



Hoda Shaarawy Theater at Heliopolis University/Cairo

ACTING AND ITS IMPACT ON CONSCIOUSNESS DEVELOPMENT

Dedicated to our youth

A study by Dorothea Walter* August 2020

*Science is the language of intellectual mind,
and art is the language of the entire human personality.*
Naguib Mahfouz



The Journey of Ibn Fatuma, by Naguib Mahfouz, arranged by Dorothea Walter
 Beit el Hekma Production, February 2019
 (Cast: employees, students, Sekem school teachers, professional actors/actresses)

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Introduction

Welcome to the world of theater and its unbelievable range of developmental possibilities for mankind - acting and theater as a tool for growth.

At the end of the study you will find a lovely little story about a few visually impaired men trying to figure out what an elephant might be, just through touch. I see you smiling when you are reading it. One obstacle among many is, quite naturally, our limited perception. But there are ways to reduce that.

At Heliopolis University we strive for holistic perspectives in many areas of science and life. Personal development, unfolding potential, consciousness, awareness, and creativity are some of the keywords and guidelines of this university.

Heliopolis University attributes particular importance to art, knowing that it contributes to human development.

This study was inspired by the feedback from the students during the interviews after the completion of the Core program classes of Speech, Poetry & Acting. The talks were of varying length. Despite the little time the instructors had, the results were obvious and the transformation was clear.

One of the most repeated statements was that **self-confidence** has developed or increased a lot or even appeared in the first place.

Even during the shutdown when we had to continue online, *Shaymaa Farek, student of Faculty of Engineering, Diversity G, says: "I got a big part in the play, my self-confidence rose strongly."*

It also did not take me long to decide to use these statements and write something about the impact of acting and theater to present it to the Council and Board of the University with a specific goal. This goal is to use this power of acting for education and further develop the theater at our university.

This extension is outlined in a proposal which you can find in the chapter "What's next at Heliopolis University?"

The study aims to show what progress can be made in changing rigid, frozen - thus limited and inflexible - ways of thinking and behavior through a deeper understanding of the influence of acting and theater on people.

You will find scientific results about the impact of acting and theater. And it will not fail to point out a holistic view, the current and possible future situation at Heliopolis University, pictures of theater productions, and last but not least some of the impressions of our students collected over the last two and a half years.

I appreciate your time, patience, and open mind while reading. Thank you for your attention.

This study does not claim to portray all many possible aspects of the world of theater. The focus is solely on the aspect of the mind-altering power.

The purpose of this study

The purpose is to show what progress can be made in changing rigid, frozen - thus limited and inflexible - ways of thinking and behavior through a deeper understanding of the influence of acting and theater on people. Such inflexible mindsets are hindering progress.

To reach the goal of Heliopolis University, which is developing holistic perspectives in all different parts of science and life, open minds are needed.

Core keywords and guidelines are: consciousness development, creativity, raising awareness, and unfolding potential.

If we would always analyze things by asking the question "*what is holistic?*", then a lot of "*the hidden obvious*" are unfolded by themselves: "*the invisible becomes visible*".

Heliopolis University has a great responsibility towards its students to implement sustainable education which develops and enriches their thinking through unfolding their potential, but how? The central point is to find new ways of thinking for all of us, the academic staff and the students. *Creativity in thinking is the necessary and so much needed quality to create a future worth living.*

The university realizes already the great importance of arts for the development of creative thinkers with entrepreneurial spirit who are able to initiate a positive development for our world.

"Creative thinking – What is it?"

In 2005, the National Science Foundation published an article summarizing research on human thoughts per day. It was found that the average person has about 12,000 to 60,000 thoughts per day. Of those thousands of thoughts, 80% were negative, and 95% were exactly the same repetitive thoughts as the day before. (Quote of neuroscience)

Is there hope? Yes, if we take research findings of neurobiological science seriously. Here are some more quotes which took already place in a series of the pedagogy meetings at Heliopolis University:

- **Art boosts self-esteem and provides a sense of accomplishment**
- **Creating art increases the feel-good neurotransmitter *dopamine* and has been called *the motivation molecule*. It boosts drive, focus, and**

concentration. Dopamine stimulates the creation of new neurons and prepares your brain for learning

- **Art affects the brain to increase connectivity and plasticity**
- **Your brain's ability to grow connections and change throughout your lifetime is called brain plasticity, or neuroplasticity**
- **Every time you engage in a new or complex activity, your brain creates new connections between brain cells**

These connections between brain cells are definitely true whenever you're a part of a play. You are facing a huge complexity. Acting in the broadest sense provides an absolute and immediate access to communication in its various aspects.

Interestingly, the meaning of the word communication is: *communicare* (lat.), "*to do something together*" – what a wonderful and short term for a play - *and you become part of something bigger than you*. I will come back again to this aspect later.

Acting *is* communication, even if sometimes there are no words, because it is not only about spoken words. We need others to communicate, to do, and to cooperate.

A few *aspects* of acting and theater, which you will find under "Themes":

- Transportation of contents, meanings, ideas
- Getting an overview about an entirety from which you are part
- Responsibility for the whole even you have only one word to say
- Team building, teamwork
- Taking different points of view, increasing perspectives
- Communication is also listening as well as reacting
- Resonance leads us to the mirror neurons (Theme: the hidden communicator)
- Using the whole body, voice and speech for expressing thoughts, feelings, inner pictures, the body as an instrument, a sacred one (Theme: the body – where matter meets spirit)
- Getting awareness of the surrounding as atmosphere
- Interconnectedness

Acting can become a meta-skill for consciousness development, which also means self-awareness. It enables us to broaden our perception and reflection and, when studying a scene or a play, to gain an idea of the big picture and all the different layers of interdependencies and interconnectedness, which leads us to a holistic perspective.

It is summer 2020!

Furthermore, this study has the aim to explain why the formation of an Academy for Applied Theater at Heliopolis University is not only just nice but also corresponds to the requirements of our time to reach our objective. It is summer 2020; we all have faced incredible things and have to face even more uncertain times. But what about our very young students, who still have their whole life ahead of them, almost still children? Where will their journey lead them? Can we promise them anything? What do we really know, except that what we know is from the past? And how will their future look like?

Will we only meet each other digitally in the future? Then will the extremely important *mirror neurons*, which I will get to later, have nothing more to do? We must not let our youth wither away and become impoverished. *It is our deep responsibility to provide young people with instruments that help them to develop as human beings.*

The real thing we can and must do now is help our young people to learn to think independently and creatively, to develop their own perspectives, so that they can develop a personality, which has the fullest range of emotional intelligence to face the uncertain demands of the future. We must give them everything that nourishes their soul and strengthens them for life.

As Naguib Mahfouz said: ... *Art is the language of the entire human personality.*

The hidden obvious – in themes

Theme: Habits

Let me start with this mysterious topic of *habits*; one of the most important, most interesting, most fascinating, and most complex aspects of the human psyche. We should pay special attention to this topic; therefore it takes first place here.

Habits create our way of seeing things, and not necessarily how they really are.

From a holistic point of view, everything starts with a thought - whether I am aware of it or not - followed by feelings and actions. The background of the way we see things is what we learned in school, from family, in the respective culture.

That's how certain convictions and opinions are formed with which we encounter the things in life. Unfortunately, we often have to deal with fixed and unquestioned thought patterns. This is the opposite of a thinking that is flexible, where one can see things in a new way and therefore might even leave the old convictions and values behind. This means everything for the development of a person and that's how social change is achieved.

The "dark side of the moon" is when habits become hidden agents in our daily life. They sabotage our plans and intentions. They make us suffer and complain: "Why does it always not work? I have tried my best. Why is this happening to me?" and so on. We have wishes, talk about visions, have a certain future in mind, but if we have not discovered our habits/patterns of thinking and acting, we will not be able to achieve our wishes and goals.

We have learned to think in categories, that's nothing bad per se. On the contrary, it serves the need for orientation. But categories, i.e. certain patterns in thinking, also obstruct the view. I might not be able to recognize a thing because it doesn't occur in my categories. That's limited perception.

Everyone would agree that it is very helpful to drive a car without reflecting on every single action; you just drive! We all know how little aware we are of driving a car, except hopefully watching the traffic carefully. But even here - if you observe yourself - you will discover how much you could be automatic.

Or you have learned to play a music instrument, and after much practice you can just do it. It becomes an unconscious habit. You are just aware while practicing. This we could call the bright part. But the dark part is habits that are a hindrance.

Is it wrong to do things the way they always have been done? Yes, it can be wrong if it no longer matches the current conditions. One needs to discover habits in thinking and doing; otherwise habits can become a huge obstacle.

Such habits can create resistance. *Resistance* to everything. Especially against changing one's point of view; because it is neither appropriate nor useful, but only restricts it. It becomes a force that wants to keep us from progress and development and keeps us in the past.

Here, we may have realized the tremendous importance of this aspect on the path of *contemporary learning*.

In acting we have the opportunity to learn all this in a playful way, associated with having fun.

Eva Österlind gets to the point in her study "Acting out of habits":

"Habits make everyday life manageable, but can also become obstacles and cause problems. The tendency to repeat old patterns of behavior is a common problem for individuals and for society as a whole. Unreflexive habitual actions constitute an important aspect of social reproduction.

Structural aspects are embedded in how we think and act, and are also inscribed in the body. These unconscious aspects of habitus are interesting in relation to theater, where the conscious use of body language, inner dialogue and action are central. Looking at Boal's theater methods in the light of Bourdieu's concept of habitus, Theater of the Oppressed clearly has the potential to make social structures, power relations and individual habitus visible and, at the same time, provide tools to facilitate change. It is one of the few methods that offers an integrated approach to work on individual, group and social levels, and involves both the body and the mind.

Seemingly, everyday experiences, internalized psychological patterns, life conditions and social structures all contribute to maintain the status quo.

Can drama and theater be useful to promote change? O' Neill (1996) states that 'drama has the power to enlarge our frames of reference and to emancipate us from rigid ways of thinking and perceiving (O' Neill 1996, 145), and that the purpose of drama is to bring about change.' (Keywords: *habits, obstacles and resistance to change, patterns of belief / unquestioned convictions maintain status quo / prevent people to think for themselves repeating patterns*)

I would like to emphasize what Eva Österlind says, that "*structural aspects are embedded in our thinking and acting and are also inscribed in the body*". This "**inscribed in the body**" has occupied my mind all my life as an actress and psychologist.

We will talk more about this in the *Theme Body*.

It is really difficult to become aware of the habits, but while working in a play, habits can change smoothly and playfully, and then "*the actor/actress can connect with the rest of the world*" (Stella Adler).

Theme: I and We

There is a lot to say about “We”. But in short, and from a holistic point of view, it is an urgent need to differentiate between the different qualities “We” can have.

Let me explain it from an integral or holistic perspective (Ken Wilber). We have to differentiate four states of human consciousness looking at the world. The first state is **the egocentric state**, which has not yet the possibility to consider something or someone else. Secondly, **the ethnocentric state**. Here, a human is able to consider family and nation, everything that is, in a way, familiar and close to them. Thirdly, there’s **the world centric state of consciousness**. Only from this state of consciousness a human is able to consider and feel responsible for things which are beyond the personal and the private. Lastly, there’s **the cosmocentric state** which includes the responsibility for everything up to the stars - the consciousness development and co-creating life and evolution.

In theater – and not only there – it can be catastrophic, shrunken and at best meaningless if the “We” of a cast would be on an ethnocentric level, unless it is a specific role.

You are never alone on stage, even if it is a monodrama; there is still the role and the audience. In the play you are always part of something bigger than yourself. This is also true in everyday life. *Obvious or hidden?*

Already here we can find a very significant overlap between theater and life. It is clear through this aspect alone that theater is so important in education.

No performance by itself can alter the routine of everyday life, but community-based theater can provide ‘what if’ images of potential community, sparking the kind of imaginative work that must precede substantial changes in customary habits.” (Sarah Weston, Being part of something much bigger than self)

The quoted article focuses on one particular method that has become very common. More on that in the chapter articles.

Moving to the attitude of the professional actor/actress, we again encounter this important point of the “I” and the “We”. Because in the real ethics of the actress/actor, it is important to overcome her/his personal, narcissistic “I” and to surrender to the “We”.

Theme: Creativity

The Core Program “Arts” is part of the Vision of Heliopolis University. Especially with arts the university wants to help their students to discover themselves as creative thinkers and doers.

But what is creativity? It is not dalliance and entertainment, not randomness. It is mainly certain openness to something new, something unknown, something beyond unreflected habits.

Is it wrong to do things the way they have always been done? Yes, it can be wrong if it no longer matches the current conditions. One needs to discover habits in thinking and doing, because habits can be obstacles. To become aware of habits is not easy. But while working in a play habits can change smoothly and playfully.

Actually every day should be a new day, with new ideas, new and more perspectives, and with new insights. This needs new decisions. And if these decisions are coming out of a creative mind, a mind which is not occupied with 95% of the same thoughts every day, then we can feel blessed.

Let's create a universe together

“Out of nothing arises something, but that is just the beginning of creativity. Absolute, tireless creativity does not stop. Evolution, love and creativity go hand in hand and bring something new to the manifestation. *Evolution is the mechanism of mind-in-action...* As Carl Sagan reminds us, “if you want to make an apple pie from scratch, you must first create the universe.” So let's create a universe together. (Ken Wilber, Philosopher)

The Core Program Arts includes four forms of art. They shall be mentioned here briefly.

Movement: The body and its various dimensions will be consciously experienced in space and time through movement. Raising awareness on finding relationships from one's own body to the surrounding, human fellows, and environment, is existential as well as self-management exercises. Also social competencies like teamwork skills can be trained. Rhythm, group dynamic, being present just with your body and its presence are content.

Music: It is an individual as well as a global language. In music one is developing and enriching personal, mental and social skills. An overview of music history and music appreciation is content, as well as analysis of musical forms. In practice, exercises for voice, breath management, listening skills and connecting to others will be experienced.

Fine Arts: Essentially this course is to get to know various painting techniques and experiences of the different quality of colors. Colors affect the human soul and the environment and that works back on the soul. It will enhance the ability to make exact and objective observations. Also get an overview of the history of art in order to learn different styles and points of view.

Acting: Acting is aiming at body language, voice projection, awareness of breath, and last but not least, presence. The basics of acting are basics for daily life performance and professional career as well. It is comprehensive communication. It also covers the study of characters and

their different points of view, coordination of opposite roles and handling different emotions, story-telling and poetry recitation.

The power of arts gives hope and courage and through beauty works in a humanizing fashion. Art lives out of a strong center; it needs a consciously created space to unfold itself while at the same time it occupies a border area. Art also leads to a sensory training, through which people advance themselves and liberate their senses.

(Dr. Ibahim Abouleish, Founder of Sekem and Heliopolis University)

Learning pathway

Characteristics for a spirit eager to learn and how we evaluate our students in the classes of Speech, Poetry and Acting

These criteria are significant terms that you also encounter in the context of this study and are necessarily a part of the *learning pathway* of unfolding one's own potential, raising awareness and changing frozen minds.

Every term is not only a word but also a way of practice, and you have to practice in terms of mind-altering. They are real guidelines in teaching as well as in self-education:

- Body-awareness
- Breath-awareness
- Voice-awareness
- Reflection
- Participation
- Cooperation
- Interaction/Reaction/Communication
- Presence
- Connecting
- Presenting
- Responsibility
- Ownership of the stage
- Creative thinking
- Creative approach
- Understanding and using the power of imagination

Theme: Ethics of communication, cooperation, awareness, and presence

To be part of a play is an ongoing communication with the others – including with your role, your mind and thoughts, your feelings - which can only happen if everyone is connecting every single second to everything that's going on within oneself, their own role and the other actors/actresses.

Awareness is the most required practice. And it needs to reach total presence.

Who to attain this? Here we can say “the path is the goal”.

But these high demanding human capabilities can be discovered, unfolded, and developed.

And it is enriching every community. It makes us humans: to communicate on such a deep level with others, beyond information. And only humans can do it: to practice being present.

It means, I am aware of my role, my body, my voice, my words. I am aware of others, I listen to them, I really see them, I make them visible, they make me visible, I help them develop and vice versa. I am awareness. This is possible to achieve in acting.

Theme: Ethics of the necessity of theater

“Theater is more than just a performance; it must have a social function, which consists in broadening the horizon. You have to tackle what needs to be told urgently.

We are the first people who are leaving nothing for our children – and America is leading the charge. We are at war against our children.” (Ariane Mnouchkine, New York, July 22, 2005)

(Miller, Judith. Ariane Mnouchkine (Routledge Performance Practitioners) (p. ii). Taylor and Francis. Kindle Edition.)

Over the last forty years, French director Ariane Mnouchkine and her theater collective, Le Théâtre du Soleil, have devised a form of research and creation that is both engaged with contemporary history and committed to reinvigorating theater by focusing on the actor.

The stage is a reflection of life

Why not look at life this way? Peter Brook is expressing very clearly how the stage is a reflection of life. You need to be precisely in everything, you need to work together, in the terms of business you would call it teamwork. And the practical question is also an artistic one.

“There is no doubt that theater can be a very special place. It is like a magnifying glass, and also like a reducing lens. It is a small world, so it can easily be a tiny one...we live less and less in villages or neighbourhoods, and more and more in open-ended global communities, the theater community stays the same: the cast of a play is still the size that it has always been...the goal is clear. From the first rehearsal, the aim is always visible, not too far away, and it involves everyone. We can see many model social patterns at work: the pressure of a first night, with its unmistakable demands, produce that working-together, that dedication, that energy and that consideration of each other’s needs that governments despair of ever evoking outside wars.

Furthermore, in society in general the role of art is nebulous. Most people could live perfectly well without any art at all, and even if they regretted its absence it would not hamper their functioning in any way.

But in the theater, there is no such separation: at every instant *the practical question is an artistic one*. In rehearsal, the height of the chair, the texture of the costume, the brightness of the light, the quality of emotion, matter all the time: *the aesthetics are practical*.

One would be wrong to say that this is because theater is an art.

The stage is a reflection of life, but this life cannot be re-lived for a moment without a working system based on observing certain values and making value judgments. A chair is moved up or down stage, because it's 'better so'. Two columns are wrong - but adding a third makes them 'right'. The words 'better', 'worse', 'not so good', 'bad' are used day after day, but these words which rule decisions carry no moral sense whatsoever.

Anyone interested in the processes occurring in the natural world would be greatly rewarded by a study of theater conditions. His discoveries would be far more applicable to general society than the study of bees or ants. Under the magnifying glass, he would see a group of people living all the time according to precise, shared, but unnamed standards. He would see that in any community a theater has either no particular function—or a unique one.

The uniqueness of the function is that it offers something that cannot be found in the street, at home, in the pub, with friends, or on a psychiatrist's couch, in a church or at the movies. There is only one interesting difference between the cinema and the theater. The cinema flashes on to a screen images from the past. The theater, on the other hand, always asserts itself in the present.

This is what can make it more real than the normal stream of consciousness. This also is what can make it so disturbing.

No tribute to the latent power of the theater is as telling as that paid to it by censorship. In most régimes, even when the written word is free, the image is free, it is still the stage that is liberated last. Instinctively, governments know that the living event could create dangerous electricity—even if we see this happen all too seldom. But this ancient fear is recognition of an ancient potential. The theater is the arena where a living confrontation can take place. The focus of a large group of people creates a unique intensity. Owing to this, forces that operate at all times and rule each person's daily life, can be isolated and perceived more clearly.”

(Brook, Peter. *The Empty Space* (pp. 99-100). Nick Hern Books. Kindle Edition.)

From the beginnings of theater in the Arab world

Still rooted in the tradition of classical and folk fiction, the two theater pioneers an-Nāqqāš and al-Qabbānī endeavoured to convey an educational message to the audience. In doing so, they stood completely in the tradition of narrative literature.

About the moral function of the theater Mārūn says an-Naqqāš:

The plays that they (the Europeans) make and by which they are guided, appear from the outside as if they were fictional and entertaining, but at their core they are reality and educational.

Also al-Qabbānī stresses that: “the spectacle intensifies the power of perception and reflects past times. Outwardly it looks as if it is merely the reproduction of states and life courses, but basically the theater is admonition and teaching”.

Naqqāš, Salīm an-Naqqāš (d. 1884)

...that the pioneers saw the theater as a new form of narrative literature. What was new for the contemporaries of an-Naqqāš and al-Qabbānī was that this narrative literature was now embodied on a stage. Understanding the theater as a new kind of narrative literature was also preserved in the following period.

About twenty-five years later one reads, for example, that Midhat Pasha, al-Qabbānī suggested offering literary games to the population of Damascus.

Muhammad as-Sanūsī(1851- 1900) about visiting a theater performance from Abūalīl al-Qabbānī:

"Of all the things that impressed me most about this kind of theater... I saw the ways of life and manners of kings of long past eras with their viziers dressed in official garb, their entourage... and servants, as if one had been transported into another age and now one saw before one's eyes embodied what one had previously only been able to read on paper, all this accompanied by Arabic music and recitation of noble poems.“

"(Theater)...determination and generosity, soothing the minds and pleasing the ears. It is also the simplest means of refining morality and learning the ways of politics."

(Abu Chalil al Qabbani 1835-1902 Syria)

“For with this theater the weaknesses of people are exposed, so that the clever one learns from it and avoids them. And in addition to the education, advice, modernization and instruction that people gain, they can also learn good expressions and allegorical phrases”.

(Mārūn an-Naqqāš 1817-1855 Lebanon)

(Amira Faisal Jaafar, Rezeption des Kulturerbes als Basis für die Originalisierung des arabischen Theaters. Reception of cultural heritage as a basis for Originalization of the Arabic Theater. (Mag. Austria)

At the time of writing in 2013

“...it is hardly an exaggeration to state that the main driving force moving Egyptian theater forward is independent practitioners. But even when wholehearted enthusiasm for independent theater--making is present, there is also a desperate lack of dedicated theater venues that are accessible to all.”

Although the Egyptian population now numbers nearly 90 million (2013), apart from the fully-operating Cultural Homes and Palaces (relics of the Socialist era) in the provinces, and not counting makeshift spaces such as the premises of foreign cultural centers borrowed for the space of 2 or 3 performances at the most, the number of operating theaters does not exceed 50. Here, as elsewhere, the independent sector comes to the rescue: the Sawy Cultural Center (although it has been known to practice internal censorship), Rawabet and other independent spaces affiliated with the Townhouse Gallery, and in Alexandria, Mahmoud Abou-Doma's Teatro and the Jesuit Center's Garage. As far as rehearsal spaces go, there is Ahmad Al Attar's Studio Emad Eddin, but it can hardly service a city of some 15 million people, and the other spaces are constantly under threat."

(Excerpt From: Rolf C. Hemke. "Theater im arabischen Sprachraum / Theater in the Arab World." 2013, iBooks)

A broad overview on **contemporary theater** in the Arab world as Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Algeria, Lebanon, Tunisia, Morocco, Iraq, Kuwait you can find in "Theater in the Arab World, edited by Rolf C. Hemke, 20113 Berlin",

I don't want to fail to mention several renowned theater festivals in Cairo every year.

Theme: Ethics of cooperation and receiving (I and We)

Ariane Mnouchkine, founder and director of Le Theater du Soleil says:

"You also have to know *that without the others in the theater you don't achieve anything that everything is given by the other*. That you don't achieve anything if you don't listen, that you don't achieve anything if you don't receive...it comes from the permeability of the exchange. basically means wanting to receive exchange."

"Listen! React to what the other person says, not to your idea. Don't make up the answer before you have heard the question. You must not be right. You must be there. In order to be there, you must really receive the other."

This is the highest level of an „ethical perspective on Me, You and We that I ever met. There is nothing to add here. She gets to the point.

Theme: Ethics of the actors and actresses – decoding of the human being

Ariane Mnouchkine shaped the term of the *ethics of effort* which means that theater work includes keeping the stage clean, receiving and caring for the audience and much more.

“I believe that an actor/actress is someone who has the ability to surrender...*to give him/herself* as a kind of generosity. Of course that's not enough...you have to have a world view and want to tell about it...it's a question of desire...with time and maturity he/she gets a kind of enthusiasm for *the decoding of the human being* in which his task consists. A good actor is able to watch others and be sensitive to them.

To be an actress/actor is to be naked in the present, defenseless against an audience, and to accept being penetrated by the character, the author, the partner, and the audience. It means to *make the invisible visible*...it also means to receive and to reproduce the received in a theater of the present that conjugates the verb "to be". With each time you have to renew your participation in the inner intimate journey and offer it to the spectator to work and enjoy it.

If a minute of theater; that is a minute of truthfulness, life in a form is expressed, everyone sees that.”

This is out of pure presence. It relies on the ability to surrender and give yourself. And the invisible becomes visible, which is a perfect description of a holistic worldview.

Growth as an actor and growth as a human being are synonymous

I would like to pay respect now to Stella Adler. She is the founder of one of the most famous and respected drama schools in the world.

To Stella Adler, the impulse to act was a sacred one which certainly applies to all theater people who do not stay on the surface.

Some extracts from the preamble of the studio:

Growth as an actor and growth as a human being are synonymous

“The...mission is to create an environment with the purpose of nurturing theater artists and audiences who value humanity, their own and others, as their first and most precious priority while providing art and education to the greater community.”

The development of independent actors

One of her most frequently quoted statements is: “Your talent is in your choice.” At the Studio, the aim is to develop actors who think for themselves, respect their own ideas and

ideals, and use the theater as a means to share those ideas and ideals. Such independent actors are fully resolved to train their minds, bodies, voices, and spirits to achieve that end.

The cultivation of a rich humanity

The actor's instrument is the actor's own body and brain but if the dramatic arts are to avoid shrinking to a self-referential, self-enclosed, detached, and isolated unit of a larger world, then the psyche upon which the actor calls must not be the actor's own, but the character's.

Therefore, an actor needs to develop resources of information and experience that connect with the rest of the world - socially, culturally, historically, and politically — thereby enriching the actor's instrument that is required to perform; which includes theater and dance theater, lectures and symposia, poetry readings and play readings, jazz and classical concerts...etc.

In short: Growth as an actor requires a lot of work and discipline. It is an ongoing observation of life, reading, searching, widening the horizon, developing independent thinking, "I and thou," not between "me and myself"; that connect with the rest of the world - socially, culturally, historically, and politically."

(The Stella Adler Studio of Acting is a non-profit organization in New York)

Theme: Universality in diversity

In my opinion, in addition to all diversity and regionalism, we can certainly find something universal, comprehensive, without ignoring the respective cultures. And to find universality is highly necessary.

From a holistic perspective it is essential to know what connects us and not what divides us. And we may be moving or stumbling towards times that increase and emphasize what divides us. This of course, leads to even more hostility in the world.

But this separation also has an effect on the mental and physical health of people, it weakens our youth. Here theater can have a healing effect.

Theme: The power of imagination and concentration

It is important to get the concept of imagination out of a certain grey area.

The power of imagination is the ability to think in pictures and involves the ability to take action, or turn an idea into reality.

But if it is only an intellectual thought that does not even encompass the complexity of a topic, it can be dry and unsuccessful.

A real imagination is a carpet of interweaving thoughts in a picture.

“Actors’ imaginations are the most powerful source for them to draw on. To bring theatrical texts to life the actor must be able to create a transforming, living experience. To create such an experience, students at the Stella Adler Studio are asked to use their imagination to locate the fullest range of motivational force, rather than depending solely on their personal past and emotional memory.” (Stella Adler)

The muscle of imagination

“It's about strengthening the **muscle** of imagination” (Ariane Mnouchkine)

The empty stage

Peter Brook, one of the most outstanding theater directors of the 20th century, won multiple awards and has been called "our greatest living theater director". He wrote the book “The empty stage” which inspired me very much. I ask:

How and with what do we fill an empty stage? If there are no costumes, no props, no special subtle lights - only the actors and actresses themselves, then it is only their bodies, thoughts, feelings, voices, imaginations.

When you take in this image, immerse yourself in it, you realize that the highest concentration and imagination is required of the actresses and actors.

These are not just two aspects of many; they are probably real major keys for shaping life and work equally.

Concentration should be - at best - the basis of every action. It needs awareness.

Concentration means to focus on something while being open at the same time. Concentration means not getting stuck, stiff or rigid, but staying aligned, and being open to everything around us so that we can react if necessary.

Theme: What would be a good drama school?

“It's a place where you remove the obstacles of the actor/actress; that is, where you give him/her a good smooth athletic, available, precise working body as well as a sense of rhythm for harmony, musical knowledge...a good physical culture. What I call body culture goes from well thought-out gymnastics to dance...it requires a culture of the eye, the body, the skin, the sensitivity. *It's about strengthening the muscle of imagination...*”

(Josette Feral, Ariane Mnouchkine & Das Théâtre Du Soleil, Alexander Verlag, Berlin 2003)



Shakespeare meets Sheherazade – Drama Highlights, written and directed by Effat Yehia
Acting Studio Production, November 2017
(Cast: HU students, employees, professional actors/actresses)

Theme: Mirror neurons - the hidden actor and communicator in our brain

Mirror neurons - the miracle of resonance

On the screen of the mirror neurons, all the different topics I have pointed out can and should be further investigated.

Mirror neurons are extremely important to develop social skills; as empathy and deep understanding. This is what we can call “emotional intelligence”.

Mirror neurons are a resonance system in the brain that makes other people's feelings and moods resonate with the recipient. The unique thing about nerve cells is that they already send out signals when someone is just observing an action. We receive the feelings of others on this path. We will be compassionate beings.

The mirror neurons are considered *the physical core of human empathy and intuition*. We have to understand life as a continuous and immeasurable oscillation. The mirror neurons are literally the inner communicator.

Acting is a wonderful, beautiful and useful tool that activates the mirror neurons enormously and thus keeps our resonance system flexible.

And we can literally summarize this in terms of: Communication = (lat. communicare) doing something together, feeling each other, receiving the other.

A Psychological and spiritual dimension

We are not used to living our lives in oneness. We are invested in our daily lives and certain sacred hours.

Genuine and deep communication - as described in this study and several times above - unites these.

I would like to point out a dimension of communication that is supposedly not commonplace. It is the sacred dimension of communication, only human beings are capable of becoming aware of it.

Theme: The body - where matter meets spirit

“...all too solid flesh...” (Hamlet)

Keywords: harmony between body and psyche, body's resistance, body as a sensitive membrane, beauty, ease, shape

This text by Cechov is very valuable to me. It says clear words, about the resistance that the body in general represents in the first place - the all-too-solid flesh (Hamlet).

And he describes how the artist actually has to model and reinvent his new body from the inside. This is a high demand. It brings absolute awareness to the inside of the body, which all too often is like an unknown country.

The body must become a piece of art within itself; even heaviness must be performed with ease and lightness, beauty, and shape.

It leads us into the spiritual dimension of the human body and finally to a kind of spiritual practice that helps us to transform.

The body is the location where matter meets spirit.

Our bodies can be our best friends or worst enemies.

Human body and psychology influence each other and are in constant interplay.

Either an undeveloped or muscularly overdeveloped body may easily dim the activity of the mind, dull the feelings or weaken the will.

Seldom to find complete balance or harmony between the body and psychology. But the actor, who must consider his body as an instrument for expressing creative ideas on the stage, must strive for the attainment of complete harmony between body and psyche.

There are certain actors who can feel their roles deeply, but who can neither express nor convey to an audience. Wonderful thoughts and emotions are somehow chained inside their undeveloped bodies. The process of rehearsing and acting is for them a painful struggle against their own “all too solid flesh”, as Hamlet said. But every actor suffers somehow from his body's resistance.

Physical exercises are needed to overcome this, but they must be built on principles different from those used in most dramatic schools. Gymnastics, fencing, dancing, acrobatics, calisthenics and wrestling are undoubtedly good and useful for what they are, but the body of an actor must undergo a special kind of development in accordance with the particular requirements of his profession.

What are these requirements?

First and foremost is extreme sensitivity of the body to the psychological creative impulses.

This cannot be achieved by strictly physical exercises. Psychology itself must take part in such a development. The body of an actor must absorb psychological qualities, must be filled and permeated with them so that they will convert it gradually into a sensitive membrane, a kind of receiver and conveyor of the subtlest images, feelings, emotions and will impulses.

Under the influence of materialistic concepts, his body becomes less and less animated, more and more shallow, dense, puppet-like, and begins to resort to all sorts of theatrical tricks and clichés...photographers of everyday life.“

(Michael Chekhov, *To the actor*, Routledge 2002, p. 1 ff. Kindle Edition. Michael Chekhov was a Russian-American actor, director, and author.)



Scream – adapted and directed by Effat Yehia
Acting Studio Production, December 2018
(on the top: Nourhan Saeed, student of Faculty of Pharmacy graduated 2020)

The integral/spiritual perspective on the body and a global perspective by Ken Wilber

I admit, it's hard to conceive but fascinating. What I find particularly interesting about the following both texts is that taking a truly global perspective depends on a certain degree of awareness. But I have to admit too that it would be beyond the scope of these texts to delve deeper. I have to let the two texts essentially speak for themselves.

What I can say is, as soon as we integrate the body; our mental-spiritual development accelerates. The body is the secret of consciousness development. And the body is the place where spirit and matter meet.

According to Ken Wilber, the evolution of consciousness takes place successively in stages. Each stage goes through "fusion, detachment, integration". The result is a self, whose perspective expands successively, is less and less identified with the ego, and can therefore take on more and more perspectives. This level holds the possibility of being able to take on a "global perspective".

This is because on the centauric level (Centaur: creature from Greek mythology with the upper body of a human and the lower body and legs of a horse. It is used as a symbol for the instinctive nature of man is dominated by the mind).

The basic process of "removal boundaries" continues. And here the consciousness takes back ownership.

(Ken Wilber, American philosopher and writer on transpersonal psychology and his own integral theory; a systematic philosophy which suggests the synthesis of all human knowledge and experience.)

Keywords: boundary between ego (I) and flesh, loss of body, the body is the place where spirit and matter meet, global perspective

“We saw (in the last chapter “No boundaries”) that by touching and eventually re-owning our projected shadow, we could “expand” our identity from an impoverished persona to a healthy ego. We could heal the split, dissolve the boundary, between persona and shadow, and thus find a larger and more stable sense of self-identity. It’s almost like moving from a cramped apartment into a comfortable home.

In this chapter we go on from the comfortable home to a spacious mansion. We continue the basic process of boundary dissolution...to expand identity from the ego (and its world view) to the centaur by touching and re-owning our projected bodies. To re-own the body might initially strike one as a peculiar notion. The boundary between ego (I) and flesh is so deeply embedded in the average person’s unconscious that he responds to the proposed talk of healing this split with a curious mixture of puzzlement and boredom. He has come to believe that the boundary between the mind and body is unalterably real, and thus he can’t figure out why anyone would want to temper it, let alone dissolve it.

As it turns out, few of us have lost our minds, but most of us have long ago lost our bodies, and I’m afraid we must take that literally. It seems, in fact, that “I” am almost sitting on my body as if I were a horseman riding on a horse. I beat it or praise it, I feed and clean and nurse it when necessary. I urge it on without consulting it and I hold it back against its will. Indeed, my body seems to just dangle along under me.

I no longer approach the world with my body but on my body. I’m up here, while it’s down there. My consciousness is almost exclusively head consciousness—I **am** my head, but I own my body, the body is reduced from self to property; something which is “mine” but not “me”.

The body, in short, becomes an object or a projection; a boundary is erected upon the total organism so that the body is projected as not-self. This boundary is a split, a fissure, or in the words of Lowen (1910 -2008, *American physician and psychotherapist, he developed bioenergetic analysis, a kind of mind-body psychotherapy*), a block : “The block also operates to separate and isolate the psychic realm from the somatic realm. Our consciousness tells us that each acts upon the other, but because of the block it does not extend deep enough for us to sense the underlying unity. In effect the block creates a split in the unity of the personality. Not only does it dissociate the psyche from the soma, but it also separates surface phenomena from their roots in the depths of the organism.”

What fundamentally concerns us here is the disruption of the total organism, the centaur, of which the loss of the body is only the most visible and sensible sign. The body is not a deeper reality than the ego, as many somatologists think, but the integration of the body and the ego is indeed a deeper reality than either one alone.

On a superficial level, we refuse to reclaim the body because we just don't think there's any reason to - it seems a big to-do about nothing. On a deeper level, we fear to reclaim the body because it houses, in a particularly vivid and living form, strong emotions and feelings which are socially taboo. And ultimately, the body is avoided because it's the abode of death“.

(Ken Wilber, No Boundaries. Eastern and Western Approaches to Personal Growth. (Chapter 8, The Centaur Level). 1979 Shambala. Kindle Edition.)

The Body-mind Integration of the Centaur

Keywords: vision-logic or network-logic sees networks of interactions, mind and body are both experiences of an integrated self

“The basic structure at this centauric stage is vision-logic. Vision-logic or network-logic is a type of synthesizing and integrating awareness. Vision-logic adds up the parts and sees networks of interactions. When the self's center of gravity identifies with vision-logic, when the person lives from that level, then we tend to get a very highly integrated personality, a self that can actually inhabit a global perspective, and not merely talk about it. So the highly integrative capacity of vision-logic supports an equally integrated self. Which is why I call the self of this stage the centaur, representing an integration of the mind and the body, the noosphere (the new state of the biosphere and described as the planetary "sphere of reason) and the biosphere, in a relatively autonomous self - which doesn't mean isolated self or atomistic self or egocentric self, but rather a self-integrated in its networks of responsibility and service.

Several researchers have looked at this stage very carefully - Loevinger, Selman, Habermas, Erikson, Graves, and Maslow, for example. But I have always liked the summary of Broughton's research: *“At this stage, mind and body are both experiences of an integrated self.”*

This says it all in a very succinct fashion. First of all, the self at this stage is aware of both the mind and the body as experiences. That is, the observing self is beginning to transcend both the mind and the body and thus can be aware of them as objects in awareness, as experiences. It is not just the mind looking at the world; it is the observing self; looking at both the mind and the world. This is a very powerful transcendence, which we will see intensify in the higher stages. And second, precisely because the observing self is beginning to transcend the mind and the body, it can for just that reason begin to integrate the mind and body. Thus, “centaur.” So in this fulcrum, we have the same 1-2-3 process that we see in every other fulcrum; namely, initial fusion, differentiation, and integration. In this case, there is the initial identification with the formal mind (of fulcrum-5). The observing self then begins to differentiate from the mind and to see it as an object. Since it is no longer exclusively identified with the mind, it can integrate the mind with the other components in awareness, with the body and its impulses. Hence, centaur - mind and body are both experiences of an integrated self.

This is, in other words, a soul on the brink of the transpersonal.

(Wilber, Ken. A Brief History of Everything (p. 208). Shambhala. Kindle Edition.)

Theme: The anthroposophical view

Rudolf Steiner's concept of man – a trinity

Rudolf Steiner's conception of a human is based on the fact that a human is to be seen as tripartite, in body, soul and spirit. This also shapes life in three different ways. These three areas are thinking, feeling and willing. A thought is quickly followed by a feeling and both are imprinted in an action.

- **The instruments** of the actor/speaker are his/her body, this is the basis, and otherwise "nobody" is here. The breath keeps us alive; the voice is the expression of thoughts and feelings. To what extent the voice is an act of the will can only be hinted here, but not carried out. But it's fascinating to find "will" in the voice. Speaking is taking action.

This trinity - body, breath, voice - which is present quite naturally is something that is encountered quite frequently in the courses at Heliopolis University.

- **In speech formation** she/he encounters the essence of the sounds. Every sound has its own place in the speech tool - which is the mouth - and its own way of existing. This leads to the three-part approach to speech which must be considered in the anthroposophical view.

These three "places" (approaches), where the sounds reside are the lips, the teeth/tongue, and the palate.

- **Speech approaches** are approaches for different texts. Thus, an epic, narrative text will be created primarily in the palate.

A dramatic text - that would be especially the drama - is created by the artist on the teeth. And everything that is lyrical - especially poetry - is formed in the lip area.

- **Speech signs:** There are the six speech signs that you can find in texts. These are:

1. Effective/pointing/incisive
2. Thoughtful/holding on to oneself - full-toned
3. Cautiously feeling/rolling movement foreword with hands and arms - slow and deliberate (like asking)
4. Antipathy, repudiation/flinging out an arm or leg - hard
5. Sympathy, recognition/reaching out to touch the person or object - gentle
6. Drawing back on to one's own ground/slanting an arm or leg away from the body - abrupt

- **Training**, as a reciter or actor also includes Greek gymnastics, which puts to work the human being as a whole and thus brings out the qualities of speech, in which the whole body becomes active in the process: running, leaping, wrestling, discus-throwing, and spear-throwing.

And of course dance, eurythmy, other sports, text study, and broad general education.

Theme: Youth - Our responsibility - Conclusion

I want to let the article below *“Playing a part: the impact of youth theater on young people's personal and social development”* speak for itself. In any case, it is gratifying that the theater for children and young people is receiving so much attention worldwide.

Also our production "Matilda - a musical" (directed by Effat Yehia) with children from the Young Scholar School from New Cairo was a huge success. The musical had education as its theme. We were generously supported by Leyla Amiri, the founder of the school. We owe her a lot. The Young Scholar School is an excellent example of how art is integrated into school life.

The entire cast - students from Young Scholar School, students from Heliopolis University, employees, professional actors and actresses - were able to gain experiences that have and will have a lasting impact on their lives.

Among many things it was the experience of being part of something whole. An experience that the others need me and I need the others; that it depends on everyone. The experience of creating something together is an experience of complexity. And new behaviors could be practiced by playing the roles.

But what is most important: Everyone was very enthusiastic and enjoyed the experience.

Enthusiasm and joy!

I only can repeat the quotation from “The Purpose of This Study”:

“Creating art increases the feel-good neurotransmitter dopamine and has been called the motivation molecule. It boosts drive, focus, and concentration. Dopamine stimulates the creation of new neurons and prepares your brain for learning.”

What better thing to do than to give our young people that opportunity.

In view of our uncertain future, I would like to repeat some words from the beginning:

But what about our very young students, almost still children? They still have their whole life ahead of them. And where is the journey going? Can we promise them anything? What do we really know, except that what we know is from the past? But what will the future look like?

The real thing we can and must give now is to help our young people to learn to think independently and creatively, to increase perspectives. So that they can develop a personality, which has the fullest range of emotional intelligence to face the uncertain demands of the future. We must give them everything that nourishes their soul and strengthens them for life.

And again *Mirror neurons are extremely important to develop social skills as empathy and deep understanding. That's what we can call “emotional intelligence”, they are a resonance system.*

This is given through doing art. And for that, we need acting for face to face interaction.

Studies – scientific articles - excerpts

When I started researching for my study, I was surprised how much research was done here. I have selected five scientific articles and quote excerpts. I refer to the content continuously throughout the whole study. Keywords are given at the beginning of each article; if they are in *italics*, they have been added by me.

Acting out of habits – can Theater of the Oppressed promote change?

Boal's theater methods in relation to Bourdieu's concept of habitus

Keywords: habitus; personal development; social change; Forum Theater; Theater of the Oppressed

(Keywords: habits, obstacles and resistance to change, patterns of belief / unquestioned convictions maintain status quo / prevent people to think for themselves)

Habits make everyday life manageable, but can also become obstacles and cause problems. The tendency to repeat old patterns of behavior is a common problem for individuals and for society as a whole. Unreflexive habitual actions constitute an important aspect of social reproduction.

Structural aspects are embedded in how we think and act, and are also inscribed in the body. These unconscious aspects of habitus are interesting in relation to theater; where the conscious use of body language, inner dialogue and action are central. Looking at Boal's theater methods in the light of Bourdieu's concept of habitus, Theater of the Oppressed clearly has the potential to make social structures, power relations and individual habitus visible and, at the same time, provide tools to facilitate change. It is one of the few methods that offers an integrated approach to work on individual, group and social levels, and involves both the body and the mind.

Seemingly, everyday experiences, internalized psychological patterns, life conditions, and social structures all contribute to maintain the status quo.

Can drama and theater be useful to promote change? (O' Neill 1996, 145) states that 'drama has the power to enlarge our frames of reference and to emancipate us from rigid ways of thinking and perceiving', and that the purpose of drama is to bring about change.

By observing traditional upbringing in Algeria, he concluded that the rules and phrases that the children hear all the time tend to create psychological 'montages' which seem to serve as protection against or even forbid improvisation and maybe prevent people to think for themselves or at least force an impersonal form to the personal thinking and feeling. In these formulas a whole philosophy is expressed which, by being continuously repeated and demonstrated in action, goes to the foundation of the child's behavior and thinking. (Broady 1991, 234, with reference to Bourdieu 1958, author's own translation)

...

According to O'Neill (1996), drama has the power to emancipate our thinking and widen our

frames of reference, which is an important part in expanding one's habitus. If we as drama practitioners want to promote change, we need methods that connect the body and mind, the personal and the political.

Eva Österlind (2008) Acting out of habits – can Theater of the Oppressed promote change? Boal's theater methods in relation to Bourdieu's concept of habitus, *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theater and Performance*, 13:1, 71-82, DOI: 10.1080/13569780701825328



Scream – adapted and directed by Effat Yehia
Acting Studio Production, December 2018
(in the middle: Sofia Razmy, student of Faculty of Pharmacy)

“I understood that every role is important regardless of whether it’s a small or a big one. It is not about myself anymore, it is about the whole play.” Sofia Razmy

Being part of something much bigger than self: the community play as a model of implicit and explicit political theater practice

Keywords: Being part of something much bigger than self/ “what if” images of potential communities

No performance by itself can alter the routines of everyday life, but community-based theater can provide ‘what if’ images of potential community, sparking the kind of imaginative work that must precede substantial changes in customary habits (2001, 38).

As part of this change, I think the community play challenges a fixation with the identity of the individual in favor of the importance of collectivity, both in terms of identity and representation but also in relation to renewed interest in political movements both in the United Kingdom and globally. Applied and community theater practitioners should not think of themselves as outside of such struggles. Rather, Community Theater is an artistic practice that can play a fundamental part in shaping political struggle, and which, in the process, would not let us forget the importance of celebration.

Sarah Weston (2019): ‘Being part of something much bigger than self’: the community play as a model of implicit and explicit political theater practice.,
Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theater and Performance, DOI:
10.1080/13569783.2019.1692653



Fatma – Day, In Day Out - A women's day to day stories
 Adapted and directed by Effat Yehia - Acting Studio Production, April 2019
 (Walaa Ahmed, student of Faculty of Engineering, graduated 2020) attended five productions

Acting and Personality Change: The Measurement of Change in Self-Perceived Personality Characteristics during the Actor's Character Development Process

Keywords: taking another view / increasing perspectives / observing own behavior / high degree of self-critique

David Belasco, a studied actor who was prominent in the early part of this century, called acting the...natural facility or gift...whereby (the actor) is enabled to enter into, comprehend and interpret to others the experiences of, successively, many persons, often most unlike himself; seeming to be them, to know all their joys and sorrows, think their thoughts, and veritably to live their lives (Cole and Chinoy, 1970, p. 578).

The connection between acting and intrapsychic processes has been formalized by another psychotherapy technique: psychodrama is a therapeutic process in which the client is coached by the therapist to literally act out inner conflicts (Moreno, 1946).

Throughout the process of preparing to perform, the actor must delve into the inner life of the character to be portrayed. Developing the role involves a rigorous process of exploration that is akin to the self-examinatory journey taken by the psychotherapy patient; and in fact, a vital part of the art of casting a play or film.

An application of social psychology's self-perception theory might explain this phenomenon. According to Bem (1972), individuals come to understand their inner experience, including their attitudes and emotions, by observing their own behavior. The craft of acting demands a high degree of self-critique, which can occur only if one engages in self-observation. Actors, then, might come to draw conclusions about their internal states by observing, throughout the rehearsal and performance period, their external behaviors. Therefore, an actor playing the role of a hero could, as a result of repeatedly demonstrating heroic qualities, eventually come to view himself as having heroic tendencies.

...

Further, Kelly emphasizes the psychological dimensions of the dramatic term "role"; he sees individuals as taking on a role in relation to others when they attempt to infer the view or outlook of another person (Sechrest, 1977). It is that ability to take on another's view of reality that is central to effective acting.

Mo Therese Hannah, Siena College,
 George Domino and Richard Hanson, The University of Arizona
 William Hannah, Siena College
 Journal of Research 28, 277-286 (1994)



Matilda – Musical, directed by Effat Yehia
 Acting Studio Production, May 2018 at HU, June at Hanager/Opera
 (Cast: students of Young Scholar School, HU students, professional actors/actresses)

The impact of drama on pupils' language, mathematics, and attitude in two primary schools

Keywords: drama, self-concept, value added, reading, mathematics, attitude, creative writing,
Keywords: English lessons through theater at Heliopolis University

Justifying drama and the arts

The research described in this paper examined the impact of drama on pupils' language, mathematics, feelings and attitudes. Justifying drama or the arts on the basis of their impact on academic performance is not uncontroversial. Arguing in this way is in danger of conceding that other subjects have a superior status. There is, for example, less interest in whether studying maths has a positive impact on performance in music than the other way around. Implicit in such arguments is the assumption that the arts are not academic subjects. To mount extrinsic arguments in favor of teaching arts may be to dismiss their real power and may account for why some art forms are marginalized (Gingell, 2000). If impact on academic performance is the main justification, there may be better ways of improving academic performance than spending money on the arts. As Eisner (2002, p. 234) has consistently argued 'the arts should be justified in education primarily in relation to their distinctive or unique contributions'.

...

Drama and the arts do not have to shun what are sometimes described as 'scientific' approaches to seeking truth.

Mike Fleming , Christine Merrell & Peter Tymms (2004) The impact of drama on pupils' language, mathematics, and attitude in two primary schools, *Research in Drama Education*, 9:2, 177-197, DOI: 10.1080/1356978042000255067



Matilda – Musical, directed by Effat Yehia
 Acting Studio Production, May 2018 at HU, June at Hanager/Opera)
 (Cast: students of Young Scholar School, HU students, professional actors and actresses)

Playing a part: the impact of Youth Theater on young people's personal and social development

Keywords: youth, successful transitions to adulthood, nowadays their transition is more uncertain, complex, and risky, out-of-school activities, 13 villages project

Introducing the study

This article describes the main findings of a study of the impact of taking part in Youth Theater on young people's personal and social development. The study was commissioned by the National Association of Youth Theaters (NAYT) and funded by Arts Council England (ACE). NAYT is the flagship organization for youth theater practice in England, UK. Arts Council England is the national funding and policy making organization, responsible for developing, sustaining and promoting the arts in England. The study was carried out by the Centre for Applied Theater Research (CATR), a research and practice unit based at the Drama Department, University of Manchester. Data collection for the study was carried out from July 2001 to December 2002 and the research culminated in a 100-page report, *playing a Part*, launched in March 2003.'

Youth Theater is a broad term used to describe a wide variety of organizations that engage young people in theater-related activities. It takes place outside of formal education and is founded on the voluntary participation of young people. Young people take part in a range of activities within youth theater, including: devising and performing theater productions with their peers; creative-, skills- or issue-based workshops preparing them for the personal and social challenges implicit in the process of making theater; experimentation with different theater forms and styles; special projects with professional artists and theater practitioners; special projects with the youth service; and tours to other youth theaters or festivals within the UK and internationally. Youth Theater has long been perceived to have important personal

and social impacts on young people.

Definitions of 'personal and social development'

The phrase, 'personal and social development' is ubiquitous in arts research and evaluation, yet its definition is often not clear. The study adapted the following from youth service and UK National Curriculum definitions: personal and social development refers to the skills, qualities, capacities, and resources that help young people make successful transitions to adulthood, that is, lead healthy, confident, and independent lives wherein they can fulfill their potential.

It is important that the concept of personal and social development is understood in the context of the current social and economic climate. Social and economic changes mean that the experience of growing up has changed radically in the last two decades (Coleman, 2000, pp. 230-242). Young people's transition to adulthood is more extended, uncertain, complex and risky.

The UK government's Social Exclusion Unit has identified a number of factors that protect and support young people to manage risk and uncertainty successfully. Protective factors include: strong relationships with parents, teachers and other adults, individual character traits such as outgoing nature and intelligence; and active involvement in family, school, and community life; especially participation in out-of-school activities.

Youth theaters are not only different from each other in terms of their provision, they vary in quality. The research highlighted characteristics of effective youth theaters or principles of good practice which help facilitate the impacts described by young people. Effective youth theaters:

- include all young people, regardless of ability or background;
- occur in informal settings outside of school and home;
- are characterized by an informal, yet disciplined process that involves high expectations of young people;
- provide opportunities for young people to take risks in safe contexts;
- provide opportunities for young people to take part in performance;
- provide opportunities for young people to take responsibilities necessary to maintain the organization;
- involve a sense of urgency, commitment to work hard and work to real deadlines.

Jenny Hughes & Karen Wilson (2004) Playing a part: the impact of youth theater on young people's personal and social development, *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theater and Performance*, 9:1, 57-72, DOI: 10.1080/1356978042000185911

“Who am I”, by Nazik al Mala'ika



The Star of Bagdad - Nazik al Mala'ika - The Pioneer of Modern Arabic Lyrics
written and arranged by Dorothea Walter, Beit el Hekma Production, March 2018
(Marwa Samir, student of Faculty of Business)

الليل يسأل من أنا
 أنا سرّه القلق العميق الأسود
 أنا صمته المتمرد
 قنعت كنهى بالسكون
 ولففت قلبي بالظنون
 وبقيت ساهمة هنا
 أرتو وتسألني القرون
 ؟أنا من أكون
 والريح تسأل من أنا
 أنا روحها الحيران أنكرني الزمان
 أنا مثلها في لا مكان
 نبقي نسير ولا انتهاء
 نبقي نمر ولا بقاء
 فإذا بلغنا المنحنى
 خلفنا خاتمة الشقاء
 ! فإذا فضاء
 والدهر يسأل من أنا
 أنا مثله جبارة أطوي عصور
 وأعود أمنحها النشور
 أنا أخلق الماضي البعيد
 من فتنة الأمل الرغيد
 وأعود أدفنه أنا
 لأصوغ لي أمسا جديد
 غده جليد
 والذات تسأل من أنا
 أنا مثلها حيرى أحرق في ظلام

لا شيء يمنحني السلام
أبقى أسائل والجواب
سيظل يحجبه سراب
وأظل أحسبه دنا
فإذا وصلت إليه ذاب
وخيا وغاب

Why poetry?

"Language incorporates spirit and by poetry, spirit is practiced.

If one reads or speaks poetry, one enters the realm of spirit, one senses the spirit."

(Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish, founder of Sekem and Heliopolis University)

What do we have right now at Heliopolis University regarding speech, poetry and acting?

Core program classes

The students get introduced to speech training, poetry, storytelling, shadow theater, drama

Arabic poetry

We have established a broad work with Arabic poetry in our classes.

Beit el Hekma

We founded Beit el Hekma at Heliopolis University as a series of productions to keep Arabic poetry alive, protect it from disappearing and make the rich treasures of this part of literature accessible for our students.

These productions are performed by students, academic staff, employees, teachers from Sekem school.

Throughout the last years, my colleagues *Hamada Shousha and Tamer Elgazzar* and I myself have staged many Arab poets and poetesses, for instance: Nazik al-Mala'ika, Mahmoud Darwish, Elia Abou Madi, Mikha'il Na'ima, Nizar Qabbani, Ghada Samman, and many others.

Beit el Hekma is a certain way of speaking and presenting poetry on stage.

And as the quote by Dr. Abouleish "Why poetry?" expresses the importance of poetry and thus its preservation should not be underestimated or even omitted.

Acting Studio

Acting Studio was founded in 2018. Under this umbrella we produce plays, musicals, monodramas etc. under the direction of *Effat Yehia*. She has directed: “Shakespeare meets Sheherazade”, “Matilda”, “The Scream”, “Fatma – Day in Day out”, and “Abou el Fenoon”.

The cast is always a mixture of students, staff members, employees, professional actors and actresses from inside and from outside Beit el Hekma and Acting Studio. Also this is a brand of our theater work.

Symposium

Last year Acting Studio invited a number of well-known personalities from the theater scene in Cairo to a symposium.

We have established a good reputation with theater colleagues outside of our theater, thanks to Effat Yehia.

Speech training

This is as unique as Beit el Hekma. It is a long research with teachers at Sekem school 25 years ago, and as a result we have published a book. This is the basis on which our colleagues work with students.

The speech training is applied in the classes with the students, with the academic staff, and also with all other employees.

Why is this important? Because it is part of life and of good communication to be able to speak clearly and beautifully. And on stage you need it under all circumstances; a culture of beautiful speech. And since we are constantly on the stage of life, it is not only a question of the theater. This is one of Sekem School and Heliopolis University’s achievements.

I would like to emphasize the importance of speech training for the development of consciousness. In the conscious handling of the sounds one subtly experiences a conscious handling of spiritual principles.

ESD speech trainings for the academic staff

We have ongoing classes under the title “Speak & Inspire”, “Basics of Effective Teaching”, “Communication, Creativity & Awareness”.

What’s next at HU

- Academy for Applied Theater at Heliopolis University
- Cooperation with the Academy for Applied Dramatic Arts (ADAB/Germany)
- Acting Studio Theater School
- Poetry department: research, translations, developing programs, current team: Hamada Shousha, Tamer El Gazzar, Dorothea Walter, N.N.
- Special theater trainings “Ethics of Life on Stage” twice a year for the higher management of HU (president, deans, professors)
Trainer: Noha el Attar, Cairo/Paris, N.N.
- Training twice a year „Ethics of Life on Stage“, for the academic staff, current team: Effat Yehia, Yacoub el Masri, Menna Okail, Dorothea Walter, N.N.
- The 13 villages project

The 13 villages project was initially developed in 2004 and was later relaunched in 2019. The project aims to holistically develop the neighboring villages to SEKEM main farm in Belbeis, Egypt. This includes human development; including educational, artistic, and cultural programs, in addition to economic, ecological, and societal development. This suggests that the project should have ongoing and intensive theater activities for all ages. A place of playful learning and interaction.

Thank you for reading this study. I hope you could truly enjoy it!



**Interviews with students of Heliopolis University and Acting Studio
2018-2020**



Matilda – Musical, directed by Effat Yehia
Acting Studio Production, May 2018 at HU, June at Hanager/Opera
(Nourhan Saeed, student Faculty of Business, graduated summer 2020)

Nourhan (Business student) Dec 2018

Theater is like meditation.

Didn't know before that I'm talented in acting.

It opened my eyes to not thinking in limits.

*

Sofia (Pharmacy student) Dec 2018

I understood that every role is important regardless of whether it's a small or a big one.

It is not about myself anymore, it is about the whole play.

*

Nery (student of Acting Studio) Dec 2018

When we are acting the different layers of our personality show up.

No sharp line between one and the others.

We can get into a kind of a frozen state, losing the ability to react spontaneously because we are sticking to a certain self-image, and we are always required to have clear-cut distinctions between right and wrong (allowed or not allowed).

*

Nancy (student of Acting Studio) Dec 2018

How can I step out of a role, not get hunted by the role.

Curiosity vs. fear of the unknown.

Words are only words at the beginning then step after step they become alive and come really out of me.

Do we have to have a new experience that the character we've played has been through before? If not, how can we be realistic in circumstances that we've never been before?

*



Scream – adapted and directed by Effat Yehia
Acting Studio Production, December 2018
(Walaa Ahmed, student Faculty of Engineering graduated summer 2020)

Walaa (Engineering student) April 2019

Dealing with the cleaning rag transformed me. Being specific with the props, giving time, listening to it, not taking it for granted. How can a prop have a profound impact on the performance? Why? To what extent? What is the difference between our usage of any prop in our daily life and on stage? What do we do differently? Why do we tend to give extra attention to it on stage? Why is it an indicator of either a good or bad performance? “

To make relation to the cleaning rag was changing her and she transformed the subject of hate/disgust/boring. She was dancing with it – it was magic and made her powerful.

*

Nourhan (Business student) Dec 2018

After Matilda and the Scream I have got a lot of experience. Especially after the Scream. I understand now that people are suffering from issues which are not highlighted and when I have problems I know that there are much bigger problems and make it more acceptable. I grew up, a kid of psychology and philosophy, I am more brave. I like theater more and more. It gives me the chance to express myself and feelings. And if I have any problems I feel stressed and I go to the theater and into my role it helps me to change my mood, it helps me in my study, it is like a meditation, this kind of activity I like. I didn't know before that I am talented in acting. People are saying I am talented to be an actress. I can't see that until now. But it opens my eyes to not thinking in limits. I am more surprised. Theater can make a real change.

*

Nery (acting student of Acting Studio) Dec 2018

Two months ago I was totally disconnected from this character and felt distant, she has so much bitterness inside, she has this negative view of life, much anger. I am not like her in my normal life, I am a pleaser, I want people to like me, I don't want anyone to feel bad... I use this character to discover this part of me I have, I discovered how to let it out and not be scared of it.

Then I connect more and more to the others in the cast. Regarding techniques...I was so stuck in trying to be creative and genuine, at a certain point Effat gave me some clues, key to the character, moods and movements of my body came sometimes together. I felt so helpless but with this advice I developed. Guidance and enjoying the process was the way. Is this bitterness and anger inside of me, is this ok, I am always frustrated, I want to be sweet, I felt something wrong with always smiling and being friendly with everyone. The character helped me...

We can get into a kind of frozen state, losing the ability to react spontaneously, because we are sticking on a certain self-image, and we are in the conflict of: this is allowed this not, this is right and this wrong.

*

Sofia (Pharmacy student) Dec 2018

In her role she was telling about circumcision. She herself did not experience that, the parents did not do that to her, but when she was walking in the street she met a lady doing this operation and she was collecting the girls in the streets and went with them and the parents didn't know that. In theater we can get reminded to own stories like that.

She understood that every role is important regardless of little or big. It's not about only her anymore but the whole play.

The Scream (Gipsy) was eye opening regarding human beings. Started to look from another perspective. She learned that is a story behind each person.

*

Nancy (student of Acting Studio) Dec. 2018

Whenever Sofia says her lines Nancy wants to cry...this shows the effect on a colleague, and empathy in general...the little 10 years old kid comes to her, amazing

How can I step out of a role, not get hunted by a role and become part of that character/personality

Examples of famous actors and actresses ... have to go to a psychiatrist afterwards.

But it brings a side in myself upside down which is hidden, there are layers and layers...thoughts inside me. Instead of being afraid we can become curious and we start to discover and explore something which can enrich us, dive into...my understanding gets wider and extended.

The migrant woman in The Scream. This feeling of loss, she is a person who has lost her life several times. This feeling of loss is hunting me now, sad, tearing, when she is in touch.

In the beginning the words are just words, and I had to digest them, and step after step they became alive and came really out of me.

The role content: she was the girl of rich aristocratic parents, she had a discussion with her religion teacher in school, asked him if god can do everything and have the total will power why he punishes us as evils, why he makes us not good from the beginning. The teacher did not accept her question or discussed it with her. He wants her to get out of school because she is a devil. She got a brain tumor and he said this sickness is because of that she said. Then she lost her hair and she wanted to go out without a veil, but her father was beating her. Her father sent her to Europe, she wanted to come back but she could not. Father and mother died. To get connected to her family she got married to her mother's doctor. He got sick, she got back to London...the time has gone...too late.

Theater, a play can activate the personal as well as the collective staff.

Even though I have not experienced a certain thing I can get in touch very much.

*

Sofia (Pharmacy student) April 2019

The play was so „easy“. She can't act in the beginning, “easy” character; it's something in our house. She started to be afraid that she will one day become such a woman.

It isn't right to be like Fatma, she can't do anything without her husband, she doesn't do any action to change it. Fatma can't live her dreams. Sofia feels now aware to avoid Fatma.

*

Nancy (student of Acting Studio) April 2019

Fatma shows me all aspects I don't want to be and in so far it was highly depressing me when I speak it truly, it connects to so many women, husband's resentment.

*

Nayera Farek Abbas Mohamed, age 21, Pharmacy – May 2019

First I thought I couldn't act, I was shy, and couldn't present well. Then I learned how to speak, how to breathe well, and heard about body language.

I did the speech exercises at home with my siblings, showed them how to breathe, how to relax, how to speak words very well.

I was in the beginning maybe 60% shy, now not more than 20%.

Normally I felt much under pressure and tense, the classwork helped to be more relaxed. Also my mood I can change now. I want more exercises.

*

Mohamed Sayed, 22 years, Pharmacy 9. Semester - Dec. 2019

was my first acting class, I always avoided it, I didn't like it, I ended painting. I discovered that it is not easy to act. It needs to research, to plan, to communicate for just 3-4 minutes a scene. It is a lot of work. And I also don't like to study pharmacy, I love poetry. I was afraid of new things, now I am more open after these new experiences, and this makes me happy. I recommend others to take acting classes, because it will make them happy.

*

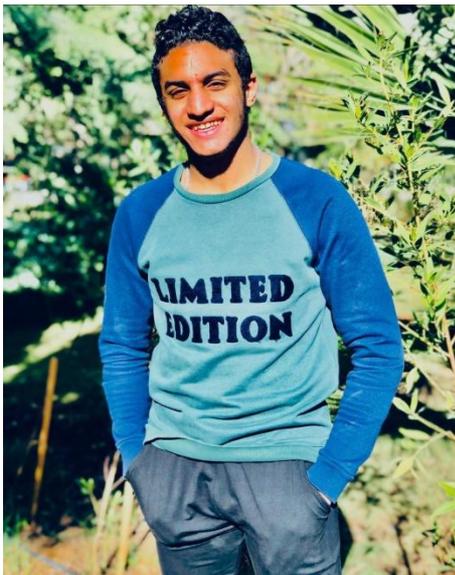
Ali Ahmed, 18 years, Pharmacy 1. Semester - Dec. 2019



The class was a very challenging experience, regarding raising my voice, 20% in the beginning now 60-70%. My self-confidence awakened, I can now speak to others without fear, I speak directly without fearing losing the love of others. Before midterm I discovered this. Learning new things made me more open and improved my skills. I love it. Study and fun should be mixed. I am writing novels.

*

Sherif Hussein, age 20, Business, 5. Semester - Dec. 2019



I want to become a marketing business man and for that I need all these acting skills. I like comedy acting to make people smile. Acting changed the mindset, I became more friendly, my communication skills improved from 2-9,5 on a scale of 1-10. It helped me to develop in many directions and discover my talents. The acting team are my friends. (2 acting classes, 1 stud. activity)

*

Noura Tharwat, age 20, Business, 5th semester – Dec. 2019

I love acting very much, my self-confidence improved, I was afraid before. Now I am not afraid anymore when I make interviews with my professors.

I found it made me patient and communicative. With others, I was closed before. It helps me in my study and daily life, I improved my voice, it's more strong now. (2nd class acting)

*

Doha Ahmed, age 18, pharmacy 1st semester – Dec. 2019

I had not much contact with others in the beginning, and then I started communicating more. I discovered that I had a voice. The poem work was good. I really recommend acting with all these breathing and articulation exercises. It helps in daily life.

*

Ahmed Hamdy, age 24, pharmacy, 11. Semester - Dec. 2019



I found myself in acting, in contact with people in the theater, in contact with the characters. I became more friendly, and I like to make contact. (3 acting classes, 1 student activity)

*

Sandy and Sylvie Nashat (twin sisters), age 18, pharmacy, 1. Semester - Dec. 2019



We were both shy, couldn't speak, no movement, voices low, now we are more brave and self confident. Acting made us open minded, more creative.

In the beginning it was a duty, in the middle we started to love it, waiting for one class to the next. Acting gave us opportunities to express ourselves.

Now we would recommend acting to others because of lots of possibilities for personal development.



Sherif Qabbani and his cast 15 people, “My soul is gone”, student activity - Dec. 2019



We got courage, self-power, self-confidence, learned to show feelings in public...you can be what you want to be, giving what you have, giving people hope if they have problems, overview, teamwork, one family, understanding each other, how to act in certain situations, to be optimistic, avoiding mistakes in life as on stage.

*

Abdelrahman Mohamed, age 19, PT, 3. Semester - Dec. 2019



I became definitely more social. As I was 16 I wanted to act in a play, but the director was choosing another one. And I realized how much I want to act. As I came to HU I found acting again and was confronted with my fears. I felt at home when I joined a play. At home in my family I am following totally the expectations of my parents and I respect the duties and responsibilities. Theater is an escape for me. I attended several plays: Ibn Fatuma, Utopia, Tuna and Abou el Fenoon.

*

Class Diversity B - Dec. 2019



Working with our life dreams and love poems as well and writing the scene by ourselves gave us self-confidence. We experienced stress release, how to be creative, and raised our body awareness. Paying attention to others gave us an idea about good teamwork.

*

Class Diversity E, Students from Netherlands Zuyd University, studying Arabic for 4 months at HU - Jan 2020



Stepping out of the comfort zone through working on Lysistrata by Aristophanes

*

Diversity G, June 2020, online, during the shutdown

- Abdallah (Engineering) learned something new through the play, it changed my character in life
- Mohamed Azzazy (Engineering) he is thankful to learn from a character/role, how the roles respond
- Mohamed Yazan (Engineering) was so happy to take this class, likes the exercises before the play work, feeling and expressing now only by the voice
- Shaymaa Farek (Engineering) she got a big part in the play, her self-confidence raised strongly

Interviews by Lilli Pohl from Germany, internship February-March 2018 at Sekem

Behind theater curtains you find different stories, characters and emotions. As you find them in every person who dares to express themselves. In this interview you have a look behind the curtains of the development of five very talented theater students who gained confidence and the ability to express themselves.

Aladham

11 FEBRUARY 2018

Aladham is a first year Pharmacy student at Heliopolis University and is born in Egypt. When Aladham was five years old he moved from Egypt to Saudi-Arabia. After living there for fifteen years he moved back a year ago. As a child, Aladham watched a lot of Hollywood movies. This is where his passion for cinema and theater comes from. At Heliopolis University he attended a theater course for one semester that changed him a lot. In his future Aladham would like to combine Pharmacy and cinema.



The theater course was never difficult for him because he loves theater so much. It was for him a really nice experience to do something just because he likes it and not for the purpose of getting a degree. Even with challenging exercises it was fun because of his dedication. Besides that, Aladham really enjoyed the theater course. He also learned a lot of things that he can apply in his work field and in his daily life.

Improvement of communication

“After being in Saudi-Arabia coming back to Egypt was a shock. How people communicate with each other is completely different from Saudi-Arabia. People are here more open and it is a lot more common to be outside and not only in school or at home. In Saudi-Arabia the only girl I spoke to was my sister. Now I have to communicate with different genders.”

Because of the theater course Aladham had to face contact with girls. Not only with girls his communication improved, but with everyone. It is for him nowadays a lot easier to connect with a lot of people and he is less shy than before. Because he is able to build relationships with different kinds of people who have different perspectives on life, his view broadened. Theater enabled him not only to observe others behavior and body language, but it also taught him to be aware of his own behavior and adapt it if needed. He can now see that some ways of communication are not inviting to make relationships and how you can change this.

Improvement of confidence

Before Aladham did the theater course he was very shy and afraid of talking in public. Not only talking in public, but also one to one conversations with strangers were very difficult for him. Now he knows how to choose his words and how to use his voice. He is not scared of the

stage anymore. This is because he knows that he is able to control his voice and his body language on stage. On stage, he still feels a little bit nervous in the beginning, but after that the confidence comes. A feeling of freedom is then arising. He feels confidence in the ability of controlling his voice and his body language. A new experience which makes him very happy.

Improvement of the ability to express

Aladham tells that in the beginning of the theater course the Doctor always had to ask him to raise his voice because he was so shy. At the end of the course, during his performance, he was not only able to raise his voice in small groups, but he was able to reach the whole audience.

Besides that Aladham learned how to speak up in front of the audience, he is now also able to express himself better at home. His parents noticed that he is now able to discuss with them and say better what he wants. They really like this development.

The feelings and thoughts that Aladham is now able to express were there before, but he did not know how to communicate this with the outer world. Through theater this ability of expressions arose, what he experienced as a huge liberation.

Overall the theater course influenced the development of Aladham a lot. He thinks it is very important that students have theater courses. According to him it is important that students explore acting, because they might discover new skills. So you have to try. Even if acting is not in your field of interest Aladham thinks that theater is important to practice. Because it can give you confidence and it can improve your ability to speak and communicate with others. This is important no matter what you study at the university or what you will do afterwards.

The advice that Aladham has for coming theater students is the following: *“If you do not like acting, just try it. Everyone has the creativity somehow. Try to find it. If you already like it, then try more.”*

Walae

12 FEBRUARY 2018

Walae is a 22 years old Engineering student at the Heliopolis University. She was born and raised in Egypt. Walae was this year part of the theater production “Sheherazade meets Shakespeare”. In this public theater performance, that took place in the Space of Cultures at Heliopolis University, she played one of the tree witches.



As a little girl Walae already started exploring theater. After watching a movie she would run to her room and start practicing the different characters she noticed in the movie. While acting and singing she would discover how to embody the huge diversity of emotions, roles and characters that had appeared in the movie. Walae's room would transform into a whole new world with endless possibilities. She also tried other art disciplines as writing, but she never found something that she likes as much as acting.

In the future Walae would like to work in engineering, but besides that she would love to also act and sing. While working as an engineer, she would like to live independently, alone in a home and travel from time to time if possible.

Improvement of communication

“Before the theater course I could not even stand in front of an unfamiliar person. I felt isolated. Communicating with other people used to be a fear of mine. If I did not know someone, I would be very scared to talk to them. If I would know them, I would find it difficult to open up and express myself properly.”

This feeling of isolation that Walae experienced was very difficult to overcome. By practicing theater she got more and more in contact with the outer world and she became less shy. In comparison with now Walae had only a few friends before the theater course. And she was only communicating with the people she already knew. Because of this she did not come in contact with different people and perspectives of life. Since the theater course this world full of strangers revealed. And nowadays they do not feel that much like strangers anymore. Walae is now able to talk with them and explore other people's experiences in life. This makes her feel less isolated and more open.

But this journey was not always easy. Opening yourself can be very difficult because it takes time and courage. When Walae had to practice with text it was fun and easy for her. But when she had to improvise it was very difficult. Because Walae felt isolated from the society, she had the feeling that she did not have the experiences of situations that were asked for during the theater lessons. Although this was challenging for her, she learned about different kinds of situations that could appear in the society. While learning by doing, she started to act on these different kinds of experiences. The revealing of those situations contributed to the fact that she feels nowadays less isolated. By experiencing different situations through acting she feels more connected with the society.

Another challenge for Walae was the poetry. She did not have a lot of background knowledge which made it difficult for her to understand it. But after reading different kinds of levels of poetry it became more and more easy. She can very clearly see the progress of her development in this.

Improvement of confidence

Since Walae is practicing theater she has not only gained more confidence on the stage but also in her daily life. This can be seen in the increased level of confidence while Walae is using her voice. Before people had to ask her to speak up, now she has the ability to play with the volume and tone of her voice.

Walae is also mentioning her progress in confidence of body movement. *“I am walking more freely now, not broken and shy anymore.”*

Improvement of the ability to express

Walae tells that she had the feeling that her father did not want to let her grow up. She found it difficult to show to him that she is not a little girl anymore. Now she has the feeling that she can communicate with him, she has the confidence and the courage to discuss with her father. Because of this, he can see that she has grown and became a young adult. Her parents like now that she is able to discuss with them and that she can express herself.

Besides that Walae sees the value of the ability to express back home, she also sees that acting skills can be very useful in her workfield. As an engineer it is important to be able to clearly express yourself. Clear, precise, kind and honest communication can improve the working relationship. Also the ability to play different kinds of rolls can be very useful. In the engineering world Walae has the feeling that it often requires some men skills or attitude. Using acting skills to play various characters in different situations can help a lot.

After everything Walae learned, she would definitely recommend trying theater. *“Most of the students did not experience theater before. I think everyone should try and see if there are perhaps some hidden talents. If you do not find your talents or excitement in theater then you should try to find it somewhere else. But you should at least always try and experience it, to see what there is to discover.”*

Shad

19 FEBRUARY 2018

Shad is 20 years old and studying pharmacy at Heliopolis University. She loves reading Islamic books and novels. But besides that she also likes to create her own world while acting and drawing. These are big passions of her, although it is not easy to read, act and draw as often as she wants. Her mother does not really like it. Those activities take time that could also have been spent on studying. Shad is still in conversation with her mother and she is trying to convince her everyday a little more. She understands her mother and her concerns, but she is convinced of the possibility to combine studying with practicing arts. And she is not giving up on this belief.



Improvement of communication

Shad tells about her life before she came to the university and before she did the theater course. *“Since I was a kid, I had one friend. Because I was always communicating with the same person I did not develop my communication skills that much. I did not come in contact with different people.”*

Nowadays Shad has many friends at the university. She does not only know them, but she is also able to collaborate with them. *“If you have to create a play together, you have to collaborate. You have to listen to each other and deal with other students. Theater is not only individual work, but also teamwork.”*

Shad brought the skill to communicate and deal with the other students also back home. Through better communication with her mom, Shad was able to convince her mother to let her go to the art classes. In the beginning her mom refused, but with the use of her developed communication skills, Shad was able to convince her. Her mother is still afraid that Shad will not have enough time for her study, but Shad made the promise that she will manage to combine her study and art.

Improvement of confidence

“Before I did theater I was really shy. I was mostly silent and people saw me as a cute girl. I wanted to become less shy, but I did not know how. Theater showed me the way. From the very first moment I loved it. I found my opportunity and I took it. I love to change myself and theater seems to be perfect for this.”

Her Doctor for theater is confirming the shyness Shad had in the beginning. *“The first time that Shad spoke, I could barely hear her.”*

When the Doctor asked Shad to raise her voice, an idea popped up in her head. She decided to make a little surprise performance for him.

At the end of the class the Doctor asked the students to bring something to play next time.

“The students are not used to taking initiative and come up with something by themselves. From the moment they are born till now people always tell them what is allowed and what not. Coming up with your own ideas or your own ways of behavior is not a common thing to do. So I always prepare something, but I give them the opportunity to bring something as well. If they want to, then they can bring whatever they like.”

The Doctor did not expect the students to bring something after the very first lesson of the semester. Because of that, he was unbelievably surprised when the shy Shad came with a role she would like to play. This was not an ordinary role. This was a big role out of the novel “Mira Mar” by *Nagib Mahfouz*. This would take a lot of time to practice. Shad was questioning herself. *“Can I do this?”* But the answer of the Doctor was clear: *“Yes, you can do this!”* So they started practicing. And she did unbelievably well. She played the role absolutely amazing!

This moment happened four years ago. Both of them can remember this moment as the day of yesterday. And for both of them this moment made a huge impact. Playing the role gave Shad a lot of confidence and it empowered her. For the Doctor it was very beautiful to see Shad grow and act the role so good.

Learning how to perform and getting positive feedback on those performances gave her a lot of confidence and trust in her.

Before Shad was scared of performing something in front of other people. Nowadays she is not afraid of anything anymore. She is still nervous, but not scared. *“I do not care about the judgments of others. What they think of me. I just do the performance. Before I start the performance, I ask myself the question: ‘Where am I scared of?’ And my answer is always: ‘Nothing!’, and then I go.”*

After the theater course Shad was another woman. Her family is making jokes about it. They say: *“You have to go to the theater academy, because you are acting like another woman now.”* Shad changed so much that her family would say that she is acting, because they almost do not recognize her anymore.

Improvement of ability to express

Since the course Shad feels more able to express herself in an honest way. This is one of the reasons she thinks acting is very important.

“Acting is important, because we must become the best version of ourselves. People must know about themselves and that they need to change. Everyone who does the course feels the change. Of course this change is different from person to person. But there is change. And this change is important.” Shad gives different examples of this change. *“People learn how to trust in themselves. This comes with acting.”* Because of the course Shad is more aware of her breath and body language. *“When I stand up, I work with my breathing. Besides this I am conscious about my articulation.”* Other changes she sees in development of confidence, courage, communication, openness and the willingness to change yourself. *“Because of all of this and the friends I made, theater is now like my family.”*

“I see my future as a pharmacist. I would like to have a job in a cancer institute. I am now trying to apply.”

We finish the interview. She is packing her bag and is about to leave. But suddenly I have one more question in my mind. *“Shad, have you ever considered to really go to the theater academy?”* During our interview I saw so much power, passion and development in her. I could not suppress this feeling of wanting to know if she wants to continue with theater in a professional way. *“Yes”* She says. *“I want to, but I can’t. In the theater academy they do not really allow actresses with a Hijab.*

Because it is limiting the possibilities of the roles you can play.”

Nourhan

21 FEBRUARY 2018

Nourhan is 19 years old and born in Egypt. This year she was part of the public theater production “Sheherazade



meets Shakespeare”, in which she played one of the three witches.

As a child Nourhan went with her brother and sister to the SEKEM School on the farm. She absolutely loved it! The calmness, the clear air, the different kinds of lessons, that were including among others theater and music. It was all very precious for her.

“SEKEM school felt like a second home.”

Being in the city, after being at the beautiful SEKEM farm, was difficult. Nourhan had to face the pollution and the trash now. Besides this it was also difficult to be understood by her friends.

“Because I went to the SEKEM School, sustainability and art is part of my lifestyle. When I started here at Heliopolis University, most of my colleagues did not understand the need and purpose of sustainability and art. They have a different background; they come from different schools, where these issues are not that important. Very often they throw their rubbish on the ground, eat non-organic food and they hate art. This was what I observed in the beginning, but I also saw that this changed. But initially it was very difficult for me to see this big gap between my lifestyle and the lifestyle of the other students.”

Because Nourhan loves SEKEM and the intention of SEKEM so much, she decided to go to Heliopolis University. For her the vision of SEKEM is quite clear. Although many students have initially no idea about SEKEM and sustainable development, she sees beautiful transformations. Students learn how to embody the things they learn in the classroom in their lifestyle. How they do not only appreciate sustainability but also change their lifestyle and that their passion is changing into something that is connected to “saving” the world.

For most students theater is a completely new experience. But for Nourhan this is different. In the SEKEM school she explored theater already from quite a young age. She loved it directly. *“What I see very often is that students hate the Core Program in the beginning. It is taking away their focus for their study. They find it difficult to see the purpose of it. But then after some lessons, they love it. They start discovering things about themselves. I think that a lot of students do not understand why they have to do the Core Program. They just go through it. And then after around one year they start to get it.”*

Nourhan really liked the theater course and the theater play she performed in. She found a good director that could guide her. After the performance she got a lot of positive feedback, which increased her confidence on the stage.

“When I came to Heliopolis University I expected to be the most passionate person about theater. But a lot of people discovered it as well. They found the right place and then a lot of passion came out. I could see so many talented people.”

Because of the theater course Nourhan became more aware of her own emotions. Now she realises when she feels sad. Because of this realisation she can do something about it. She can do something that makes her happy. After the theater course she also feels more confidence in communicating with other people. She feels more strength.

What Nourhan likes a lot about acting is that you can become another person. *“This is different from music. Because if I am playing music, I am still myself. You feel it, but you are*

not someone else. If I play theater, I become someone else. I go deep into this person. I like this a lot!"

Besides enjoying theater and recognising her own emotions, Nourhan improved her articulation, confidence and pronunciation. Through theater she developed a lot of skills she is very thankful for. *"I think one of the most important things to learn is to allow yourself to express, to be not afraid of showing your emotions. Through theater you travel to another world. Then many emotions come out. This can be negative and positive emotions. But both are fine."*

"Theater makes me also feel comfortable. It made me grow up. I think that all the arts make my mind grow up. I discover and see more things in life and in myself now. In every art course you can find something to take in order to grow."

Nourhan thinks that the conditions that create this change are mostly spending a lot of time practicing theater and doing the courses. *"Time, spending time here. See, feel and live in this society. You can take a lot of things from it."*

In the future Nourhan wants to do something that benefits her and the society. Not a regular job, perhaps she would like to be an entrepreneur related to sustainable development. But what exactly, she doesn't know yet.

As advice for students who would like to do theater she says: *"Be not afraid to go through it. Be brave. Learn how to love it."*

VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTER COURSE IN SEKEM SCHOOL

6 MARCH 2018

Every Tuesday students from the SEKEM School have a theater course given by Maher. They



explore theater together. Learn how to play different characters and how to collaborate.

The children from the school enjoy acting. *"Normally we see actors on the TV, now we learn how to act by ourselves. We can do it as well!"*

Learning how to act was not easy for the schoolchildren. It was difficult for them because they never tried it before. Standing in front of an audience was a big challenge, expressing your emotions was scary and speaking clearly was almost impossible. But all of this changed. According to the schoolchildren theater became even simpler with practice.

One of the schoolboys says: *"Now everything is ok. I am not afraid anymore of expressing emotions on the stage and I broke the wall between me and the audience. It is not scary anymore."* There is a lot of nodding. The whole group is agreeing with the fact that they know nowadays how to interact with the audience. How to bring them something in an amusing way. *"We can make positive energy. It's about the power to create something. This talent was inside, but we did not know how to show it."*

The schoolgirls are explaining how theater made them less shy. Also the boys recognize this. They are now more confident. Not scared of people anymore and able to make relationships with all different kinds of people. One of the schoolgirls says: *"I am now able to speak with everyone. I can see how theater changed my body language and speech. I can see it on the stage, because I can stand and sit with confidence in front of the audience. But I can also see it in my daily life, how I interact with people."*

What the schoolchildren perceive as a useful practice is embodying a different character and to behave and think like someone else. This can broaden your perspective. Another valuable

practice is to learn how to make the audience understand what you are performing. You have to think from their point of view. How can you make something interesting that they will understand and like?

According to the schoolchildren it is also very important that you learn how to do something with full concentration. *"If you are doing theater, you have to be 100% focused. You cannot be distracted by anything."* Learning how to concentrate can make school a lot more efficient and it is a very useful life skill.

Do the schoolchildren want to continue theater? For most of them the answer is yes. They want to continue anyhow with the theater course. *"It is the spark of my day! If I realize I have theater in my day schedule, I wake up early. I cannot wait to start!"*

A lot of students also have the ambition to become an actor or an actress. So keep this picture with the schoolchildren somewhere safe because you never know if one day they will become famous actors and actresses.

Yassin

6 March 2018

Yassin was born and raised in Egypt. He graduated from the faculty of Engineering at Heliopolis University. After his graduation he chose to stay at the University and became a Teacher Assistant. Due to his profession he is nowadays helping students with the process he went through a couple of years ago.



Yassin chose, very consciously Heliopolis University. He wanted to study something that was connected to energy, but finding a university that offered this was complicated. He applied for two universities and got accepted. But one day his father came with a special newspaper. In this newspaper, it was announced that a new university was opened. This was Heliopolis University, with the faculty of Engineering that focused also on energy. He directly applied. This is how Yassin became a student of the very first year of Heliopolis University. Although studying took a lot of time and Yassin did not have a lot of spare time for hobbies, he practiced theater. Yassin participated in a couple of theater productions and poetry readings.

Yassin tells that when he started at Heliopolis University, he was not shy like most Egyptians

are shy. No, he was extremely shy. Through theater this became less. After half a semester he could already see the difference. Not only his shyness shrank, but also his stress level decreased. Bit by bit Yassin could explore the world full of theater more and more. He describes it as exploring, discovering and experimenting.

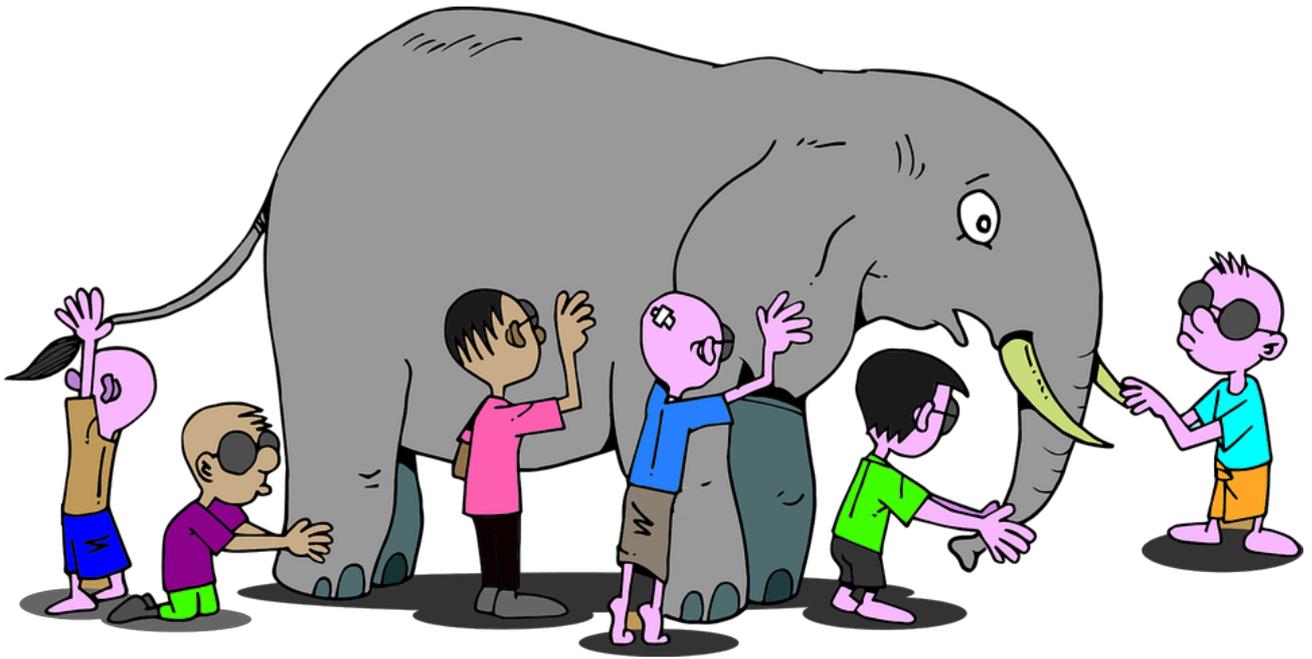
Yassin worked with *Dorothea* and played in one of the *Beit El Hekma* productions. He played the Sultan. **"Quite a challenge, but also very interesting."** One of the things Yassin learned is how to use his voice and his body in order to express something. He is grateful for the trainings of *Dorothea Walter* where she puts herself in the role of the audience. **"Then** she is giving useful feedback. You learn how loud and clear you have to speak to reach the whole audience. These are great lessons to learn."

Not only his confidence and his ability to use his voice improved, he also learned how to cooperate and how to work together. This is why Yassin thinks theater is very important. "You learn how to understand each other better and to look from different perspectives. This is so useful. The theater courses were not just doing things together. It is playing and discovering together. It was fun and even more than fun". Yassin learned how to think before doing, not to be aggressive and to know the impact of your actions. Also he learned how to breathe and communicate and how to not be stressed anymore.

"Nowadays I just do it! This helps as a teacher assistant. In a way the students are now the audience and the script is the content of the lectures I give. It also helps that I can stand in the shoes of the students. That I understand them and that I can interact with them". Because of all of this Yassin thinks that theater is definitely important for students. "There are students like me, who will need it. And besides personal development, theater is also a cultural experience. You can play Shakespeare and do things you never did before! Meet people from different faculties. Through theater you meet many different realities."

As advice for coming theater students Yassin says: "Give yourself to the process, accept it and do it. If someone would have asked me before if I would go on stage and tell that to something, I would have refused to do it. But now I do. If you never try, you will never get rid of your fear. You have to accept the challenge and have faith".
both smiled.

*



THE PARABLE ABOUT LIMITED PERCEPTION

The earliest versions of the parable of blind men and elephant is found in Buddhist, Hindu and Jain texts, as they discuss the limits of perception and the importance of complete context. The parable has several Indian variations, but broadly goes as follows:

A group of blind men heard that a strange animal, called an elephant, had been brought to the town, but none of them were aware of its shape and form. Out of curiosity, they said: "We must inspect and know it by touch, of which we are capable". So, they sought it out, and when they found it they groped about it. In the case of the first person, whose hand landed on the trunk, said "This being is like a thick snake". For another one whose hand reached its ear, it seemed like a kind of fan. As for another person, whose hand was upon its leg, said, the elephant is a pillar like a tree-trunk. The blind man who placed his hand upon its side said, "elephant is a wall". Another who felt its tail, described it as a rope. The last felt its tusk, stating the elephant is that which is hard, smooth and like a spear.

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