



Shadow Theatre as a Performative Art for the Development of Uninhibited Corporal Expression and Group Cohesion in Sixth-Grade Students of Primary Education

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Abstract

Shadow theatre is an educational resource based on the use of silhouettes and the body as a means of communication. It allows the incorporation of music and sound effects that help students discover movement possibilities in the stage space. It also encourages collaborative work through the creation of groups. Therefore, the aim of this research is the incorporation of shadow theatre as a performance art for the promotion of uninhibited corporal expression and group cohesion. An action-research methodology is used to define a didactic proposal that incorporates shadow theatre in the field of music education at primary school. The learning situation is carried out in two public schools in the province of Malaga, with a sample of 213 students. The results indicate that shadow theatre effectively improved pupils' body expression and group cohesion. Some students had initial difficulties, but thanks to the anonymity provided by this resource, fear of ridicule was reduced. It is proposed to compare this resource with theatre in order to define whether the method of incorporating the shadow is really effective.

Keywords: musical education; theatre; body expression

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INTRODUCTION

Inhibition is a response to bodily expression activities in many cases, evidencing situations of nervousness, insecurity, and rejection towards their performance. Undoubtedly, it is directly related to the behavior carried out by an individual based on fear or withdrawal in the face of certain stimuli or unfamiliar situations and people. In contrast, disinhibition is conceived as the absence of the cognitive process that suspends the manifestation of a specific behaviour (Guimón, 2004).

In two public schools in the auto-

nous community of Andalusia, specifically located in the province of Malaga, a direct observation of the music class was carried out. The main objective was to define the level of use of the body as a means of communication and expression through the disinhibition of movements. In this observation, difficulties in socializing with some classmates were also identified. In this sense, they accuse the media through the internet as the culprits as they have become the mode of interaction among young people, thus showing fear of public speaking and face-to-face relationships Suárez (2019).

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The analysis of this situation determines the beginning of this research process in which, after knowing the reality of the classroom, the necessary actions to modify it are defined.

In the field of education, it is necessary to promote the comprehensive development of students' competencies. For this reason, it is necessary to create the appropriate scenarios to favour learning situations that offer resources and strategies to obtain tools that allow them to interact in social life in the best possible way. Achieving corporal expression based on the disinhibition of movements will offer students the possibility of using their body to communicate and express feelings, emotions, and ideas; as well as an important resource for relating to the environment around them and other individuals. Students should be able to face unfamiliar situations, overcoming the possible fear of ridicule through activities that encourage their free, creative and collaborative behavior with others.

For all of the above, this research is based on premises affirming that teaching proposals must be meaningful and functional to become unforgettable for students by making them the protagonists of learning and favoring their integral development (Heras, 2010).

After a bibliographical review of previous work, the activity proposed to achieve the premise set out is the use of shadow theatre in the music education class. In activities that develop corporal expression, pupils may feel fear of ridicule (Pérez-Pueyo and Casado, 2011). Thus, shadow theatre can offer greater safety as it does not consist of direct exposure of each student but through their own shadow projected on a white cloth (López-Villar and Canales, 2007).

Body expression can be defined as the discipline favoring the use of movements with a communicative intention, more importantly the knowledge and use of expression and communication skills of students rather than aiming for perfect technical execution (Cifo, 2016). This com-

municative relationship attends to the definition of the body as a language (Schinca, 1998; Pelegrín, 1996) involving both the body and psychological and social aspects (Pérez et al., 2012).

The incorporation of drama and theatre at the Primary Education stage allows, through representation, to solve and address everyday life situations (Holdhus et al., 2016). It favours the development of communication, empathy, socialization, the expression of emotions, and group cohesion. It also develops creativity critical thinking, and values education (Trozzo, 2016; Beetlestone, 200) by providing a safe space for the exploration of ideas.

On the other hand, it is an interdisciplinary activity as it can incorporate plastic, dramatic, and musical elements to work on artistic expression. Similarly, it fosters the development of communicative and linguistic skills and psychomotor skills. In addition, it facilitates the development and acquisition of social skills and conflict resolution as it is an activity that requires group work, favoring cooperative learning and consciously explores moods, feelings, and the consequences of the responses offered to different problems. For this reason, it is ideal for working on interpersonal intelligence and emotional education (Goleman, 1996).

There are numerous studies that incorporate dramatization in the classroom through the use of shadow theatre in the Infant Education stage (Cifo and Ureña, 2022). The benefits are so numerous that extrapolating it to the last level of Primary School is an interesting resource to work on the disinhibition of movements, the use of the body as an instrument of communication, the improvement of interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of collaborative work.

Shadow theatre is defined as "the representation of stories, scenes, actions, etc., with shadows (bodily and/or objects) that are projected on a cloth or similar thanks to a spotlight" (Cifo, 2016, p. 41), being an easy and economical resource in the music education classroom (Martín

and López-Pastor, 2007). With the use of this type of theatre, the total expression of the students is achieved, favouring their integral development (Pallarés et al., 2014).

The necessary elements to carry out a shadow theatre are a light projection (spotlight or torch) and material to project (white cloth), allowing the addition of auxiliary elements (costumes, objects) (Cifo, 2016). The use of music and sound effects can also be incorporated. In this sense, the incorporation of current musical fragments is allowed under the teaching filter due to the possibilities of increasing the motivation and participation of students (Flores, 2007; Mok, 2017, 2018) and the development of their creative (Hall, 2014) and musical skills (Pulman, 2014). For this reason, many authors propose incorporating musical genres that are not limited only to academic music (Woody, 2007).

There are different basic techniques for the use of shadow theatre based on; 1) observing the shadow cast and knowing what the others see; 2) taking into account the distance to the focus, as the closer to it, the bigger the shadow cast; 3) the distance to the canvas, as the closer the shadow is, the more it defines the shadow and; 4) casting the shadows preferably in profile, as it allows better definition of the gesture (Barba-Martín, 2002). In this aspect, Barba-Martín and López Pastor (2007) recommend starting the use of shadow theatre with simple positions to work, in a playful way, on the aforementioned techniques. The point is to use shadows as a means of corporal expression and the development of creativity.

Incorporating shadow theatre as a didactic resource in the music classroom has numerous benefits. On the one hand, as has been mentioned, it favours the integral development of the pupils as it triggers the students' creative process, needing few means and technique to be carried out (López-Pastor and Lacruz, 2007). At the same time, it allows work on aspects related to multiculturalism, helping to improve knowledge of different cultures (Iglesias and López-Pastor, 2003). Finally, it favours

motor development, incorporating content related to the adjustment of the body schema, spatial-temporal structuring and perception (Martín and López-Pastor, 2007). It is an activity that works directly with the body, awakening curiosity to explore its possibilities and encouraging spontaneity and improvisation (Pérez et al., 2012).

METHOD

Design

The research design presents a qualitative approach as it is "an active, systematic and rigorous process of directed inquiry, in which decisions are made about what can be investigated in the field of the object of study" (Pérez-Serrano, 1998, p. 46). Within this field, the DBR (Design-Based Research) model is introduced, which includes the generation of initial research as the production of applications taken to direct practice (Stokes, 1997) and consists of the design, development, and subsequent evaluation of specific educational interventions with the intention of contributing to the advancement of knowledge about them at the pedagogical level (Plomp and Nieveen, 2010). At all times, this type of proposal is included in real teaching contexts (Barab and Squire, 2004) to provide validity and ensure tangible conclusions that improve the initial situation (Valverde-Berracosó, 2016). Therefore, these theories are not decontextualised and do not necessarily work in the same way in different educational settings (Anderson and Shattuck, 2012). This research seeks the influence of teaching practice (Romero-Ariza, 2014) to generate theories and conclusions of value to educational professions (Clarke and Dede, 2009). Thus, the roles of researchers and teachers are differentiated, but cooperative work is fundamental (Anderson and Shattuck, 2012). Therefore, this work can be framed within collaborative action research, which involves an intervention in a specific context without claiming to offer a generalisation (Casals et al., 2008). This approach is functional for uniting educational theory

and practice (Moreno et al., 1999), seeking a joint construction of knowledge through the sum of the knowledge and experiences (Desgagné, 1997).

The procedure adopted follows a qualitative research sequence structured in several stages: it begins with a needs assessment and contextual analysis, followed by a literature review and the creation of a specific theoretical framework. It continues with a prototyping phase, where the intervention is designed and formatively evaluated and ends with a semi-summative evaluation to determine the satisfaction of the initial objectives, as described in Plomp and Nieveen (2010). This approach is distinguished by its focus on concrete processes and objects within the context of an application, avoiding the isolation of variables, and is defined as an interventionist model that seeks to improve educational interventions through a design based on practice and theory, as argued by Valverde-Berracoso (2016).

Context and participants

The research was carried out with 213 pupils from two public schools in the province of Malaga, both with four classes of sixth-grade Primary Education, chosen for their accessibility and layout, according to valid criteria established by Úriz et al. (2006). The total number of participants making up the selected sample is 213 students. The study involved 159 students from two schools, with the Malaga city school contributing 79 students aged 11-12: 26 in the first class (16 girls, ten boys), 27 in the second (17 girls, ten boys), 26 in the third (12 girls, 14 boys), and 27 in the fourth (18 girls, nine boys). The Marbella school had 80 students: 27 in the first class (19 girls, eight boys), 27 in the second (17 girls, 10 boys), 26 in the third (13 girls, 13 boys), and 27 in the fourth (16 girls, 11 boys).

Instruments

The beginning of the research is characterised by the use of participant observation, where the researcher is involved in

the actions, including experiences from other artistic fields such as theatre, according to López and San Cristóbal (2014). This technique allows direct information to be collected, preventing certain aspects from going unnoticed (Sarriá-Sánchez, 2010). The findings are documented in a field diary with descriptions, subjective analyses and audiovisual records of the activities observed.

The study used individual in-depth interviews with 10 educators (8 sixth form tutors and 2 music teachers) from the selected schools, following the criteria of being teachers at these schools and with at least five years of professional experience. The interviews were conducted according to López and San Cristóbal (2014), favouring an environment of trust and using open and flexible questions to encourage an open dialogue (Gómez et al., 2020). A “funnel” approach was used in the initial questions, detailed by Kerlinger (1975), focusing on teachers’ perceptions, emotions and experiences of pupils’ comfort during the shadow theatre activity and their behaviour in group work, followed by a content analysis, which consists of “translating” the sample’s input into tangible evaluative information (Kerlinger, 1975).

Process

The research was conducted in the Marbella school in the third term of the academic year 2020-2021, and in the Malaga school in the same period but in the academic year 2021-2022. The performance art methodology focuses on a live musical performance, including elements such as creation, style and cooperation (Kartomi, 2014). Rodríguez-Quiles (2018) suggests that this methodological strategy in the music class favours students’ development of skills and knowledge. The process of participation in the schools lasted three months in each institution, following a series of phases that make up the research procedure and culminating in the analysis of the results in order to improve aspects of the process based on the spiral cycle of observation, evaluation and reflection of

the results obtained, proposed by Elliot (1991, 2005).

The management and families of the students were informed, and their consent was obtained for the publication of the research results. As the children were minors, no personal data were disclosed for ethical reasons.

The phases carried out are as follows: 1) Initial observation and setting of objectives: It begins with a direct observation by the researcher in the music classes and recorded data on inhibition and group cohesion, which he then used to define the objectives and design a research proposal. 2) Literature review: of previous work related to the topic in question that forms a theoretical and practical starting point on which to build in the context of schools. 3) Designing and implementing a learning situation: A didactic proposal centred on shadow theatre was designed, carried out in five sessions with tutors and music teachers to create a graduation script with sequences based on the experiences of sixth grade students. The final proposal, which integrates music and corporal expression, results from the contributions of the students and the guidance of the teachers, emphasising the importance of teamwork to achieve great results (Egger, 2019; Espinosa, 2019; Harrison et al., 2013; Whitener, 2016). A motivating and respectful environment is essential, according to Reid and Duke (2015). The rehearsals, supervised by the researcher and the music teacher, prepared the students for the performance. 4) Performing the shadow theatre live for the educational community: At this point the final aesthetic aspect will be a fundamental element, being an objective to be able to perform in the best possible way (Hargreaves, 2012). 5) Conducting an in-depth interview with the participating teachers and assessing the satisfaction of the participating: A word cloud was generated with descriptions of the participants to analyse satisfaction and compare it with previous observations, facilitating the drawing of concrete conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section is based on the degree of acquisition of the objectives formulated in this process. Thus, after the review of the literature, the use of shadow theatre is defined as an excellent didactic resource to get the sixth-form pupils to perform body expression movements in an uninhibited way, also favoring group cohesion.

In the initial observation, data were collected in a field diary concerning two variables. On the one hand, with regard to the inhibition present or not in corporal expression activities carried out by the students in their practical music classes. On the other hand, it was also taken into account whether there were any difficulties when performing this type of task in a group. After this, they were analyzed and translated into a graph to be able to observe the percentage of pupils with impediments in carrying out these activities as a result of inhibition and/or lack of cohesion with the group. The graphs resulting from this initial analysis in each of the schools are shown below, showing how the percentage of students who carry out these activities have inhibition problems. In this sense, a slightly higher percentage are the students in Malaga city. The image shows that the total number of students who act in a disinhibited manner is very low.

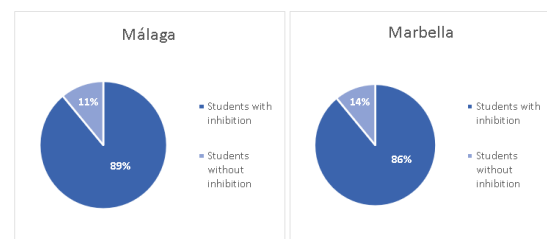


Figure 1. Summary of results of participant observation in relation to inhibition

Figure 1 shows a higher percentage of pupils with difficulties in group cohesion and in carrying out cooperative activities. The Malaga city centre shows less imbalance compared to the one in Marbella. However, in both cases, it is a tangible element to be incorporated into the didactic

proposal.

Figure 2, refers to the feelings and impressions about working in a group; 77% of the total were generally comfortable working with the others. Within this 77%, 42% did not agree with the group at the beginning and even created situations of discord, but finally managed to get the work done. On the other hand, 33% did not feel comfortable working in a group, with 12% of participants adding that they would have preferred not to have carried out the task or to have done it individually.

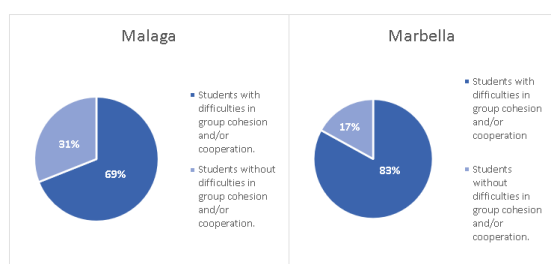


Figure 2. Compendium of participant observation results concerning cohesion/cooperation

Once this initial situation has been analyzed and the didactic proposal has been developed and implemented, the teachers are interviewed in depth. In order to clarify and group the contributions made by the sample of participants in the interview, they will be classified into the two topics mentioned in the previous lines.

On the one hand, the initial theme is directly related to their sensations and perceptions of the class in terms of the level of comfort and comfort that they consider that the students have been able to feel when carrying out the shadow theatre activity. In this aspect, it can be affirmed that 72% of the participants have offered, at a general level, a positive answer, identifying the didactic proposal carried out as functional to achieve the objectives proposed in this educational context. "Shadow theatre had never been carried out in the last cycle of the Primary School and it is a success because they feel more protected as they do not show their faces and bodies directly and they participate and enjoy the activity" (Teacher 1). Students of this age

tend to be shy when it comes to using their bodies as a means of expression and "the uninhibited attitude that I have been able to observe has left me speechless" (Teacher 3). Moreover, all the students participated, even those who usually find it more difficult to do so (Teachers 4, 8, 9 and 10).

The sample has identified the proposed activity as motivating and attractive for pupils (Teachers 2, 5 and 7) and "simple to carry out in terms of the few materials needed" (Teacher 6). Even so, "I don't know if it can be easily extrapolated to any Primary School context because a space is needed to carry it out, and not all schools have one" (Teacher 10). Despite this, "I have never seen my students so motivated towards an activity in which the basis of everything is corporal expression" (Teacher 6). Being able to move around the space, taking into account a musical selection, "is also a task that is very difficult in the sixth grade because they feel embarrassed very early on" (Teacher 1). In this sense, "I think that, in the Infant Stage, or even in the first levels of Primary, carrying out activities that involve free and uninhibited corporal expression is easier because they are not so concerned about what others will think" (Teacher 8) but, in this course, "using shadow theatre was something that had not occurred to me and I plan to incorporate it into my Music Education sessions" (Teacher 4).

In addition to these contributions, 28% of the total number of interviewees expressed mixed feelings about the didactic proposal carried out. On the one hand, they consider shadow theatre as "a resource that undoubtedly attracts their attention, because it is something different that is not usually done every day, far from it" (Teacher, 10); moreover, "it can be fun playing with the silhouettes" (Teacher 1) but, "I have not managed to see all the pupils comfortable at all times" (Teacher 5), moreover, "some of them have had a hard time getting them to participate in the activity, they have done it, yes, but they would have preferred, without a doubt, not to do it" (Teacher 7). In this sense, some of the

teachers interviewed said that what their students liked least was having to perform the final performance in front of an audience, which made them feel embarrassed, regardless of how they felt while rehearsing (Teachers 5 and 7).

The second question asked refers to the teachers' perceptions regarding group work. In this aspect, 82% of the participants give answers that identify the activity of shadow theatre as an interesting proposal for the creation of cooperative groups. "There are groups of students who had never worked together before and I have been pleasantly surprised by what I have seen in them, the way they have been able to get the work done" (Teacher 9). In this aspect, "I have created some groups that I know have difficulties in understanding each other, because I have known them for years and yes, at the beginning they had problems, but I think that, when they understood that this was their group with no possibility of change, everything started to work" (Teacher 4). Moreover, "I have been surprised by the attitude of some students who I thought would have difficulties in cooperation and they have worked phenomenally well" (Teacher 8). In this sense, some teachers say that they will incorporate this type of proposal at other educational levels to encourage student cooperative work (Teachers 6 and 9).

On the other hand, there are negative contributions regarding the creation of cooperative work. In this sense, "I think it is very difficult to carry out a didactic proposal that is difficult for them in itself, as it is about corporal expression, in a collaborative way. From my point of view, I think that this makes the embarrassment they feel even worse" (Teacher, 2). A proposal that is added is "to carry out these activities, but individually as an option so that those who do not want to work in a group can develop their uninhibited corporal expression without the conditioning factors of not being comfortable in their team" (Teacher 3).

Finally, each student is given a piece of paper on which he/she has to write a

word that defines his/her perception, how he/she felt, or how much he/she liked or disliked doing this activity. With the compendium of responses, a word cloud is designed as a data analytical tool that offers visually weighted words according to their popularity, representing the most frequently used words in a larger size (Gómez García and Therón, 2014). In this way, the visual result shows the most repeated and, therefore, most significant concepts (Cano, 2020) so that no opinion in the sample is isolated (Gross, 2008).



Figure 3. Word cloud after compendium of responses

Figure 3 shows the word cloud created from the students' responses. Highly repeated words such as fun, amazing, awesome, I love it, and cool. The words nervous, fear and embarrassing are also incorporated, although to a lesser extent of repetition. In this aspect, it is interpreted that a percentage have not managed to overcome these feelings.

To begin with, it is worth mentioning that the didactic proposal has exceeded the initial expectations with the sixth-grade students. The final performance carried out, and the compilations of answers given in the interview and the word cloud make the incorporation of shadow theatre a functional didactic resource to encourage uninhibited corporal expression and group cohesion at this educational level.

The results offered after analyzing and compiling the field diary notes of the participant observation of the researcher involved show that a high percentage of pupils in each of the selected schools have

difficulties in using their own bodies as a means of expression and communication. At the same time, it can be clearly seen how they have difficulties when it comes to working as part of a team. In this sense, after reviewing the literature, we advocate the inclusion of shadow theatre as a performative art to try to change this educational reality through a process of collaborative research-action.

The comparative analysis of the data collected in the participant observation with the responses of the interview and the word cloud allows us to conclude that the use of shadow theatre has been an ideal resource to promote disinhibition despite the percentage of students who have not achieved complete inhibition. In the interview responses, it is defined in this way, by eliminating the close-up visualization of the students and replacing it with the projection of the silhouette, offering them an anonymous identity, giving rise to a means of expression that allows them to make free movements without fear of being ridiculed. Particularly at this age, the feeling of shame is very intense and the fear of ridicule is all too present. This is because the desire to be accepted by the rest of the group is a constant reality (Chimal, 2003).

On the other hand, in direct reference to the promotion of teamwork and group cohesion, the results obtained are interesting, as they show, compared with the initial observation, that incorporating this didactic proposal improved group bonding. Even so, a small percentage prefer to work individually and do not appreciate this type of activity. The reason may be that they have not done them before or have only incorporated them a few times. Therefore, implementing them more regularly through different dynamics would offer full participation and enjoyment of the students.

CONCLUSION

Shadow theatre has proven to be a valuable teaching resource for promoting uninhibited body language and group co-

hesion among sixth-grade students. The elimination of direct visualization provides students with an anonymous means of expression. Still, although the didactic proposal has improved teamwork, it needs to be incorporated regularly to encourage full participation and enjoyment. As a future line of research, it would be interesting to integrate this proposal at a higher interdisciplinary level, involving more areas and creating learning situations that favour the integral development of the students. Furthermore, it would be very interesting to compare the inclusion of this resource with the theatre itself in order to define whether the incorporation of the shadow is really effective.

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