

DIGITAL STORYTELLING: AN INNOVATIVE DIDACTIC APPROACH IN THEATRE FOR IMPROVING PSYCHOPHYSICAL WELLBEING AND SELF-ESTEEM

DIGITAL STORYTELLING: UN APPROCCIO DIDATTICO INNOVATIVO NEL TEATRO PER IL MIGLIORAMENTO DEL BENESSERE PSICOFISICO E DELL'AUTOSTIMA

Roberta Minino

Università degli Studi di Napoli Parthenope

roberta.minino@uniparthenope.it

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8416-0807> 

Marianna Liparoti

Università degli Studi Pegaso

marianna.liparoti@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2192-6841> 

Double Blind Peer Review

Citazione

Minino R., Liparoti M., (2023) Digital storytelling: an innovative didactic approach in theatre for improving psychophysical wellbeing and self-esteem, *Giornale Italiano di Educazione alla Salute, Sport e Didattica Inclusiva - Italian Journal of Health Education, Sports and Inclusive Didactics*. Anno 7, V 2. Edizioni Universitarie Romane

Doi:

<https://doi.org/10.32043/gsd.v7i2.838>

Copyright notice:

© 2023 this is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Open Journal System and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

gsdjournal.it

ISSN: 2532-3296

ISBN: 978-88-6022-470-5

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the work was to evaluate the effect of theatre on psychophysical well-being and self-esteem, and whether innovative teaching approaches, such as digital storytelling, bring improvement on well-being and self-esteem compared to traditional classes. The results show a greater state of psychophysical well-being and self-esteem in those who practice theatre, and that the group who attended classes with digital-storytelling further improved their level of well-being and self-esteem

Lo scopo del lavoro è stato quello di valutare l'effetto del teatro su benessere psicofisico e autostima, e se approcci didattici innovativi, come il digital storytelling, apportino un miglioramento su benessere e autostima rispetto alle lezioni tradizionali. I risultati evidenziano un maggiore stato di benessere psicofisico ed autostima in coloro che praticano teatro, e che il gruppo che ha frequentato lezioni con il digital-storytelling ha ulteriormente migliorato il livello di benessere e di autostima

KEYWORDS

Theatre, Didactic, Digital Storytelling, well-being, self-esteem
Teatro, Didattica, Digital Storytelling, Benessere, Autostima

Received 10/04/2023

Accepted 3/05/2023

Published 20/05/2023

1. Introduction

Performing arts are a set of scenic arts and represent a form of communication based on the use of the performer's body and voice(Dixon, 2015). These art forms are often created to be presented live, and the audience is an important element of the performance, which can influence its development and dynamics. The term Performative is closely related to the term performance, which derives from the late Latin "performāre", where the prefix "pēr" stands for "all the way", thus translatable as "forming all the way". Usually, performance refers to the result achieved in a competition and generally refers to athletes and sports(Ohuruogu et al., 2016), although it is also used in other contexts, such as finance, writing, linguistic and the arts.

The performing arts enable people to activate their creativity in more direct and multiform ways, allowing them to express themselves through the body, in order to represent the external world and the society to which they belong(Thomson & Jaque, 2016). Indeed, they are often used to convey social and cultural messages, and can also be used to entertain or create an emotional experience(Botes, 2016). Furthermore, the performing arts can be used to explore universal themes such as love, death and loneliness. For this reason, the performing event can be conceived as a multidisciplinary representation, sometimes realistic and sometimes imaginary, of reality(Reinelt & Roach, 2007). The main forms of performing arts are dance, music, and theatre, while secondary forms are illusionism, mime, puppet theatre, circus art, and performance art(Helbo, 1987).

Among them, theatre is a form of artistic expression involving the body, capable of integrating different aspects of the sensory, emotional and mental self, within the inclusive boundaries of the body structure(Chabert, 1982). Theatre is also a form of research and knowledge that investigates human nature, social relationships, emotions and conflicts(Antonacci et al., 2016). Thus, theatre is a performance art that relies on action and interaction between performers and spectators.

Theatre is able to stimulate the imagination, empathy, sensitivity and capacity for expression in both adults and children(Grabowski, 2013). It is precisely for this reason that it can be considered a very useful tool for fostering development in various aspects during developmental age. Through acting, children learn about themselves and others, how to work in a group, and how to recognise and manage emotions. Theatre also helps them develop their self-esteem, autonomy

and social relationships, fostering an inclusive environment(Lewandowska & Węziak-Białowolska, 2020). Theatre is therefore a very useful activity for children's psychophysical well-being and self-esteem, preparing them to face life's challenges with creativity and courage(Walsh-Bowers & Basso, 1999).

Besides traditional theatre, there are other forms of theatrical communication that exploit the potential of new technologies and digital media. One of these is digital storytelling, the art of storytelling using multimedia tools such as images, video, audio, music and text(O'Byrne et al., 2018). Digital storytelling is a practice that involves both creativity and digital competence, and can be used in various educational and cultural settings(Alismail, 2015). It is considered to be an innovative teaching methodology that is very effective in developmental ages, stimulating learning and fostering excellent skills in creativity, problem solving, as one is the author, director and producer of one's own story. Its primary function would be to help people tell stories from their lives through the use of media. Digital storytelling is an active process already in the design phase, intentional for those who realise it, cooperative because it is often the result of the collaboration of several subjects, authentic because it recounts real experiences and lived experiences and constructive because it wants to convey well-defined messages(Mittiga, 2018).The activity of inventing stories requires and prompts the development of a variety of cognitive skills, such as selecting information and knowledge, comparing and reviewing it, but also language skills(McAdams, 2019).

Starting from the now clear knowledge that theatre plays an important role in development and psychophysical well-being at different developmental ages, the aim of this work was to evaluate its effect in a cohort of young adolescents. In particular, firstly we wanted to assess psychophysical wellbeing and self-esteem in a group of children practising theatre, and to compare it with a group of children not practising any extracurricular activity. The second objective was to investigate whether the innovative didactic method of Digital Storytelling brought additional benefits in terms of well-being and self-esteem.

2. Methods

To pursue our purposes, we firstly assessed well-being and self-esteem in a group of adolescents practising theatre, compared to a group practising no extracurricular activity. In addition, we evaluated the effectiveness of implementing an innovative teaching method on well-being and self-esteem by

comparing a group that followed lessons implementing the Digital Storytelling strategy, and a group that continued to follow standard lessons.

2.1 Participants

Our sample group consists of 17 young adolescents who practice theatre, aged between 10 and 18 years. The control group consists of 15 young adolescents, with no extracurricular activities, compared in age and gender to the sample group.

2.2 Protocol

The first part of our experimental project involved administering the Multidimensional Test of Self-Esteem (TMA)(Filippello et al., 2013) and the Positive Affect and Negative Affect Scales (PANAS)(Terraciano et al., 2003) to the sample group and the control group, in order to assess the conditions of Self-Esteem and Psychophysical Well-being in the two groups.

Subsequently, we divided our sample group (consisting of 17 actors) into two subgroups, each consisting of 9 and 8 members respectively. The first group, which we will call the Experimental Group (EG), underwent to theatre lessons with an innovative teaching approach, the Digital Storytelling two hours a week for four weeks. The second group, the Traditional Group (TG), continued classes with the traditional teaching approach. Four weeks after the start of the protocol, the PANAS and TMA tests were re-administered to assess whether the experimental protocol followed by the EG had led to improvements in well-being and self-esteem, compared to the TG.

2.3 The Digital Storytelling

Lessons according to the Digital Storytelling teaching methodology included the performance of theatrical scenes from stories, chosen by the teachers that had 'take-home messages' useful for young participants' maturation. The stories were read in small groups and then partly performed, giving the young actors the opportunity to perform improvisations.

2.4 Test Administrated

Regarding the tests administered, the Positive Affect and Negative Affect Scales (PANAS) is a useful test to assess psychophysical well-being, and in particular positive and negative affective states. It consists of 20 items, 10 for the positive affection scale (PA) and 10 for the negative affection scale (NA). Participants had to assess their feelings at that precise moment and answer the item by choosing

one of five options (1=not at all, 2=a little, 3=moderately, 4=quite a bit, 5=extremely). Examples of items were 'full of energy', 'interested', 'happy', 'embarrassed', 'bored', etc(Terraciano et al., 2003).

The Multidimensional Self-Esteem Test (TMA) is a test designed to measure various components of self-esteem and in particular, it assesses self-perception in each of the following six subdomains: emotionality, interpersonal relationships, body experience, environmental control competence, school success and family life(Filippello et al., 2013).

2.5 Statistical Analysis

A T-test was performed to compare the sample group with the control group for both tests. As for the comparison between the EG and the TG, to assess the improvement PRE and POST the experimental protocol, DELTA values, (Δ =post score-pre score) were calculated for both the Positive Affection Scale and the Negative Affection Scale and for TMA test. Subsequently, a T-test between the Delta values was performed to compare the PANAS and TMA results of EG and TG.

3. Results

2.1 Theatre Group vs. Control Group

The first purpose of this work was to assess psycho-physical well-being and self-esteem in a group of young adolescents practising theatre and to compare it with a group of young adolescents who did not practising any extracurricular activity.

Psycho-physical wellbeing has been evaluated through the PANAS test, assessing positive and negative affective states. The comparison of the PANAS test scores of the sample group and the control group showed statistically significant differences between the two groups. In particular, the values relating to the positive affective state were statistically greater in the group of young people who practised theatre than in those who did not practise any extracurricular activity ($p < 0.01$). No statistically significant difference was found in the comparison between the two groups with regard to negative affective states.

The self-esteem has been evaluated through the TMA test (The Multidimensional Self-Esteem test) corrected considering the Z-scores. The comparison between the Theatre Group and the Control Group showed a statistically significant difference, with higher values for the theatre group ($p < 0.05$).

2.2 Digital Storytelling Group vs. Traditional Group

The second purpose of this paper was to evaluate, in the theatre context, whether the innovative didactic method of Digital Storytelling brought additional benefits in terms of well-being and self-esteem, compared to theatre practitioners with traditional lessons. In order to answer this question, we divided our sample group into two subgroups. The first, called the Experimental Group (EG), which followed theatre lessons using the Digital Storytelling method for four weeks, and the second which continued to follow the lessons using the traditional method. After 4 weeks, both groups took PANAS and TMA tests again.

With regard to psychophysical well-being, the positive affection results of the PANAS test showed no differences when comparing EG and TG, although there was a trend toward significance ($p=0.08$). However, the statistical analysis revealed a significant difference in the values of Negative Affect, with a significant reduction in the value of EG ($p<0.001$).

Concerning self-esteem, the comparison between EG and TR did not show a statistically significant difference.

4. Discussion

The aim of this paper was to assess the effect of the Performing Art of Theatre on Psychophysical Well-being and Self-Esteem in a group of young adolescents, and subsequently to evaluate whether the innovative didactic method of Digital Storytelling in the context of theatre could provide further improvements in well-being and self-esteem compared to traditional didactic methods.

In order to evaluate it, we firstly compared the results of the PANAS and TMA tests to a group of young people practising theatre and to a control group, which did not practise any extracurricular activity. The results of the comparison between the Theatre group and the Control Group showed that as far as Psychophysical Wellbeing is concerned our sample group had greater psychophysical wellbeing. In particular, adolescents practising theatre showed a higher score in the positive affection data of the PANAS. This result is partially confirmed in the literature, although there are no studies that use this test to investigate psychophysical well-being in young people practising theatre. However, Meeks et al., in their recent work, highlighted the positive effect of

theatre on well-being in different age groups, both in the role of spectator and actor, and above all the benefits on emotions and positive feelings it brings (Meeks et al., 2018). Conversely, our results showed that there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups in the Negative Affection Data of the PANAS. This result seems to be at odds with the above. However, practising theatre, young adolescents have fun, improve social relations, start to embody themselves in other characters by learning to know themselves better, but they also go against negative emotions like anxiety, confrontation with others, and other negative emotions that are not addressed.

With regard to the level of self-esteem, this work has shown that the group that practices theatre has a better level of self-esteem than those who do not practice any activity. After all, theatre, like other performing arts and other activities such as sports and physical activity, improves life skills, improving knowledge and self-awareness, problem-solving skills, belonging to a group, and fosters sociality and inclusion, factors that influence self-esteem (Conard & Asher, 2000; Wright, 2006).

The second aim of this paper was to assess whether the innovative didactic methodology of Digital Storytelling brought additional benefits in terms of well-being and self-esteem in theatre practitioners. To do this, we divided our Theatre Group in two subgroups, the first, the Experimental Group (EG), underwent to theatre lessons with the Digital Storytelling methodology, two hours a week for four weeks. The second group, the Traditional Group (TG), continued classes with the traditional teaching approach. Four weeks after the start of the experimental protocol, the tests were administered again in the two subgroups, and then the change in scores (Delta values) between PRE AND POST protocol were compared.

The comparison of the Delta value in the PANAS test between the two groups showed no statistically significant difference in Positive Affections, but it showed a difference in Negative Affections, with a clear reduction for those who practised theatre with Digital Storytelling. One possible key to interpreting this data is that, on the one hand, Positive affections have already statistically improved with traditional theatre practitioners compared to non-theatre practitioners, and apparently Digital Storytelling did not make any further improvements over the time span we considered. However, with regard to negative affections, digital storytelling proved to be a valid strategy to reduce them. Speculatively, we can assume that this is caused by the operators' choice of stories to represent. These stories dealt with topics also related to the improvement of negative affections (i.e. self-knowledge and acceptance, value of sharing, belonging to a group etc.).

Finally, with regard to self-esteem, our analysis did not show a statistically significant difference between the two groups. This could be caused by the fact that the duration of the study was too short and probably 4 weeks were not enough time to have significant changes in self-esteem. In fact, whereas the PANAS test, is a test that evaluates positive and negative feelings at the precise moment (and can also undergo variations with respect to what occurs on a daily basis), the TMA, evaluates self-esteem, which is a skill that is subject to fewer variations depending on the environment and therefore more complex to alter.

Conclusions

In conclusion, our study has shown first of all that theatre definitely has a remarkably positive effect on the psychological and physical self-esteem and well-being of young adolescents, particularly on positive emotions. In addition, it was shown that innovative teaching strategies and methodologies can be a useful tool in the theatre context that, when combined with classical teaching, can improve some aspects of well-being and reduce negative emotional states. Speculatively, we can say that although there was no improvement in self-esteem in the digital storytelling group, there was a tendency for improvement even if not significant. This could be caused by the short duration of the study. In fact, it is necessary to mention some limitations of this study, including the duration of the study. It would be interesting to evaluate the effect of Digital Storytelling over a long period of time to see whether the improvement in mental and physical well-being is accompanied by an improvement in self-esteem. In addition, another limitation is the small sample size. Indeed, it would be necessary to increase the number of participants to confirm our preliminary results.

References

- Alismail, H. A. (2015). Integrate Digital Storytelling in Education. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(9), 126–129.
- Antonacci, F., Mancino, E., & Guerra, M. (2016). Dietro le quinte: Pratiche e teorie tra educazione e teatro. *Dietro le quinte*, 0–0.

- Botes, P. (2016). Le performing arts. Un percorso di ricerca tra lingua, emozioni e movimento. *Formazione & insegnamento*, 14(2), Articolo 2.
- Chabert, P. (1982). The body in Beckett's theatre. *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 8, 23–28.
- Conard, F., & Asher, J. W. (2000). Self-Concept and Self-Esteem through Drama: A Meta-Analysis. *Youth Theatre Journal*, 14, 78–84.
- Dixon, S. (2015). *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation*. MIT Press.
- Filippello, P., Sorrenti, L., Larcan, R., & Rizzo, A. (2013). Academic underachievement, self-esteem and self-efficacy in decision making. *Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 1(3).
- Grabowski, D. (2013). Identity, knowledge and participation: Health theatre for children. *Health Education*, 113(1), 64–79.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/09654281311293646>
- Helbo, A. (1987). Theory of Performing Arts. *Theory of Performing Arts*, 1–161.
- Lewandowska, K., & Węziak-Białowolska, D. (2020). The impact of theatre on empathy and self-esteem: A meta-analysis. *Creativity Research Journal*, 32(3), 237–245. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10400419.2020.1821553>
- McAdams, D. P. (2019). “First we invented stories, then they changed us”: The Evolution of Narrative Identity. *Evolutionary Studies in Imaginative Culture*, 3(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.26613/esic.3.1.110>

- Meeks, S., Shryock, S. K., & Vandenbroucke, R. J. (2018). Theatre Involvement and Well-Being, Age Differences, and Lessons From Long-Time Subscribers. *The Gerontologist*, *58*(2), 278–289.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnx029>
- Mittiga, S. (2018). Il valore educativo del digital storytelling. *Media Education*, *9*(2), 308–328.
- O’Byrne, W. I., Houser, K., Stone, R., & White, M. (2018). Digital Storytelling in Early Childhood: Student Illustrations Shaping Social Interactions. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *9*.
<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01800>
- Ohuruogu, B., Jonathan, U. I., & Ikechukwu, U. J. (2016). Psychological Preparation for Peak Performance in Sports Competition. *Journal of Education and Practice*, *7*(12), 47–50.
- Reinelt, J. G., & Roach, J. R. (2007). *Critical Theory and Performance*. University of Michigan Press.
- Terraciano, A., McCrae, R. R., & Costa Jr., P. T. (2003). Factorial and construct validity of the Italian Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS). *European Journal of Psychological Assessment*, *19*, 131–141.
<https://doi.org/10.1027/1015-5759.19.2.131>
- Thomson, P., & Jaque, S. V. (2016). *Creativity and the Performing Artist: Behind the Mask*. Academic Press.

Walsh-Bowers, R., & Basso, R. (1999). Improving Early Adolescents' Peer Relations through Classroom Creative Drama: An Integrated Approach. *Children & Schools, 21*(1), 23–32. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/21.1.23>

Wright, P. R. (2006). Drama Education and Development of Self: Myth or Reality? *Social Psychology of Education, 9*(1), 43–65. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-005-4791-y>

Author Contribution

R.M: conceptualization; investigation; writing (original draft preparation). M.L: investigation; writing (original draft preparation—supporting); writing (review).