

A BRIEF PROSPECT OF THEATRE TEACHING IN BRAZIL

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The Theatre Pedagogy is not restricted to the actor's background, even included here a non-expert one. The inclusion of the theatre in the elementary school and kindergarten (child school) curriculum gets a conception about theatre and a perceptive about the aims of teaching (...). What should come first when teaching a non-expert in theatre? This question opens investigations on epistemological fields and gets lots of answers.¹

There were many attempts of employing theatre as a tool for the education process in Brazil, but its overflowing scholarship consolidated itself progressively in the last fifty years, as this article will make it clear. Despite the pseudo-initiative accomplished by the public power along five centuries, the effective presence in this field of knowledge in basic school² only happened from 1971 with the compulsory teaching of the subject "Artistic Education", centralized on a general initiation in Arts. Now with the curricular reformulation implemented by the Brazilian law of "Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional", dated from 1966, four languages were stabilized in the field of formal curriculum: visual arts, dance, music and theatre.

On this approach, the epistemology of a knowledge area has constituted itself through the praxis of its historicity. Therefore it makes necessary to analyze the constitution of the content corpus related to the theatre pedagogy in a critical perspective, verifying the most relevant happenings, the cultural phenomena and the overflowing theories that have contributed to its consolidation on scholarship, task that requires a building of an overall narrative about the history of Brazilian education. Taking the problem as a complex trouble one tries to bring up a short view, even based on an exhaustive research.

In despite of people consider Jesuit priests made use of theatre as a pedagogical tool during the colonial age, one knows that their action in this field was limited to catechism, due to the insufficiency of a quantitative and qualitative performance in their "schools of learning how to read and count."³ In the first three hundred years of colonization the cultural development kept itself tied to the Portuguese interests, and not even the illuminist ideals had major effect around here. The diffusion of innovative ideas was forbidden by the Portuguese authorities, the publication were looked under "seven keys" that means controlled, and very few institutions gave cultural production incentives.

The genesis of the artistic teaching happened formally in 1816, with the creation of the School of Sciences, Arts and Employment Profession, and The Imperial Academy of Fine Arts, both in the city of Rio de Janeiro. The literature points out to the prejudices that

¹ Ingrid Dormien Koudela, PhD of São Paulo University, In: Arão Paranaguá de Santana, Teatro e formação de professores, 2000, p. 12.

² The concept of "basic school" in Brazil refers to the levels of teaching that are prior to university degree.

³ The Jesuit priests arrived in Brazil in 1550, with the mission of taking care of the "soul" of the lords and natives, to preach to the Indians and implement a teaching system, but they were expelled under the orders of the Portuguese crown in 1759.

the artists had to face at that period and the characteristics that marked their teaching practice – on one side the “artist-teachers” ignored the culture that was being unfolded and, on the other hand, they themselves didn’t have the same prestige granted to poets and writers. From that moment on, drawing teaching became relevant in some way in the elementary school, talking for granted the methods that would not take into consideration the native culture and the baroque tradition that was still enduring for two hundred years.

With the Independence Proclamation and the Constituent Assembly (1823) the debate about educational matters was always on fashion even though it was conceived a political strategy that would invert most elementary educational system and a unified teaching, third degree level courses was established or reformulated in areas that would only attend the most immediate interests of the Court-Law, Medicine, Fine-Arts and Military Engineering. The Pedro II School, liked in its beginning to the Empire Ministry and after to the Republic Government, was conceived to be the standard to school organization and teaching quality, with contents in some areas of Arts from the “study table” on could find Vocal Music and Figured Drawing in all the seven school years, but in the last years, one would add to the list of contents Rhetoric and Poetics, but in the pedagogical practice one ignored the tradition on the dramatic plays reading in public even though at that time Martins Penna and Gonçalves Magalhães works and João Caetano plays were a success. These were the three Brazilian responsible for the national theater modernization. In the middle of the 19th century João Caetano tried to create The Drama School in Rio de Janeiro, having conceived the philosophical and organizational structure of the institute but they have never had the necessary support to accomplish that. But one cannot only entrust to João Caetano the pioneer sense cause the institution “theatre school” would be something new to be developed later.

On top of scenic revolution, that stamped the turning of the century in the East, some proposals gave a new course to the Dram Art and to the Acting Art in special. Many factors on aesthetic and technical nature got the theatre practice more complex requiring new procedures to be implemented through a long process of study. This idea had a slow repercussion in Brazil, beginning in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo with the creation of theatre schools or conservatories, in the first half of the 20th century.

Historic research registers that the first insertions in this area of knowledge in elementary school were accomplished as a resource to celebrate the ephemeris - performance about Brazil’s history or other festival, plays production to cheer up graduation parties etc. - no need for a precise chronology. Meanwhile, in school practice, not only in theatre but in the other artistic forms started to be given certain value with the rising out of the ideals spread by the Escola Nova (New School) which repercussions arrived here in the 30th, right. When the Brazilian society was going through political changes of great importance: a genuine national thought was being crystallized, one was planning the scholarship expansion and, in the art field, gathered the fruits in expansion in the modern movement.

Once the ground has been prepared came along the Little Art School of Augusto Rodrigues, John Dewey’s proposals about “art as an experience”, from Herbert Read about “education through art”, Victor Lowenfeld about “expressive developing.”⁴ The first

⁴ The plastic artist, critical of art and journalist Augusto Rodrigues was the first to diffuse in Brazil the concept of the education for the art, having been created initially in Rio de Janeiro (1948) and later also in

influences on the field of theatre education came from the Anglo-Saxon culture countries, and the proposal of Peter Slade around the “dramatic child’s game”. Being well spread out under the teaching methods point of view, the mentioned authors collaborated in the dissemination of the free-expression, which became one of the pilasters of the education movement for the Art, taking a great number of teachers into the extremes, where everything was permitted, considering that the students “expression” could not suffer the teacher’s “interference”. So, the spontaneous approach predominated in theatre teaching where its contents were based upon a psychological core dramatization, and sometimes the supporting activity of other subjects in the curriculum.⁵

When the artistic education teaching was established in a compulsory way in the Brazilian education (1971), in the climax of the technicist pedagogy imported from the USA, this was the kind of thinking worked into the schools except for rare isolated experiences: art would only play an specific role (instrumental one). And in such a moment where critics would rise towards the official education and politics of a dictatorship government, the public power inserted a subject with a conformed content in the public school curriculum – “artistic” education – conceived while multivalent art fusion, what in practice, seemed to be somewhat an impracticable experience as well as unworkable in the whole national territory. In a recent document the Education Ministry recognizes the mistake:

In a general way, between the 70s and 80s teachers would find themselves responsible for their students education in all artistic languages (...). These tendencies implied on a quality decrease of the knowledge regarding to the specifications of each one of the forms, and in their place, a belief was developed that the teaching of artistic languages could be reduced to a variety of activity proposals combining plastic arts, music, theatre and dance, without getting deeper into the knowledge referred to each one of them.⁶

In other words, one faced a teacher’s improvisation, pedagogical approaches techniques and didactic materials, without the inherent acquaintance to the areas of knowledge that involves the languages of arts could contribute to built up a citizenship through quality education. Nevertheless, besides the obligation of the artistic education in elementary school came up the problem of teaching formation, and it helped crucially to the expansion of art teaching on a third degree level of education and made possible a great need for Academic research in a field ever before explored.

In 1970 there were no more than 30 courses (on third degree level), almost all of them on Bachelor’s degree, being in its majority plastic arts; the Music and Theatre areas would count on very few opportunities, whereas dance and cinema courses were rare, for example. Today there are about 250 Academic courses in several regions in Brazil, including fashion, decoration, design, besides music, plastic arts, dance and theater – from this total, 98 refers specifically to teacher’s training courses.

other cities, the Little Art School, with purposes gone back to the informal teaching but that became centers of teacher’s training - due to the pioneering.

⁵ The music area, that was denominated in the end of 1940s “choral society”, it had a development similar to the one of theater in terms of didactic approach, as well as a slower penetration in the official curriculum than the plastic arts and the geometric drawing.

⁶ BRAZIL, Ministério da Educação, *Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais*, 1999, p. 47.

The academic teaching (third degree level) in the theatre became regular in 1985 only, after the legal creation of professional careers for actors, critics, directors, set designers and dramatic art teachers, even though the Brazilian Theater Conservatory – an organ linked to the Ministry of Education – would offer a course called “academic” since 1939 but that worded alternatively during many years. Following an expansion that took place in all academic teaching 11 bachelor’s courses got progressively established as well as 19 on the degree of licentiate in theatre, what contributed greatly not only to the enlargement of the educational opportunities as well as interfered in the market job and in the cultural scene of the big urban cities. The most relevant characteristics of this expansion are: concentration of vacancies in the most developed areas; the institutions that offer the courses show an outstanding performance in relation to the others; the teaching staff has a reasonable profile in terms of PhD and Master degrees; a great part of the egress teachers work on formal or informal education programs. However, there are still many challenges such as in the Brazilian social, political and economic life – among them the qualitative education supply for all inhabitants, prevailing the preparation of timetables to make this mission to come true.

It is important to say that teacher formation in Brazil happens on license academic degree courses and historically, a model called “3+1” – became standard foreseeing teacher formation over the bachelors degree. It means that after 3 years on bachelor’s the candidate has to go through more one year on the study of pedagogic subjects – and it has been changing little by little where one searches for a more solid profile towards the nature and epistemology of the courses.⁷

History registers two types of teacher formation, Professorship in Dramatic Art (1965) and Artistic Education/Qualification in Scenic Arts (1973).⁸ The Ministry of Education adopted to the Dramatic Art professorship the “model 3+1”, but to license degree in Artistic Education one has foreseen the formation in two cycles: a first adjustment in a general way, in which the student learns the “rudiments” of plastic arts, theatre, dance and music contents, and the professionalizing cycle itself, the choices in the same areas are reserved to the students. This was a cheap solution, easy and practical once it offered multiple formation in just one course... but that didn’t work though!

Besides being the target of deep critics along the last two decades, due to the devoid of typical features in which languages and artistic form were treated, the Artistic Education Courses helped the theater teaching to spread all over Brazil, not only in elementary school but also in informal education terms and cultural action. Today the reality does not show a cheerful picture, but the perspectives are good, specially because today is a breaking through moment with the “generalistic” model, in search of the language autonomy.

To attend the scholarship in the theater’s demand, proclaimed by the educational law in force, many decisions have to be made on several public spheres specially in the teacher’s formulation field. Not too long ago the debates about that subject had modest intentions, but with art conquering in school education and the alternatives suggested in the several instances of pedagogic action, more daring steps started to be rehearsed.

⁷ The “3+1 model” is practically extinct in the current days, mostly after determination of federal law in 1996 which, besides determining that the teachers should be graduated in Universities, also advises the setting of pedagogical principles that would promote a search for an identify and unity in all levels of professional development-graduation, post-graduation and continued education.

⁸ The “scenic-arts” terminology is used in Brazil to refer to theater, dance, circus drama, auto popular and forms of scenic representation.

Considering the redimensioning process of the courses carried out, concludes that the future teacher will be able to know, practice, research, reflect and teach theater, working aware of his/her social function and of his/her historical responsibility that will hold in hands: work in favor of a citizenship construction in art and education landings.