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CREATIVITY STUDIES

CREATIVITY AND IDENTITY. PARTICIPATORY THEATER AS A TOOL IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF REFLECTIVE IDENTITY: THE ROLE OF SOFT SKILLS

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Abstract. In this article, I undertake an analysis of issues related to the role played by creativity in the process of identity construction, in particular reflective identity. As I see it, social changes characteristic of late modernity, mean that processes related to creativity and the development of emotional intelligence, have gained in importance in the context of identity development. Contemporary social reality also requires the stimulation of new competences useful for constructing reflective identity within the framework of nurturing and educational systems. Is it possible for participatory theater to act as a tool to support the development of creativity and thereby be employed in the development of reflective identity?

1. Introduction

Creativity has always been an important element of identity. Our ability to engage in creative activities, which we owe to the evolution of both the mind and self (being part of its later evolution) is one of the basic processes of identity formation. In my opinion, the role that creativity plays in identity processes is gaining importance in modern social systems. This fact is referenced in the treatises of Anthony Giddens, who argues that it is related to the specificity of identity construction under the conditions of late modernity, accompanied by processes such as, namely: the weakening of axio-normative systems and related relativization of social norms, uprooting mechanisms and institutional reflectivity. Giddens (1991, p. 3) states that "One of the distinguishing features of modernity is the tightening interdependence between the two extremes of being and intentionality: global factors on the one hand and individual dispositions on the other". One of the observable and extensively characterized indicators of this phenomenon in the literature is the moratorium. The originator of the term *identity* Erikson (1994), indicated adolescence as the period characteristic to its formation. Modern day researchers representing a variety of disciplines across humanities and social sciences mention, that the process of identity construction not only cannot be reduced to a single developmental period, but is also in many cases a continuous phenomenon – a form of undertaking, the implementation of which occurs constantly throughout life.

The reason for this state of affairs is undoubtedly down to the shift in the social situation in which modern identities are constructed. To paraphrase slightly and somewhat simplify the findings of researchers on this subject, it can be stated that late modernity has instigated a change in terms of key questions with reference to human subjectivity. Much earlier generations of social participants seeking answers to the question *who am I?* were inclined to forge their identities in response to questions such as: *where am I from?*, *who were my ancestors?*, *what kind of work do I do?*, *what is my social position/status?*, *where was I born?*, *what is my nationality?*, *what is my ethnicity?*, *to which social class do I belong?*, *which customs can I class as mine?*, *etc.* The search for answers to such questions facilitated the stabilization of basic social identifications. Nowadays, many of the above-mentioned criteria involved in social identification have become relativized, and individuals in the process of constructing an identity have to deal with relating themselves to a much wider and more variable spectrum of social references.

As I see it, these phenomena stimulate a need for increased emphasis on developing emotional intelligence competences as part of nurturing and educational processes (and, in particular, on the development of creativity). The process of forging identity under the conditions of late modernity also requires the shaping of new competences in relation to the coordination of activities within many simultaneous dimensions and contexts. Thus, the basic research problem presented in this text constitutes an attempt to answer the question – can participatory theater be a tool to support the development of creativity and thereby be employed in the development of reflective identity? In the search for an answer, the following auxiliary questions will also serve to be useful – whether and to what extent participatory theater could act as an arena for the development of other soft skills? What other abilities important in the development of reflective identity can be exercised through it?

However, before proceeding to the research findings, allow me to introduce the basic theoretical issues related to the role of creativity in the development of reflective identity.

2. The role of creativity in the development of reflective identity

At least since the scientific research of the classics of symbolic interactionism, especially since the classical proposals of Cooley (1902) and Mead (2015), identity has been recognized as a phenomenon for which reflection is a characteristic concept. Florian Znaniecki wrote about the reflective self in the first decade of the 20th century (Hałas, 2011). The self always arises as a result of an individual's conscious reflection on himself – the ability to acquire identity is closely related to the mechanism of reflecting what others think about the individual, but also what others think about themselves. A comparison of these two factors shapes the self-assessment of social entities (Cooley, 1902). The mechanism of reflectivity consists of the ability of an individual to both consciously reflect and control their own behavior, which goes hand in hand with the expectation that others will also monitor this process. It is a means of control – on one hand, the individual controls the arena of his actions, whilst expecting the same from others. From the point of view of this article, however, it is worth emphasizing that reflectivity as such is not a new feature, characteristic

of our contemporary reality. Rather, it is the basic mechanism for both primitive and late modern societies (Hałas, 2011).[1]

As Hałas (2011) points out, nowadays in social theory, something we can call a "reflective turn" is taking place. Although the process of reflection seems to have been an indispensable element in constructing identity since the dawn of our species, life in contemporary, complex social systems seems to require a special way of referring to rules and resources – individuals treat them in an unprecedented way, on one hand strategically planning their use, on the other, approaching them with a reserve quite specific of our time (Hałas, 2011). There are many factors underlying this phenomenon resulting from the transition from traditional to post-traditional societies, widely described in the literature. I would argue that the most important include: industrialization and development of the capitalist system, which underlie the development of nation-states and modern forms of organization (Giddens, 1991); changes in the field of social relations control resulting in the power dissipation mechanism described by Foucault (1995, 2002); the rationalization of reality described by Weber (2009) resulting in the weakening of axio-normative systems and in particular the weakening of the role of authority and morality (Rieff, 2006). The related development of individualism contributing, on one hand, to an increase in subjectivity of the participants of social life, and on the other, to their loss of a firm basis for objectivizing their activities (Jacyno, 2007) and the unprecedented acceleration of socio-cultural changes associated with globalization and technical development.

These processes contribute to the existence of new conditions for constructing identity, which differ from the pre-industrial.[2] In my opinion, this phenomenon is aptly characterized by Giddens, pointing to the fact that one of the basic features that distinguishes modernity – institutional reflexivity – boils down to the tightening of interdependencies between global factors and individual dispositions. However, this leads to individual identities being created in circumstances of uncertainty resulting from the constant necessity to choose between a staggering number of possibilities, touching almost all dimensions of social life (Giddens, 1991). Of course, these choices are accompanied by uneasiness and risk (Beck, 1992) and the construction of social reality, increasingly based on uprooting mechanisms (such as symbolic

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[1] Today, mechanisms underlying identity construction are described by representatives of various scientific disciplines. The latest, and I think, in this regard, the most spectacular accounts come from neurobiologists. It turns out that the mechanism of reflection described in classical sociological thought, as well as the contemporary issue of reflexivity have their organic counterparts. Antonio Damasio points out that the so-called "simulated body loop" is responsible for these processes. In his view, man is not only able to constantly monitor the states of his own body but also, thanks to the mind, can simulate states, which do not actually take place. This is due to the underlying ability of consciousness to manipulate data resulting from all the information flowing into the nervous system through the senses. Therefore, it concerns both the internal states of the body and all available data regarding its external environment and previous experiences. This immensity of information can be efficiently used and managed by the body's activation of systems responsible for emotions and feelings – which allows for the coordination of many interacting circuits in the nervous system (Damasio, 2000). The "simulated body loop" also permits such manipulation of data, enabling us to mirror the states of other people and thus trigger the mechanism needed to create identity (Damasio, 2010). Thanks to this, the human mind creates the reflected self based on reflection (Cooley, 1902) and launches a reflection-based role-taking mechanism (Mead, 2015), which in turn leads to the creation of individual, social and cultural identity.

[2] In my opinion, this is particularly evident in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which until recently were under the influence of the Soviet Union. The systemic transformation is the actual process of transitioning from the totalitarian system, characterized by strong interactions of axio-normative systems, to postmodernity (or late modernity using Giddens terminology), which is characterized by the fluidity of social reality and the weakening of axio-normative systems.

means and expert systems), visibly transforms the conditions under which the participants of contemporary social life construct their identity. Giddens (1991) points out that, modern reflectiveness has a specific character – as he sees it, the majority of social activity and material attitudes to nature are systematically revised due to newly acquired knowledge, which is in turn a structural element of modern institutions, uncertain in its knowledge and based on doubt, which becomes a source of anxiety for ordinary people. Characterizing the late-modern reflective identity, Giddens draws our attention to its creative character. He refers to the area of ontological safety. In his opinion, the extremely complicated process of its shaping within contemporary social reality is much easier for those individuals who, in early childhood, develop a safe attachment relationship with their careers. It is a kind of vaccine that immunizes an individual against excessive risk and anxiety, in the future allowing them to unleash creative processes dependent on their capability of acting without unnecessary levels of fear, for example when taking a "step into the unknown" (Giddens, 1991). Creativity as such, seems to be one of the general parameters of identity, but it plays a special role in the process of forming a creative identity.

Issues related to the concept of creativity are being presently considered by representatives of various scientific disciplines. This concept has also undergone rigorous in-depth analysis carried out by representatives of the social sciences, the phenomenon being studied within various theoretical paradigms and using various empirical techniques (Karwowski & Kaufman, 2017). Sociologists most often consider them in the context of the so-called "creative society" (cf. *e.g.* Kačerauskas, 2015), or the commonly known creative class (Florida, 2004). From the point of view of this article, however, the most important considerations appear to be those, which analyze the interrelationships between self, identity, and creativity. The creation of identity is and always been, by nature a creative process. Regardless of the complexity of the social system, the processes associated with its construction are dynamic, it being a complex, heterogeneous structure with a reflective character, built (obviously) in conjunction with other participants of social life, but also with the structural and cultural dimension of reality.

In modern scientific research, creativity is often considered as the process underlying the creation of self and identity. Its importance in this context is backed up by neuroscientists – the skills underlying the emergence of the mind, self, and identity, such as: manipulation of information flowing from the senses, in combination with the constant monitoring of physiological, emotional, and psychological processes at both conscious and unconscious levels, complemented by simulating non-existent states of the body and the anticipated states of interaction partners, by the nature of things, is a phenomenon related to creativity (Damasio, 2010). It appears that the basis for these processes are emotional (unconscious) experiences, whose evolutionary origins are earlier, and their transformation into emotional experiences based on the conscious reflection of the subject led to people developing imagination, reason and creative intelligence (Damasio, 2018, p. 186). The idea of fun has played a significant role in this process. Its role has long been highlighted by neuroscientists, in whose opinion it allows for humans to activate advanced mental functions related to participation in social life (see Panksepp, 1998). These theses correspond surprisingly well with the considerations

of the classical sociology of Mead (2015) from almost a hundred years earlier, on the subject of fun and play as basic processes contributing to the construction of the self.

The issue of identity construction in terms of the creative process was also analyzed in classical humanistic psychology, and is presently under examination through the lens of positive psychology (Karwowski & Kaufman, 2017). According to Richards (2010), creativity as such is characteristic of all people and due to its existence, as a species we are able to adapt to various ecological niches. Creativity takes on many forms, whereby we can distinguish its variant Big-C, which characterizes the great creators and inventors, Little-C creativity – present in everyday life and characteristic of all those who act creatively, such as children. Finally, we have Mini-C creativity – innovative, personal interpretation of activities, experiences and events characteristic of the learning process (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009; Richards, 2010). However, it seems to me that regardless of the adopted paradigm, researchers dealing with these phenomena unanimously emphasize that processes related to the construction and functioning of the self (and therefore, those responsible for constructing identity) are creative. Terms such as *subjectivity*, *self-awareness*, *self*, and *identity* denote dynamic phenomena, whose basic defining feature is creativity. The creation of identity is and always been, by nature a creative process. Regardless of the complexity of the social system, the processes associated with its construction are dynamic, it being a complex, heterogeneous structure with a reflective character, built (obviously) in conjunction with other participants of social life, but also with the structural and cultural dimension of reality.

Everyday creativity (Little-C) is characterized by way of two criteria – originality and meaningfulness related to social meanings. It is a basis for acquiring the skills necessary to deal with daily risk, protecting against fear (Richards, 2010). It consists of self-actualization – a kind of childhood openness to experience that characterizes adults – self-understanding and self-fulfillment (Maslow, 1968).

Today, educators wonder which care-giving and educational conditions are conducive to the development of reflective identity (see, for example, Melosik, 2016). In this context, Sobecki (2017) points out that such identity should not be dogmatic (closed off), the individual who possesses a reflective identity must accept difference as a natural feature of reality and respect the subjectivity of the partners they interact with, in spite of their differences. The process of constructing reflective identity is therefore based on the mechanism of shaping the autonomy of the individual relative to social structures, thus its acquisition shows the hallmarks of a creative process, because the individual's image of the world must come face to face with the visions of other participants in social life. Barbot and Heuser (2017) are of a similar opinion, pointing out that: the creative thinking process may enhance identity formation processes, creative activities represent domains of commitment leading to positive self-definition, creative activities may be used as outlets for "adaptive" self-expression. According to the authors (Barbot & Heuser, 2017, p. 90), both processes – constructing identity and developing creativity are based on similar processes. In particular, it comes down to exploratory thinking (creative problem solving and the search for various solutions), convergent-integrative thinking (combining different elements in a new original way), exploratory thinking (expanding the range of solutions in creative problem solving), and convergent-integrative thinking (the combining of elements in new, original, and integrative ways).

3. Research project and its methodology

In the summer semester of the last academic year, as part of sociological studies and the subject of performative ethnology, classes for students at the University Culture Center, University of Białystok, Poland, were conducted utilizing the tools of participatory theater. The direct inspiration for this undertaking was a letter by Władysław Bożyczko, Edward Lutostański, and Leon Lutostański, published in the illustrated daily courier on 6 May, 1939. In response to Adolf Hitler's threats against Poland, the letter's authors volunteered to fight by offering their services as human torpedoes. Many Poles living at that time responded to their appeal – as a result, a list of about 1500 volunteers willing to form such a fighting unit, was drawn up (see Szumiec-Zielińska, 2016, pp. 93–129). We asked students – participants of our workshops, to put themselves in the position of a recipient of such a letter and formulate their own response. The reaction of the participants was intended for analysis on several planes, as a slogan for rethinking the hierarchy of values (including the role and importance of patriotism), triggering cognitive and emotional processes related to the need to put themselves in the position of responders, launching processes related to biographical identity (during the performance, participants presented themselves as descendants of their ancestors, often taking an active part in various historical events). Movement workshops led by the actress and director of the performance – Justyna Schabowska, accounted for a large part of the classes.

Meetings regarding the performance took place over the entire academic semester and were conducted by three curators-researchers – Katarzyna Sawicka-Mierzyńska, Katarzyna Niziołek, and myself. In addition to our performance preparation duties, we conducted participant observation during rehearsals. However, the primary research technique employed in this project was the free in-depth interview, with the survey conducted in accordance with the basic requirements of the consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research. All students engaged in the performance participated in the study – so in a formal sense, neither sampling nor case selection was used – as the entire population of project participants was surveyed (and thus maximum saturation of the research sample with data saturation was attained). At this point, however, it is worth highlighting the criteria for students' recruitment to the project. The classes described in the study were optional – in this sense, enrolling in the recruitment process in order to participate was voluntary. However, the recruitment was not typical for this type of research project – students were able to choose these classes as part of an optional module. The study used dispositions – which are answers to the previously formulated research questions. In light of the extensive experience of those conducting the study, a detailed script was abandoned and research dispositions were favored. With the consent of the subjects, the interviews were recorded using a dictaphone and then transcribed. Interviews lasted from 45 minutes to one and a half hours. Data was coded by two independent researchers.

4. Reflective identity basic characteristics and skills

The reflective identity characteristic of our modern-day social systems is neither easy to operationalize. When referring to it, social researchers often use the metaphor of liquidity

(cf. *e.g.* Bauman, 2000), thus emphasizing its variable and plastic character. Despite this (and apart from the institutional reflexivity discussed above), there are several features that appear to be specific to it.

The first one is a consequence of the weakening of axio-normative systems and manifests itself in the transformation of consciousness, which, as a result of this process, is becoming more individualized, privatized and ahistorical (Beck, 1992). On one hand, this contributes to an increase in the importance of so-called situational identities and leads to a rise in the significance of social roles as relatively stable reference points in the process of identity creation (Stryker, 2003; McCall & Simmons, 1978; Burke & Stets, 2009; Porankiewicz-Żukowska, 2012, 2019). On the other hand, it contributes to the relativization of the feeling rules (Hochschild, 2003), which causes their inconsistency, changeability, and ambiguity, and in turn translates into difficulties related to the efficient valuation of things, people and phenomena that underlie the construction of identity[3]. As Damasio (2010) points out, the valuation mechanism being a derivative of emotional systems has an evolutionary origin encompassing the simplest of unicellular organisms, in which one can see the basic mechanisms associated with so-called biological evaluation (manifested primarily in the highest evaluation of phenomena aimed at supporting life). Such processes and the emotional systems associated with them, have been at the root of the emergence of consciousness, mind, self and identity in the evolutionary process (Damasio, 2010; Porankiewicz-Żukowska, 2016). In pre-modern societies, participants in social life were assigned with more aspects of individual identification in advance, as part of their positioning within the social structure, and the axio-normative system strongly affecting their lives resulted in limiting dilemmas related to the sphere of emotions and valuation. Under the new conditions characteristic of late modernity, the individual is dependent upon his own skills in this area. I would say that this increases the importance of competences referred to as emotional intelligence, in the process of identity construction. This applies in particular to abilities indicated by Salovey and Mayer (1990), such as: perception of emotions, supporting thinking with the help of emotions, the understanding and managing of emotions, which are the basis for the valuation mechanism discussed here. The competences described by Goleman (2006) also seem important in this context: self-awareness (knowledge about current feelings used to assess one's own abilities, directing one's own decision-making processes, and belief in one's own abilities) and self-regulation (controlling emotions in such a way, as to facilitate the individual's completion of a given task). Conscientiousness (the ability to delay rewards, speedy recovery from emotional problems), motivation (taking the initiative and efforts to achieve goals, coping in spite of failures), empathy (understanding how others feel, the ability to empathize and put oneself in someone else's shoes), and social skills (controlling emotions in dealing with others, leadership and negotiation skills, teamwork) (Goleman, 2006).

Another characteristic of reflective identity is associated with the operation of uprooting mechanisms, associated with the separation of time and space, distinctive of our current social reality (Giddens, 1991). It causes the loss of a sense of safe homeliness in relation to any

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[3] The essence of creating identity is efficient evaluation of issues related to such questions as: *who am I?, who are my people and who are strangers to me?, which traditions belong to us and which do not?, etc.*

place when building individual identifications, and in this context the generational cycle is also losing importance. However, non-personal (not based on direct experience) and non-local knowledge is gaining in importance. This leads to present day individuals operating simultaneously in multiple contexts and dimensions, which requires coordination and the activation of new resources (Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2016, p. 50). These are so-called consolidating practices that allow individuals to maintain relative consistency in the face of permanent social change and the associated situationality and multitude of experiences. They are made up of: coordination activities – a set of procedures integrating thinking and acting, involving the use of cognitive and interpretative strategies aimed at coordinating many sequences of actions that the individual undertakes (often simultaneously); internal dialogue – connected with the ability to constantly negotiate meanings, build justifications and defend one's rights. This skill becomes the basis for negotiating social roles and the self-images related to them; habits – mental patterns included in the repertoire of an individual's behavior reproduced over the course of daily activities; struggle for recognition – in particular for the identity of the individual, one's creativity and imagination, thanks to which the individual projects an open attitude in the face of changing reality (Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2016).

5. Reflective identity – theater classes

The classes discussed here were not based on a script and according to the conventions of participatory theatre, the actors were amateurs. This put all participants in a situation of dialogue and negotiation. Of course, the conditions of these negotiations were not fully democratic, the situation being characterized by an obvious inequality of social status (director, academic teachers, students). In my opinion, however, it strengthened the laboratory nature of the project because it imitated the rules governing real social situations, while at the same time providing a safe convention that allowed for experimentation without the sanctions often found in social life. This was facilitated of course, by use of the theater stage – a traditional venue for rehearsal, experimentation and creative activities. One respondent expresses it in this fashion:

> "For some, acting is therapeutic, […] when you play a role, you can allow yourself to do things you wouldn't do in normal life. That is, if I push a colleague on stage because the role requires it, he can't hold […] it against me when we meet later for coffee, yes? So owing to the fact that somehow I can play someone else, this allows me to explore and check out what suits me, as if it were happening in my own life" (Interview no. ZT05: 22).

This statement, in my opinion, extremely accurately characterizes the potential of participatory theater as an ideal stage for creative activities, which at the same time serve as exercises for developing the necessary skills in the formulation of a reflective identity. However, this is not the only advantage of participatory theater in this regard.

During the first meetings, it had already become apparent that the primary stage tools in participatory theatre are to be found in the vivid emotions of untrained actors. Since they do not possess any traditionally acquired acting skills, an effective stage performance requires their deep emotional commitment. Therefore, during the preparations, exercises related to the body and emotions were of great importance. In the context of the reflections conducted

here, they obviously provided an opportunity for exercises in the field of self-awareness and self-regulation. This proved to be very difficult for the participants. Both physical and emotion-based exercises had a tiring effect – in interviews participants emphasized a low awareness of their own bodies and the emotions flowing from them – one participant tells it this way:

> "I tried to turn off my body completely and focus only on my mind, which is something I often do. The body? I don't know exactly what it's there for. It's there because it just is [...] it does what it wants to do, and my head does something else, so I'm not in effect connected with my body, like someone, I don't know, who dances really well and can use his/her body to show off everything, I always envy such people" (Interview no. ZT02: 18).

This task necessitated placing trust in other group members – another person shares this insight:

> "If an individual doesn't trust the group, he won't be able to get so involved, [...] because sometimes you have to place your fate in [...] someone else's hands, so to speak, for a while. So, well trust is very crucial to ventures, [...] getting closer to each other through all these kinds of exercises, which required us to commit excesses, to step out of our comfort zones, because we don't like it when [...] strangers touch us or something, and here suddenly everyone touches you one after another, and you have to accept it somehow, in order to also transcend maybe your own barriers" (Interview no. ZT05: 16).

Despite the obstacles pointed out, the effects of this kind of exercise ultimately proved quite useful. One participant supplied the following description:

> "I have such a lifestyle [...] where emotions are kind of the main driving force in me, yes? So they kind of [...] after these classes it's easy [...] to re-channel them in a certain direction that will be less destructive [...] I also understood myself more in general. I became more familiar with some of my mechanisms, just the emotionally different ones, like how a person reacts in given situations, how he can react" (Interview no. ZT01: 21).

Theatre rehearsals also served as a pretext to practice other elements of emotional intelligence. During our classes, the participants improved their motivation (for most of the meetings we collaborated to develop a script dependant on various student initiatives, which caused a sense of excessive ambiguity and fluidity in the situation and required some practice in this regard). Certainly, for the participants in the project here described, this was one of the most difficult elements of the process. One of the respondents describes it thus:

> "Previously, no one had presented us with any kind of scenario, and this caused some of the others to feel irritated, like – what are we doing here again today? Some more touching each other here some dancing, some shouting, what is it all about? And later, when it all started to come together, that's what it was, exactly, it was a meeting of theory and practice, that wow!, something was coming out of it (Interview no. ZT04: 22).

Another person talks about it in this way:

> "First off, there were the values and the discussion, well that was hard, [...] then there was the touching, which in general I found to be just terrible, hopeless, why are we doing this? I want out of here right now. So there was such a moment after the cigarette break where I just completely wanted to leave, just go, because it was hard for

me. Well, actually I stayed, because we were a group after all. So anyway, and then we moved on to talk about heroism, I think, yes, after those two or three movement classes, and that was just better for me, because after those two bad ones I preferred to continue the discussion and then go back to that later, where someone grabs me and touches me and those other strange things" (Interview no. ZT02: 11).

Many of the elements of participatory theater had the capacity to surprise the participants. One participant adds the following:

"It is certainly somehow enriching, even more so for a young person, a student. Well, because it also provides some kind of [...] alternative perspective as well as the opportunity to see exactly how [...] such theatre works. Well, because this participatory theater, as it turns out, is completely different from that which we are familiar with. Here there is no, okay, you're a tree, you're a king and you're a mouse, just everyone [...] played themselves, everyone had something to say and everyone was equally important. So such equality really. Well I met some fantastic people too, who I am still in contact with. And those people I got to know, I managed to know even more what was going on in their souls. Well I certainly have no regrets, and if the opportunity arose, I would most probably volunteer to take part in something like this again. Although when it comes to the subject matter, I was quite surprised, because until the end [...]. For a while I didn't understand what it was all about. Exactly [...] this theme of this heroism is also a bit [...] contentious for me. But at the end of the day I'm happy with the end result" (Interview no. ZT03: 22).

Work on the performance also presented an opportunity to practice empathy (the story we recalled required the ability to empathize with a situation that was situationally and historically distant) and social skills (working on the performance supplied a pretext for practicing all the skills associated with group work). Participants in the performance commented that:

"It is at the beginning that we are a group of people, who can be divided quite simply into those from sociology and those from philology. After some time [...] these two groups just start to connect with each other, somehow communicate more. Towards the end we have just, it seems to me, good contact; one might even say, a certain camaraderie" (Interview no. ZT02: 25);

"Because for me the whole experience with the theater was, as I also mentioned, very self-developmental, in terms of at least [...] working on my problems with [...] being shy or closed off within myself. So I will also say a little coming from the perspective that I have changed a lot here, I took away a lot from it. And it gave me something, just in terms of this aspect. On the other hand, just who was I there as an individual? In fact, it was also a totally new experience for me here, so I can say here that I had no idea what was awaiting me. Every [...] at every rehearsal when came there and so on, it was always new things. And even with being on this stage, connected up with wireless microphones and so forth, it was all new to me and it was simply great for me, yes" (Interview no. ZT07: 20).

The situation created during the classes became a pretext to improve consolidating practices so important from the point of view of reflective identity. Project participants had the opportunity to practice coordination activities – preparation for a stage performance required simultaneous coordination of phenomena from many disciplines (it required the use of new tools such as a micro port or microphone; entering into a sequence of lights, projected images and inscriptions; mastering control of the body, sound, speech, *etc.*). Another one comment of the participants on it in this way:

"When we first clipped on those microphones, well, gee, I thought I was just going to die. Then I realized that we were going to stand on stage and so on, that we were going to stand there and pretty soon just speak to people. That there weren't going to be any more ridiculous rehearsals, right? All of that gave me a little fright' (Interview no. ZT07: 21).

Another offers up the following reflection:

"I saw the show, the members of the show as a kind of puzzle. Well, because without one piece of the puzzle, usually the whole thing doesn't look the same, yes? So we were like kind of one big puzzle. And in fact, every missing piece caused it to fall apart in some way. If someone wasn't at the rehearsal for example, then it occurred that one person had to be alone, because there was no one to pair up with" (Interview no. ZT09: 12).

Another participant makes the following statement:

"My body was telling me that I was not very athletic, so it was hard for me to do anything [...]. What was I thinking, what was I feeling? I don't know, I was constantly thinking very intensely about what command to give next, as I was already hypnotizing these people, what commands, that's what I was mainly thinking about, what to do here, and if I didn't have anything in my head I started to panic, that I was going to freeze to the spot or repeat myself, that it had already been done, that how should I do it, why should I do it. I was in a constant state of bewilderment, I didn't know what it was all for, [...] why we were hypnotizing each other. I mean later when we saw the final show well it all came to pass, that this is some kind of figurative, something in that style [...]. And how [...] we were united, that when one person and then another showed us what to do, [...] that we do the same exercises together, that we are seemingly different from each other, and yet we must do the same thing, that maybe it doesn't quite work out, but still we try. So it was in fact quite an interesting exercise" (Interview no. ZT03: 2).

During the performance, participants spoke or read out on the issues, reflecting their own vision of the imitated social situation. They thereby expressed (without censorship or correction) their point of view, justified it, and during discussions with the audience, had to be ready to defend their position. They thus strengthened internal dialogue, exercising both creativity and imagination. The justification for their arguments also served as a means for improvement in the so-called struggle for recognition. And here is how one respondent remembered and interpreted this situation:

Researcher: "And how was it, and what did it look like? I mean you tried to convince each other over to your own viewpoint, yes? And how do you feel in just such situations, like this one, as you specified, where there is an intense exchange of opinions?". Respondent: "Well, first of all, it makes me uncomfortable, because I'm the type of person who doesn't like to argue, doesn't like to, kind of force someone over to my point of view, so it was so incredibly tiring [...]. It's just learning [...] to have meaningful conversations, debates, [...] you could say, when all things are considered. That way of accentuating one's opinion, right?" (Interview no. ZT01: 20).

At times, the effort of exercise and constant improvisation was so great that the participants reverted to familiar patterns of behaviour. School adaptation strategies meant that they habitually hid behind the curtain or otherwise tried to disappear out of sight of the leaders, thereby gaining a much-prized moment of peace.

6. Conclusions

Based on the material gathered, the conclusion can be posited, in my opinion, that participatory theater is an excellent arena for the practicing of soft skills. Its conventions provide a favorable, safe framework for workshop exercises in terms of a variety of emotional and social competencies. These exercises take place in the theater, as it were, under the pretext of a performance – providing an opportunity to practice, without the consequence of incurring sanctions that can result in the event of possible failures (it was, after all, just a rehearsal). This form of theatre exercise also permits participants to practice skills they are convinced it is too late to polish up, which they believe should be worked through with children, not adults. More specifically, it is about competencies related to emotional intelligence, such as – recognition of emotions (in the body), knowledge about the meaning of emotions (especially those more socially problematic ones, *e.g.* in interactions with others, anger is essential, because without it we would struggle to set and negotiate boundaries, *etc.*) or management of emotions.

The workshop exercises in emotional intelligence and integrative practices carried out as part of the project here presented, included all the elements characteristic of the creative process. As features of the assigned tasks, students were able to practice both exploratory and convergent-integrative thinking. The qualitative research carried out by myself and Niziołek with the project participants had the intention of showing, among other things, whether the workshops translated into a way of building positive self-definitions and adaptive ways of self-expression for those involved, and therefore whether to some extent they facilitated in the construction of their own identity. Analysis of the responses that we received from our interviewees revealed that they had a fundamental dissatisfaction with themselves in the context of the development of emotional intelligence. Practically all of the respondents indicated scope for self-improvement in this realm. One of the respondents even states that:

> "I don't understand this emotional intelligence. I don't believe that I am emotionally intelligent. It's just that these emotions are there, and you somehow have to release them somewhere, because you can't spend your whole life explaining them, but when it comes to emotional intelligence, I don't think I have it and I won't be able to build it, but it was exactly this performance which showed me that my emotional intelligence is in a poor state, and it's difficult to talk to me sometimes because of it, so it needs working on" (Interview no. ZT02: 22).

At the same time, my interlocutors do not associate school classes, including academic classes, with the development of this type of competence. Rather, they point to the family home as the primary source, preferring to assign to educational institutions a role in the formation of cognitive processes. Admittedly, however, they point to the fact that developing such competencies is for them extremely important. I think in the case of several participants the theater workshops we conducted contributed to their ability to build positive self-definitions and ways of expressing themselves. One of the interviewees already quoted above pointed to their role in practicing social interaction and putting themselves out there among people, while another interviewee emphasized the fact that performing on stage was for her an act of courage, which earlier she would not have thought possible:

"Well, it was partly a sense of self-satisfaction, because in the end I performed on stage, I broke through some barrier of mine or whatever, and it was a relief for sure, well, because after all, we had finished it, and it was cool, because we had already sat down and talked so much about ourselves and that was that. So, for me the moment after the show was probably the coolest out of the whole thing we had created, well, because it was basically a moment without any pressure, you know, that someone is watching you or someone wants something from you, something like that, all of that stress is gone, so I could just sit there, have a beer or water or something, just like I am drinking water now. So, it was such a pivotal kind of moment, kind of wow, I did it. And the day after I told my mother that I had been happy there and so on, that it was cool and basically that's all. So I guess that was the most important moment for me, in terms of such a positive feeling, such a mega positive feeling, that it was such a relief, like *uffff! It's over with, I've done it* and that's that" (Interview no. ZT02: 21).

When asked directly about the relationship between creativity, emotional intelligence and the development of a reflective identity, the project participants chiefly expressed a sense of surprise. The relationship between these processes is largely unconscious, rather unintuitive, and has not been extensively outlined in the literature (that might be a source of knowledge on the subject for students). That is not to say, however, that the project we designed was without positive impact on the processes of reflexive identity formation for the project participants. The analysis of the collected empirical material undertaken in the previous paragraph indicates that the project participants recognize that it contributed to the development of many valuable skills related to identity development. However, the intervention described in this article was a one-off occurrence, and although it lasted the entire academic semester, from the participants' perspective it was merely a brief episode. Stimulating the processes of, for example identity construction, requires in my view, comprehensive, long-term interventions in this field. Nonetheless, for the duration of the process, it turned out that participatory theater is a useful convention for honing skills related to so-called unifying practices. In this context, the above presented material, in my opinion, can serve as a source of inspiration for didactics in the application of unconventional solutions for shaping competencies that support the development of reflective identity. It may also inspire in-depth empirical research in this area and usher in interesting curricular content related to the issue of creativity and emotional intelligence in the didactic process of higher education.

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