

## THEATRE AS A METAPHOR FOR THE EDUCATIONAL RELATIONSHIP

### *El teatro como metáfora de la relación educativa*

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#### ABSTRACT

This article analyses the educational relationship through the metaphor of theatre. It aims to offer a new interpretative model of the pedagogical relationship, from a dramaturgical perspective.

Of all the possible parallels between theatre and education, the human element stands out as the source of life in every educational relationship and every theatrical representation. The article assumes that the educational relationship is the central component of all educational action. In which, roles and biographies, stage and scene, actors and spectators, theatricality and ritualisation, interaction and conflict, resolution of problems, situations and interactions are crystallised.

The study of the educational relationship based on the theatrical metaphor allows for consideration of two levels of analysis. On the one hand, there is theatricality and the production of meaning in a pedagogical stage, and on the other, there is staging

or scenic interactions. At the core of this analysis lies the dramaturgy or pedagogical staging. Likewise, the approach of inclusive education is incorporated into the dramaturgical analysis of the educational relationship.

To achieve the objective of this study, critical and documentary analysis of sources from philosophy, theatre theory and micro-sociology have been used.

Overall, the article attempts to reinterpret and lead the educational relationship from a dramaturgical action perspective, considering it as an element with its own voice at the service of all students, as a resonance box for them, being sensitive to the infraverbal, as is the case in theatrical play.

*Keywords:* Educational environment; metaphor; theatre; teacher student relationship; educational relationship.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza la relación educativa desde la metáfora teatral. Persigue como objetivo un nuevo modelo interpretativo de la relación pedagógica, desde la mirada dramática.

De todos los paralelismos posibles entre teatro y educación, el elemento humano destaca sobre los demás, fuente de vida de toda relación educativa y de toda representación escénica. Se asume en el artículo que la relación educativa constituye el componente central de toda acción educativa. En ella, cristalizan roles y biografías, escenario y escena, actores y espectadores, teatralidad y ritualización, interacción y conflicto, solución de problemas, situaciones e interacciones.

El estudio de la relación educativa a partir de la metáfora teatral permite considerar dos niveles de análisis. De un lado, la teatralidad o producción de sentido en el escenario pedagógico; de otro, la puesta en escena o comunicación escénica. En el centro de este análisis, se aborda la dramaturgia o escenificación pedagógica. Asimismo, se incorpora el enfoque de la educación inclusiva en el análisis dramático de la relación educativa.

Para el logro del objetivo de este estudio, se ha empleado el análisis crítico y documental de fuentes procedentes de la filosofía, la teoría teatral y la microsociología.

En resumen, el artículo defiende reinterpretar y liderar la relación educativa desde la acción dramática, concibiéndola como un elemento con voz propia al servicio de todos los estudiantes, como caja de resonancia para estos, y sensible a lo infraverbal, como sucede en el juego teatral.

*Palabras clave:* ambiente educacional; metáfora; teatro; relación profesor-alumno; relación educativa.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Of the possible parallels between theatre and education, one stands out above all others: the human element. The playwright and essayist Peter Brook (2015) already said it when he pointed out that “to make theatre you only need one thing:

the human element. This does not mean that the rest is unimportant, but it is not the main thing” (p. 23). Just as there is no theatrical scene or play without the presence of a human being (Boal, 2004), there is no educational relationship without the human element, despite all the technological mediations that are present today in the school setting. This human element, moreover, both in theatre and in education, gains significance through the relationship —whether in the actor-audience dynamic or the teacher-student group interaction—. This relationship constitutes the single most essential reality in both theatrical and pedagogical spheres. The human element, along with its inherent physical presence, is particularly crucial in the early and intermediate stages of education, as it plays a fundamental role in school learning through the emotional framework it provides. Hence, authors such as Betton (2022) categorise the physical presence of the human element as a clear example of pedagogical mediation and consider that virtual *presence* implies a loss of sensitivity, relational dynamics, and, consequently, the vitality, corporeality, and sensory dimension of the pedagogical setting.

This is the starting point of this essay that leads us, in turn, to select theatre as a metaphor for exploring the educational relationship from a different perspective. In this article, this relationship is conceived as a network of interpersonal ties woven within the classroom (a theatrical space) with significant symbolic power, prompting a reconsideration of the teacher’s role in building inclusive educational environments.

The human element, which is one of the central pillars of these reflections based on the theatrical metaphor, links us closely to the educational relationship, the central component of educational action in the pedagogical scenario. Within this relationship, various aspects crystallise and take shape, including roles and biographies, stage and scene, actors and spectators, theatricality and ritualisation, interaction and conflict, problem-solving, situations, and relationships.

In this article, *metaphor* is used as a methodological strategy because of the generative force that analogy possesses for the creation of knowledge, which goes beyond literal meaning (Davidson, 1978). Anticipated by Aristotle (335 B.C/2017) who advocated in favour of the use of metaphor as an intellectual resource for the understanding of similarities, philosopher Max Black (1977) referred to it as a device that encourages the *listener* —in this case, the reader— to engage in the intellectual exercise. Along the same lines, Ortega y Gasset (1983) emphasised the double function of metaphor as a means of expression and as an intellectual tool.

The use of theatrical metaphor is not new as an intellectual strategy in the Humanities and Social Sciences field. In the first half of the 20th century, in Sociology, role theorists applied the theatrical metaphor to analyse the similarities between stage work and social life (read, among others, Ralph Linton, George Herbert Mead, Jacob Moreno or Erving Goffman). More recently, Richard Sennet (2024) addresses the relationship of interpretation to art, politics and everyday experience. In the field of Philosophy, the use of the stage metaphor has been employed especially by contemporary French thinkers, with special attention to the theatrical concept of *the*

*stage* (read, Jacques Derrida, Françoise Proust, Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière) (Alvarado Castillo, 2018). In the field of Linguistics applied to education, Kenneth Burke (1955) developed a theory that explained that the pragmatics employed—that is, the way in which language is used— influenced the audience to whom it was addressed. In Germany, Hannah Arendt grounded the concept of public space on the theatrical metaphor. In the case of Educational Sciences, the theatrical metaphor has germinated in the development of studies on the teacher (conceived as an actor), the classroom (as a scenic space), drama as a pedagogical strategy for the improvement of learning (Bryant et al., 2005; Laferrière and Motos Teruel, 2003; Motos Teruel and Navarro Amorós, 2011), theatre education and teacher training (Navarro Solano, 2005; Núñez-Cubero y Navarro-Solano, 2007; Núñez-Cubero, 2009, 2016, 2022, 2023-2024; Pettersson et al., 2004; Postic, 2000; Villeneuve, 2014; Vieites García, 2014), rituality in school (McLaren, 2003) and in the classroom (Le Breton, 2023).

Thinking about the educational relationship from the theatrical metaphor allows us to transform our view as educators and also as researchers and scholars of the educational relationship. On the one hand, it encourages the consideration of *theatricality*, as well as its *staging*. *Theatricality* understood as the *production of meaning on stage* (Elam, 2002) and *staging* understood as the materialisation of stage communication. In the centre of this analysis, we place the teacher, the group of students addressed and the classroom as the stage on which the pedagogical dramaturgy or staging is materialised. For this reason, a *micro* analysis of the educational relationship as a scenario in which the daily practice of teachers takes place is chosen. At the same time, the inclusive educational approach is incorporated as a horizon of intelligibility for the analysis of the educational relationship, which implies considering as *public*—as spect-actors, paraphrasing Boal (2008)— not only students with special educational needs but also students of different gender, ethnicity, social and health conditions and heterogeneous biographical and learning trajectories.

## 2. THEATRICALITY IN THE EDUCATIONAL RELATIONSHIP: INTERACTION RITUALS IN THE CLASSROOM

In the field of literary and theatre studies, as well as in Anthropology, the term *theatricality* is used to refer to a wide variety of meanings that oscillate between the “thickness of signs and sensations on which the scene materialises”, a sort of external language of the dramatic text, as Roland Barthes (1977) pointed out, to the production of meanings in the scene (Elam, 2002). It is also understood as a “way of organising the gaze of the other and allowing one’s gaze to be organised by the action of the other, establishing a dialogue in this interplay of gazes (Dubatti, 2018, p. 13). That is, theatricality can be conceived as a communication system (semiotic approach), or poesis (philosophical approach). In Anthropology, theatricality resembles the qualities of any social practice—which, lacking dramatic text—, are instead governed by theatrical codes (gestures, words and

silences, clothing, spatial disposition, temporal cadence). These codes are used with the objective of communicating and being seen (Grajales, 2015). Theatricality is conceived, from this anthropological reading, as a cultural practice composed of codes that operate in a symbolic way and whose meanings acquire meaning within the sociocultural environment in which they unfold. This understanding of theatricality inspired Peter McLaren's (1985/2003) ethnographic research in an urban Catholic school in Canada and showed that the classroom is not only a physical place, but also a symbolic space in which class, identity and generational conflicts, among others, emerge.

The *ethos* or school culture is constructed and materialises, at a micro level, in the formal and informal relationships between teachers and students. At the macro level, these relationships would include a wide range of relationships, including those among teaching staff, between teachers and the school leadership, between the school and families, as well as between the school, the administration, and the broader community. Randall Collins' (2009) theory of interaction rituals posits that social interactions shape our shared existence. According to the sociologist, they constitute the "habitat of intentionality and consciousness and the territory of the emotional and unconscious aspects of human interaction" (Collins, 2009, p. 17). According to this theory, successful social exchanges are those that provide emotional energy among participants; unsuccessful ones, on the contrary, deplete it. Similarly, just as bonds can be formed, they can also take different forms—bonds of growth or bonds of subjugation. The construct "ritual", widely theorised by Anthropology, is conceived, according to the microsociological approach, as a "situationally generated flow of norms and meanings" (Collins, 2009, p. 22) and not as a formality or ceremony (popular language) or as a reflection of social structure.

The theory proposed by this author endorses the emotional architecture that underlies all successful educational relationships: the desire to educate and teach—in the case of teachers—, and the desire to learn or to be educated and taught—in the case of students—. It is evident that a relationship based on aversion can hardly sustain any form of education (Romero-Pérez, 2024). Successful interactions bring emotional benefits to the participants, while unsuccessful or failed interactions either bring no affective experience at all or, worse, generate traumatic experiences or feelings of discomfort. The roles adopted by the faculty (teacher-actor) and students (spectators) mediate the flow of pedagogical interaction rituals. Some teachers structure the ritual around rules seeking to legitimise their teaching authority (disciplinary rituals); others focus obsessively on the curriculum, time management and the completion of tasks (organisational rituals), while others are primarily interested in building a trusting relationship with the group of students to manage the day-to-day in the classroom (exchange rituals). As Escolano (2020, p. 93) notes: "a large part of the behaviours that students and teachers put into practice in schools are subject to this ceremonial formalism (...) as mechanisms aimed at normalising school life".

Interaction rituals populate the *theatrical landscape* in schools and classrooms, a ritualised landscape filled with gestures that act as signs, symbols or conventions that operate as shared meanings. When conceived as dramatisation, rituals enact meaning through a sequence of actions. They represent common practices that are part of everyday life in the classroom and have a high symbolic value for both teachers and students. Through them, the processes of socialisation and orchestration of the pedagogical relationship are regulated. In other words, they help guide participants (teachers as actors, students as spectators) in understanding “what to expect” in the interactive process. The daily practices that teachers use to frame *the scene* are sequential and repetitive, but this does not mean that they are routine or mechanised. Repetition is a strategy to establish order and cadence in classroom activities. It helps create a predictable environment with clear boundaries. It generates a sense of continuity and coherence to the daily educational activities. It also solidifies the legitimacy of the institution and its established order. Not surprisingly, the ritualisation of the educational relationship between teachers and students in their classrooms creates predictability of what happens in them, although in some cases, it may fall into a mere mechanisation or automation of the action, taking away its freshness and authenticity.

The rituals of interaction between teachers and students are subject to differentiated roles and their symbolic weight reveals status differences between them. The teacher’s eloquence in relation to the students’ words is asymmetrical, as is the educational relationship itself: “The teacher said it”. The eloquence<sup>1</sup>, as an expression of the teaching *authority*, often holds a different status than the student’s voice. There are rituals of pedagogical interaction that only pivot on the teacher’s eloquence and accuse, silence or exclude the students’ voices, especially those of the most vulnerable. Daniel Pennac (2008) devotes a chapter in his book *Mal de escuela* to the direct imputation of students or the teacher’s exasperation at having to explain something yet again. He illustrates this with an exchange where a teacher interprets a student’s struggle as intentional defiance: “You’re doing it on purpose.” To which the student responds, “No, I’m not.” (Pennac, 2008, p. 164). *Being heard* is usually one of the students’ demands, as well as one of the recommendations contained in the guides on educational inclusion to overcome the barriers that limit the incorporation of diversity in classrooms and educational centres (Azorín Abellán and González Botía, 2021). In line with the authors, considering the students’ voice is relevant, so school scenarios should be adapted to interaction rituals based on dialogue (and not on monologue), listening (and not on accusation, complacency or indifference) and reaching agreements with them so that they feel represented as a group.

<sup>1</sup> The term *eloquence* is used in the sense expressed by playwright Anne Bogart (2007, p. 37): “expression, communication, speech, signal emission, verbalisation, clarification and enunciation”.

The rituals that articulate the educational relationship take different forms. De Vain (2018) summarises some of them in the anthropological study conducted in three schools located in northeastern Argentina: rituals of space and time; rituals of body domestication; rituals of distinctions; rituals of sanctions; rituals of writing; and rituals of celebration (such as commemorative events and school ceremonies). Ritualisation (dramatisation) in the educational relationship allows teachers to define roles between teachers and students. For instance, the ritualisation of space delimits the focus of the scene, actors and spectators within the classroom setting. An example of this is the teacher's gestures ("signals") -such as pointing at the blackboard or the screen- which transform the classroom into a stage where instructional actions unfold. In contrast, break time, a shared space, constitutes a different scenario for students: a space to interact, play, distract themselves, but also, in some cases, as a scenario of bullying, intimidation, harassment or exclusion, especially in groups at risk of social exclusion or vulnerable groups (Artiles Rodríguez et al., 2016; Benavides-Delgado, 2022). When spatial rituals are repeatedly or violently transgressed in the classroom, (or during break time, or in other school spaces) students may face expulsion from those spaces. The same happens with the ritualisation of time related to schedules, times for activity execution, the time for carrying out activities, break times, or deadlines for task submission and completion.

Since all ritualisations contain meanings and may impose "exclusionary barriers that establish clear distinction between those who participate and those who do not" (Collins, 2009, p.72), this can lead to a decline in group dynamics, reducing trust, enthusiasm, initiative for action, respect and a sense of belonging. In this way, it is explained that one of the pedagogical recommendations for teachers who have to adapt their teaching to students diagnosed with or exhibiting symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is to implement greater flexibility in time management. In general, students exhibiting this syndrome have difficulty with movement control, focusing on explanations, sustaining attention on tasks, and organising their academic work. One of the most conflict-prone rituals in classrooms is the domestication of the body. This type of ritualisation results in a type of educational relationship organised on the basis of constrained and motionless bodies (Gaussel, 2018) in which, again, ADHD schoolchildren are often excluded. The results of a meta-analysis conducted by MacLean et al. (2023) found that although teachers strive to create cordial and warm bonds with students exhibiting ADHD symptoms, they are, in turn, also more likely to engage in negative interactions with them.

In short, rituals give the educational relationship meaning, variety and dynamism. When properly incorporated into classrooms, they offer the opportunity for greater student involvement and engagement and bring out a sense of personalisation and belonging within the group (Valenti Nigrini y Briseño Fabián, 2020). As Taylor (2008) rightly points out, teachers must be aware of how they ritualise the relationship with their students: their role as catalysts of emotional energy in the classroom and also, unconsciously, as transmitters of culture and, therefore, of the hegemonic narrative



around power. Thompson (2017) bets on ritualising the educational relationship through rituals of inclusion from a social justice approach, presenting this as both an antidote and a means to foster deep and authentic communication between teachers and students. Ritualising the relationship in this way requires a change in teachers' attitudes that allows them to question their own cultural assumptions about the dominant narratives of ethnicity, disability, sexuality, and gender that subtly permeate every educational relationship. This would allow students to build relationships of trust and authenticity among their peers and with teachers, as well as to realise that they are not alone.

### 3. THE HUMAN ELEMENT IN EDUCATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

The quality of the educational relationship develops and “strengthens” itself when it is consciously cultivated, and the teacher becomes “invisible”. British playwright Declan Donnellan (2015) observed that the difference in quality between different theatrical performances does not lie in technique, but “in the source of life that makes technique seem invisible” (p. 18). This “source of life” is not found in external conditions, but in the human element, which brings a performance to life. Japanese actor and theatre director Yoshi Oida (2015) tells the story of why he aspired to become an actor: the desire to be invisible and make the spectator discover that “something more” that the audience does not find in everyday life. A good actor or actress manages to disappear in front of the audience. In the same way that a good teacher, by making himself or herself invisible, makes his or her students discover that “something more” that they would not otherwise be able to appreciate on their own<sup>2</sup>.

This article is based on two key premises. The first is that the quality of the educational relationship depends on the quality and variety of chains of ritualised interactions (theatricality) between teachers and students. These involve a collective gathering (teacher and student group body co-presence) with a shared focus of attention and shared emotional experiences (Collins, 2009). The second premise is that the quality of the educational relationship requires, like any theatrical experience, an adequate fusion between the impression that the classroom dynamics offer to the students (spectators) and the expression of the teacher within the classroom setting (actor). As in any theatrical performance, a basic alignment of interests

<sup>2</sup> The parallels between stage performance and teaching come to life in this compelling example from Yoshi Oida (2015): “In Kabuki theatre, there is a gesture that signifies ‘looking at the moon’, where the actor extends their index finger towards the sky. A highly talented actor performed this gesture with grace and elegance. The audience thought: “Oh, what a beautiful movement! They enjoyed the beauty of the performance and the actor’s technical skill. Another actor made the same gesture: he pointed to the moon. This time, the audience did not notice whether it was elegant or not; they simply saw the moon. I prefer this type of actor, the one who shows the audience the moon. That is, the actor who becomes invisible” (pp. 24-25).



between teacher and students is essential. Otherwise, the necessary communion between both actors in the relationship cannot be established. Theatrical theory highlights the process of audience identification with the character and the ideas that are represented on stage. This, more than any other factor, is a defining feature of both education and theatre.

Students and teachers have different goals and expectations about the meaning regarding the school experience. Each one views and experiences it from distinct visual and emotional perspectives. Despite the heterogeneity and diversity of the student body, schoolchildren go to school —beyond the compulsory nature required by school regulations— guided by extrinsic motivations (“to be someone”, “to have a profession”, “to be important”, etc.) or intrinsic motivations (“to value myself”, “to learn values”, “to mature”, “to have friends”) (Neut Aguayo, 2024). For teachers, the meaning of the school experience is driven by the “desire to teach” and to “share a world with new generations” (Fernandez et al., 2020). At times, the horizons of meaning of students and teachers barely touch, and that is when the academic life of students and the professional life of teachers begin to fracture.

Paraphrasing Bujvald (2011), the visual angle of the students (spectators) is in one direction: from the seat to the stage. On the contrary, the visual angle of the teachers adopts the opposite direction: from the stage to the auditorium. For students, attending class, studying and learning requires a sensory-perceptual environment (principle of impression) enriched with certain sensory-affective qualities (dynamic and fun classes). In general, from their classes and school experiences, students expect *spheres of resonance* (Betton, 2022; Rosa, 2023; Rosa and Endres, 2022); that is, spaces that amplify affective experiences that “move” them, make them “vibrate”. For teachers —although this is not always the case for a minority of teachers— teaching is a primarily relational and communicative matter (principle of expression).

From the student’s perspective (spectator), the success of the educational relationship largely depends on the teacher’s relational sensitivity and ability to understand what students desire and need. A teacher who adopts a dramaturgical perspective will know how to direct students’ (spectators) attention towards the stage (a shared focal point). Ultimately, it is not just about teaching methods but rather about gestures and interaction rituals that shape the educational experience. A recent study carried out with ninety primary and secondary school students in a school in Spain, in a context with a low socioeconomic and educational index, with the aim of identifying the facilitating factors that favour the connection between students and teachers (García-Rubio et al., 2024) concluded that “the personal aspects of the teacher, as well as their attitude towards the profession and the relationship with the students, are much more transcendental in the engagement of students than aspects related to the pedagogy used in the classroom” (p.361). The involvement and interest of teachers in everything that happens to their students, the empathetic and respectful attitude towards them, together with the cheerful and even fun treatment towards

the class group, along with their teaching skills (clear explanations, resolution of doubts, use of diverse methodologies with all kinds of resources, participative and dynamic classes sometimes using games) are key characteristics of teachers who “hook” their students.

In spite of the logical differences from the relational point of view between the theatrical and the educational fact, there is, nevertheless, a common denominator: the paradox in the relationship (either of the artist with the audience, in the case of theatre; or of the teacher and the group of students, in the case of education). As playwright Anne Bogart (2013) points out regarding the artist’s relationship with their audience “in order to speak to many people, you must speak to only one person” (p. 122). In teaching, the audience (students) is often the least considered element, although the most important one in the process (read, theatrical or pedagogical). Brook (2015, p. 78) stated: “the essence in the art of theatre is creating a relationship with the audience”.

This highlights the importance of the human element —and thus, of the You— in the educational relationship. Importance that takes us back to the philosophy of Martin Buber (1923/2013), which distinguishes between the two different types of relationships between people. On the one hand, the “I-That” relationships, which is the proper way to connect with the world of objects. On the other hand, the “I-You”, which are truly human relationships. The former are transactional, superficial and instrumental. In this type of relationship —applied to the educational relationship— the teacher *uses the* students for a specific academic purpose or interacts with them in a limited and superficial way. This relationship contrasts with the “I-You” relationships, which are based on trust, reciprocity, listening, dialogue and affection. These types of “I-You” relationships, Buber warns, require more energy and are inherently more meaningful to both parties.

Building inclusive educational relationships requires rethinking the “You” —the human element— through the lens of diversity. Ultimately, it is about speaking only to one person in order to speak to all, paraphrasing playwright Anne Bogart (2013).

#### 4. THE EDUCATIONAL RELATIONSHIP AND ITS STAGING

Theatrical *staging* concerns the “organisation of elements in space and time, shaped by the relationships of characters on a stage” (Eisenstein, 2018, p. 7). It consists of “the attempt to organise the chaos that animates life” (Assai et al., 2009, p. 14) through the creation of an overarching framework that aims to give form — and thus life— to a work (dramatic text) in front of the audience. In the theatrical metaphor of *staging*, we find certain tools to infer general guidelines for building inclusive and quality educational relationships.

The overarching framework represents the unity of meaning which harmonises the different elements that participate in the staging. From the educational point of view, teachers have to coordinate the instructional elements (teaching) with the

relational ones —managing the heterogeneity of the group by embracing diversity— around a common instructional objective. Hence, as in theatre, the work of the teacher is crucial in the pedagogical stage play. Stage direction involves harmonising and providing coherence to “all the elements that participate in the staging, from the text (first) to the lighting (the last)” (Alonso de Santos, 2018, p. 18). It coordinates the signs to ensure unity in the messages. In the case of teachers, as stage directors, they have to harmonise both the qualities of the text (teaching material) and the qualities of their spect-actors (group of students) as well as the qualities of the interaction with them through the creation of a classroom atmosphere or environment conducive to learning the *text* (instructional objective) throughout the stage play (relational). Forging such an environment is crucial in both stage direction and teaching. Studies on dramaturgy point out that there are three important principles that should not be left to improvisation in the staging of a play. These principles are resonance, impact and proximity, which will be discussed below.

#### 4.1. *Principle of resonance: on the “same wavelength”*

The concept of resonance in Physical Science refers to “the maximum transformation of energy to the system (mechanical or electrical)” (Bustamente and Robles, 2023, p. 41). A relevant construct in seismology, structural analysis and electromagnetism, it refers to the situation in which the system is sensitive to “certain frequencies of disturbances” that it experiences (Bustamente and Robles, 2023, p. 42). In theatrical theory this concept is related to that of sensation and also to that of affectivity. Kent Trejo (2024) defines it, in relation to the theatrical experience, as “a territory of encounter with the energetic charges of the images that carry the fundamental human emotions” (p.115). It refers to the sensation and flow of emotions in motion; that is, what “vibrates” in bodies: “the way we feel and relate to the world we feel” (p. 115).

Thus, this principle in the pedagogical field is linked to relational phenomena that appeal to the sensitive nature and energetic power that permeates every educational experience. In a similar sense, the principle of resonance applied by Rosa (2020) as an antidote to acceleration in the performance society, refers to “a way of *being in the world*, that is, a specific way of relating between subject and world” (p. 217). Or, in other words, as a “*relational happening*” (p. 218), rather than just an emotional state.

Resonance, as a quality of the relational sphere, invites us to think of the educational relationship as a *sphere of resonance* in which teachers and students feel “on the same wavelength”. For this, and since we are talking about a sensitive-affective level, it is important that the students feel like co-conspirators in the *staging process*. The role of the teacher —stage director— is crucial, as is the protagonist role of the students.

In the theatrical sphere we speak of *communion* between actors and spectators, materialised in processes of *identification* (with the characters and their ideas) that

activate thoughts and feelings. Recognising and identifying the emotional state and interests of students and giving them agency is a first step in activating the dramaturgical principle of resonance. In practice, the real challenge in building a positive relationship between faculty and student group is to reveal deep meanings in them, as in theatre. Aware that within a group of students there will be varying degrees of resistance to *be taught or educated* —especially in secondary education— the principle of resonance invites teachers to create a *sphere of educational disturbances* or, in other words, to build *resonance boxes* that foster the interest, motivation and agency of each student.

#### 4.2. Principle of impact: “feeling part of”

If the principle of resonance is located in the sensory sphere, the principle of impact is located in the emotional sphere. According to Kent Trejo (2024), both principles are organised in a dialectical way, feeding back on each other. The Royal Academy of the Spanish Language (RAE) defines the term impact on two semantic levels. As a synonym for effect, incidence, consequence or influence of something on something or someone and as echo, resonance, reverberation.

The quality of an educational relationship is evaluated in terms of the positive emotional impact it has on students in relation to their school experience. In 2022, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Ministerio de Educación, Formación Profesional y Deportes, 2023) analysed the quality of student-teacher relationships based on several dimensions that are related to professional ethics and positive teacher qualities: respect, hospitality, trust, interest and kindness<sup>3</sup>. The results obtained in the case of Spain were encouraging, since the score obtained was 0.15 above the OECD average (0.00) and well above the total for European Union countries (-0.10). Likewise, the results obtained in the dimension of sense of belonging to the school were positive, with a value of 0.27 points, significantly above the total of the European Union countries (0.04) and the OECD average (-0.02).

Through the affective classroom environment, teachers contribute to promote cohesion and inclusion of their students in school life. This is one of the elements that teachers, as stage directors, must know how to harmonise in the classroom.

<sup>3</sup> The students surveyed responded on a four-point Likert scale (“strongly disagree”, “disagree”, “agree”, “strongly agree”) to six positive statements and two negative ones:

*i.* the teachers at my school are respectful towards me; *ii.* if I came to class feeling depressed, my teachers would be concerned about me; *iii.* if I were to visit my school again in three years, my teachers would be happy to see me; *iv.* when my teachers ask me how I'm doing, they are genuinely interested in my answer; *v.* the teachers at my school are kind to me; *vi.* the teachers at my school care about the students' well-being; *vii.* I feel intimidated by the teachers at my school; *viii.* the teachers at my school are cruel to me.

Students who feel lonely, isolated or excluded by their peers or teachers are more likely to disengage and drop out of school. Conversely, in a classroom environment where the teacher creates an atmosphere of tolerance, understanding and acceptance of diversity, students are more likely to develop feelings of security and belonging. An inclusive classroom environment needs to respect and pay attention to the identities and individualities of students, combat group segregation, and foster a sense of belonging among peers and towards the school.

#### 4.3. *Principle of proximity: “pedagogical sensitivity or tact”*

A new similarity between the theatrical and pedagogical worlds is found in the type of bonds that actors, actresses and stage directors—as well as teachers and their student groups—build with the audiences they address. In the case of education and, more specifically, in the scenes involving teaching and learning processes, *weaving bonds* with students provides the educational relationship with a structure of security and affectivity prone to energise the students’ learning processes and promote their emotional well-being. This creates a “mutually accepted communicative relationship” (Asensio, 2006, p. 55) between teachers and students.

Playwright Peter Brook (2004), during his rehearsals, prioritised the creation of a favourable climate for the actors to feel free to bring all they could contribute to the play, without losing sight of the objective: to correctly interpret the theatrical text. For the playwright, creating this emotional climate is a prerequisite to *explaining* what the play is about, how the stage work will be approached and the role of the director. Hence Brook (2004) warns that the word “directing” needs to be broken into two parts:

Half of directing is, of course, being a director, which means taking charge, making decisions, saying “yes” or “no”, having the final say. The other half of leading is keeping the right direction. Here, the director becomes a guide, steering the ship, having studied the navigation charts, and knowing whether they are heading north or south (p. 9).

This leads us to reflect on teacher leadership in the management of the learning environment and the qualities that accompany such leadership. The sense of leadership in an inclusive classroom is geared toward leaving no student behind. Every student holds the same status: co-participants and protagonists. There is no room for indifference, exclusion or marginalisation. And yes, there is room for proximity, closeness and complicity. As Asensio (2010) states: “Educating can only be pursued if the people involved feel close and confident” (p.41).

Proximity, in the theatrical context, takes the form of gestural rituals of the actors with the spectators (gestures, silences, words, movements, rhythms) as a means of drawing closer to the public. In the pedagogical context, it means being sensitive to the subjectivity and uniqueness of each student, using infraverbal means, as in theatrical play.

Van Manen (2010) theorised about pedagogical sensitivity and the role of tact in teaching. He showed that the teaching process required tact, that is: interpretative intelligence, practical moral intuition, sensitivity to the uniqueness of each student, and the ability to improvise in daily interactions with the class group. This pedagogical sensitivity or tact is materialised in speech, silence, gaze, gestures and the management of space and time in the classroom.

Caring and close educational relationships with students require dedication and attention, and often, small “wastes of time” that help strengthen communication within the classroom. In a similar line of thought, Le Breton (2023) reflects on the role of emotions in the educational relationship through physical presence, speech and silence. The affective quality in the classroom, through words, their rhythm, intonation, and accompanying silence demonstrates consideration for the other and offers them a space of their own. In conclusion, the principle of proximity makes it possible, through pedagogical tact, to preserve and respect the uniqueness of each student, to be attentive to their vulnerabilities and to instil security and confidence in them.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Empirical studies on educational relationships have addressed interactive processes —dyadic or group— between teachers and class groups from an instrumental reading, assigning them the value of a modulating variable in the teaching and learning processes. These studies also highlighted the role of these interactions as a promoter of school coexistence and, more recently, as a protective factor for students’ emotional well-being.

Theoretical studies have referred to the educational relationship as a space of encounter, where the recognition of otherness, empathy, and dialogue serve as its foundational ethical principles (Martín-Alonso et al., 2019; Mínguez et al, 2016; Moreno Aponte and Vila Merino, 2022; Vila Merino, 2019). Other theoretical contributions have referred to it as a mode of interpersonal relationship, dialectical in nature, woven of love, friendship and solitude (Jover Olmeda, 1991) and as a specific form of affiliation (Bárcena Orbe, 2018).

The aim of this article has been to highlight some common points that theatre and education share, starting from a basic element that is present in both realities: the *human element in relation*, that allows us to discover new dimensions for analysing the educational relationship. Considering the educational relationship from theatrical coordinates invites to analyse it through theatricality and scenic communication. The educational relationship emerges as an element with its own voice at the service of the student (spect-actor); a sort of *resonance box* with its own life that is nourished by ritualised actions (theatricality), circulation of affections (also, disaffections) between the teacher and the group of students, centred

around specific instructional goals and the pedagogical sensitivity of the teacher (as stage director).

We are currently witnessing a critical phase in the teaching profession that inevitably affects the creation of inclusive educational relationships. A recent study by Fundación SM (2023) in collaboration with the Educational Research and Advisory Institute (IDEA) detected among teachers —especially those with less teaching experience—: a lack of motivation (loss of enthusiasm and prevalence of indifference) and teacher distress (apathy, burnout, anxiety and depression). On the other hand, teachers reported that the greatest challenges in teaching are the difficulty in engaging students' interest and completing the planned academic curriculum.

In light of these needs and obstacles experienced by teachers, this article proposes a commitment to forge a *scenic* or *dramaturgical vision* and to train teachers —novice and experienced— in theatrical strategies and techniques. This would provide a valuable tool to strengthen agency, security and confidence in teaching practice, which would ultimately enhance the relational well-being between teachers and students. Likewise, the educational contributions of scenic principles and strategies go beyond the improvement of motivational and communicative processes in teaching. In this sense and taking inclusion as an educational goal as a reference, teachers would benefit from implementing dramatic principles and strategies to reinterpret teaching, analyse the personal educational philosophies that underpin teaching practices, as well as to find creative and appropriate solutions to problematic educational and pedagogical situations. This would enable them to better maintain their own teaching well-being while also promoting the students' well-being. This article invites you to analyse evidence-based pedagogical experiences that integrate dramaturgical principles in teacher and educator training: Bayne et al. (2021), Hammer and Lenz (2022), Hos et al. (2023), Lu (2025); Sappa and Barabasch (2019), Tracena and Bailey (2022) and Xiajing (2024). It also encourages exploring the potential of applied arts and theatre in the university context, particularly at a Spanish university (Massó-Guijarro et al., 2021).

In conclusion, thinking the educational relationship through the theatrical metaphor invites to rethink the *knowledge of being and doing as a teacher*, from the perspective of inclusive education, in the design and staging of a *dramaturgical architecture* based on the invisibility of the teacher, resonance, impact, and proximity to the students.

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