of the experiment.

This research was approved by the ethics committee of the University of Cagliari, Italy.

2.3. Theater workshop of Grotowski's method

The workshop was divided into two stages: (A) pre-expressive and (B) improvisation into the habitat.

A) Pre-expressive stage. This stage focused on: (i) actions and reactions; (ii) play; (iii) sound, dance and rhythm. All activities focused on the body in order to re-establish a perfect contact with the body itself. Once boys and girls had joined the theatrical setting, they took off their superfluous objects (e.g., necklaces, bracelets, etc.) and shoes in order to differentiate the theatrical work environment with their routinary life. They were also bare-footed to better adhere to the floor. Subjects were asked why they took part in the workshop and it was pointed out that theater, like all games, needs rules. Each boy and girl received a notebook and a pen to write down everything that they would learn. Subsequently, the work was divided for the first meetings in: 1) training of the body; 2) voice accompanied by the rhythm.

- 1) "Body training" involved: (a) games such as "the raft" (the participants had to occupy the space rhythmically with eyes closed); (b) work on the parts of the body and impulses (aimed at discovering the various possibilities of the other parts of the body); (c) mimic exercises; (d) breathing; (e) work on the shape of the partners; (f) walking; (g) the silence of the body; (h) the rhythm.
- 2) "Vocal training" included: (a) the importance of silence and listening; (b) the vowel system in the Italian language (*i.e.*: a, è, é, i, ò, ó, u); (c) resonators; (d) diaphragmatic breathing. After the first meetings, the possibility of creating one's own actions with one's own body or with the voice or with both (physical actions were introduced and repeated over time). This workshop was a first approach to the work on the character. To start this work, a frame was used where the subject could build their own repeatable actions by acting in small groups.

At this stage, some theatrical techniques were used: 1) "the body as a story-teller"; 2) "the sound as a story-teller"; 3) "the voice as a story-teller".

- 1) The body as a "story-teller". These techniques were based on the different parts of the body. First, the backbone was considered as the movement generator. Then, the differentiation between the upper and the lower parts of the body was stressed. Again, the homo-lateral movement was refined by moving either the right part of the body or the left one, separately. Last, focus on the lightness or heaviness of the body as well as on the impulse coming from head, shoulders, hands and posterior was put.
- 2) The sound as a "story-teller". These techniques focused on telling a story by means of sounds, where voice and words were strictly linked to the body and implied speaking as a physical action. The subjects were invited to focus on breath and how vocal emission, linked to movement, became more fluent. Moreover, the sound changed according to the body parts associated to it.
- 3) The voice as a "story-teller". The subjects were divided into three groups. Each group was given a story. Subjects had to tell a story by using the expressive means developed in the previous steps (*i.e.* body and sounds as story-tellers).

Thus, the workshop started from an idea, where the participants, led by the operators, became an active part through their own proposals.

2.4. Improvisation into the habitat

This stage consisted of a 3-day itinerary across the island of Carloforte. Through improvisation techniques as well as songs and stories, the subjects "met" three local mythological characters of the island called: *Vegiumen*, *Raza du Païse* and *Puvuppo*, respectively.

In this overall context, the influence of Grotowski consists in: the training mode of the actor; the importance of a body in the space in relation to the environment and to the other; the ability to adapt; attention and concentration; the fundamental ability to rely on a repeated physical action enabling to reach the emotions.

The 3-day itinerary on the island was based on the concept of "leaving": leaving old habits to meet what we do not know. The subjects were pushed to find another self and learn new possibilities in this context, the three characters symbolizing the phases of the inner journey through the island of Carloforte.

In particular, *Raza du Païse*, represents our link with the old habits still present at this stage of the journey; the action was set in the village. *Vegiumen*, represents the inner search of something different from oneself; the action was set in the inner and wildest areas of the island. *Puvuppo* symbolizes creativity, freedom and the different-from-the-known.

The workshop ended with a rendering focused on: (1) the theatrical experience as a whole; (2) all the songs, readings and stories learned during the workshop; (3) the acquired skills to move in the space; (4) the rhythm learned on the drums. All this was organically organized, in a precise structure, with a dramaturgical-narrative sense.

2.5. Trainers training

All trainers, 6 in total, belonging to the Association "*Botti du scoggiu*" of Carloforte, who took part in the workshops with the subjects, had previously attended to workshops both in the San Pietro island (Southern Sardinia) and Cenci (Umbria, central Italy) between 1997 and 2005. For the current study, the following workshops: "Meeting with India" and "Theatrical Ecology", both focused on the way to play at theater in small groups, played a major role. They were carried out at Cenci (Umbria) under Abani Bismas and the Milon Mela group the former, and by Jairo Cuesta and Jim Sloviack the latter. Both had been Grotowski's assistants in the "Theater of the Springs".

In line with the concepts of Grotowski, the work proposed was mainly focused on:

- 1) physical training, turning the body into a tool able to accept the psychological nuances of the character;
- 2) developing physical exercises to physically support the actor when coming from different artistic experiences;
- 3) building a repeatable physical action once got familiar with points 1 and 2.

All the participants had to develop their skills in: (i) listening, through the training of attention and concentration, as Grotowski proposed; (ii) awareness of their body; (iii) awareness of their own self and the surrounding environment. The workshops lasted 24 h a day, from 5 to 10 days, and were held in a residential context and totally merged into nature. All participants worked hard under a strict discipline at the orders of the leaders. The working day was divided into three moments:

- a) Physical Training: Jogging in the fields; watching; proprioception exercises; body contact; plastic and exercises based on weight displacement.
- b) Vocal Training aiming to: explore the possibility of the voice; find new expressive source; develop the potential of vocal articulations concerning natural breathing, diaphragmatic breathing, rhythmic breathing, work on resonators, polyphonic songs, acquisition of the basic elements of the rhythm and listening education.

- c) Rendering: work on repeated physical actions in order to increase awareness of the relationship between voice and body.

2.6. Survey of interpersonal values (SIV)

The SIV measures universal values concerning an individual's relationship to other people and their relationship to him/her (Gordon, 1977; Schwartz and Bilsky, 1987; Suárez et al., 2011).

SIV (Gordon, 1960), based on 90 items with two answer choices (YES-NO) evaluates six areas of the individual's relationships with the others. A high score on a scale means that the subject values the dimension. A low score means that a person does not value that dimension. The six scales and their meanings are:

S – Support. Being treated with understanding; receiving encouragement from other people; being treated with kindness and consideration.

C – Conformity. Doing what is socially correct; following regulations closely; doing what is accepted and appropriate; being a conformist.

R – Recognition. Being looked up to; being considered important; attracting favorable notice; achieving recognition.

I – Independence. Having the right to do whatever one wants to do; being free to make one's own decisions; being able to do things in one's own way.

B – Benevolence. Doing things for other people; sharing with others; helping the unfortunate; being generous.

L – Leadership. Being in charge of other people; having authority over the other; being in a position of leadership or power.

2.7. Semantic differential (SD)

The core of the SD is that words represent things as a mediation process (Osgood et al., 1957; Arthur, 1966; Masters and Tong, 1968; Schacter, 1987; Roediger and McDermott, 1993; Xiong et al., 2003). SD is the crucial identification, the bond between particular signs and specific meanings. Therefore, the meaning attached to the same signs will change among individuals and situations. Osgood et al. (1957), looked for a method by which a subject, being presented with a stimulus word, could indicate what it meant to him/her. Their studies explained that some commonly used adjectives had a common evaluative basis. Indeed, the subjects were asked to watch such adjectives in polar opposition and, by this method, the most commonly used pairs were found, (e.g. Good-Bad, Awful-Nice, Foolish-Wise, etc.) (Osgood et al., 1957; Franks et al., 2000). Likewise, Osgood et al. (1957) using different stimulus words or concepts, found that the subjects could point out the direction of their experiences with the word or concept previously listed by emphasizing one of any pair of polar opposites. Moreover, these authors found that intervals between commonly used opposites revealed that in a 7-interval scale between, say, "Good-Bad," a subject was able to define the intensity of his/her experience with the stimulus concept. They called this arrangement of word pairs "Polar Scales" and applied the term Semantic Differential for the entire test. The first three semantic factors (dimensions) extracted were the "evaluation," "potency," and "activity" factors, according to the proportion of variance accounted (Bentler and LaVoie, 1972; Tzeng, 1975). These dimensions are universal across the individuals, and they reflect the following affective and connotative meanings (Osgood et al., 1957):

1. Evaluation (E) refers to "good" and "nice" versus "bad" and "awful" and their associated trends: "approach" versus "avoidance".
2. Potency (P) denotes "strength" and "control" versus "weakness" and "ineffectiveness" in the appraisal of situations or persons.
3. Activity (A) dimension reflects "arousal" and distinguishes between "excited" and "calm" affective states as well as "active" and "passive" behaviors.

Together, these dimensions constitute a three-dimensional affective space within which the affective meaning of any concept (e.g., persons, behaviors, situations, objects and emotions) can be located. Empirical studies have compiled numerous affective dictionaries, language-specific datasets of hundreds or thousands of concepts (e.g., role-identities, behaviors, traits, emotions) that have been assessed by cultural informants with the semantic differential technique (Osgood et al., 1957; Xiong et al., 2003).

2.8. Data analysis of SIV

The data consist of the answers given by each subject to the SIV, divided by factor (S, C, R, I, B and L) in the two surveys: test and retest. In order to verify the differences between the test period and the retest period and to verify changes in the subjects concerning the relationship with the other, a mixed ANOVA 2x2x2x6 was performed. Subsequently, Duncan test was performed at $p < 0.01$ in order to evaluate the differences between means.

ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) (Keppel and Wickens, 2004) is a statistical analysis used in scientific researches to interpret experimental results and ascertain scientific hypothesis. ANOVA is a statistical test based on the differences between means. It is useful to generalize the results to other situations and to other samples with similar characteristics. In particular, ANOVA allows to generalize the data observed on the samples to the population in this specific example. This test is based on the means differences between levels of variables (e.g. between male and female or between levels of SIV).

The comparison between means gives an output called "F" point. If F point is higher than critical F value, the results of the difference are statistically significant and can be generalized to the population with a probability of error called "p". The value of p is the probability of error of this generalization. For example, $p < 0.01$ means that there is the 1% of probability of error in interpreting the results. Thus, if we repeat our experiment for 100 times, we expect to have the same results 99 times out of 100. Conversely, we may not have these results 1 time out of 100.

For this analysis, factors were: Gender (2 levels: male and female), Groups (2 levels: experimental and control), Time (2 levels: test and retest), SIV (6 levels: S, C, R, I, B and L).

2.9. Data analysis of SD

The data consist of the answers given by each subject to SD divided by factors (E, P and A) in the two surveys (test and retest). In order to verify between test and retest periods and consequently verify changes in the evaluation of the workshop, a mixed ANOVA 2x2x2x3 was performed. Duncan test was performed at $p < 0.01$ in order to evaluate the differences between means.

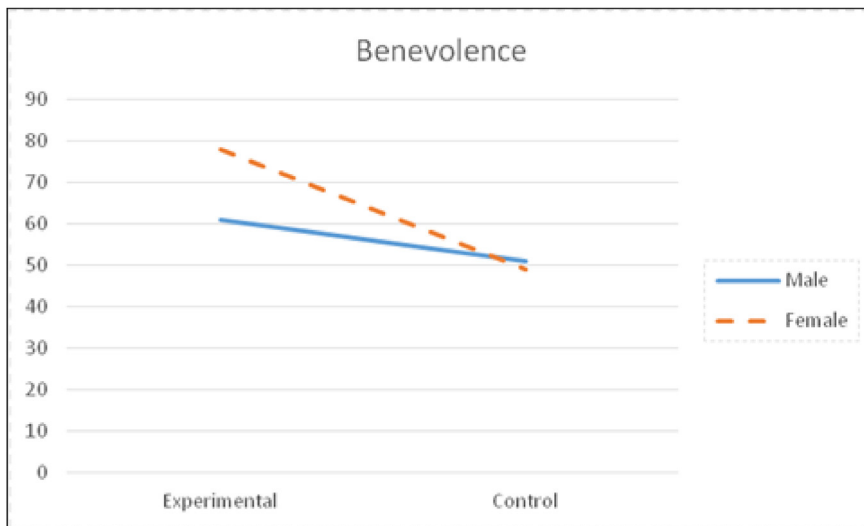
Factors were: Gender (2 levels: male and female), Groups (2 levels: experimental and control), Time (2 levels: test and retest) and SD (3 levels: E, P, A).

3. Results

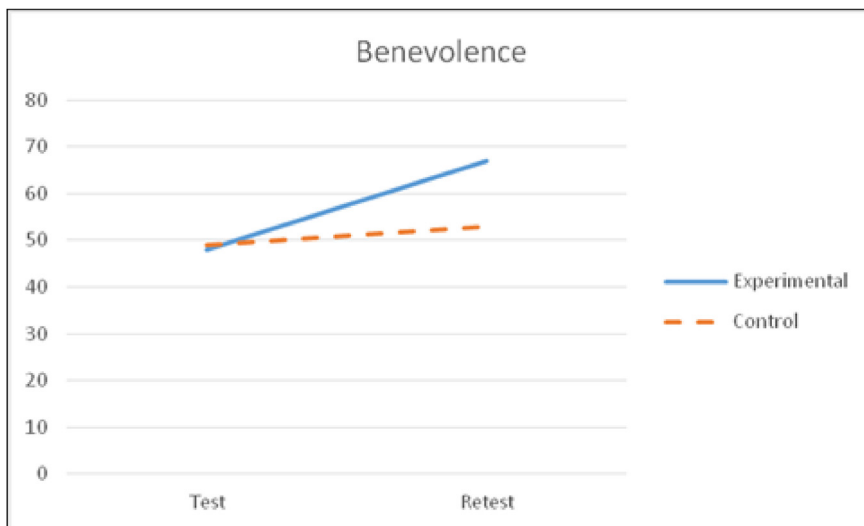
3.1. SIV

ANOVA 2x2x2x6 showed highly significant results for the interaction between Groups, Gender and SIV ($F = 2.25$; $df = 5/350$; $p < 0.001$) and the interaction: Gender x Time x SIV ($F = 2.77$; $df = 10/700$; $p < 0.01$). Duncan test showed:

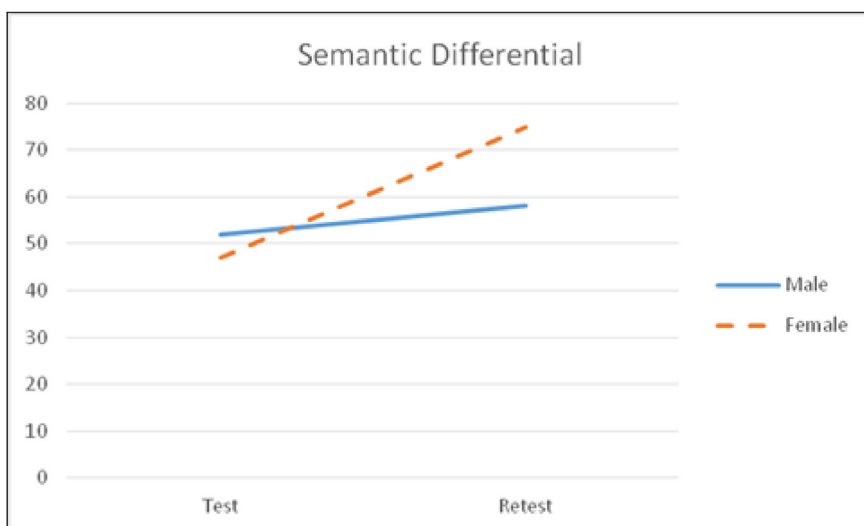
1. significant differences for B between male and female for the experimental group ($p < 0.01$) (Graph 1);
2. significant differences for B from test to retest in the experimental group ($p < 0.01$) (Graph 2).



Graph 1. shows a statistically significant difference between male and female in the experimental group for B.



Graph 2. shows a statistically significant difference from test to retest for experimental group for B.



Graph 3. shows statistically significant differences between test and retest periods for male and female for B.

Graph 1 shows a statistically significant difference at $p < 0.01$ between male and female in the experimental group. Female of the experimental group showed a significant superior B. In contrast, no statistically significant differences between male and female for the control group were found.

Graph 2 shows a statistically significant difference from test to retest for the experimental group at $p < 0.01$. At the test period, no statistically significant differences between experimental and control groups were found. At the retest period, a statistically significant increase of B at $p < 0.01$ was registered for the experimental group.

3.2. SD

ANOVA 2x2x2x3 showed statistically significant results for the interaction between gender and test ($F = 3.46$; $df = 2/140$; $p < 0.001$) and for the interaction between groups, test and SD ($F = 4.47$; $df = 3/140$; $p < 0.001$). Duncan test showed:

1. significant differences between test and retest for female ($p < 0.01$) (Graph 3);
2. significant differences between test and retest for the experimental group for E ($p < 0.01$) (Graph 4);

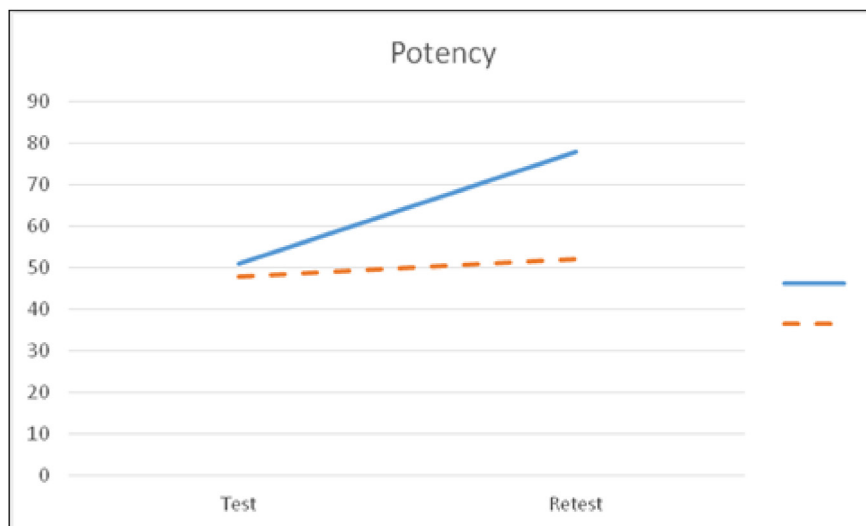
3. significant differences between test and retest for the control group for E ($p < 0.05$) (Graph 4);
4. significant differences between experimental and control groups at the retest period for E ($p < 0.05$) (Graph 4);
5. significant differences between test and retest periods for the experimental group for P ($p < 0.01$) (Graph 5);
6. significant differences between test and retest for the experimental group for A ($p < 0.01$) (Graph 6);
7. significant differences between test and retest for the control group for A ($p < 0.05$) (Graph 6);
8. significant differences between experimental and control groups at the retest period for A ($p < 0.05$) (Graph 6).

Graph 3 shows statistically significant differences between test and retest periods for male and female at $p < 0.01$. At the test period, no statistically significant differences between male and female were observed. At the retest period, a statistically significant difference at $p < 0.01$ between female and male was found.

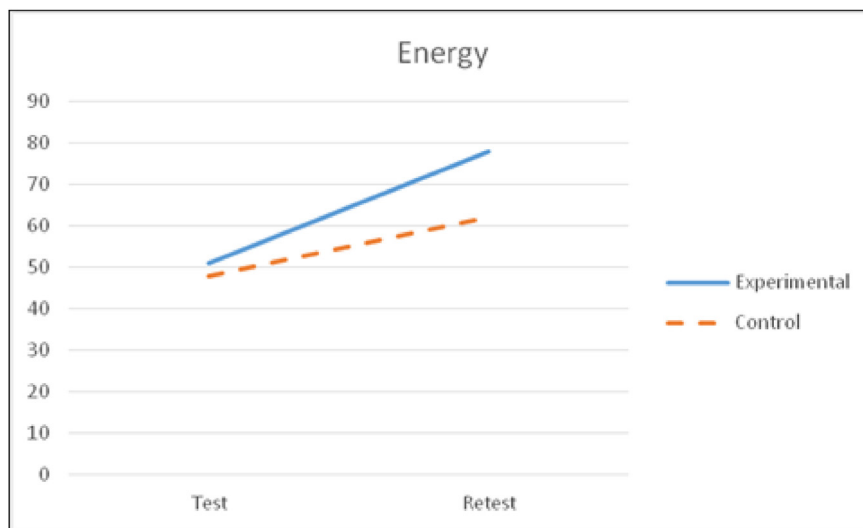
Graph 4 shows statistically significant differences between test and retest periods at $p < 0.01$ for experimental and control groups. At the test period, no statistically significant differences between experimental and control groups were observed. At the retest period, both experimental



Graph 4. shows statistically significant differences between test and retest periods for E.



Graph 5. shows a statistically significant difference between test and retest periods for experimental group for P.



Graph 6. shows a statistically significant difference between test and retest periods for the experimental group for A.

and control groups showed a significant increase for E. Experimental group showed a significant difference of E from the control group at the retest period.

Graph 5 shows a statistically significant difference at $p < 0.01$ between test and retest periods for the experimental group for P.

At the test period, no statistically significant differences between experimental and control groups were observed. At the retest period, the experimental group showed a statistically significant difference for P at $p < 0.01$ from the control group.

The experimental group showed a statistically significant increase for P at $p < 0.01$ from test to retest periods.

Graph 6 shows a statistically significant difference between test and retest periods at $p < 0.01$ for the experimental group for A.

At the test period, no statistically significant differences between experimental and control groups at $p < 0.01$ were observed. Both experimental and control groups showed a statistically significant increase for A from test to retest periods at $p < 0.01$. At the retest period, the experimental group showed a statistically significant difference for A from the control group at $p < 0.01$.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Theater at school is a useful tool to stimulate changes in a child's self-concept (Bernstein, 1985; Walker Sydney, 2014) with a positive impact on individual wellness, on self-esteem and empathy (Boehm and Boehm, 2003).

Furthermore, empathy improves in a theater workshop. When the boys and girls engage in dramatic role-plays they see their own lives from the point of view of the other (Heinig, 1993).

In this viewpoint, this current study shows that boys and girls taking part in the theater workshop activity increase their benevolence. In other words, they take on altruistic behaviors such as helping the others and being sympathetic.

The choice of Grotowski's method workshop was suggested by its connection with Psychology. Both deal with emotions linked to cognition and actions. Cognition and emotion are two complementary tools used by the living organism to maintain their self regulation processes as well as their exchanges with the environment (Colombetti, 2014) with the goal of making "oneself available to oneself" (Stanislavsky, 1967; 1979; 1980a; 1980b; 1981; Grotowski, 2007; 2012). In fact, in the human experience, every emotion is linked to a specific situation and action. For example, if a lion is chasing me, in all likelihood I will run. Running will be associated to the emotion of

fright. Thus, I will be afraid because I feel myself running and my body contracts. As an outcome, the action of running will be the stimulus activating the emotion "fear" (James, 1950). Being aware of body modifications allows to reach the emotional memory and the episodes that generated the emotions recorded in the emotional memory. The useful knowledge of these living connections inevitably leads to a better knowledge of oneself and one's motivations and feelings with an improved psychological wellness. Grotowski's method is useful to reach the "self awareness" and to improve the psychological characteristics in preadolescents: Energy, Friendship and Openness according to the Big Five theory (Costa and McCrae, 1985) improved after the workshop (Conte et al., 2018).

Moreover, in the current research, the experience of Grotowski's method was evaluated very positively by boys and girls and very "potent" in terms of strength and control. Noteworthy, it was evaluated as energizing and arousing. Likewise, boys and girls taking part in sport activities evaluated their activity as "energetic" but their evaluations were lower when compared to participants to Grotowski's workshop. The "action" in Grotowski's method is the "core" of the psychological changes: the emotions linked to the actions reappear in all cognitive and neuro-automatic conditions allowing the individual to have direct contact with the self.

In conclusion, the workshop based on Grotowski's method is crucial to improve personal psychological characteristics, it is very positively valued by preadolescents and improves acceptance toward the others. This research proves that Theater-therapy, focused on Grotowski's method is a helpful and pleasant tool to simulate positive psychological changes in pre-adolescents that can be considered as soon-to-be adults or individuals "in progress". Last but not least, this technique favors well-being both in the individual and in the group.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Stella Conte: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data.

Gioia Cambiaggio: Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data.

Carla Ghiani: Conceived and designed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data.

Margherita Buffa: Conceived and designed the experiments; Wrote the paper.

Funding statement

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Competing interest statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.

References

- Alsina, C.M.A., 2017. Teoria y práctica de procedimiento actorales de construcción teatral. *Agus- A. Artes y Humanidades*.
- Artini, E., 1983. Il ruolo dell'attore in Jerzy Grotowski: dal teatro al post-teatro. *Collegio universitario S. Caterina da Siena*.
- Attisani, A., 2006. Un Teatro Apocrifo–Il Potenziale Dell'arte Teatrale Nel Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards. *Medusa*, 1-259.
- Arthur, A.Z., 1966. Response bias in the semantic differential. *Br. J. Soc. Clin. Psychol.* 5 (2), 103–107.
- Babelt, D., Grotowski, J., 2003. La técnica del actor. *Università de La Rioja: Dialnet*, pp. 149–158.
- Benedetti, J., 1982. *Stanislavsky: an Introduction*. Theater Art Book, New York.
- Benedetti, J., 1998. *Stanislavsky and the Actor*. Methuen, London.
- Bentler, P.M., LaVoie, A., 1972. An extension of semantic space. *J. Verb. Learn. Verb. Behav.* 11 (2), 174–182.
- Bernstein, B., 1985. Becoming involved: spolin Theater Games in classes for the educationally handicapped. *Theory Pract.* 24 (3), 219–223.
- Bickerstaff, J., 2011. Collaborative theatre/creative process. *Commun. Assoc. Minn. J.* 38 (1), 42–54.
- Boehm, A., Boehm, E., 2003. Community theater as means of empowerment in social work: a case study of women's community theatre. *J. Soc. Work* 3 (3), 283–300.
- Bussel, K., 2012. Acting in Opera: a Stanislavsky approach. *Undergraduate Honor Theses*. East Tennessee State University, Tennessee.
- Colombetti, G., 2014. The Feeling Body: Affective Science Meet the Inactive Mind. MIT Press, Cambridge MA.
- Conte, S., Ghiani, C., Cambiaggio, G., 2018. Stanislavskij's method improves personality aspects in preadolescents. *Humanit. Bull.* 1 (1), 197–204. ISSN: 2517-4266.
- Costa, P.T., McCrae, R.R., 1985. The NEO personality inventory. *Psychol. Assess. Res. Fouladi, N., Shahidi, E., 2016. Creativity, thinking style and mental disorders. J. Fundam. Appl. Sci.* 8 (2), 1728–1736.
- Franks, J.J., Bilbrey, C.W., Lien, K.G., McNamara, T.P., 2000. Transfer-appropriate processing (TAP) and repetition priming. *Mem. Cogn.* 28 (7), 1140–1151.
- Gordon, L.V., 1960. *Manual for Survey of Interpersonal Values*. Science Research Associates, Chicago.
- Gordon, L.V., 1977. *Cuestionario de Valores Interpersonales (SIV)*. TEA, Madrid.
- Gordon, M., 1987. *The Stanislavsky Technique: Russia*. Applause, New York.
- Grotowski, J., 2007. *Esercizi*. In: Flaszyn, L., Pollastrelli, C., Molinari, R. (Eds.), *Il teatro laboratorio di Jerzy Grotowski 1959-1969*. La casa Uscher, Firenze, pp. 155–156.
- Grotowski, J., 2012. *Toward a Poor Theater*. Taylor & Francis, Oxford.
- Harris, T.A., 1967. *I'm Ok – You're Ok*. Harper & Row, New York.
- Heinig, R.B., 1993. *Creative Drama for the Classroom Teacher*, fourth ed. Englewood Cliffs, A Simon and Schuster Company, New Jersey.
- Hennessey, B., Amabile, T., 2010. Creativity. *Annu. Rev. Psychol.* 61, 569–598.
- James, W., 1950. *The Principles of Psychology*, II. Dover, New York.
- Keppel, G., Wickens, T.D., 2004. *Design and Analysis: A Researcher's Handbook*. Pearson Prentice-Hall.
- Masters, F.G., Tong, J.E., 1968. Il test differenziale semantico con soggetti di Borstal. *Br. J. Criminol.* 8 (1), 20–31.
- McCaslin, N., 1984. *Creative Drama in the Classroom*. Longman Inc., New York.
- Merlin, B., 2003. *Konstantin Stanislavsky*. Routledge, London.
- Merlin, B., 2007. *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit*. Nick Hern Book, London.
- Merlin, B., 2008. An actor's work is finally done. *Draft* 3 (1), 1–27.
- Mitter, S., 1992. *System of Rehearsal – Stanislavsky, Brecht, Grotowski and Brook*. Routledge, London.
- Osgood, C.E., Sua, G.J., Tannenbaum, P.H., 1957. *The Measurement of Meaning*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana.
- Richards, T., 1995. *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*. Routledge, London.
- Rapin, J., Segalowitz, S.J., 1992. *Handbook of Neuropsychology*. Eshelvier Science Publisher, Amsterdam.
- Roediger III, H.L., McDermott, K.B., 1993. Implicit Memory in normal Human Subjects. *Handb. Neuropsychol.* 8 (1), 63–181.
- Ruggeri, V., 1988. *Mente, Corpo, Malattia*. Il Pensiero Scientifico Editore, Roma.
- Schacter, D.L., 1987. Implicit memory: history and current status. *J. Exp. Psychol. Learn. Mem. Cogn.* 13 (3), 501.
- Schwartz, S.H., Bilsky, W., 1987. Towards a universal psychological structure of human values. *J. Personal. Soc. Psychol.* 53 (3), 550–562.
- Stanislavsky, C., 1967. *On the Art of the Stage*. Translated by D. Magar-Shack Faber, London.
- Stanislavsky, C., 1979. *Building a Character*. Translated by E. Hapgood Methuen, London.
- [Stanislavsky, 1980a] Stanislavsky, C., 1980a. *An Actor Prepares*. Translated by E. Hapgood Methuen, London.
- Stanislavsky, C., 1980b. *My Life in Art*. Translated by J.J. Robbins Methuen, London.
- Stanislavsky, C., 1981. *Creating a Role*. Translated by E. Hapgood Methuen, London.
- Stanislavsky, C., 1990. *An Actor's Handbook*. Translated by E. Hapgood Methuen, London.
- Suárez, L.A., Delgado, A.O., Vega, M.A.P., Jiménez, A.M.L., 2011. Desarrollo y validación de una escala de valores para el desarrollo positivo adolescente. *Psicothema* 23 (1), 153–159.
- Tzeng, O.C.S., 1975. Reliability and validity of semantic differential E–P–A markers for an american English representative sample. *Psychol. Rep.* 37, 292.
- Walker Sydney, R., 2014. *It's Not All Just Child's Play: A Psychological Study on the Potential Benefits of Theater Programming with Children*. University of Main, Honors College, Main.
- Xiong, M.J., Franks, J., Logan, G.D., 2003. Repetition priming mediated by task similarity in semantic classification. *J. Exp. Psychol. Learn. Mem. Cogn.* 31 (7), 1009–1020.