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CONSCIOUSNESS THROUGH MOVEMENT: THE THERAPEUTIC POTENTIAL OF YOGA AND THEATER KNOWLEDGE IN ARTS TEACHING

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Abstract: This text is an invitation for art educators to add a therapeutic approach to their teaching practices. Whether by revealing, within artistic languages themselves, the potential for healing and/or maintaining health and well-being intrinsic to the Arts, or by promoting dialogues between the Arts discipline and therapeutic practices listed by the SUS-Sistema Único of Health as PICS-Complementary integrative practices. The idea of this article is to build this invitation, telling readers about pedagogical practices with a therapeutic approach that I have been developing based on dialogues between the knowledge of Theater and Yoga.

Keywords: Teaching; Theater; Yoga; Therapeutic.

FIRST CONCERNS: THE PAIN OF OTHERS MOVES ME AND MAKES ME REALIZE WHERE IT ALSO HURTS IN ME

Don't talk to me about theories! Tell me about your experience.

Alejandro Jodorowsky

It is necessary to say that this text is based on my experience as a Theater teacher. It is not my objective here to make a bibliographical review of Art therapy in basic education, but to share some teaching practices, with a therapeutic approach, that I have been building from the dialogue between Theater and Yoga. It is from the school floor, from the daily contact with my students that the restlessness and the need for an integrative look at art education emerged. I have been working teaching Theater in formal and non-formal education for over a decade. I started my activities as a teacher giving workshops on social projects and then joined the UFPA School of Application, where I have been teaching for eleven years.

The fact that I have been following, year after year, the growing number of

students diagnosed with depression, panic syndrome, anxiety, among other conditions of psychological-emotional illness, made me realize the need and urgency to integrate therapeutic practices into schools. As well as making formal education a more welcoming and less sickening place. It is known that it is not the teacher's responsibility to cure physical or mental illnesses, that there are health professionals responsible for carrying out appropriate treatments in each case. However, what I propose here is an invitation for art educators to reflect on the possibility of promoting, in their classes, dialogues with therapeutic practices or even being aware of the therapeutic potential of Art. In order to do so, take a more careful look at maintaining the health of students, acting to prevent physical and emotional illnesses, and when there is already an established pathological condition, contribute with activities transversal to clinical treatment.

This movement of bringing a therapeutic approach to Theater classes occurred from an awareness of my perspective, when I personally saw the benefits of therapeutic practices, listed by the Unified Health System as PICS - complementary integrative practices. Some of these PICS acted in my life as a form of prevention and care for physical, mental and emotional health. It is important to highlight that if there is a significant number of students falling ill, there is also a considerable number of teachers in a similar situation, therefore it is of great importance that education professionals have access to therapies that promote self-care and self-knowledge.

Over the last four years I have studied and practiced the knowledge of Yoga, aromatherapy and family constellations. These are three complementary integrative practices, recognized by the Unified Health System as therapeutic resources that seek to prevent illnesses and restore health, with a focus on

welcoming listening, the development of the therapeutic bond and the integration of human beings with the environment and the society.

Of the three therapeutic practices that I have studied, I started to include Yoga knowledge in my Theater classes. In dialogue with the objects of knowledge and specific skills of the Arts/Theater discipline, I seek to share with students meditation techniques, Pranayama, respiratory perception, psychophysical movements, body awareness exercises, in short, practices arising from Theater and Yoga that can provide well-being, body-mind-emotions integration, affectionate and welcoming socialization, thus promoting health from a physical, mental, emotional and social perspective. This perspective is even more necessary in the post-pandemic context, in which all the difficulties that already existed in the lives of these young people were added to the grief, lack of socialization and various uncertainties brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

EXPERIENCE WITH YOGA AT SCHOOL

Over the last three years, I have been offering Yoga knowledge and practices to 8th and 9th year students at the UFPA School of Application. Whether through my regular classes, where I establish dialogues between the knowledge of Theater and Yoga, or through the Yoga teaching project at school: teaching Yoga in basic education, where I teach integrative Yoga classes to students.

It is important to specify that, when I mention Yoga practices and knowledge, I am referring to asanas (postures and psychophysical exercises), mudrás (specific movements with the fingers), pranayamas (exercises aimed at controlling and expanding breathing), techniques of meditation and various physical exercises, as this set of

activities comes from the knowledge of Yoga. And as for meditative practices, I understand them as:

Meditative practice can be defined in different ways, but can basically be characterized as self-regulation practices focused on training attention and awareness, in order to promote greater voluntary control by the individual, allowing the development of capabilities such as calmness, clarity and concentration, focusing your attention on a purpose, in the present moment and without judgement. RODRIGUES, Bárbara Luana Silva, 2014, p.22)

There are countless meditation techniques, present in various traditions, such as Yoga, Tai Chi, Buddhism and others. Meditation can be divided into two groups, concentrative and mindfulness. Regarding the first group, there is concentration training, returning attention to a single focus, and this can be breathing, counting, a point drawn on a white sheet (Tratak), a landscape, among other possibilities. In turn, mindfulness is characterized by full attention to the present moment and the exercises performed. This brief description of Yoga and meditation knowledge aims to clarify which definitions we are working with when we refer to these practices.

THEORETICAL BASES I: THEATER THERAPY BY AUGUSTO BOAL

The understandings and practices of the Theater of the Oppressed and the Rainbow of Desire, by Augusto Boal, are theoretical and methodological bases for me to think about teaching Theater with a therapeutic approach in schools. Boal's games and exercises can be used by actors who intend to improve their scenic practice and/or build characters, but not just for actors, in fact, Boal's main focus was non-actors. Therefore, field workers, factory workers, housewives, young students, prisoners, psychiatric patients and everyone

who wanted to have an experience with Theater saw Augusto Boal's methodologies.

The experience gained from years of work, in different sociocultural contexts, led Boal, in the 1990s, to take a more specific look at the therapeutic developments of Theater. That Theater is a great transformative power, we already know, that it would hypothetically have the power to agitate people so that they could promote revolutions, is also known, but the profound transformative power of Theater can also be aimed at a more subjective and individual dimension, triggering processes of self-knowledge and physical and psycho-emotional changes. Theater then reveals its great therapeutic potential and is equally necessary for the development of social changes. How can we change the world without first taking place a profound transformation in the hearts and minds of individuals? Driven by these questions, Boal develops a therapeutic method called Rainbow of Desire. Regarding the motivations that led him to develop this method, Boal highlights:

With Virgílio I learned to see a human being and not just his social class, the peasant and not just the peasantry, struggling with their social and political problems. With the fat lady, I learned to see human beings fighting against their own individual problems which, even though they do not encompass the entirety of their class, encompass the entirety of a life. And that doesn't make them any less important. But I still needed to learn more: what I learned in my European exile. (...) Around here, people die of hunger; over there (Europe), of overdose, pills, blades and gas. Whatever the form, it is always death. And imagining the suffering of someone who would rather die than continue with the fear of emptiness or the anguish of loneliness, I forced myself to work with these new oppressions and accept them as such (BOAL, Augusto, 1992, p. 23).

Boal has observed over the years that there are many other forms of oppression besides

class oppression. That in some circumstance's oppression is not materialized in a dictatorial government, but is also found between the lines of intersubjective relationships woven in society. The author realized that the oppression of a violent husband, experienced in a private context, is as harmful and sickening as the oppression of the police in a military dictatorship. As a white man, Boal had seen class oppression, an oppression that permeated his body, but the lethality of race and gender oppression, it took years of experience and close contact with people for him to realize the severity of them.

It is necessary to recognize that we live in a system of intersectional oppressions of class, race, gender and sexuality that promotes various physical and psychological violence and that consequently triggers people's physical, mental and emotional illness. Augusto Boal then adds a new dimension to his work: caring for the individual through a methodology developed over a few decades and described in the book *The Rainbow of Desire: Theater and Therapy*. Boal's understanding of the therapeutic potential of Theater greatly helps me to think about and implement healing art education.

THEORETICAL BASES II: INTEGRATIVE YOGA

In 2021, I was at the `` Centro de Yoga Montanha Encantada ``, located in Garopaba, Santa Catarina, studying teacher training in integrative Yoga. Designed and created by Joseph Le Page and Lilian Aboim, the `` Centro de Yoga Montanha Encantada `` is the headquarters of the integrative Yoga school, a place built to offer and receive Yoga and self-knowledge programs. The Center also adds an eco-environmental dimension to its mission, contributing to the preservation of the surrounding nature, as it is located in an area of 40 hectares of Atlantic forest.

Throughout the training course, I came into contact with the integrative Yoga approach. It is based on four pillars; the goal, the path, the tool and the destination. The goal is the main objective of Yoga “to serve as an instrument for transforming the practitioner’s vision of himself and the world” (ABOIM, Lilian. P.187. 2019), the path is the methodology of teaching yoga developed in a few steps, which I will talk about later, and the tools are the ancient knowledge of Yoga and other Sciences and Arts that can contribute to the development of the classes. Finally, the object is the student’s self-development and physical and mental well-being.

The integrative vision of Yoga is based on some points that make this approach to teaching Yoga genuine. These points are: the first point is experiential education, where theory is just a support to point out paths, but the aim of the classes is to create an adequate condition to provide experiences that reveal the process of self-perception of the body and mind, thus triggering a process of self-knowledge and self-healing of the individual.

The second point is that the focus of classes is centered on the student and not the teacher. Therefore, the objective is to create a safe and welcoming environment for all students, built based on the teacher’s careful consideration of each student’s individuality. The third point is the flexible structure of the classes, as the integrative Yoga teaching methodology is not a ready-made Yoga class formula, but a fully adaptable structure, according to the needs of each class and the diverse knowledge that the teacher wants to add to the classes. classes.

The fourth point aims to encourage creativity during classes, knowing how to work gradually with psychophysical techniques, sharpening students’ curiosity and enthusiasm. And finally, establish an integrative dimension in the construction of class plans, maintaining the backbone of Yoga,

but integrating other concepts, knowledge and techniques that contribute positively to the practices. It is these perceptions of care for the student, encouraging creativity in preparing classes and integrating other knowledge into Yoga classes that brought me closer to this teaching methodology.

The applicability of this Yoga teaching methodology is guided by a few steps. Each integrative Yoga class must be designed following moments that offer pranayama, mudras, meditation and other Western and Eastern knowledge, such as somatic exercises in the warm-up and others that the yoga teacher wants to include in their classes. I will talk, very succinctly, about the steps of an integrative Yoga class. The first step consists of opening the class, where the teacher will welcome the students, check through an initial conversation how they are feeling, whether there is any physical discomfort, any illness that needs to be given greater attention when developing the class. Continuing with step one, the teacher must introduce the theme to be worked on in the day’s meeting into the class, as all integrative Yoga classes need to have a theme, an intention to be worked on in that class. Following this, the teacher guides the students through a body awareness exercise and pranayama practice.

The second step is the practice of conscious movements, at which point the body is invited to start warming up through different exercises performed in a high plane (standing), medium plane (sitting or on all fours) and low plane (lying down). At this point, the authors Joseph Le Page and Lilian Aboim (2000) recommend the execution of somatic movements to perform the warm-up. The third step consists of executing a series of asanas (psychophysical Yoga postures), proposing a fluid sequence of body movements with the aim of stretching and strengthening the muscles, lubricating the joints, releasing muscular and emotional

tensions. And end the class with a moment of integration, proposing relaxation and a final meditation with mudras.

This brief theoretical approach to Theater Therapy by Augusto Boal and integrative Yoga by Lilian Aboim and Joseph le Page is just to present to the reader the two main methodological references for teaching Theater and Yoga that I have consulted for the construction of classes, be they those of Theater in dialogue with Yoga, or those specific to integrative Yoga. It is interesting to note that the objective of Augusto Boal's Theater Therapy and Integrative Yoga are close, as both seek to induce students to develop a self-perception of the body, assisting in the cure of physical, psychic and emotional imbalances, through body movement and awareness of breathing, realizing and expanding your breathing capacity, being more aware of the body and its potential for expression, connection with your own self, respectful and affective socialization, self-knowledge and personal development. All these objectives, when achieved, promote a state of health in its comprehensive vision, in other words, the enjoyment of a state of physical, psychological, emotional, intersubjective and social health.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS: THE BENEFITS OF A THERAPEUTIC APPROACH IN TEACHING THEATER IN DIALOGUE WITH YOGA

There are countless articles and books that point out the benefits of Yoga and meditation on physical and mental health, and there are also researchers who expose the benefits of these practices on the human development of children and adolescents in school contexts. The authors Fabiana Moraes and Rômulo Balga, in the article Yoga in the school environment as a strategy for changing student behavior, talked about an experience with the execution of yogic postures and meditations, applied to

students in the 1st year of Elementary School I, throughout three months, at a state school in the city of São Paulo. The researchers observed, despite the short time of practice with the students, a considerable change in their performance. Moraes and Balga state:

Even with a short experience, it was possible to notice visible changes in terms of gaining general flexibility, tone, posture, concentration, ease in performing asanas and balance. Concentration itself is a fundamental element for tone and especially balance to develop. (...) It is a gradual process that depends on overcoming and willpower to make it happen. More subtle changes, such as a decrease in anxiety and aggressiveness, were noticed more punctually, but familiarity with the practice and the degree of motivation will determine how these aspects will develop (BALGA, Rômulo and MORAES, Fabiana, 2007, page: 63).

As we can see in the quote above, the authors highlighted Yoga and meditation as practices that had a good impact on the physical and mental development of students. Therefore, pedagogical practices that seek intersections between Theater teaching methodologies and Yoga teaching methodologies prove to be great allies for positive changes in the school context. And regarding positive changes, we are referring to the establishment of a culture of peace, the process of self-knowledge and self-control of students, the development of more respectful interpersonal relationships and consequently the improvement of students' academic performance.

The feedback I receive from students about our Theater classes in dialogue with Yoga knowledge is generally very positive. I realize that classes with a therapeutic approach have had beneficial effects on the lives of students. I would like to bring some testimonials from students about, for example, how they feel after our breathing awareness and pranayama exercises. The question addressed to students at the 9th year UFPA Application School,

via Google form, on January 5, 2022 was the following: “In the 2021 school year we worked on several breathing awareness exercises. From this work developed in class, are you more aware of your breathing? Why?” I listed three answers here:

Yes, I can be calmer and more serene in relation to my breathing, it also helps a lot when I feel very euphoric or in agony. Matthew, 14 years old.

Yes, this has helped me a lot with my impulses, I am more aware of my breathing and my actions. Leonardo, 14 years old.

It improved a lot, even the anxiety attacks improved, and the asthma improved. Cassia, 15 years old.

These testimonials are very precious to me, with them I can see that my pedagogical practices contribute to the well-being of students. This finding is an additional strength to continue this path of teaching and research on the teaching of Theater in dialogue with complementary integrative practices. Above all, to democratize the means of access to self-care practices, as many of these practices are difficult to access for those with less purchasing power. And we know that a powerful means of democratization is to take these practices to public education classrooms.

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