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## DOING THEATRE AT SCHOOL: EFFECTIVE AND FUN LEARNING\*

**Introduction:** The theatre arts within the school curriculum has sparked a growing interest in schools as they have unique qualities that can help teachers propose teaching methods and strategies to train subjects who are able to identify their feelings in social contexts, but also a way to attract students' attention and at the same time have an enjoyable and entertaining learning experience.

**Research Aim:** The aim of this research was to evaluate the effectiveness of using the arts within curricular learning through a literature review. In addition, a questionnaire was administered to primary school teachers in Taranto, Italy, and its province, on the validity of the use of theatre at school.

**Evidence-based Facts:** The experience of theatre in education enables students to explore help-seeking options. Even apart from explicit learning, it is evident that engaging children and young people with the arts can have a positive impact on their mental health and well-being.

**Summary:** Encouraging varied activities should be considered a cornerstone for incorporating theatre practice into the school learning program, as it appears to be not far removed, in terms of education, from the school needs of the pupils themselves. The teachers interviewed themselves turn out to be, in this sense, still very restrained and tied to curricular activities to the detriment of the implementation of training interventions that are essential and geared to enhancing different skills.

**Keywords:** theatre, school, learning, well-being, mental health, motivation

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## INTRODUCTION

When we ask ourselves what theatre is, we must start from its etymology. The term “theatre” derives from the Greek *théatron*, meaning “spectacle”, and the verb *theàomai*, meaning “to see”; both terms encapsulate a set of disciplines that come together to create a live performance. The starting point is the narrative basis of dramatization, in which a story (an event or a play) is told through these disciplines, i.e. “drama”, which is not to be understood with a negative connotation, but in the semantic sense of the Greek word *draw* meaning “I act”.

The arts have been proposed as a fundamental tool of education; just think of the great dramas of ancient Greek culture that benefited from educational actions in the religious and socio-political spheres. Learning through the arts increases an individual’s exposure to multiple ways of experiencing the world and, in so doing, increases the potential for human development (Hardiman, 2016). The arts can improve a student’s overall thinking capacity and willingness to learn: persistence on the task, more sustained attention, sharper observational skills, richer tools for expression, and improved focus (Aprotosoaië-Iftimi, 2015). There is no single way to do theatre with children: theatre art is one of those rare educational and didactic opportunities in which several skills are activated simultaneously within a collective work (Bortolotti and Quaggio, 2007). Helga Dentale, an expert in theatre pedagogy and expressive languages and proponent of the Teatro in Gioco® Method, uses the equivalence Theatre = play. However, preparing a theatre show with children is a laborious process, which generates performance anxiety in children and teachers. It involves setting up, assembling skits, and endlessly replicating movements and jokes. Comparing theatre to acting is a cliché, a stereotype. Theatre cannot be demonstrated. Theatre cannot be indoctrination (Dentale, 2015).

The teacher, Mario Lodi, does not think of theatre and end-of-year performances for an audience of parents: he thinks of a “social space”, an arena in which to make his students’ sense of participation grow, to make citizens little by little. The classroom is a training ground for democracy, it offers to teachers and students a tool and a space for democracy (Rivoltella, 2021). From recent studies on the validity of the use of theatrical art at school, learning and teaching practices were examined involving physical and role-playing games and how games and gamification could be adapted to the curriculum and pedagogical objectives of teachers. A key finding is that educators, open to working with the wide-ranging possibilities of games, must apply creative and nuanced pedagogical thinking to the design of playful learning. This generates a number of curriculum-related learning opportunities, the development of key competencies, and the creation of an inclusive learning environment that supports and enables the emergence of different strengths and interests for the benefit of individuals and the community (Bolstad and McDowall, 2019). In the face of the growing interest in the inclusion of the arts in schools, it was analyzed, through a systematic review, the effective-

ness of the use of theatre in school learning and interviewed the teachers of the primary school of Taranto (Italy) and province on the effectiveness of the use of theatre art at school.

## RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTION

This research work follows the statements of a Systematic Literature Review, conceived as a systematic process of selection, analysis, review and evaluation of studies. In this case, the research questions that guide the process are: can the theatre facilitate the child in educational learning? How can teachers effectively incorporate the teaching of the theatrical arts into their lesson programs and/or teaching styles?

## EVIDENCE-BASED REVIEW

Table 1.

*Structure research demand*

P	I	C	O
<i>Population</i>	<i>Intervention</i>	<i>Comparison</i>	Results
School level, primary school.	Type of theatre intervention (improvisation, movement, reading, etc.) duration of the intervention, description of the intervention.	Type of activity of the control group.	Category of results between cognitive skills, school performance.

Source: Authors' own study.

The PICO structure was used to define the research question to which this systematic review of the literature responds. The methodology of data collection that took place between October 2022 and ended in April 2023 and, therefore, the conduct of the survey, followed the typical paradigm of descriptive research. We started from the website of the University Library System of the University of Urbino Carlo Bo, Italy. Later, investigations were also started through the EBSCO database, through which the following databases were consulted: APA PsycArticles, APA PsycINFO, Audiobook Collection (EBSCOhost), eBook Business Collection (EBSCOhost), eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), eBook Open Access (OA) Collection (EBSCOhost), ERIC, MLA Directory of Periodicals, MLA International Bibliography with Full Text, Open Dissertations, Philosophers Index with Full Text, Political Science Collection, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Complete, SPORTDiscus with Full Text. The parametrics used were: “theatre school”, “drama

school”, “drama in the classroom”, “theatre activity”, “theatre education”, “theatre and movement”, “theatre children”, “theatre learning”, “theatre in primary school”, “children”, “childhood”, “kids”, “theatre writing”, “theatre reading”, “theatre didactic”, “teacher and theatre”, “teacher primary school”.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria are:

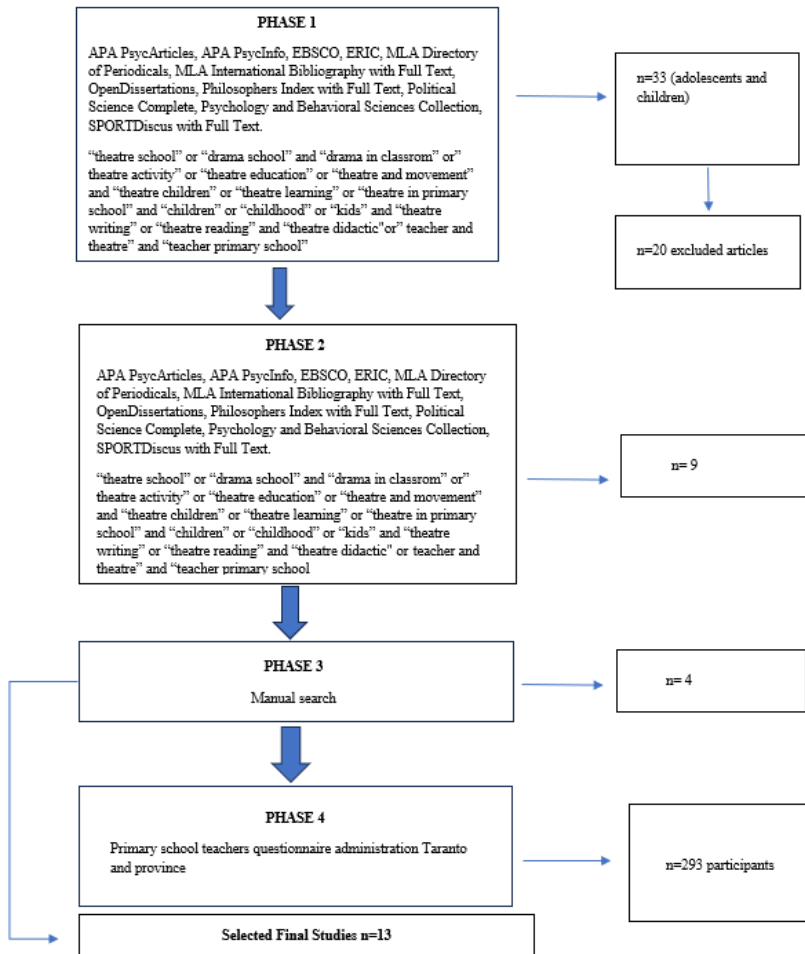
- inclusion criteria: scientific studies between 2010 and 2022, target age of the sample between 5 and 12 years, written studies in English and Spanish with the availability of the full text. Finally, the option to consult only academic publications has been selected;
- exclusion criteria: age target, which included samples of adolescents and adults, middle and high school teachers, studies carried out before 2010 or written in different languages from English and Spanish, research aimed at purely clinical populations, and studies not in line with the objective. Following the exclusion of duplicates and irrelevant results, a total of 15 articles were examined.

In conclusion, the last step of manual research was carried out encouraged by reading and deepening of the articles included previously, thanks to which 2 articles were found and added. As we will see in the course of this work, the questionnaire, administered between December 2022 and January 2023, has been oriented exclusively to gather information about the opinion and judgment of the teaching staff in service within the province of Taranto, with reference to the importance of theatrical activities within learning processes. It should also be pointed out that the type of questions asked to the teaching staff has been characterized by closed and constrained answers on certain topics, identified by the writer as fundamental to be able to lead to the formulation of a judgment with respect to the predisposition of teachers interviewed to support theater initiatives within schools. The analyzed sample can be considered medium-sized, with answers joined and cataloged through the appropriate IT tool made available by Google, compared to the administration of appropriate sets of questions. In particular, the respondents were 293, all primary school teachers within the province of Taranto. In this respect, it should be noted that the sample analyzed is distinguished by being homogeneous with regard to teacher training and specifically to the tasks performed. It is certainly unbalanced research in terms of the gender of the participants in the interview, for almost all of the samples analyzed were formed by women. However, this factor is not relevant to the description of the carried out analysis. This type of data collection methodology differs significantly from the qualitative and quantitative methodology. The discriminating element is certainly that of the statistical validity of the data collected. Both qualitative research, often consisting of interviews and informal interviews with key figures within productive organizations, both quantitative and structured in questions with the collection of data relating to a given sample and structured in such a way as to provide a dimension, precisely, of a quantitative type of a given

phenomenon. It must also be said that this type of research, the descriptive one, was carried out within the present work and should be considered the most common form of online investigation as conclusive because of its quantitative nature. This research has the characteristics of a survey able to give a quantitative dimension of a given phenomenon, but not the statistical and analysis constraints that true quantitative research imposes. The general objective of this working methodology is to better define an opinion, attitude, or behavior of a group of people regarding a particular aspect. Conceptually, the validity and usefulness of this type of analysis are certainly comparable to the answer to be given to a multiple-choice question. A questionnaire, as well as the one structured and used in the course of this analysis, provides insights that we can define of a predefined nature, as those who respond have had – and in general have – predefined answers. The data that come out of it describe the attitude towards a given phenomenon, also being able to count on a discreet database that inside of the analyzed sample has a sort of significativity, exactly of a descriptive nature. Quite the opposite, a more rigorous methodology would have made it possible to understand the validity of certain responses on a larger scale. The choice of this research methodology is, therefore, to provide results that could also be useful for statistical inference. However, within the research methodology, the typical principles of exploratory research have also been used, since, although in a closed way and with predefined answers, an attempt has also been made to investigate the personal convictions of respondents with regard to certain topics, which are the subject of this text. While the weaknesses of this type of analysis are to be found in the lack of statistical validity, the method used has made it possible to measure the strength of opinion, attitudes, or behavior of a target group in relation to a specific topic such as theatre initiatives. It is no coincidence that the part of the questionnaire that returns the results in terms of demographic data of the schools considered is also very important.

At the level of analysis of the results, the working method used has made it possible to limit as much as possible any distortions within the results provided. This was done by defining the characteristics of the respondents before conducting the analysis. Basically, all this information can be used by organizations to make better decisions. It is certain that the achieved results describe a certain phenomenon and certainly do not provide analytical data capable of assuming certain explanations. The purpose of the analysis is to provide information indicating a trend, therefore, of descriptive data valid in a short period of time. It turns out to be impossible to understand the reason for certain choices. In the course of commenting on the data found in the part “Questionnaire to primary school teachers of Taranto and province – methodology and data collection”, we try to outline these descriptions to the conclusions of the reference literature on the subject, literature partly cited and in some respects preparatory to this analysis.

Figure 1.  
Flow chart of the research phases



Source: Authors' own study.

## RESULTS

Fifteen total studies were valid at the end of the research, the sample of which consisted of children between the ages of 5 and 11 and primary school teachers. The characteristics of the analyzed studies, including objectives, activities, and results, are highlighted in Table 2.

Table 2.  
Selected studies on how theatre can positively influence curricular learning and how teachers can integrate theatre into teaching programs, taking into account the relationship between theatre activity and learning.

YEAR TITLE	N° OF CHILDREN/ TEACHERS AGE, DURATION SETTING	OBJECTIVE, TYPE OF RESEARCH	ACTIVITIES	RESULTS	INSTRUMENTS
2011. Integrating theater arts into the classroom: The new responsibilities of the elementary school teacher	1 teacher interviewed Age: / Duration: /	This paper researches how teachers can successfully incorporate theatre arts into their daily programs. The aim of this study is to find out if and how students benefit from teachers' integration of theatre arts into their lessons, as well as to find effective ways to do so. Interview Questions.	The interview asked a series of direct questions on the subject and was transcribed without leaving out any details. The interview and location were kept to protect the privacy of those involved.	The integration of theatre arts into the school curriculum has a positive effect on students.	Interview technique

<p>2018.</p> <p>The impact of criteria-referenced formative assessment on fifth-grade students' theater arts achievement</p>	<p>520 children Ages 10–11 years 13 schools Duration: 5 years</p>	<p>The aim of this study is to improve student achievement in the arts by providing teachers with the use of balanced assessment and the integration of technology in instruction and evaluation.</p> <p>Experimental study</p>	<p>Teachers in the treatment group received professional development for the purposes of this project. The teachers in the control group did not receive any professional development and used their regular teaching practices.</p>	<p>Evaluation is strongest for performance-based learning activities.</p>	<p>Pre and post assessment of success in theatre arts were measured by Benchmark Arts Assessments – Theatre Arts (BAATA). The BAATA were developed to measure students' understanding of theatre arts concepts and their application.</p>
<p>2020.</p> <p>What do teachers think and do about theatre at school?</p>	<p>326 primary school teachers Age: / Duration: /</p>	<p>The aim of the research is to investigate teachers' understanding of the practice and use of drama in the early years of primary school.</p> <p>Qualitative and quantitative descriptive study.</p>	<p>Distribution of the questionnaire to teachers throughout the state.</p>	<p>Respondents understand that theatre is important at school, but at the same time there are no theatre qualification courses for teachers and in the future educators can be trained in the use of theatre practice and games.</p>	<p>A questionnaire with closed and open questions: SPSS software; IRaMuTeO software</p>



<p>2014. The effect of readers' theatre on the reading ability of elementary special education students</p>	<p>10 children Age: 10 years Duration: six weeks</p>	<p>This study hypothesised that students with special educational needs in primary school, Readers Theatre, would significantly increase their reading fluency skills. Qualitative study</p>	<p>Scripts were given that were similar to the texts in their didactic reading levels. The chosen scripts were given to the groups for practice and familiarisation</p>	<p>Data suggest that if students showed an increase in fluency during six weeks of intervention, it can be assumed that they would certainly benefit from the intervention for the entire school year. With appropriate support, these students can make progress in reading.</p>	<p>Screening tools and database for monitoring students.</p>
<p>2015. Using readers theater as a facilitator in elementary school English training</p>	<p>32 children Ages: 10–11 years Duration: 44 days</p>	<p>The aim of the study was to investigate the effect of Readers Theatre training on primary school students. Quantitative and qualitative study</p>	<p>While participating in Readers Theatre, participants were engaged in theatre activities from reading aloud to performing on stage.</p>	<p>The results suggested that teachers use Readers Theatre activities to instruct students in reading English. Thanks to these activities, students are motivated to read English-language books and gain meaningful experiences from the characters in the plot.</p>	<p>Anglia Ascensis Junior Level and questionnaire.</p>

<p>2017.</p> <p>The effectiveness of readers' theatre on fluency, comprehension, and motivation on primary students</p>	<p>27 children</p> <p>Ages: 7–9 years</p> <p>Duration: Two weeks</p>	<p>Use of an expository text to determine whether Readers Theatre increases comprehension and mastery of information content.</p> <p>Experimental study</p>	<p>The research included repeated reading passages based on the same content material.</p>	<p>This research was conducted on the basis of the average abilities of second-grade pupils, with a reader's script and a repeated reading control curriculum. It may be advantageous to create a written script for various reading abilities. The lack of diversity among reading materials may have contributed to the small or no effects found in this study, as the content material in this study was created at an average second-grade reading level for the specific time of the academic year.</p>	<p>The Wechsler Individual Achievement Test-Third Edition (WIAT-III). easyCBM. Motivational assessment. Assessment of knowledge acquisition. Delayed assessment of knowledge retention.</p>
<p>2020</p> <p>Using theatre to develop writing skills: The Story Pirates idea storm</p>	<p>25 children</p> <p>Age: 8 years</p> <p>Duration: 5 meetings</p>	<p>The Story Pirates programme involved a group teaching children how to write stories and then transforming their stories into a sketch comedy show.</p> <p>Exploratory study.</p>	<p>To establish a basis of writing skills, each student wrote a story using the following suggestion: "Write a story involving a character who has to solve a problem. Your character can be a real person, an animal or an imaginary creature. Something should go wrong and your character must solve the problem".</p>	<p>The percentage of students incorporating key elements of writing – settings, main characters, additional characters, and motifs – increased significantly after their participation in the Story Pirates program. These results suggest that drama-based interventions can strengthen the writing skills of primary school students.</p>	<p>Flesch Reading Ease, used to assess the improvement of the whole story, was compared the difference in word count and sentence count. <b>Flesch-Kincaid</b>, in narrative style and in the completeness of the structure of the story.</p>

<p>2017. Playlinks: A theatre-for-young audiences artist-in-the-classroom project</p>	<p>248 primary school children Ages: 6–11 years Duration: 10 seminars</p>	<p>Enriching and deepening students' theatre learning experiences through theatre-based activities and optimal conditions for conducting artistic initiatives in the classroom. A quantitative and qualitative study</p>	<p>Phase 1 pre-production workshop: a visit to the classroom by an actor who presented two activities related to the content and script themes. Phase 2: performance of the play, seen simultaneously by all the classes. Phase 3 post-production workshop: classroom visit by an actor who presented three drama-based activities designed to deepen the student's understanding of the play.</p>	<p>The results focus on teachers' perceptions on three topics: a) student engagement; b) learning across the cognitive and affective domains; and c) benefits for teachers.</p>	<p>Assignment of the evaluation form to the teachers of the classes participating in the research. The form consisted of two parts: a) an evaluation on a Likert scale; b) a space for written comments on the workshops.</p>
<p>2021. Promoting well-being at school through a drama education workshop. An experience at primary school and its preliminary evaluation</p>	<p>102 children Ages: 10–11 years Duration: 10 meetings</p>	<p>Promoting through theatrical activity the psychosocial well-being of children both for their inner growth and for their relational sphere with peers and teachers. Cluster analysis</p>	<p>The research is structured in three stages: – design and definition of objectives, starting with an analysis of needs and resources, ten meetings lasting one and a half hours – final creative project, in which each pupil performs in front of parents and teachers. A questionnaire was administered to pupils and parents.</p>	<p>The aim of this study was to present a proposal for a Theatre Education Workshop, and the initial results demonstrated the usefulness of this intervention in promoting the psychosocial well-being of the participating children through an exploratory qualitative survey of the perceptions of the pupils and their parents.</p>	<p>Students and parents' responses were analyzed using T-Lab, a textual analysis software that allows for various in-depth textual operations of both an exploratory and interpretative nature and offers an advantage in terms of rigor and reliability of the analysis.</p>

<p>2020.</p> <p>Socio-environmental problems on the stage of primary education: Theatre as a didactic resource</p>	<p>9 primary school teachers</p> <p>Average age: 43.5 years</p> <p>Duration: /</p>	<p>Theatre as a teaching resource in education as a teaching-learning tool on socio-environmental issues.</p> <p>Qualitative study</p>	<p>An open text of questions was developed to guide the research and allow participants to openly express their conceptions while ensuring completeness of answers. The interview text was divided into two blocks: in the first, identification data was requested and the second was geared towards the specific interview questions. The interviews were conducted in person between the researcher and the selected participants.</p>	<p>The results were structured on the basis of three categories: motivation and values, context and subjects, and difficulties. The potential of theatre in primary schools is highlighted.</p>	<p>Semistructured interviews</p>
<p>2016</p> <p>The body as didactic mediator in learning reading and writing</p>	<p>28 children</p> <p>Age: 5 years</p> <p>Duration: one and a half months</p>	<p>Purpose of the study was to qualitatively assess the impact that corporeality has in didactics on the development of graphic competence, in terms of motor control in the execution of the stroke, memorization, recall and reproduction of letters.</p> <p>Pilot study</p>	<p>In the module the performative moment consisting in the motor execution of the letters with the whole body according to the alphabet bodily alphabet of the artist Menna and through the tactile exploration of them, first on the partner's body, then on a sheet of paper with digito-painting.</p>	<p>Body teaching, following an ECS-based approach and applied to writing, thus seems to confirm that the body offers itself as a powerful tool for mediating learning and that acquired knowledge is internalized through the joint and circular work of the mind and body.</p>	<p>Battery for assessing writing and spelling competence in compulsory schooling, by Tessoldi and Cornoldi.</p>

<p>2021.</p> <p>Outcomes of a readers' theatre program on oral reading prosody: An exploratory study in different environments</p>	<p>11 children</p> <p>Ages: 8–10 years</p> <p>Duration: 4 months</p>	<p>Through a Readers Theatre programme improve reading and prosody in dyslexic pupils.</p> <p>Exploratory study</p>	<p>The researchers carefully chose the texts so that they were accessible, i.e. suitable for the reading level of the students, neither too long nor with unfamiliar vocabulary. Twelve children's plays were selected, transcribed in Arial font, size 12 and 1.5 spacing. The text presented affirmative, negative, exclamatory, passive and active sentences.</p>	<p>The results obtained in this study indicate that the Readers Theatre programme appears to produce significant improvements with pupils with learning difficulties.</p>	<p>Model CIIP</p>
<p>2013.</p> <p>Can mimetics, a theatre-based practice, open possibilities for young people with learning disabilities? A capability approach</p>	<p>181 children</p> <p>Age: 6–11 years</p> <p>Duration: 5 years</p>	<p>The theatre practice of "mimicry" can transform and extend the aspirations and achievements of children and young people with learning disabilities.</p> <p>Longitudinal study.</p>	<p>The Open Theatre led interventions, through mime interventions, which involve a type of interactive communication based on imitation. These interventions took place weekly.</p>	<p>Mimicry has significant value for children with learning difficulties. The results suggest that mimicry provides a lived, dynamic process through which children can realise self-fulfilment and develop skills.</p>	<p>Four-point Likert scale, annotation of evidence and comments along with the evaluation.</p>

Source: Authors' own study.

The scientific studies that make up this systematic review come from the following countries: 5 from the United States, 2 from Italy, 1 from Great Britain, 1 from Canada, 1 from Spain, 1 from Brazil, 1 from Chile, and 1 from Taiwan. The included studies are divided as follows: two experimental studies (Chen and Andrade, 2018; Marshall, 2017), two exploratory studies (Mayes et al., 2020; Quezada, 2021), one pilot study (Paloma et al., 2016), one cluster analysis study (Molgora et al., 2021), one longitudinal study (Trowsdale and Hayhow, 2013), one quantitative and qualitative descriptive study (de Carvalho and de Sa, 2020), two qualitative studies (Lewis and Feng, 2014; Moreno-Fernandez, 2020); two quantitative and qualitative studies (Lin, 2015; McLauchlan, 2019) and one interview question (Brock, 2011). Nine of the thirteen studies examined included 1,184 children, of whom 10 were BES children, 11 were dyslexic, 181 were DSA, and the remainder as controls. The age range was 5–11 years. While, in the remaining four articles, 336 primary school teachers were examined.

The risks of bias were considered and mitigated:

- publication bias: a large number of scientific publications were considered, with results often confirming the authors' initial hypothesis, sometimes partially confirming it. Most of the studies analyzed a medium/high sample of participants,
- time lag bias: the scientific publications that were included in this systematic review include a wide time range from 2010 to 2022. This was done in order to avoid selection bias,
- language bias: the scientific publications are mainly written in English, only a few in Spanish and Italian. They were selected from the main search engines and published in scientific journals in the field.

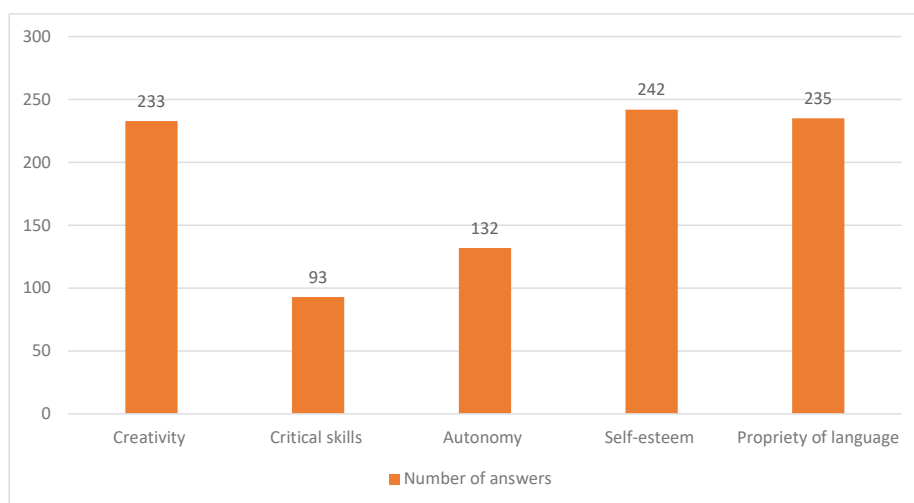
## QUESTIONNAIRE TO PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN TARANTO AND PROVINCE – METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

Based on the scientific research carried out on the use of theatre at school, studies from the teacher's point of view emerged in Table 1. The aim of this research was to verify how theatre is practised and taught in schools by teachers. The conducted qualitative and quantitative research involved schools in Taranto and its province, in Italy. As can be deduced from the answers obtained, the analysis conducted mainly concerned female teachers working in primary schools. The province within which the questionnaire was administered was Taranto. There were a total of 293 participants. The entire sample responded, in general, to question number two that theatre initiatives are to be considered important for the education of children. As mentioned above, the questionnaire aimed to gather general information precisely in the initial part, with the formulation of general questions.

With reference to the usefulness of theatre in the development of specific skills, we say that the sample is totally oriented towards the fact that theatre initiatives have a strong impact on pupils' creativity, self-esteem, and language skills. Acting means engaging and placing oneself in front of a specific audience by showing one's abilities. That is why it has a great impact on the evaluation of one's personality in relation to others, influencing the level of self-esteem.

Figure 2.

*Distribution of a number of answers by choices, theatre utility on the individual pupil*



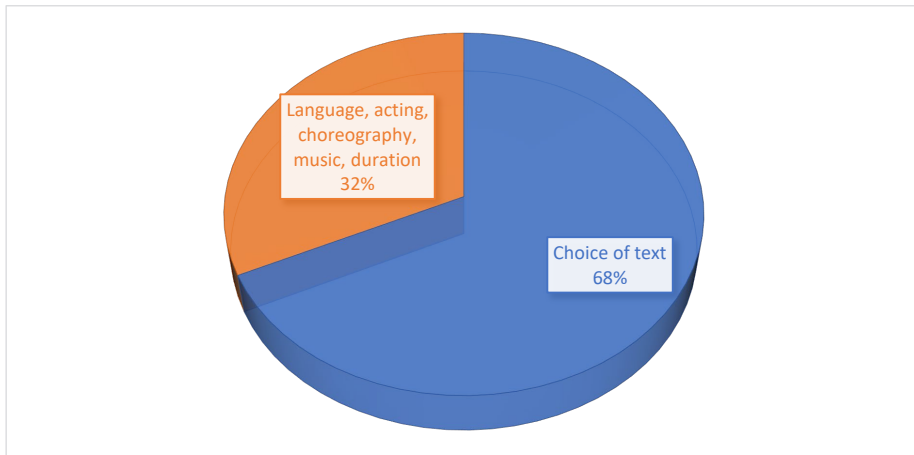
Source: Authors' own study.

Generally speaking, the answers given are all related to several choices, all inherent to creativity and self-esteem. The choice that totals the fewest responses is certainly the one relating to critical capabilities, due to the tender age of the subjects who materially participate in this type of initiative. Also, with reference to autonomy, the need to guide the young "actors" within theatrical events that we can define as articulated and even complex makes the choice concerning autonomy less important. The data concerning the age of the participants certainly influences this type of choice. The chosen text, the performance, and the topics that characterize it are certainly some of the main elements that teachers dwell on in their comprehensive assessment of the value of theatre initiatives. Acting and the way of internalizing a given initiative totaled, together with the choice of text, the highest number of choices concerning the points considered crucial regarding the use of theatre performance for educational purposes. Isolating the individual choices imposed by the closed answers, it can be seen that around 70% of the respondents opt for the choice of text as the crucial element regarding the performance

of a play. This figure should be interpreted as an absolute percentage relating to the individual choice and not to the overall choices made by the sample. A similar concentration of responses is obtained with reference to the choice of acting as the predominant element in terms of the importance of the theatrical performance.

Figure 3.

*Frequency of "text choice" out of total answers regarding the importance of representation*

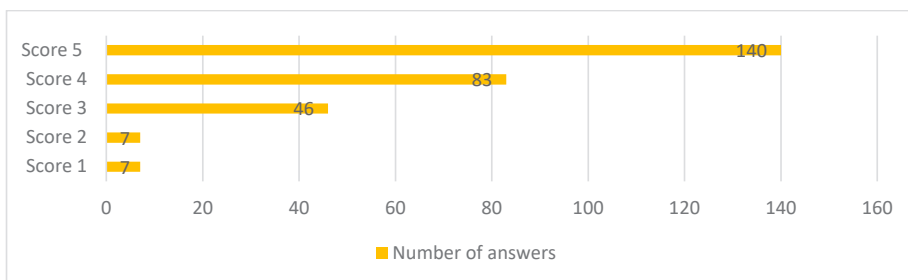


Source: Authors' own study.

The effectiveness of drama is definitely consistently recognized with specific reference to the answers given. On a scale of 1 to 5, it has to be said that teachers attach crucial importance to the effectiveness of drama in addressing curricular learning.

Figure 4.

*Curricular learning effectiveness rating. Score min 1 to max 5*



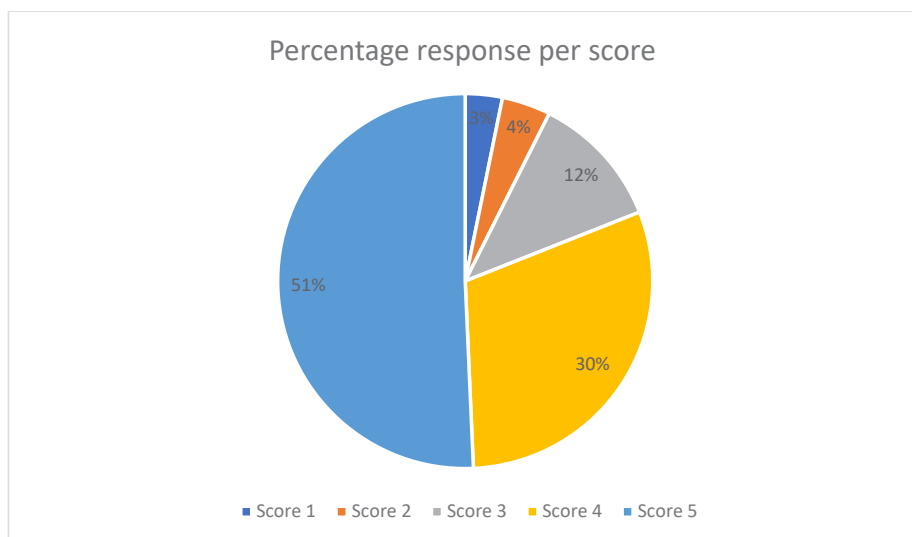
Source: Authors' own study.



Concerning the ways in which theatre performs its educational function and the reasons why the interviewees attach so much importance to it, most of the answers focused on describing theatre initiatives as participative and, therefore, capable of significantly involving pupils. Participation is also seen as a slightly higher factor than the involvement of pupils in the classroom, in studying parts and learning acting. The answers regarding the place of the theatre within an inclusive and participatory context are clear: 190 of the 293 respondents, give a clear indication of the utmost importance of theatre as a tool for intervention and inclusion. A further 60 teachers give a score of 4, i.e. almost the maximum. With regard to the assessment of overall effectiveness in relation to disciplinary performance, the answers giving the highest score are less frequent than in the previous question. If, therefore, one contextualizes the development of cognitive skills through drama initiatives, the answers are certainly clear-cut and oriented towards emphasizing the importance of the latter. However, the responses are not as clear-cut as those found in terms of participation and inclusion.

Figure 5.

*Percentage assessment of cognitive activity by type of score (1 min – 5 max)*

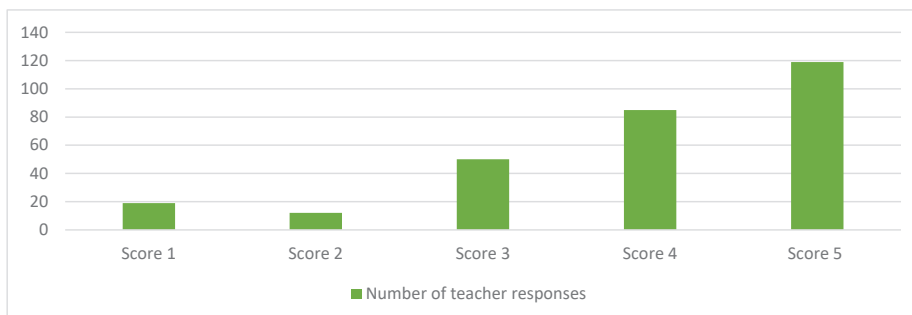


Source: Authors' own study.

Almost all of the sample responded positively to the possibility of attending courses specifically designed to enable teachers to acquire specific skills. There were even fewer responses concerning improvements in the teaching pathway, compared to the responses concerning the consolidation of cognitive skills assessed following theatre-based teaching interventions.

Figure 6.

Scores of responses related to improvements in awareness of expressive skills (min 1 – max 5)



Source: Authors' own study.

It can be observed that, although the answers from the sample are polarised decisively on a score of 5, it can be noted that half of the respondents do not fully and overwhelmingly recognize the validity of certain initiatives in relation precisely to student improvement. However, although perplexities do exist and are documented by the answers regarding precisely the usefulness from a didactic point of view of theatre performances at school, the majority of the sample practically agrees in considering such kinds of events to be strongly important for the general concept of children's growth.

Figure 7.

Percentage scores obtained with reference to the assessment of the general growth of the children (min 1 – max 5)



Source: Authors' own study

## REFLECTIONS ON THE QUESTIONNAIRE

For further information, here are the 15 questions, 4 of them are open-ended and 11 of them are closed-ended, formulated and proposed to the 293 primary school teachers in the province of Taranto:

Teacher: Where is the school where you practice your profession located?

1. In your opinion, is it important to have theatrical experiences with children?
2. Do you think that theatre helps develop creativity, greater autonomy, self-esteem and language skills in children?
3. When staging a show, what do you give most importance to?
4. Do you believe in the effectiveness of theatre in addressing curricular learning?
5. Why?
6. Theatre can be considered a tool capable of promoting:
  - Ideal space for creating and sharing.
  - An experience lived in a group and not individually.
  - Bodily, graphic-pictorial, manipulative and linguistic expressiveness.
7. What difficulties do you find in developing theatre-related activities?
8. Do you consider theatre as a teaching resource in primary education?
9. How effective are theatre interventions in schools for improving students' academic-disciplinary performance, cognitive and non-cognitive skills?
10. Do you consider the proposal of theatre education training projects aimed at teachers useful?
11. As a teacher, have you carried out theatrical activities directly at school? What are the pros and cons?
12. Have you noticed significant improvements in your students' awareness of their expressive abilities?
13. Did your students feel involved in the theatrical experience they had at school?
14. Do you think that theatre is useful for the growth of children?

The administration of the questionnaire aimed to investigate, in general, among the teachers interviewed, how theatrical art can be used within the school context.

In the first instance it is clear from the teachers that the use of theatre has enormous potential in the curricular context, but, at the same time, it is proposed on few occasions since the teachers themselves do not have the training to propose such activities and the hours available are aimed exclusively at curricular learning.

It can be seen that a small percentage of teachers (20%) carried out theatrical activities in class with fair/good results in terms of attention, motivation, satisfaction, involvement, confirming the positive results also of the research taken into consideration, through the answers obtained from the open-ended questions this can be stated: Involvement, language development, content acquisition, develop-

ment of cognitive skills; cooperation, teamwork; The pros are endless. Children learn while having fun. They gain more confidence in themselves.

Due to the lack of training, the little time available (preferring “classical” curricular contents), the resistance at times from parents, and the space not always being adequate, it is still difficult to offer theatre arts at school. While recognizing its added value in educational/learning activities, it is not valued as it should and would like. A paradigm shift will certainly be needed: strengthening non-verbal languages with attention to the affectivity of students, taking care of them, also aided by doing theatre for a quality of individual experience and human relationships within the school community.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The results of the research carried out (Table 1) and the analysis conducted in the course of this work showed, in fact, that theatre initiatives within the school dynamic are of great importance both for almost all the teachers interviewed and in facilitating pupils’ learning. In most of the studies analyzed, it appears that the use of the Readers Theatre technique brings clear improvements in text comprehension and reading fluency (Lin, 2015; Marshall, 2017), even in those pupils with dyslexia and special educational needs (Quezada, 2021; Lewis and Feng, 2014). Another research recognizes theatrical mimicry as a good practice to integrate during learning, especially for pupils with learning difficulties (Trowsdale and Hayhow, 2013). This provides a dynamic process for the child to develop self-actualization. Some research has found benefits in including theatre practice in the acquisition of writing (Mayes et al., 2020; Paloma et al., 2016) through the analysis of different areas of learning (Moreno-Fernandez, 2020), in relation to children’s psychosocial well-being; research (Molgora et al., 2021; McLauchlan, 2019) affirms the improvement of peer-teacher relationships. The aim of this work was to analyze the way in which teachers can incorporate theatre arts into their daily programs, although little research was found on this subject. Therefore, given the limited number of scientific studies, a questionnaire was administered in the schools of Taranto and its province and, according to the analysis conducted, it was shown that in the teachers’ imagination, the use of theatre at school is not only formally an extracurricular activity but also in substance. This statement is intended to make it clear that they do not believe that pupils’ teaching methods and scholastic skills improve significantly through the use of such types of events. It should be pointed out that very often, teachers recognize the socializing, inclusive value of theatrical initiatives, but not with the same conviction do they recognize the usefulness of certain events in enhancing pupils’ school performance. In fact, this can be deduced from the study of the results obtained. Teachers recognize the importance of certain

initiatives but are limited to the playful and socializing aspects of them, so there remains a very important distinction between the subjects studied and the choice of theatrical texts and performances. The research, although descriptive in nature and limited to a precise sample of teachers, shows that the predisposition of the teaching staff is not totally unbalanced towards a progressive change in methods of study and knowledge transmission, while such innovation is evident in Brock's (2011) study. From a general point of view, the enthusiasm for a certain kind of initiative is beyond doubt. The generality of those interviewed maintains that certain projects are essential within a school in which inclusion and the limiting of what we might call differences turns out to be a strategic element for the generation of future cultural and social value. It should also be pointed out at the same time that teachers are absolutely ready to receive suitable training in this regard (de Carvalho and de Sá, 2020). The same fact, which, reading between the lines of the answers obtained within the questionnaire, becomes clear: teachers wish to embark on training processes that can materially enrich their cultural background (Chen and Andrade, 2018). Theatre appears to be one of the initiatives and practices that can ennoble man, both from a subjective and personal point of view and in a collective sense. The willingness on the part of the teaching staff to get involved should be considered relevant: teachers unequivocally recognize the need to broaden their cultural background and are ready to use certain initiatives to support what we can define as the pupils' growth path. It is also important to emphasize that this type of willingness is, in many cases, conditioned by uncertainties in terms of how certain programs are to be implemented and the usefulness of the training actions themselves.

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## TEATR W SZKOLE: EFEKTYWNA I PRZYJEMNA NAUKA

**Wprowadzenie:** Wprowadzenie sztuki teatralnej do szkolnego programu nauczania wywołało rosnące zainteresowanie wśród nauczycieli pracujących w szkole. Wynika to z tego, że posiada ona unikalne cechy mogące pomóc im w stosowaniu nowych metod i strategii nauczania przedmiotów, które są w stanie zidentyfikować uczucia w kontekście społecznym. Ponadto przyciągają uwagę uczniów, którzy mają przyjemne i zabawne doświadczenie edukacyjne.

**Cel badań:** Celem badania była ocena skuteczności wykorzystania sztuki w nauczaniu poprzez przegląd literatury. Ponadto przeprowadzono badania ankietowe wśród nauczycieli szkół podstawowych w Taranto we Włoszech i jego prowincji na temat zasadności wykorzystania teatru w szkole.

**Stan wiedzy:** Doświadczenie teatru w edukacji pozwala również uczniom odkrywać opcje poszukiwania pomocy. Nawet oprócz wyraźnego uczenia się istnieją dowody na to, że angażowanie dzieci i młodych ludzi w sztukę może mieć pozytywny wpływ na ich zdrowie psychiczne i samopoczucie.

**Podsumowanie:** Należy to uznać za punkt wyjścia do wprowadzenia praktyki teatralnej do szkolnego programu nauczania, ponieważ wydaje się, że teatr nie jest odległy od edukacji i odpowiada na potrzeby samych uczniów. Nauczyciele, z którymi przeprowadzono wywiady, wciąż jednak wykazują dużą powściągliwość, pozostając ściśle związani z tradycyjnym programem nauczania. To niestety utrudnia realizację interwencji edukacyjnych, które są niezbędne i ukierunkowane na rozwijanie różnorodnych umiejętności.

**Słowa kluczowe:** teatr, szkoła, nauka, dobre samopoczucie, zdrowie psychiczne, motywacja

