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Abstract

In a world where learning is offered to all, the attitude of the consumer learner tends to dominate the school environment. Art, especially theatre, comes as a living tool to stimulate learning and to act on the learner's performance, especially on his brain, which changes in contact with new competences. Théâtre in the classroom is a catalyst of performance and a modifier of the neural networks that can change from a classical and traditional learning based on repetition to a brain show, a serious game that allows a better assimilation and a better understanding of the learning.

Key words:

Learning-performance-brain show-attitude-behavior-neurons-art-drama-art therapy-gaming.

The In-class theater as a neural promoter of reward networks.

Introduction

There has always been a tendency to minimize the art of theater to a simple art of acting and a clownish activity in which the actor is engaged in order to make people laugh. This way of trivializing the theater is beginning to disappear in favor of a new wave of reflections enveloped in experiments that show how much the theater can change the attitudes and behaviors of those who practice it. Playing is a way of appealing to even the most destructive emotions, such as fear, because by recognizing our emotions we are able to manage and control them. The physiologic responses of the emotions are essentially composed by modifications of the autonome nervous system, variations in hormonal discharge rates and changes in neurotransmitter production. The main organic effects that are noticeable during an emotional reactivation are: changes in heart rate, body temperature, respiration and peripheral blood flow.

Methods

These common features of emotional origin are crucial in the communication among living beings, including learners in a learning situation. A practice that I engage in as a teacher of French in an international school is theater. I am an actor and art therapist, and theater is taken as a parallel practice to any strategy I implement. The knowledge I have gained goes beyond acting as I have operated as an artistic mediator to develop the academic and social skills of learners through this channel.

During my long career as a French teacher, I have always been concerned about the term "living language", which is used in the teaching of foreign languages within the framework of the standard curriculum, because it seems to me that in spite of the evolution of the methods, French, for example, remains on the whole a foreign

language to the student, not lived, rather endured. At this level, to undergo, makes the learning easier but does not anchor it with any affectivity or attachment and therefore it becomes less perennial, less durable. In my opinion, it is a mistake to eliminate from the teaching of the foreign language the bodywork, the relaxation exercises, the experience of the senses, the explanation of the emotions, the dynamics of the group, in other words all the preparation of the actor before taking the stage.

It is surprising that foreign language speaking is rare in the heart of the language or that it is characterized by a certain Psittacism* (Psittacism is a way of speaking or writing that appears mechanical or repetitive, like a parrot). Peter Brook shared this matter in the theater workshops he led and said: "What hurts the most in the world today is parody. It is not necessary to start with the language, with the ideas, but with the body. The free time is a first step."*

This art of speaking is worked out from simple and progressive exercises, like the glibness of the merchants who boast of extraordinary products with few words, but rhythmically repeated on different tunes. Are we going to let ourselves be convinced? Or seduce because mimicry also comes into play. To this is added a work that is not without importance that touches upon certain technical aspects of the language because the learner-medium must make the right tone of the partition heard, which implies a demanding work on the general expression, on the materiality of the language (sons, intonation, expressiveness). Just as one opens the ear of children to other sonorities than those of their own language, so it is imperative to widen their palette of flavors and tastes such as the ginger of the "ginger cookies" and all the exotic spices found in the Christmas pudding. Foreign words are steeped in the culture they express and evoke like Proust's madeleine.

"The oral communication is multichannel and plurisemiotic" Thus, it is also tactile. Apprehending a new language is also done through touch. The objects have an extent in the space they limit. They give rise to sensations and the data of the senses allow to anchor the words, to give them a form. This is why, in my French through Drama class, I avoid the flashcards that are placed on the board to present the vocabulary. Nothing beats the concrete object that one names while touching. During one lesson, a 7 year old girl from grade 2 had brought in many stuffed animals to introduce the names of the animals. The children were so fascinated that they waited for their turn to come and pick up, pet and touch the animal.

The arms were stretched out in desire towards the object of the foreign language. In another lesson on the theme of music, the students of grade 8 had learned about real instruments. The children were very focused, happy to manipulate the instrument and proud to draw sounds that brought them closer to understanding the music of the foreign language. The drama with a theatrical approach appears to be an avenue to be explored. Indeed, "We speak with our physical organs, but it is with the whole body that we speak. (Peter Brook,). Obviously, the body takes its place in these practices as the motor of this activity that leads to sustainable and affective learning. Using to marionettes (Puppets) is also precious to my heart because daring to wear another's mask offers a multitude of hidden potentials and strengths. They have this hidden power to allow transformation and to make it possible to try. They are powerful tools for teaching/learning general principles. These figures, made of varied materials, offer many possibilities of theatrical inventiveness, and allow to represent the world in new dimensions and they project us into this common reflection that says that some small details can bring big differences.

Further, in the context of working on familiar words, common or idiomatic expressions, and common sentence types and structures in everyday situations and in the student's immediate environment, such as customary introductions, time, and date; morning and evening routines, chores, visits to the principal - the framework takes the form of a script or a narrative of the daily life, composed of a continuous succession of events in a situation of daily life. These scripts, elaborated in collective, allow to insist on simple syntactic formulations; they are played independently of the type of characters embodied by the puppets. The simplicity of the first scenarios allows the young student to become familiar with the manipulation of his marionette. The direction of the marionette's gaze (the position of her nose, the position of her hands and head..)as well as the posture and the breathing of the manipulator must be trained. These scripts allow a work of systematization of simple movements and a precision of the gesture. They can also prepare the theatricalization of stories which integrate such segments in their framework.

All of these feelings and emotions increase through play, creative practice, cognitive activity and the pleasure of learning. In moments of play, the brain matures through the secretion of a brain molecule, BDNF (Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor) which ensures the growth, survival and differentiation of neurons. When a young child comes home from school, he feels an irrepressible need to play; the more time he has spent sitting and learning in his classroom, the more this need will be felt when he comes home; he will express it in time spent or in quality.

Play is vital, the child plays with his feet and hands, the baby plays by exploring his universe; imitating will bring other perspectives of play, the child learns by playing. The more he learns with joy and enthusiasm, the more his brain develops

and the more the positive emotions linked to learning encourage him to explore other skills and other learning path.

All this reflection leads us to conclude that play allows for the change from state A to state B and this change automatically implies talking about transformation on all possible levels. The learner changes during his journey but there is no question here of hormonal or intellectual change. It is about perception, conscience, attitude and behaviour. When we develop new approaches to teaching, for the teacher, and to learning, for the student, our brain reacts differently. Indeed, he throws itself out of this comfort zone and plunges into a new zone of confusion but which can at least bring him comfort, well-being and pleasure in learning or teaching. He dares, cares and shares new path which leads to new and better understanding full of inquiry and reflection. He began to question his abilities, his limits, his hidden powers, his strengths and weaknesses because for the first time he dared to face his fear and dared to stand up and try without judging his performance.

The topic we are discussing here is the concept of *Brain Plasticity*. The analysis will focus on the learner as a subject of learning and an actor of knowledge, and how artistic activities in their plurality can bring about a cognitive change in them. Plasticity is a fundamental organizational characteristic of human brain functioning. Traditionally, the brain was thought to be wired after a critical period of development. However, it is now recognized that the brain has a remarkable capacity to change its structural and functional organization throughout life, in response to changes in the environment. Learning a skill provides a useful model for studying plasticity because it can be easily manipulated in an experimental setting. The knowledge of this permanent neuroplasticity supports the growth mindset model: in terms of human skills, it is possible to progress throughout one's

life regardless of one's starting level. We have much more power and much more potential talent than we think! and people who are aware of these abilities are more likely to change their behaviour, because they are more confident, more persistent and more involved in this transformation. It goes without saying that the theatrical exercise or the dramatic act knows several sub-acts which ensure its consistency, such as the vocal game where the actor changes voice and plays on several vocal levels according to the situations proposed, or the social game where he dialogues and federates conversations with others and so on. We can also mention the problem of repetition. Neuroscience teaches us that repetition - of a gesture, of a thought, of a behaviour - leads to important cerebral modifications, at the functional and structural levels, making communication faster and more efficacious within the nervous system. Neuroplasty is therefore that capacity of the nervous system to modify its own synaptic connection as a function of the lived experience and the simulation, which can be environmental or mental. The principle of neural plasticity is very simple: the more a connection is simulated, the more the solicited neural network fortifies and consolidates.

According to Lionel Naccache, the impact of repetition reveals advantages: "[...] the speed of the process, the rapidity of responses, the allocation of resources to different tasks, the ability to deal with several activities in parallel".* In particular, the practice of music (e.g., learning to sing, declaim a text, or perform a play) is an activity that generally begins early in life, when the brain is most sensitive to plastic changes, and is often pursued throughout life by musicians and actors. The brain is a fountain of youth and produces neurons until our last hour. It wears out if we don't use it and if we are of an inquisitive mind, we keep our brains working throughout our lives. It thrives on change: moving, taking up new activities, learning a language, escaping from habit, allows the newly born neuron to survive. New stimuli encourage our young neurons to integrate into brain circuits and

establish connections. The child is made for joy and wonder and thrives on new discoveries and experiences. Some elderly people who are intellectually curious all their lives feel that they are eternally adept; indeed, the more their brains perceive changes, the more they regenerate! Theatre, among other things, known as the art of the stage, allows for this eternal play and movement which enlivens, embellishes, and pushes us to self-discovery.

Teaching is an art and all the ideas previously expounded have a single purpose which is to show that a connected teacher i.e., accepting the learner in his entirety and integrity as a thinking and emoting entity is the foundation of a secure and safe relationship between the teacher who gives knowledge and the learner who receives. It is a form of empathy that has as its markers a form of attentiveness and tolerance of the learner aspect. The teacher listens, understands and teases the learner because they vibrate together in the same environment from which they must emerge as winners.

Jean Carasso says in this sense:

"To play, to accept the challenge of the game, is therefore to accept to improve oneself through pleasure, which makes the theater a fantastic tool for education.

References

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