Psicología y Educación: Presente y Futuro

Coordinador: Juan Luis Castejón Costa
ACIPE- Asociación Científica de Psicología y Educación
Teatro y la autoestima en estudiantes de Educación Secundaria

Hugon, M.

Laboratory PS-DT, University Jean Jaurès, Toulouse, France.

E-mails: mandarinehugon@yahoo.fr

Resumen
Nos preguntamos acerca de los efectos de los diferentes métodos de enseñanza del teatro en la escuela secundaria sobre la construcción de la identidad durante la adolescencia. El objetivo de este estudio es evaluar con mayor precisión los efectos de la actividad teatral realizadas en la escuela secundaria sobre la socialización de los adolescentes y las diferentes dimensiones de la autoestima (medidos por la “Echelle Toulousaine d’Estime de Soi “, Oubrayrie, Safont, de Leonardis, 1994). El teatro fue trata con la experiencia teatral, sino también el significado y el valor que los estudiantes atribuyen a esta actividad artística, medida por un cuestionario diseñado para este estudio. La muestra incluye 176 estudiantes de secundaria y todos están involucrados en un programa de teatro en la escuela (82 experimentados y 94 principiante). Los resultados (MANOVA) muestran que la experiencia teatral tiene un efecto positivo en la autoestima global y emocional mientras que la dimensión social de la autoestima está más influenciada por el significado y el valor asignado a esta actividad. Estudiantes que ven el teatro como una actividad de ocio parecen tener más habilidades sociales (auto alta sociales, p <0,05). Un ambiente de aprendizaje más entretenido podía seguir fomentando el desarrollo de las interacciones sociales? Este estudio pone de manifiesto el interés de ofrecer actividades creativas y divertidas para los adolescentes, ya que podrías desarrollar las habilidades sociales necesarias para la construcción de la identidad. 

Palabras clave: actividades teatrales; adolescencia; autoestima; aprendizaje de socialización.
Theatrical practice and self-esteem among secondary school students

Hugon, M.

Laboratory PS-DT, Jean Jaurès University, Toulouse, France.

E-mail: mandarinehugon@yahoo.fr

Abstract
We question the effects of different ways of theatrical teaching at high school on identity construction during teenage years. The goal of this study is to assess more exactly the effects of the theatrical activity practiced at the high school on adolescent socialization and the various dimensions of self-esteem (measured by the “Echelle Toulousaine d’Estime de Soi”, Oubrayrie, Safont, de Léonardis, 1994). Theatrical practice was tapped by the theatrical previous experience but also by the meaning and value that students assign to this art activity, measured by a questionnaire designed for this study. The sample comprises 176 twelfth grade students all being involved in a theatrical program at school (82 beginners vs. 94 experienced). The results (MANOVA) show that the theatrical previous experience has a positive influence on global and emotional self-esteem while the social dimension of self-esteem is more influenced by the meaning and value assigned to this activity. Students who consider theatre as a leisure activity seem to have more social skills (higher social self, $p<.05$). Would a more entertaining learning environment encourage more social interactions development? This study highlights the interest in offering creative and playful activities for teenagers because it could develop the social skills needed for identity construction.

Key words: adolescence; self-esteem; socialization learning; theatrical activities.

1. Introduction
French school system is increasingly open to artistic activities, such as drawing, music and drama. Do arts need to be developed in schools? As new pedagogical approaches, what art can bring to students? Both literary and cultural learning, the theatrical practice, considered as an innovative learning which involves a multi-disciplinary approach, help notably in development of openness toward oneself and others, thereby promoting self-construction (Théberge, 2006). We wonder whether artistic activities offered in high schools affect the construction of identity in adolescence.

Many research focus on analyzing psychological benefits of various artistic productions as a therapeutic support with people with psychological, physical or social difficulties. However, few researches focus on the psychological effects of theatrical activities performed at school during teenage years (Daykin and al., 2008). Besides, methodologies used for research, primarily in the United States, are limited: the researcher is fully involved in the study since he leads the theatrical activity, and self-esteem has been studied only in a one-dimensional way.

The goal of this study is to assess the effects of theatrical experience at school on twelfth grade students’ self-esteem.

In French high school, three forms of drama education are possible: acting classes are practiced in a playful way or in a school way. The academic option “speciality”, only for students in the Literary series, consists of a thorough practical and theoretical classes over three years (five hours weekly in final year) and completed with written (3 credits) and oral (3 credits) examination as part of the baccalaureate. The academic option “voluntary drama,” open
to all students, is also assessed by an oral examination to the Baccalaureate (1 credit) that relies on a dossier and a
collective drama work. At last, “the drama workshop” open to all students (two hours a week outside school hours),
does not imply any evaluation. Here, drama is further proposed as a leisure activity. Most options and workshops
are run in a complementary way, by both a teacher and an artist. Each of the before mentioned contexts of theatrical
practice has a different objective. Will it produce a different effect on self-esteem?

Barbot (2005) shows in particular that the most creative teenagers have a more positive image of themselves. More-
over, theatrical practice would have a positive effect on the development of social skills and peer interactions (Iwai,
2002), highly valued by teenagers and whose role is essential in the evolution of self-representations.

Self-esteem is a “process by which an individual carries on himself - on his performances, abilities and attributes -
positive or negative judgments” (Oubrayrie, de Leonardis and Safont, 1994, 311). The multidimensional approach of
self-esteem requires that appreciation that the subject makes on himself is global but also depends on the importance
given subjectively to more specific areas estimated (Harter, 1998). Considering self-esteem as multidimensional, we
assume that the various skills related to drama practice value the person in various areas, including creative, social,
physical and emotional fields. We will approach the effect of theatrical practice on self-esteem by considering the
theatrical experience in terms of context but also of years of practice and the fact that drama is practiced outside the
school as a complementary activity.

Adopting an interactionist perspective, we consider that the subject is actor of his own development, which leads
us to consider the meaning it gives to his activities. So, theatrical practice is tapped by theatrical experience characte-
ristics but also by the meaning and value that students assign to this art activity. We will refer to it as a “relationship
to drama,” which means the relation of meaning and value maintained by the subject toward theatrical practice. It
takes into account the reasons given by the teenager to explain the choice of this discipline in high school, but also the
definition and purpose attributed to the practice of this art. We assume then that not only the theatrical experience but
also the meanings given to theatrical practice in schools («relationship to drama») orientate the overall self-esteem
and the emotional, social, physical and creative dimensions of self-esteem.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The sample is composed of 176 twelfth grade students, all being involved in a theatrical program at school. A
large majority of students practicing drama are girls. For this variable, our sample is representative of the population
of students enrolled in an educational drama in French high school.

Our sample is divided in two groups of subjects according to the theatrical experience: 46.6% of adolescents
surveyed practiced drama for less than three years, we consider them as beginners since they have just learned the
basics and technical of drama; 53.4% have been practicing for four or more years (so they started at primary school,
or college) and are considered as experienced. These students learned the basics and know well drama; they are no
more in a context of discovery.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Numbers</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years of experience</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginners</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>46.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>53.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Practice after school</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>81.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic status of drama practice</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several contexts</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speciality school option</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary school option</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>81.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Socio professional category of parents</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very favored</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favored</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>176</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1  
Sample characteristics

2.2. Measures

To answer our hypothesis, we conducted a quantitative study based on questionnaires completed by a qualitative study conducted through semi-structured interviews with voluntary adolescents practicing drama at school.

Three data collection instruments have been employed: a questionnaire measuring their theatrical experience; a scale of “relationships to drama”; and the “Echelle Toulousaine d’Estime de Soi” (Oubrayrie, de Léonardis and Safont, 1994), a scale which assess the various dimensions of self-esteem.

To assess the “Relationship to drama,” we built and validated a Lickert scale consisting of 22 items (Hugon, 2009), based on analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted among 20 teenagers practicing theatre at school (Hugon and De Léonardis, 2007). We identified four dimensions of “relationship to drama”:

- “The identity relationship to drama” refers to personal development and corresponds to acting in order to “feel more comfortable”, to “overcome shyness”, to “express himself more easily in speech” and to “control emotions better”.
- “The epistemic relationship to drama” corresponds to considering this practice in a more objective way. Teenagers are focused on the content of this learning, its cultural and artistic interest (that is “acquiring an artistic culture,” “creating, inventing” and “discovering a world”).
- “The utility relationship to drama” puts more emphasis on drama as a “way to get better grades” or “to learn the acting profession”.
- And “The playful relationship to drama”, where the practice is regarded more as a leisure, a way to “get out of the everyday”, “forget the school context”, to “liberate” and “have fun with friends”.

2.3. Procedure

The questionnaires were distributed in person in 26 different public high schools located in Southern France (Midi Pyrénées ; Aquitaine ; Limousin ; Languedoc Roussillon).

To understand the effects of the theatrical experience and each dimension of «relationship to the drama» on self-esteem dimensions, we made analysis of variance multivariate (MANOVA) and univariate (ANOVA) using the software SPSS.14.
3. Results

3.1. Adolescents and “relationship to drama”

The results show that high school students have diverse types of relations to drama.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Asymmetry</th>
<th>Flattening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R. epistemic</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>-0.88</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. playful</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>-0.63</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. identity</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>-0.43</td>
<td>-0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. utility</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Average scores associated with each dimension of the relationship to drama

It seems that the surveyed adolescents tended to do drama to acquire an artistic culture, and have an interest for the content of that learning («Epistemic relationship to drama»; M=3.9; ET=0.69). Furthermore, adolescents seem to be many to design drama as a way of development and of personal construction (M=3.4; ET=0.97) but also as a playful practice (M=3.6; ET=0.89). But respondents seem to consider drama less as a way get better grades, or a way to learn the profession («Utility relationship to drama»; M=2.91; ET=0.64).

3.2. Adolescents and Self-esteem

The sample under investigation reveals a rather positive level of self-esteem. This self-esteem level of adolescents in our sample (average age = 17.7) can be explained in part by age (Oubrayrie, Lescarret and Leonardis, 1996).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Intervalle</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.429</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>4.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.292</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.353</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>4.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.565</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>4.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.437</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>4.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.155</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>4.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Average scores associated with each dimension of self-esteem

The highest average score corresponds to the social self which is the representation of interactions with others and sense of social recognition (Oubrayrie, Safont and Leonardis, 1994). This is in line with the work of Ucar-Martinez (2004), which shows that theatrical practice encourages learning of openness to others, social interaction and communication.

3.3. Theatrical experience and self-esteem

First, we didn’t find any significant link between the academic drama status of practice and self-esteem dimensions. Therefore, more than the context of practice, the meaning that adolescents assign to this activity and their experience seem to have an effect on self-esteem. Indeed, we will see that the multidimensional approach of self-esteem helps to highlight the variation of some dimensions of self-esteem according to the theatrical experience and the “relationship to drama”.
Our results confirm previous studies who show theatrical practice effects on global self-esteem (Iwai, 2002) but we can deepen this first results indicating that being experienced in drama would not only positively assess the overall skills but also emotional control. Indeed, theatrical experience (more than 3 years of practice and complementary practice) positively influences the overall self and emotional self. Being experienced in drama may further encourage to control emotions, to control impulsivity and to evaluate positively overall skills. Learning to distinguish reality from fiction will enable teenagers to control their emotional reactions (Zucchet, 2001) because an imaginary encounter can activate the emotional system in the same way that a real meeting (Harris, 2007). Essential in theatrical practice, teenagers will identify these emotions and learn to manage them; artistic activities allow generally self control (Cloutier, 1996).

3.4. Relationship to drama and self-esteem

The “utility relationship to drama” has a positive effect on creative self ($p < .05$). Teenagers with a high “utility relationship to drama”, have average scores of creative self-esteem ($M = 3.22$ ; $SD = 0.68$) higher than adolescents which tend less to practice drama in order to be successful ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 0.59$). Conceiving drama as a way to succeed academically or professionally would allow a better assessment of creative skills.

However, considering drama mainly as a leisure activity involves low physical self-esteem ($p < .05$). Students who have a low “playful relationship to drama” have a score of physical self higher ($M=3.13$ ; $SD= 0.74$) than those who consider drama to be more a place of leisure and relaxation ($M=2.89$ ; $SD = 0.73$).

It is possible that the more teenagers give importance to drama as an artistic practice, the more they value their physical skills. Indeed, drama, practiced intensively, requires more body involvement including through specific exercises.

3.5. Interactions between theatrical experience, relationship to drama and self-esteem

Emotional and social self are the only self-esteem dimensions, which vary depending on interaction between each indicator of theatrical experience and dimensions of “relationship to drama”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of theatrical practice</th>
<th>[1 ; 3] years</th>
<th>&gt; 3 years</th>
<th>ddl</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global self</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>1 ; 174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Self</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>1 ; 174</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$\text{Lambda de Wilks}=0.037; \ p>.05 ; \ \eta^2_p=0.081$

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drama practice outside the school</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>ddl</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional self</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>1 ; 174</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$\text{Lambda de Wilks}=0.671; \ p<.05 ; \ \eta^2_p=0.025$

Table 5

Comparison of average scores of self-esteem with theatrical experience

Comparison of average scores of self-esteem with complementary practice of drama

Comparison of average scores of self-esteem with theatrical experience

Comparison of average scores of self-esteem with complementary practice of drama
Figure 1

*Average scores of emotional self and complementary practice of drama outside school and playful relationship to drama*

First, students who consider drama less than a leisure activity (low “playful relationship to drama”), and complete their drama practice outside of high school, have an emotional self higher than those who just do drama in high school. Moreover, among students who practice drama outside school, those who maintain a low playful relationship to drama are also those with the highest emotional self.

Practicing drama intensively (practical completed outside of school) would highlight emotional-self and, especially, when drama is not considered as a leisure activity. But, when drama is just practiced at school, it seems to be important to consider it as a leisure in order to have a higher emotional-self.

Figure 2

*Average scores of social self and complementary practice of drama outside school and playful relationship to drama*

High school students who have a low playful relationship to drama have a different level of social-self according to their drama practice (or not) outside of school. Those who practice drama in a complementary way outside school have a higher social-self than those who practice only drama in high school. So, it seems that considering drama less as a leisure activity and practicing it complementary outside school positively influences social self-esteem level, such as emotional self-esteem.

We see a reverse trend when students have a strong playful relationship to drama: in this case, those who practice only drama in high school have a higher social-self than those who practice it outside of school. It can be explained by the fact that students practicing drama at school seem to feel more positive effects when they are in heterogeneous groups (various ages and levels) and when they see theatre as a leisure activity (not scholar).
At school, to develop the adolescent social-self, it would be important to develop the “playful relationship to drama”. However, when we propose drama outside school, it seems not important to develop the “playful relationship to drama” for having a high score of social self.

3.6. Effects of theater practice contexts?

To complete these results, we conducted semi-structured interviews with five teenagers (four girls and one boy), 18 average age (enrolled in university) and having practiced theater in high school but with different theatrical experience. Our interviewing guide allows to explore how adolescents define theatrical art, what this means to them and what it brings. The speeches of adolescents questioned are fairly homogenous. According to them, drama would seem offer a framework in which we learn to understand the other, oneself and openness to others: “Besides developing the creativity and imagination, the thing that attracts me the most in theatre, it is the relational side” (Clément).

Emotional control, being valued and complicity in the working group, key elements in learning theater, seem to be a lever to promote self confidence: “It really opens me more to others. Now, I’ll go talk to them more rather than staying isolated in a corner [because theater] really pushes us to surpass ourselves” (Sophie). According to interviewed teenagers, this artistic activity seems to encourage a new relationship to the other, because of the public presence and socialization it involves: “I learnt to be looked and thus, I look at people differently, I judge less quickly, I learn more easily to go to the people” (Marie).

However, the positive effects of drama are less raised among youth people who practice theater on specialty academic option. They conceive it as a school activity, which leads them to differentiate themselves from their peers not enrolled in this option, thus they feel “categorized”. This practice is not as conducive to socialization development as a voluntary practice.

4. Discussion

To summarize, our results show that students practicing theater have high global and social self-esteem. So, theater could then enhance the positive assessment of the capacities of adolescents, including social capacities, by the game of interactions, exchange and openness to others which it implies.

Theatrical experience seems to have better effects on self-esteem dimensions, especially emotional, social and overall self: at school, the more drama is longer practiced, the more it will have effects.

The analysis of semi-structured interviews shows that for these adolescents, theatrical activity, medium of cultural expression and communication, has positive effects on interactions between peers. Furthermore, the more the environment learning is playful at school, the more it could encourage relationships with others and develop the emotional autonomy. Would a more entertaining learning environment encourage more the development of social interactions?

The school context involving students of all levels (workshop) seems to promote openness to others. A playful teaching with mixed ability groups should be developed at secondary school to encourage social interactions.

Finally, we may wonder whether the speech of adults and educators on the effects of drama practice (activity to improve self-confidence, for example) influences the choice of the teenagers to practice it and their representation.
5. Conclusions

This exploratory study highlights the interest to offer creative and playful activities for adolescents because it seems to develop the social skills needed to identity construction. However, these first results put theatrical practice effects in perspective: practice in schools should be offered on a playful way, on a sufficiently long term basis and the meaning attributed to the activity must be questioned.

Proposing drama option to teenagers, choosing a school teaching drama or a more playful drama, seem more important to observe identity development on them. Indeed, it is necessary that they remain voluntary for their drama practice and that the school context chosen is consistent with the meaning and value they put on it.

Moreover, interviews analysis highlights the interest of thinking about activities and theatrical techniques to propose to teenagers that would be more conducive to the development of social skills. It also seems necessary to propose different activities depending on the difficulties encountered by the young and on his personality.

Furthermore, this research must be deepen, especially by other longitudinal and comparative studies (for example, students practicing drama versus students not making drama).

Acknowledgements: Thank schools and pupils who have allowed me to carry out this study.
References


