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**IMPROVING STUDENT-ACTOR PERFORMANCE THROUGH
THE DEVELOPMENT OF BODY AGILITY**

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Abstract

Agility is the ability to decelerate, accelerate and quickly change direction, maintaining conscious and effective control of the body in motion, without losing the speed of movement. Agility is directly related to the dynamic balance of the body, involving as the main requirement the regulation of changes of direction at the level of the center of gravity of the body and simultaneously straightening the postural deviations. The development of agility at an above-average level through the multidirectional development of speed, can lead to an improvement of the actor's performance in everything that represents stage movement, and through reflexive influence can improve not only bodily expressiveness but also verbal expressiveness. The objectives of the study: to correlate the agility with the development of the stage action, with the imposition of the adequate rhythm and the improvement of the synchronization between the stage partners. The aim was to establish the inter individual differences that appear and manifest themselves in similar working conditions between the students of the Performing Arts section, the first year of study, during a semester of the academic year 2020-2021. We started from an initial assessment of students' agility by performing a simple test that consisted of quantifying the number of successes in terms of spontaneous and unprocessed responses of students to auditory and visual stimuli. The favorable effects of the development of agility are: increased control over body movement generates a sense of control in the execution of movements, the development of body plasticity can be amplified.

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1. Introduction

The physical training specific to the student actor must focus on the development of speed in coordination, that is agility, this being one of the important qualities that the student actor uses in obtaining professional performance.

The human body, through the kinematic chains it can make, has a great freedom of movement. The effort to achieve the movements within the kinematic chains is transmitted through the elastic tractions of the skeletal muscles (Netter, 2020). This makes it necessary to direct the movements correctly, by means of sensory corrections, in order to obtain the motor precision (Adshead et al., 1998). Only when this mechanism gains value can it be operated effectively to improve the body's agility.

It should be added that in the physical activity of the student actor the speed has a complex and combined manifestation, as the stage tasks differ both from one role to another and from one moment to another (in the sense that each rehearsal, show or exam requires another assessment / reassessment of the situations they interpret). To this the aerobic effort is added, which is aerobic in nature, involving high energy consumption, which makes it difficult to adapt to the body and leads to a loss over time due to the installation of fatigue, precision of movement and implicit body agility.

The need to choose this theme derives from the fact that the exercises aimed at training the actor's agility, through the precision and motor correctness he aims at, lead to performance. The exercises emphasize an aesthetic-artistic side of the movements and lead in time to the efficiency of the execution, which is manifested by unity, fluency and logic in linking the movements, elegance and body art, but especially by a plus of motor expressiveness that appears and it manifests itself on the background of the security it acquires in execution. Merce Cunningham said: *The appearance of intensity may come from their devotion to what they are doing. It can give the look of being highly involved in the moment, that urgency that doing something precisely in the largest possible way can provoke* (Taylor & Estanol, 2017).

The relationship that is established at the level of movement between partners becomes a means of nonverbal expression, which helps to form, develop and train the way of thinking of the future actor. When we have a concordance between nonverbal and verbal language, the trust and clarity between the interlocutors is amplified, emphasizing and amplifying the transmitted messages (Ekman, 2019). Body language (nonverbal language) can be defined as an attitudinal language that achieves interpersonal relationships and is less used for the transmission of information and knowledge (Reiman, 2019).

2. Problem Statement

We start from the definition of agility: Agility is the ability to decelerate, accelerate and quickly change direction, maintaining a conscious and effective control of the body in motion, without losing the speed of execution of the movement (Dragnea et al., 2006). Agility is directly related to the dynamic balance of the body, involving as the main requirement the regulation of changes of direction at the level of the center of gravity of the body and simultaneously straightening the postural deviations (Haas, 2020).

If we were to talk about a secret of developing agility, it would be to find ways to minimize the loss of speed when moving the center of gravity of the body. This is only achieved through a correct learning of the technique of performing the movements.

3. Research Questions

The fundamental question regarding the development of agility is how and to what extent it can be influenced by training. At the same time, we need to think about what skills and motor qualities, at an early level, the student actor should have in order for his agility to reach the performing parameters through training.

These questions lead us to two directions of investigation: finding effective training methods to improve the methodology of teaching the movement part of student actors and obtaining diagnoses aimed at their correct professional orientation.

4. Purpose of the Study

Study hypothesis: The development of agility at an above-average level through the multidirectional development of speed, can lead to an improvement of the actor's performance in everything that represents stage movement, and by reflexive influence can improve not only body expressiveness but also general expressiveness taken in all 3 implications of meaning (the ability to have an expression, property or value of a subject to arouse, to highlight, to communicate and to influence a perceiving agent through the created harmony, own creative vocational quality).

Objectives of the study:

The main objective of the study is to correlate the reaction speed with the development of the stage action, with the imposition of the appropriate rhythm and the improvement of the synchronization between the stage partners. That's why Liviu Lucaci (2017) said: acting is reacting.

Another objective is that agility requires and leads to better intersegmental coordination, much-needed distributive attention, correct spatio-temporal orientation and, through the results it produces in the student's activity, induces a state of optimism, based on which we can build and induce a motivational optimum (Gheorghiu, 2017).

5. Research Methods

A pilot test was carried out in which the aim was to establish the interindividual differences that appear and manifest themselves in similar working conditions between the students of the Performing Arts (Puppets) section, the first year of study, within the *Ion Luca Caragiale* National University of Theater and Film. The study was carried out during the classes of the actor's Art held by the university lecturer, PhD Dana Voicu.

It started with an initial assessment of students' agility at the beginning of the course. The test was worked in pairs and consisted of the response at first sight of a student to the proposal of a colleague designated as a partner by the evaluator.

We then proceeded to a course that aimed to develop agility through exercises derived from psychomotor tests (we used the tests of Professor Valentina Horghidan, PhD). Due to the complexity of the work, the course also included exercises specific to the world of movement: exercises aimed at obtaining various biomotor skills (which develop balance, pelvic mobility and leg speed); ladder

exercises (which develop the agility of the lower train); roller exercises (which develop the speed of change of direction); routes with complex actions, with and without objects; dynamic lifting exercises etc. At the end of the course, the test was repeated in order to evaluate the results obtained.

Test description:

It starts with the formation of pairs, which must be balanced in height. The two partners are placed in a row (one behind the other), at a distance of about one meter. The student in the back using an auditory stimulus (like Hai!; Now! And! Or any other onomatopoeia) places his right palm in a position chosen at random, but located outside the visual range of the colleague. He must find positions as diverse as possible and try to put his partner in difficulty. The student in front must respond as quickly as possible after hearing the audible signal, by suddenly turning and touching the partner's palm with his right hand. After that, both students quickly return to the position they left. The situation described is valid for right-handed people, for left-handers we will work with our left hand. The number of successes is evaluated within 60 seconds.

This test is a starting point in obtaining a personalized training program, which leads to the progressive accumulation of information and at the same time to improve the ability to react. The exercise-turned-test can be fun, which will have a positive and motivating effect on your mood. At the exercise level, the point of contact can be changed on the way back, using another body part as a point of contact (leg, knee, elbow, reaching to the imitation of a body posture, a gesture or a state). Later you can work in large groups of 4, 8, 16 people.

Initial testing: We started from an assessment of students' agility at the beginning of the course by performing a simple test that consisted of quantifying the number of successes in terms of spontaneous and unprocessed responses of students to auditory and visual stimuli.

Final test: At the end of the course, after a 5 minutes break, the test given at the beginning was repeated to establish the level of information accumulation by the students.

6. Findings

Between the first and the second test there is a spectacular increase in values, in some cases the values doubling or being even higher.

Of course, we must take into account what the world of psychomotor skills explains to us, namely that in the specific learning of a movement, in a first phase, in which the movement is correctly performed technically and correctly integrated in space, there is a substantial qualitative leap, which is the result of the internal motor scheme. This leap is directly proportional to the learner's will, motivation, experience and skills (Schofield & Start, 2019). Then, in a second phase, when the skill is formed and when the specialization and refinement of the movements appears (representing the elimination of inaccuracies and parasitic movements in order to obtain a finesse in execution), a level of stabilization of the execution appears which in a research we cannot determine the pilot type.

But what remains certain in the small experiment is the demonstration that the student's agility can be modified by specific training.

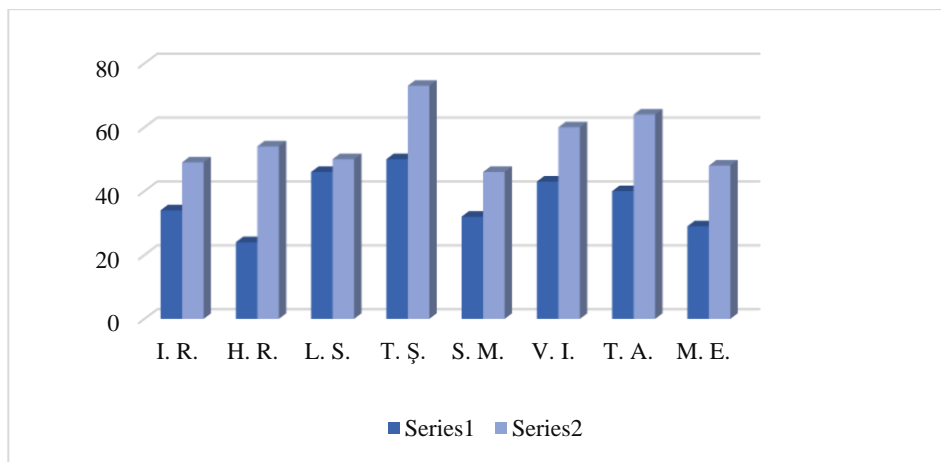
The arithmetic mean of the mean values obtained after the first test is 37.25. The maximum value recorded is 50 successful motor actions, and the minimum is 24. This indicates a range of values equal to 26 successful motor actions (see Table 1).

The arithmetic mean of the average values obtained after the final test is 55, 5. The maximum value recorded is 73 successful motor actions, and the minimum is 46. This indicates a range of values equal to 27 successful motor actions (see Table 1).

If we compare the data of the two tests we notice that although the values are increasing, the range of values remains almost the same (see Figure 1). This indicates the homogeneity of the group of students tested, but also shows the existence of a potential for the accumulation of agility through training.

Table 1. Table with recorded data for tested students

First and last name initials	Initial testing	Final testing
I. R.	34	49
H.R.	24	54
L.S.	46	50
T.S.	50	73
S.M.	32	46
V.I.	43	60
T.A.	40	64
M.E.	29	48



(Series 1 - initial testing; Series 2 - final testing)

Figure 1. Graph with recorded data

It is clear that the data obtained are purely indicative and represent only an estimated value, as not many aspects have been taken into account. And to give just one example: the magnitude of the upper limbs of the subjects, which influences the reaction speed in this test, was not taken into account. It is known that a person with a large arm will need a much longer time to form the neuronal synapse and to transmit information from the nerve centers to the performing organs. The test was primarily aimed at assessing agility in the upper limbs as for the students concerned the handling of puppets is essential and involves a particular agility of the hands.

7. Conclusions

The favorable effects of the development of agility are: increased control over body movements, which results in a concentrated form of kinesthetic awareness; generating a sense of control in the execution of movements, which will result in more safety in execution; amplifying the development of body plasticity by obtaining a higher awareness at the neuromuscular level; the development of the explosive character of the large muscle groups of the body, which in addition to speed, lead to a better coordination of skills that are achieved at high intensity (Epuran et al., 2022).

The development of agility can be achieved through training methods aimed at: repeating skills at high intensity (95-100%) until the onset of fatigue; application of the interval method (resumption of motor structures after short breaks, without complete recovery of the body, ie with oxygen deficiency); applying the alternative method (which consists of a succession of exercises that differ in structure, using efforts of varying intensity) (Toma & Toma, 2017). Regarding the design of training programs, it should be added that the correct oxygenation of the body is of great importance in obtaining movement accuracy. Therefore: physical training without proper breathing will lead to rapid fatigue and poorer results in terms of the benefits of practicing the exercise program, the benefits of relaxing the whole body, eliminating stress, streamlining the activity of internal organs and of the whole organism, respectively the optimization of the quality of life (Jianu & Macovei, 2013).

Once developed, agility has a greater persistence over time, compared to other motor qualities that can be trained and therefore developed (example: strength, endurance). However, we must not forget that the slow pace at which a motor quality develops coincides with the rate at which this quality is lost in the absence of training. Therefore, once developed, agility must be maintained through appropriate activities.

The unequivocal confirmation of the hypothesis from which it was started was made during the first specialized exam (in the discipline of the actor's art) at the end of the first semester of study. Thus, it was highlighted that the test was not limited to increasing the parameters of the pilot experiment, but, by extending the agility exercises in the activity that followed the test, there was an improvement in motor performance of the entire group of students tested. Improving the speed of reaction, expression and body expression was achieved by constantly introducing, during the semester (about 5 months of training) some sets of exercises aimed at developing agility. The specialized commission, present at the exam, found and considered that the preparation of the group of tested and systematically trained students for the development of agility is superior to other similar promotions of students who did not benefit from this type of training. In addition to the Mastery of Puppet Handling exam, it was found that there was a higher reaction speed and greater adaptability in terms of correlating puppet movements with student movements and actions required for the technical execution of their handling. It also improved the synchronization between the student's movement and that of the puppet, the synchronization between the students who performed actions and / or interactions with the puppets, obtaining a better coordination at the level of the hands which allowed them a more correct evolution from the point of view technical. We specify that in this study program, the main objective to be achieved in the first year of study is to learn the correct handling of puppets. So agility development programs are of paramount importance, as they can effectively complement the training of future puppet artists.

The most important benefit of agility training is learning the body to work in energy saving (Hansen, 2017). This translates into high motion efficiency with minimal power consumption.

The transition from psychomotor tests to training systems is necessary both for the systematic and rigorously organized development of the agility of student actors during schooling, and for the establishment of methods by which this motor quality can be maintained for as long as possible. In order to make agility training more efficient, it is good to find solutions to combine these agility exercises with learning as many motor skills as possible combined with a large number of multi-segmental coordinations, which must be followed by periods of consolidation of motor information. In order to develop agility, the exercises must progress at a fast pace and take place in direct relation to their speed and spatialization, but also to the volume of movement. The force, by which we understand the development of the physical condition of the student actor, must also be adapted to the main objective: agility.

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