

## E.Q. – An Indispensable Skill for the Student Actor

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this approach is to highlight the importance of emotional intelligence in general, but especially in the development of the student actor. I believe that before creating characters, acting students need to know both theoretically and practically what emotion is, how many emotions there are, and what their roles are. I also strongly believe that knowing the difference between feeling and emotion is necessary. Emotional literacy is necessary both for recognizing, managing and self-regulating personal emotions as well as the emotions of those around us. After learning about emotions, we are going to integrate them so that we find that balance between EI and IQ, especially since the acting profession requires active and rational thinking. Only by reconciling the brain and the heart, reason and emotion, will we be able to express feelings judiciously. Naturally, the physical body will also be integrated, thus harmonising the three bodies: the physical, mental and emotional body.*

**Key-Words:** *emotions; psychology; personal development; emotional intelligence; self-control; intuition;*

### 1. Introduction

Starting from the premise that the actor is a good observer of life and of the world in general, but especially of the human being and interpersonal relations, I propose an approach based on a series of rhetorical questions, such as: is the actor not a human being after all?! How much conscious introspection did he do before or while preparing to be a future actor? When do actors acquire competence in self-knowledge and self-awareness, and where do they learn about the healthy development of the neurobiology of self-regulation<sup>2</sup>, with all the human psychological and emotional complexity, as well as everything that this entails? What does the actor know about the processes which involve the emergence of emotion? How many emotions does he recognize in himself and those around him? Why does he need to understand the mechanics of his own emotions, of his game partners, and subsequently of the characters?!

Studies and exercises dedicated to the actor's *Intuition* can be found in various specialized theatrical works. For example, Viola Spolin often refers to intuition in her books on *Improvisation*. She considers intuition – "*the direct knowledge of a thing, without the conscious involvement of reason.*"<sup>3</sup> In other words, knowledge is not only formed through the development of the intellect (IQ). The main objective of Viola Spolin's work was to discover and develop the intuition of future actors and directors. As a result, she produced entire volumes dedicated to theatrical games, in order to activate the intuition of future actors, teachers and directors. She also devised routines about movement, interaction and

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<sup>2</sup> Maté Gabor. 2022. *When the Body Says No: The Cost of Hidden Stress* [Când Corpul Spune Nu: Costul stresului ascuns], second edition. Bucharest: Curtea Veche Publishing.

<sup>3</sup> Spolin, Viola. 2008. *Improvisation for the theatre* [Improvizație pentru teatru]. Bucharest: UNATC Press, p. 31.

transformation, which served as tools to stimulate the creative expression of the apprentices through self-discovery. I will point to V. Spolin in particular, for the obvious reason that her book is the primary source of reference, thus laying the foundations of improvisation in modern theatre. Returning to the topic, I will specify that Spolin also claimed in her work that: "*Anyone can play. Anyone can improvise. Anyone who wants to, can play theatre and learn to become fit for the stage.*"<sup>4</sup>

To this end, she provides actors with a method, a system focused on theatrical games and the development of intuition, while emphasising the importance of the group in creative experiences. Information regarding the aspects listed above, especially concerning the importance of the group can also be found in K.S. Stanislavsky's "system", from which we conclude that theatrical art is a collective art. Theatre is learned through experimentation, as well as through experience - where appropriate, in addition to spontaneity, attention, observation, etc.

In the same train of thoughts, we will identify the term *emotion*, which is frequently used in the two volumes written by K.S. Stanislavsky. According to the first volume, we admit the thirst for deeper knowledge of the Russian theatre director and theoretician in terms of human psychology. We deduce this from the mention in his work of Theodule Armand Ribot, considered to be the representative of experimental psychology. Drawing inspiration from the French philosopher's books, he uses expressions such as *emotional memory, affective memory and sentimental memory*<sup>5</sup>. Going back to *Improvisation for the Theatre*, also written by Spolin, we will also discover a paragraph entitled *Emotion*. Although Spolin acknowledges the difficulty of clarifying a definition of what *Emotion* means, she does not hesitate to formulate a position regarding this term. The issue is that this position seems rather detached, or is it perhaps tackled from one single perspective?! Since it is a direct problem that the actor has to deal with, emotion finds its place in the endeavours of the theatre people mentioned above. For instance, Spolin, inspired by the work of K. Stanislavsky, urges students not to use their own emotions or any subjective emotions, because they would risk creating psychodrama instead of theatrical communication. In no way does V. Spolin encourage actors to exploit their own emotions, following the desire to create scenic situations.

I do not intend to contradict any of the conclusions drawn by the great men and women of the theatre. On the contrary, in hopes of bringing my personal contribution to classroom work with young students, I feel the need to address another perspective of the term *emotion* in its intrinsic meaning. Working with several generations of students, I noticed a need to intervene with information and research studies in the field of psychology on the topic of emotional intelligence. Before they have reached the creation of stage situations and especially the composition of a dramatic character, they need to know not only theoretically but also practically what *emotion* is, how many kinds of emotions there are, what their roles are and what the difference between emotion and feeling is. In other words, emotional literacy is required because knowledge without practice remains barren, like fertile soil never sown.

## 2. To introspection and emotional upregulation

It has come to my attention that art and theater therapy, practiced by psychotherapists, has become a current and even modern practice. I myself have been invited to theatrical

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 49.

<sup>5</sup> Stanislavski, Konstantin Sergheevici. 2013. *An actor's work on a role [Munca actorului cu sine însuși]*, vol. I-II. Bucharest: Nemira Publishing House.

games in various personal development camps, in order to work as a trainer. Yet I have not found a specific interest in the education of emotional intelligence, either for children in specialized high schools, or for young people in the university cycle anywhere in the vocation educational system. It did not seem ethical to me that psychotherapists should take advantage of these theatrical games in order to include them in their studies, and that actors should not have access to new discoveries in the field of psychology and neuroscience. Consequently, this was one of the reasons that prompted me to embark on this endeavour.

In the 1990s, two psychologists, John Mayer, professor at the University of New Hampshire and Peter Salovey, professor at Yale, put forward the first statement of the concept of *Emotional Intelligence*, abbreviated: EQ. In 1995, the psychologist and neuroscience researcher Daniel Goleman published his book *Emotional Intelligence*, which not only took the world of science by storm, but also revolutionized knowledge in general. Another eye-opener in early academic endeavours regarding EQ or EI was Reuven Bar-On, from the University of Texas Medical Branch of Houston. Due to his own theory on EI, numerous studies and academic books have emerged, among which a reference work entitled *The Handbook of Emotional Intelligence*. What we can deduce simply and clearly from all the theories regarding the definition of emotion, is that it is still largely in a realm of the unseen and in a space of the intangible. On the other hand, emotions are very clear indicators that show us how we feel in relation to what happens to us and what surrounds us.

Nonetheless, if we carefully examine the way our educational system is run, we will notice that emotions have been put aside, suppressed, repressed, ignored, while to their detriment, intellectual understanding, or intelligence, has been encouraged and continues to be so (IQ). According to philosophy teacher and spiritual leader, Osho, the story is quite simple – the human being is born and perceives the world in a pure state; following physical development and social interaction, his/her perception is distorted through education. Later, as he/she grows up and enters the human jungle, or in other words, school, some constraints of an emotional nature are imposed on each human: you are not allowed to cry, you are not allowed to shout, you are not allowed to get angry, you are not allowed to you enjoy yourself too loudly, etc. And so, little by little, day by day, humans learn to hide the so-called reality of human experiences and they become robots with mental or intellectual abilities. If they fail to be good mentally, they feel inadequate. To conclude, this is what is valued in the educational system, the IQ. Therefore, it does not matter what the child feels, it does not matter how they perceive the world, nor how they feel about competition, comparison, criticism and punishment; instead, what matters is whether they obey and follow the rules in the way they are imposed. Consequently, all of this is naturally conducive to rebellion, violence, frustration, which, if accumulated over time, begin to turn into latent anger that inevitably entails self-destruction and subsequently, the desire to destroy others.

Let us return to the student actor. Through an exercise of imagination, we shall visualise him as a recent high school graduate, a candidate for a degree in Theatre. Since he has reached his intellectual capacity, completing his high school studies, it is assumed that he has all the rational and physical data necessary for a student actor, thus refining his presentation of the required curriculum, and meeting the main conditions for enrollment and participation in the admission stages. Only after this selection, and then the direct transition to the actual courses, through the meaningful interaction with each individual student, do we collide with the reality of "emotional illiteracy". Emotion is by far the actor's direct operating tool. However, during class discussions, when they are asked to list the emotions they know and/or experience personally, the number stops at a maximum of ten emotions. They are greatly surprised when we put forth data and scientific studies, according to which they

discover the existence of more than a hundred emotions that will be referred to more extensively by the end of this paper. Although it has been shown that "*social and emotional education is the active element in school curricula that improves a child's ability to learn*,"<sup>6</sup> the young people I teach in the classroom were barely able to recognize between three and five emotions in themselves and in the people around them. Beyond probing and working with emotion in the actor's work in order to create the dramatic character, I am equally concerned with the student's own emotional state and psychological balance.

This fact represented the basic catalyst for my desire to think and develop a course guide, so as to introduce the student actor to the world of emotional literacy, based on specialised research, but to the same extent focused on offering practical techniques of recognition and management of emotions. In order to personally understand all these processes and mechanisms in a more effective manner, I took several training courses (parenting, psychological pedagogy, personal development), thus I got certified by ANC and acquired the skills of a guidance and personal development counsellor. Goleman argues in his paper, "*If EI were to become as widespread as IQ and as entrenched in society as a measure of human qualities, I believe that then our families, our schools, our jobs, and the communities in which we live will be all the more humane and stimulating.*"<sup>7</sup>

How do we recognize and manage our emotions and those of the people around us?! When I ask students in class how they are feeling, the answer is almost always, I am good or bad. They are having trouble recognizing the exact emotions they feel. They cannot distinguish between anger, frustration, dissatisfaction, confusion or fury, so they limit themselves to the phrase good - bad. I could make an analogy with my knowledge of wines. As a casual wine drinker, I can say only one certain thing in this area: I know for sure that there is white, red, rosé and sparkling wine. That's it! This is where my wine knowledge ends. When I taste a glass of wine, I do not have the necessary skills to judge what kind of grape that wine is made of, what year it was harvested, or how a certain blend is made. To understand the taste and all the procedures related to wine making, there is a special profession that deals with it, which is called sommelier. The qualification of a sommelier consists in teaching people to appreciate the subtleties of wine tastes, since a sommelier has the expertise to recognize the quality of a wine just by looking at the glass of said liqueur. My objective is that by the end of the bachelor's cycle, the apprentices will turn into a kind of emotional sommeliers – actors who will be aware of how they feel, being able to verbalise something more clearly than good or bad when they access certain emotions. They should have a precise idea about what mechanisms engender these feelings of *good and bad*. They should know how to decrease the level or degree of unpleasant states and how to increase the degree of pleasant emotions. Also, they are expected to recognize only through non-verbal and/or behavioural language, what the people around them, their friends, family or colleagues feel. They are supposed to understand and appreciate at a single glance, not the glass of wine, but the person, the content, the condition, the possible character. And now let us specify precisely why the student actor needs to understand both his own emotions and those of the people around him.

1. In order to recognize and manage their own emotions; to control and express themselves appropriately, realising the consequences related to the expression of emotions.
2. In order to free up inner space, so as to develop and increase positive states.
3. In order to understand other people and regulate behaviours.

<sup>6</sup> Goleman, Daniel. 2021. *Emotional intelligence [Inteligența emoțională]*, Bucharest: Curtea Veche Publishing, p. 23.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 37-38.

4. In order to generate more energy and inner strength both at a personal level and on stage.
5. In order to cope adequately with emotional shocks and the difference between personal emotions and those of the dramatic character.
6. To understand the behaviour mechanisms of the characters.

For all this, we need *Emotional Intelligence*. Just the way the sommelier, through his skills, teaches people to discover and understand wine, to enjoy the aromas and taste of quality liquor, not just drink it in ignorance, I wish and dream to guide students whom I interact with. To this end, my goal is for them to learn how to operate with their emotions to their advantage, to live their life, to feel its taste, to see all its colours and nuances, enjoying and taking advantage of it to its fullest capacity, both in their private life and in the scenic one. After learning about emotions, we are going to integrate them so that we find that balance between EI and IQ, especially since the acting profession requires active and rational thinking. Only by reconciling the brain and the heart, reason and emotion, will we be able to express feelings judiciously. Naturally, the physical body will also be integrated, thus harmonising the three bodies: the physical, mental and emotional body- the operating instruments of the actor.

There is a plethora of specialised materials on the topic of body and psychology, such as Michael Chekhov's book, *To the Actor: On the Technique of Acting*, or Vsevolod Meyerhold's *Biomechanics*. We can also mention David Esrig, Jerzy Grotowsky and Eugenio Barba, etc. These theatre people discuss the need for special training, adapted to the profession of an actor. M. Chekhov proposes three specific requirements to fulfil the purpose of our profession: *sensitivity of the body to creative psychological impulses; the richness of psychology itself; total submission of body and psychology*.<sup>8</sup> Yet again, we find materials that examine at length the need to merge body, reason and psychology, but nothing about what psychology is, what its laws are and how we access the psychological side, with distinct reference to emotions.

In the guide, I will tackle a more extensive analysis of the components of emotional intelligence. I will specify the ramifications of each basic emotion and of the four constituent aspects of emotional intelligence: self-awareness; self-control; social sensitivity; relationship management. The first two aspects refer to the self, whereas the other two point to the people us. To sum up, the main conclusions resulting from the four aspects are: self-confidence, optimism, conflict prevention and mediation plus teamwork and collaboration. Moreover, I will elaborate on the manner in which emotion appears and explain its path, from the trigger (triggering event), to the thought (interpretation of the event), the one that detonates the emotion, which is then felt in the body as a physical sensation, finally turning into action.

From cognitive behavioural therapy, which is currently proven to be the best functioning method in psychotherapy, I extracted the concept of questioning the automatic thought. I refer here to that thought, which appears at the second point on the path of emotion emergence, because in 95% of cases, thoughts appear automatically following the event or trigger. I further propose the automatic thought questioning technique. Therefore, following the germination of the automatic thought, I suggest the following questions to dismantle it:

- \*write your thought, limiting belief
- \*what evidence supports this thought, belief?
- \*what evidence contradicts this thought, belief?

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<sup>8</sup> Chekhov, Michael. 2017, *To the Actor: On the Technique of Acting* [Gânduri pentru actor, despre tehnica actoriei]. Bucharest: Nemira Publishing House, pp. 16-20.

- \*is there any alternative explanation?
- \*what would be the worst thing that would happen if you believed this thought?
- \*will you be able to survive this?
- \*what would be the most realistic outcome?
- \*what are the consequences of your belief in automatic thought, limiting beliefs?
- \*what might be the consequences of changing your thinking?
- \*what are you going to do about it?
- \*what advice would you give your friend, if he were in a similar situation?

Therefore, we introduce the extremes of emotional manifestations: repression or exacerbation of emotions. According to Goleman, when we repress emotions, there are long-term effects, which become poisonous, hence endangering our physical health. A conclusive example is obsessive smoking in the tensest moments, in the case of smokers. However, this pattern of behaviour is also valid for other forms of manifestation (compulsive eating, excessive consumption of sweets, alcohol addiction, etc.). The long-term consequences of repressing emotions become obvious: inner disintegration, disease, chronic fatigue, insomnia, alienation, depression. On the other hand, the exacerbation of emotions is another extreme that leads to considerable damage, such as the destruction of relationships with family and people around us, constant loss of energy and finally acute feelings of guilt. After realising the harms of the two extremes, we tend to reach the balance, that golden mean. Yet the question arises, how do we do this? It is clear that neither suppression nor exasperation brings us emotional release. Instead, sharing emotions with trusted or expert people can bring that release. But, more often than not, sharing is confused with dumping emotions on those around you, like dumping emotional waste on the person in front of you. And then, in order to distinguish the two phenomena, I have compiled two short lists that will make the difference.

#### ***"Spilling" of emotions***

- \*they start suddenly"*
- \*they don't ask if you're willing to listen*
- \*they pour everything out like a stream*
- \*it's hard for them to stop*
- \*they repeat the same things*
- \*they talk about other people and their emotions*
- \*they are in the victim position*
- \*they accuse others*

#### ***Sharing the emotion***

- \*they warn you that the discussion is coming*
- \*they ask for your permission to speak*
- \*they touch only one topic of discussion*
- \*they share concerns in limited time*
- \*they don't cling to the same thought*
- \*they talk about themselves and their emotions*
- \*they do not go into the victim regime*
- \*they use "I-message"*

The next obstacle in emotional management is what psychoanalytic scientists have called "emotional contamination". This is what we call the phenomenon as a result of which a person who is in a bad or good mood tries his best to contaminate those around him with his emotions, not validating the personal states of those he interacts with. What must the person who unconsciously wants to emotionally contaminate others do? Our emotions belong only to us and no one is responsible for them, just as we cannot ask someone else to feel what we feel. There is no need for everyone around us to suffer when we suffer, or for everyone to be ecstatic when we are joyful.

There is a plethora of studies which examine theories of emotion. We will not address all of them, but we will refer to the Wheel of Emotions by Robert Plutchik<sup>9</sup>, an American

<sup>9</sup> „Understanding Robert Plutchik's Theory of Emotion: A Comprehensive Guide". June 6, 2019. *Envision Your Evolution, Contemporary Psychology*. Retrieved March 3, 2023, from <https://www.envisionyourevolution.com/evolution-emotion/robert-plutchik-theory-of-emotion/2151/>.

psychologist, professor and author of many articles and books. This daisy-shaped wheel is multicoloured and centred around the basic emotions, as Plutchik calls them, suggesting 8 primary emotions.

In the following lines, I will enumerate a list of approximately 80 emotions, then, as in the guide mentioned above, I will complete both the classification and the characteristics of each individual emotion more thoroughly. Here is a series of emotions from A to V: Acceptance, Admiration, Affection, Fun, Angst, Anticipation, Anxiety, Apathy, Self-Pity, Joy, Kindness, Torment, Social Connection, Confidence, Confusion, Faith, Courage, Curiosity, Depression, Disappointment, Disgust, Contempt, Desire, Lust, Love, Empathy, Enthusiasm, Euphoria, Excitement, Ecstasy, Happiness, Frustration, Fear, Anger, Jealousy, Gratification, Gratitude, Horror, Interest, Envy, Exaltation, Trust, Doubt, Worry, Sadness, Mourning, Embarrassment, Greed, Pride, Anger, Pity, Wonder, Contentment, Distrust, Nostalgia, Hostility, Ostracism, Panic, Passion, Pleasure, Boredom, Relish, Gratefulness, Regret, Remorse, Resentment, Shame, Loneliness, Hope, Suffering, Grief, Surprise, Suspicion, Shock, Shyness, Annoyance, Outrage, Humiliation, Hatred, Relief, Veneration, Guilt.

### 3. Conclusion

I conclude by asserting my wish to approach another side of the study of emotion. I strongly believe that the study and experimentation of emotions in laboratory conditions is a *sine qua non*. I intend to reveal to the student actors, with whom I interact directly, a new perspective that would allow them to unlock their own emotions, understand their origins, learn self-regulation, and then experience a wide emotional spectrum in working with their own alterities and with the characters. When they become aware that all emotions are born in the mind, which is a complex phenomenon and contains conceptual thinking as well as emotional behaviours and feelings, they will be able to operate with all the necessary tools in life and on stage. Emotional capacities also include self-awareness and the identification, expression and management of feelings, the ability to control stress and anxiety, all of which are necessary not only for the actor but for humans in general. In conclusion, I want to quote Goleman, with whom I fully identify in the following dictum: *"I predict that a day will come when education will include in its regular curriculum the study of such invaluable human qualities as self-awareness, self-control and empathy, as well as the art of listening, conflict resolution and cooperation"*<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Goleman, Daniel. *Emotional intelligence [Inteligența emoțională]*, București: Curtea Veche Publishing, p. 49.

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