

Theater as a Pedagogical Tool to Teach History of Contemporary Education

El teatro como herramienta didáctica en la enseñanza de la Historia de la Educación Contemporánea
O teatro como ferramenta didática no ensino da História da Educação Contemporânea

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ABSTRACT. If current universities demand an education that trains individuals to face future changes, now we face the challenge to educate for change. Innovation, creativity and theater as art are fundamental pillars for a more revealing construction of historical and educational knowledge. From this approach, we can provide justification for a more practical and significant teaching of History of Education, based on the use of pedagogical resources that are more attractive for students. This paper presents the development of a teaching innovation in the History of Contemporary Education subject of the Degree Course on Pedagogy at the University of Seville, which results in the application and use of theater pedagogy as a teaching resource to learn about education in the past.

Keywords:
History of Education, pedagogy, theater, university, educational innovation.

RESUMEN. Si la Universidad actual está demandando una educación que capacite al individuo para afrontar los cambios del futuro, hoy estamos retados a educar para el cambio. La innovación, la creatividad y el teatro como arte, son pilares fundamentales para una construcción más reveladora del conocimiento histórico educativo. Desde este planteamiento, justificamos una enseñanza de la Historia de la Educación más práctica y significativa, amparada en el uso de recursos pedagógicos más atractivos para el estudiante. Este trabajo recoge el desarrollo de una innovación docente en la asignatura Historia de la Educación Contemporánea del Grado en Pedagogía de la Universidad de Sevilla, que se concreta en la aplicación y uso de una pedagogía teatral como recurso didáctico para el conocimiento del pasado educativo.

Palabras clave:
Historia de la Educación; didáctica; teatro; universidad; innovación educativa.

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RESUMO. Se Universidade atual está demandando uma educação que capacite o indivíduo para enfrentar as mudanças do futuro, hoje somos desafiados a educar para a mudança. A inovação, a criatividade e o teatro como arte, são pilares fundamentais para uma construção mais reveladora do conhecimento histórico educativo. A partir desta abordagem, está justificado o ensino da História da Educação de uma maneira mais prática e significativa, amparado no uso de recursos pedagógicos mais atraentes para o estudante. Este trabalho inclui o desenvolvimento de uma inovação docente na disciplina História da Educação Contemporânea do curso de Pedagogia da Universidade de Sevilla, que se concretiza na aplicação e uso de uma pedagogia teatral como recurso didático para o conhecimento do passado educativo.

Palavras-chave:

História da Educação; didática; teatro; universidade; inovação educativa.

In this last decade, there have been many important debates and discussions about the teaching momentum in higher education (Zabalza, 2002). Learning in a different way at university is more than an academic challenge that faculty face in order to contribute to a better and higher quality teaching at university. Today, teachers are expected to be learning facilitators, so that they can contribute in an innovative and significant manner to the expansion and transference of academic scientific knowledge with new methodological and pedagogical approaches. And, based on these approaches—relying on the necessary and essential university teaching training (Vaillant & Marcelo, 2015), for example—we can maybe locally and actively participate in educational improvement processes. Therefore, and due to the growing development to which higher education has been subject to, it is more and more important that it becomes aware of the need to render account to society in relation to its main *raison d'être*.

For not so long, universities have been developing a special interest in learning to teach (Durán, 2014) and value and encourage teaching quality, oriented towards the training of better professionals. All of this within the framework of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), in which competency-based learning, teaching to think, and transferring the knowledge learned play a leading role. Nevertheless, nowadays, university teaching still requires important

local reforms which can contribute to guaranteeing the comprehensive development of students through their training processes. Faculty today need to learn to communicate ideas innovatively, to trigger astonishment and motivation, to awaken interest and to generate opportunities for students' queries, to guide and orient students towards excellence, etc. With this objective, we need to recognize that two decades ago, teaching renovation as such was not a priority in university institutions. Proof of that is the importance that universities have recently given to university teaching training programs, in-class innovation projects, teaching material design for teaching activities, etc. Before, aside from these new possibilities, it was the university faculty who, taking advantage of their academic freedom, had the opportunity to transform their own teaching with individual initiatives. However, in order to perform this task today, university faculty have the support of the university itself, through an important array of training methods that contribute to making university teaching a more integrating, intelligent, skilled, changing and times adjusted pedagogical process.

In spite of the abovementioned, today many instructors make a great effort and obtain good results when they want to improve their teaching style through the use of different methods to develop educational processes associated with teaching innovation (Peña, 2014). In that sense, we understand that universities should

prioritize, appreciate and value the teaching activity much more, valuing the pedagogical innovation results that thousands of faculty members are providing in Spanish universities, above all to facilitate students' learning in today's society.

Nowadays, teaching activities at universities generate high-impact innovations that have a positive effect on the development of the teaching-learning processes of the most diverse and sometimes unsuspected disciplines. Thus, teaching History of Education at university is always a challenge faculty members face if what they wish is to put together a more practical, active, new, emotional and significant teaching, adapted to the new EHEA demands. Precisely, theater in this context is a powerful pedagogical resource (García, 2004; Navarro, 2010; Sánchez, 2007), which combines speech, music, sounds, movement, gestures and staging to visually show ideas and concepts, represent stories, reconstruct conflicts or share thoughts, emotions and feelings, etc. Theater, given its strong interpersonal and relational character, is also an important pedagogic tool, especially useful to develop social skills and values education (Núñez & Navarro, 2007).

THE INNOVATION CHALLENGE AND CREATIVITY IN EHEA UNIVERSITIES

We are immersed in an ever-changing society whose changes affect us personally and professionally. If we focus on the educational context and, more precisely, on universities, it can be observed that most pedagogical methods developed at universities are similar, very much like those from other times, and are also proposed with the parameters that are usually associated with traditional teaching (order and rigorousness in the mere transmission of data, rote learning, using speech to convey knowledge, the teacher as the center of the teaching-learning process, use and abuse of school manuals, etc.).

With this outlook, it can be observed that, in terms of the development of teaching-learning processes, there is something that has not progressed enough. We are still teaching and learning the way we did

decades ago, thus preventing a true pedagogical process revolution (Acaso, 2013), in which both faculty and students assume new roles, approaches and pedagogical challenges. Whilst faculty are demanded a continuous pedagogical training update—supported by innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship as educational agents of change—, students remain expectant, awaiting to be able to understand that learning has no limits, that learning can be achieved in different ways, and that current educational objectives can be reached through more contemporary, innovative and different pedagogical resources.

The EHEA in the university context can be conceived as an innovation platform (Caldevilla, 2012). There is no doubt this platform as well as creativity can contribute to optimizing the teaching-learning processes in this context. Innovation at university implies changing paradigms, changing yesterday's rules—with which we were educated and trained and which are still used to learn—to new ways of doing things, which need to be reinvented. Nowadays, it is necessary to transform the teaching practice, requiring faculty to innovate, contribute with new ideas and bet on more original pedagogical methods with two purposes. On the one hand, students are to learn in a more amusing and dynamic way, and, on the other, faculty are to choose teaching to think historically, based on innovation and creativity. In this line, pedagogical renovation itself becomes a possibility faculty have in order to find themselves in teaching, which will motivate them to research about new ways of communication; new guidelines, mechanisms and ways to make students think; and new resources, so students may learn in a fun and significant fashion (Álvarez, 2011; Álvarez & Payà, 2012).

Innovation is always associated with reconquering creativity (Trias, 2014), which is not only convenient for faculty and students and for classroom activities, but also becomes the first step for every innovative process. Creativity has to do with the human capacity to invent something new. It refers to the generation of new ideas and concepts, or to new associations between ideas and concepts already known, which usually produce original solutions. This way, we think

that “the presence of the attractive will always be a fundamental value in the exercise of the teaching activity” (Petschen, 2013, p. 99). Maybe because of that we understand that every subject, with no exceptions, may be planned and organized in an interesting manner for students.

Every educator should enable their students to be capable of generating innovative and creative ideas (López & Sevilla, 2009). If we focus on the setting that concerns us here—the university classroom—we need to keep in mind that both faculty and students should be able to adopt a flexible attitude always towards the development of attitudes related to innovation, change, creativity, imagination, etc. Educating in creativity is educating for change, creating original people, with initiative, flexibility, and vision; people who are risk-takers and entrepreneurial, besides offering them tools for innovation (Rabadán & Carbalán, 2011). Without a doubt, educating in creativity favors personal development and professional improvement in the teaching practice. Hence, creative innovation within the EHEA is still a pending issue, which needs to be responded from particular formal educational scenarios on behalf of a better education, adapted to new times and circumstances.

THEATER AS A RESOURCE FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF EDUCATIONAL HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE

Theater, within the field of education, is another pedagogical tool which can be used to develop the students' expressive and communicative skills, in as far as it focuses not only on the linguistics abilities of reading, writing, listening or speaking, but mainly on the abilities of communicating, constructing, stating, and transferring knowledge.

Theater itself is a branch of performing arts through which works and stories are represented before an audience. Theatrical activities allow us to be in touch with knowledge in an amusing and fun manner. They help us to get to know the history of education based on dynamism and amusement, contributing to the analysis of the educational past based on constructivist

educational approaches. Theater stimulates students to learn, instilling a dramatic sense in them.

Human beings are always about expression and representation: a gesture, movement, a look, a drawing, a word, etc., which jointly contribute to developing communication. Communication which a single person can express in different languages, for example. Theater and all dramatic expressions enable one's own personal creation of a complete language, generating different multiple intelligences (Navarro, 2007). Doubtlessly, we understand that dramatic expressions favor the development of basic competencies and ease the acquisition of knowledge.

Using theater as a pedagogical resource at university (García, 2004) is a novel a proposal, which within EHEA is especially attractive for students. The basic idea here is that students' motivation is a decisive factor in their own teaching-learning process. This way, we acknowledge that theatrical practice is an active pedagogical methodology which enables students to become discoverers of their learning, more than mere information receivers. Through theater, faculty and students have the opportunity to promote the study of school past from the present. Through theater we reconstruct past actions through artistic manifestations, which students usually find appealing. Incorporating the theater in the university classroom is a reliable method for innovative learning and to capture the students' attention in particular. Besides, it stimulates imagination and conflict resolution, increasing students' curiosity. This is an educational tool suitable for studying and learning at university based on discovery, revelation, and creativity. In this case, we conceive it as an instrument of change that has important benefits for the construction of significant educational historical knowledge, which serves students as an impulse to stimulate creative, artistic and review potentialities.

Theater, through its verbal and non-verbal resources, helps create true communicative situations, reconstructing experiences and even involves the subject's whole personality (Tejerina, 1994). Developing group theatrical practices helps us present critical

reflections about education in an open society, which requires to value thoughts and ideas in relation to the history of education through emotions and feelings. Role playing in theatrical practice helps students to perform a role different from the person they are. This practice is particularly interesting to learn to be in somebody else's shoes. We are aware that historical educational representations through the language of drama helps us to better understand the meaning and repercussions of educational acts and facts.

If theater facilitates the development of an active pedagogy for expression and communication, through theatrical representations we have the opportunity to value the individual's expressive resources. Given this, there is no doubt that educators have the opportunity to teach History of Education using the artistic potential of their students, who with the aid of theater performance will be able to become familiar with the educational historical contents. In this sense, faculty's role is to be guides, coordinators, hosts and referees to keep students' determination, managing to increase their creativity, motivation, imagination and active participation (Motos, 2009).

Applying theater to the teaching of History of Education can provide a series of advantages, dealing with some of the following issues: (a) strengthening interpersonal relationships, which favors the student's comprehensive personality development; (b) stimulating the pleasure for oral expression and reading, which favors the development of communicative skills; (c) encouraging self-confidence, which helps us overcome personal obstacles and difficulties; (d) contributing to expressing that which is difficult for us to verbalize; (e) favoring empathy by putting students to play the role of different characters, etc. All this leads us to consider that theater is a good pedagogical resource for the construction of historical educational knowledge. Together with this, we are aware that theatrical practice helps students to improve their social relationships and self-esteem, to eliminate taboos and negativity, to internalize knowledge based on ludic activities, and to transfer the knowledge learned, among other particularly important issues.

Theatrical practice becomes then an observatory through which we intend to get to know and/or decipher the educational-historical reality. The students' task in this case is to learn how to interpret the past footprints in education. It is they, the students, who are to offer their interpretation to the audience in relation to the reality they are representing. The actor will aspire to move the audience, affect them emotionally so his/her interpretation is not lost upon coming back to reality. In fact, our duty is then to foster theatricality as the proper essence of theater at all times (Motos, 2009).

As students become not only spectators but also creators of theater, they acquire a sense of the discipline, so they will need to regularize and harmonize all the elements that make a certain representation possible. This way, within the university setting, students are presented the opportunity to appreciate aesthetics, keeping in mind the taste for beauty (Mantero, 2006). Additionally, under such circumstances, students internalize the true sense of working in groups, respecting key aspects such as perseverance, order, dialectics, corporal expression, compliance, etc.

THEATRICAL PEDAGOGY AS A PEDAGOGICAL PROPOSAL TO TEACH HISTORY OF CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION

History of Contemporary Education is a mandatory subject with 8 ECTS credits in the curriculum of the degree program in Pedagogy at Universidad de Sevilla, during the second year. It is a subject which usually turns out to be theoretical and dense for students, and usually becomes one of the least attractive courses in the program. Given this circumstance, and on behalf of introducing a new pedagogical component in the methodological structure of the courses, we set out to use theater as a pedagogical resource to make the course a more practical and attractive educational experience. From this assumption, we decided to make students able to channel information and internalize the educational historical knowledge in a more attractive manner. Thus, we established the following objectives:

- Foster opportunities and experiences to teach and learn History of Contemporary Education

through the application of a theatrical pedagogy.

- Use theater as a pedagogical resource to familiarize students with the educational historical knowledge in a more attractive way.

The faculty innovation referred to has been continuously under way since the past academic year 2012/13 in the School of Educational Sciences at said university. The students in the course, distributed in groups of four, are invited to design a theater play related to the most important life, work and educational contents of each one of the authors that are part of their program. Each one of the groups is randomly assigned an author, whose key pedagogical principles, works and features are the main object of the play they will represent. Some of the authors are: John Dewey, Francisco Ferrer y Guardia, María Montessori, Ovide Decroly, Antón Makarenko, Giner de los Ríos, Andrés Manjón, Lorenzo Milani, Alexander Neill, Celestine Freinet, Iván Illich, Paulo Freire, etc. This way, every group must read the corresponding bibliography related to the author selected by the faculty.

During the implementation of this teaching proposal, we have carried out an active participative methodology, through which students can learn to work individually and as a team, developing activities and attitudes such as collective participation, representation, knowledge transference, empathy, respect, motivation, etc.

The stages carried out to put this pedagogical innovation into practice are the following (Mercer, 2004; Nicolás, 2011):

- Presentation of the pedagogical proposal.
- Selection of an author, topic and situation to represent.
- Duration of the representation and time sequence: works conceived based on the approach (contextualization), climax (central part of the representation) and end (as a conclusion), with an approximate duration of six/eight minutes each.
- Enumeration and characterization of the characters: each student represents at least one character, considering their physical, psychological and social condition aspects (Stanislavski, 2002).

- Elaboration of the script and rehearsal: the theater script which students use as a base; it can refer to personal adaptations of texts or collective creations. One thorough rehearsal. It is essential to previously work on the setting, the selection of the stage, props and resources, lighting and music, etc.
- Representation or acting: from accountability to the need to offer classmates the best theater representation possible.
- Recording of the play: once the play has been rehearsed as many times as necessary, it can be recorded. Later, the video is uploaded to a space specially designed for such purpose and even to YouTube, so plays are available to the community. The importance lies on transferring the results of the plays represented.
- Handing in the assignment/Critical review: this is about handing in the final result and reflecting on the work done as a way of evaluation. Students, besides telling about their experience, present the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal, the interaction level and satisfaction with the experience, etc.

In terms of evaluation, once the play was designed and represented, it was considered appropriate to have the following aspects evaluated by a jury of peers randomly selected and the instructor (Motos, 2013): a) originality and novelty; b) range of register and flexibility; c) contrast and juxtaposition of ideas; d) distribution of time; e) rhythm of the interpretation; f) script, argument and narration coherence; g) setting and development of imagination; h) emotion and feeling arousal; i) Interpreter's eloquence; j) contents; k) resources and materials used; l) characterization; m) end of the play; etc. Each aspect was scored from 0 to 10, and then the average was calculated (see Appendix 1). This activity accounted for 20% of the final grade. A written test accounted for 60% of the grade and the remaining 20% was related to the elaboration of a written assignment and a didactic video related to the authors studied in this subject. We need to point out that all groups that participated in the theater project reached at least 14% of such score. Thus, it is worth mentioning that most participants have obtained a score that ranges between very good

(7 points) and excellent (10 points) in this practical assignment. None of the groups obtained a fail (fewer than 5 points). During the proposal, both faculty and students showed a high degree of satisfaction with the results obtained. These issues were manifested in discussion groups created specifically for students to express their opinions and reflections in relation to the strengths and weaknesses of this pedagogical proposal.

Among the positive aspects mentioned by participants in relation to the use of theater for learning purposes in the course of History of Contemporary Education, the following stand out: *a) We learn contents in an easier way; b) The ludic element makes us more willing to learn; c) Theater helps us work in teams and more collaboratively; d) Theater plays are like examples of contents which are easier to internalize; e) I couldn't have imagined we were going to learn History of Education through theater; etc.* Among the negative aspects or susceptible to improvement, the following were mentioned: *a) Sometimes not all students take theatrical practice with responsibility; b) Not all students have the same ability to represent a theater play; c) Loss of academic rigor in the classes; d) A lot of time is required for the rehearsals to present something more or less good; e) Sometimes the grade obtained does not correspond to the work performed and the effort put; etc.*

We also want to say that, since we began developing this program, students feel especially attracted to this subject. Although the number of dropouts is not significant in this case, we wish to state that the design and representation of a theater play within the pedagogical framework represents an important incentive for future pedagogy graduates.

The recordings of the theater plays can be seen as a result at: <http://asly55.wix.com/educadores-as-en-hec> This is a web page specifically conceived and created by students to gather the results of this faculty innovation project in a single space (see Figure 1).

Working in class through theatrical practice has allowed us to develop a methodology in which students have learned in a different manner, taking them away

from the traditional system of memorizing facts and dates on educational history and going deeper into the construction of knowledge in a much more emotional (Navarro, 2007), attractive, agreeable and diverting fashion for students.

CONCLUSIONS

Albert Einstein once said: "If you look for different results, stop doing the same." And, in fact, the teaching experience upon which we have reflected in this paper was conceived on behalf of innovation, providing better learning results in the teaching of educational history. Learning History of Contemporary Education through the theater turns up as an intriguing and innovative university teaching proposal, which has enabled students to look back at the past of education from a contemporary lens adapted to the methodological demands established by the EHEA for universities currently (Lucas & Claxton, 2014). Theater offers the possibility to learn History of Education in a living context and environment, which is shared and collaborative, which allows the development of core and specific competencies, along with a better conceptual representation and improved internalization of educational history contents.

Through this teaching experience, we can say that students in the second year of the Degree Program in Pedagogy have been able to actively participate in a new way of studying History of Contemporary Education, which is more rewarding, dynamic and ludic. We understand precisely that one of the best ways for our students to learn History of Education in a significant manner is to include a ludic and participative element. Focusing on the development of educational history knowledge based on a theatrical pedagogy, we can state that a certain subject may become more pleasing and attractive to students in so far as faculty and students are able to undertake a common teaching project, based on active and collaborative learning.

When students—besides being spectators— become actors, they acquire a sense of discipline, which they need to systematize to arrange all the elements that make a representation possible. In this way,



Figure 1. Screenshots of the web page designed to include the theater plays of characters of the History of Contemporary Education.

the student/actor has the opportunity to appreciate aesthetics and the taste for beauty which is associated with scientific knowledge. Needless to say, through theatrical practice students internalize team work, order, eloquence, persistence, corporal expression and compliance better, among other abilities (Boud & Molloy, 2015; Durán, 2014; Motos, 2013). As stated by Navarro (2007, p. 165), "the practice of drama favors interpersonal and intergroup communication." Through it, students reconstruct the reality of their own experiences, emotions and feelings, valuing the true meaning of experiential and practical learning.

Theater, in the sense of assuming roles and working scientific texts to render them in first person and face to face, undoubtedly represents an effective tool in the development of the teaching-learning processes. The use of theater as a teaching resource fosters the students' intrinsic motivation in the face of learning, facilitating also understanding, cooperation, and dialog between the faculty and the students. In this case, we consider that we have been able to conceive theatrical practice as a formal teaching proposal which has helped us replace more conventional and traditional methods. Nevertheless, theater as a resource requires constant educational renovation associated with an important methodological awareness on the part of the faculty and with the will to encourage democratic values in higher education (Navarro, 2010).

Having mentioned these considerations, we need to mention some issues in relation to this project, which we understand need to be improved/transformed, above all, taking into consideration the negative or improvable aspects pointed out by students. First, we consider it appropriate to improve the grade that may be obtained in the subject thanks to the development of this proposal. All this to the detriment of the percentage assigned to the written test at the end of the course. This way, the test would need to account for a 50% and the design and representation of the play a 30% of the final grade. Second, given the amount of work students put into this practice, we intend to show these plays before an audience, with the intention of strengthening the work done even more. We intend to charge an entrance ticket to assign the funds to social work. Third, we want to invite theater-specialized professionals to the classrooms

at the beginning of the course in order to delight and motivate participants with their best contributions in terms of concepts and competencies, associated with the use of theater as a teaching resource. Fourth, it is essential to point out our desire to include contents related to other subjects in the plays, so as to encourage collaboration among the faculty in other fields of knowledge. Fifth, we intend to record all the plays so as to edit a DVD which would be available to all the educational community, in libraries and on Internet. Definitely, we wish to continue teaching and learning History of Contemporary Education through theater, through the self-evaluation of our teaching activity and the evaluation of the students as principal actors of this experience.

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APPENDIX 1

Evaluation Rubric for the Representation of Theatrical Plays in the Course of History of Contemporary Education

ASPECTS EVALUATED:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	TOTAL
1. Originality and novelty											
2. Range of register and flexibility											
3. Contrast and juxtaposition of ideas											
4. Time allocation											
5. Rhythm of the interpretation											
6. Script, argument and narrative coherence											
7. Setting and development of imagination											
8. Emotions and feelings arousal											
9. Expressiveness of the interpreters											
10. Contents											
11. Resources and materials used											
12. Characterization											
13. Ending of the play											
14. Others...											
											----- 14

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