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## The Versatility of Drama-Based Pedagogy and Teacher Training

*In drama-based pedagogy, the insights of several sciences and arts interact with one another: art pedagogy, psychology, pedagogy, puppetry, acting, literature, music. Unfortunately, the approach of drama-based pedagogy is gaining less and less ground in today's educational practice. Those, however, who adopt it know that emotional-intellectual learning can be greatly facilitated by this method. The tool system of drama-based pedagogy helps the work of several educators, psychologists and trainers. It is well-known that we can talk about dramatic play activities in the usual sense from kindergarten age onwards. The common activities of children, led by the referee, promote self-knowledge, knowledge of each other and of the world, and serve personality formation. Every play is dramatic in its character, based on imitation of life situations and behaviour patterns. As Gavin Bolton puts it: from a pedagogical point of view, drama is a game that builds an imaginary world, involves the actors in it, makes them face real-life problems and conveys them thereby real knowledge and real experiences. The power of drama lies in the fact that it seems to be real action. Its thinking is embedded in action, and its goal is to create meaning by mediating between two contexts (Bolton, 1993).*

### 1. Introduction

In drama-based pedagogy, the insights of several sciences and arts interact with one another: art pedagogy, psychology, pedagogy, puppetry, acting, literature, music. Unfortunately, the approach of drama-based pedagogy is gaining less and less ground in today's educational practice. Those, however, who adopt it know that emotional-intellectual learning can be greatly facilitated by this method. The tool system of drama-based pedagogy helps the work of several educators, psychologists and trainers. It is well-known that we can talk about dramatic play activities in the usual sense from kindergarten age onwards. The common activities of children, led by the referee, promote self-knowledge, knowledge of each other and of the world, and serve personality formation. Every play is dramatic in its character, based on imitation of life situations and behaviour patterns. As Gavin Bolton puts it: from a pedagogical point of view, drama is a game that builds an imaginary world, involves the actors in it, makes them face real-life problems and conveys them thereby real knowledge and real experiences. The power of drama lies in the fact that it seems to be real action. Its

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I would like to emphasize how drama can be integrated into teacher training in order to establish a solid base for teacher trainees. Those who do not know much about drama ask the questions whether or not all teachers should learn about drama-based pedagogy and its tools. To agree with Katalin Gabnai, I would say yes. All teachers should learn about drama-based pedagogy, however, *„not because everyone should apply it in their teaching, but at least to decide in time whether or not to be a teacher at all. And who they want to teach”* (Prezsmér, 2013). Gabnai emphasizes that while learning about the different tools of drama-based pedagogy, competent trainees are capable of learning and later teaching the subject in a much shorter period of time, and by this *„to raise interest regarding the values that they consider important”* (Prezsmér, 2013). Further, their self-knowledge becomes richer; understand their personal power and learn how to manage their energy to convey knowledge (Prezsmér, 2013).

Among teachers learner-centered approach is a common topic, however, one aspect of this approach is often neglected, which is the prior knowledge of language, experience and value system of the learner. Therefore, it is important to note the following: drama-based pedagogical approach requires that the new impulses should be attached to the existing experience of playing. As in the context of pedagogy, drama is not about teaching theatrical skills *„but it concentrates on influencing the experience in an imagined context. Within imagined situations experience is a medium that is suitable for kids to try out ideas, thoughts, values, roles and use language creatively in action. So drama focuses rather on children gaining experience than being in a performing role”* (Neelands, 1994, p. 13). According to Neelands’s drama approach and our drama-based pedagogical concept, it is relevant for me what art pedagogy summarizes. With *„the tools of drama and theatre while working actively together, it is not the final product, but the path towards it and the time that we spend together are of great value”* (Demeter, 2008, p. 15). Agreeing deeply with Peter Slade, I believe that drama concentrates on the individual, on the special personality, that is why it is important because it is difficult to evolve skills to fit today’s norms in this highly performance oriented world, the new values, as there is hardly any guide and the repertoire of teachers is poor.

## 2. The teacher's personality and competences

The process of becoming a teacher is very complex and diverse. Teacher training institutions face the expectations to shape the candidates' view, skills and attitude to own a rich repertoire of teaching methods by the time they start their teaching career (Falus, 2004). What is successful teacher training like? Researches show that training institutes should consider trainees as active learners who organise their own learning and the candidates should receive training to become experts in controlling their studies. The training has to take place in practice environment (nursery or school), and there is a very important approach to be considered from the mentor teachers' point of view: trainees should be treated the same way as one expects to be treated (Putman–Borko, 1997). Receiving theoretical knowledge in training institutes that is in accordance with the practice environment – a handful of reflexions, experience is provided and the candidates' culture of teaching methods may be refined. It is possible if during teacher training and further studies the teachers (nursery, primary and high school teachers) can improve their skills and competences according to modern approach.

To achieve this the teacher training:

- uncovers the teacher trainee's point of view and knowledge,
- makes facts, practical examples, views available that recognise the deficiency of the teacher's own practice,
- gives chance to group discussions, reflexions to set against and alter the different viewpoints,
- makes it possible to learn about, to discover and acquire a wide variety of strategies, methods, procedure (Falus, 2001, p. 27).

Amongst teachers, charmed by the word competences, the future is the educational institution where the teacher experiments, discovers, develops and applies new methods. To meet the requirements, the teacher *“behaves in an adequate way, is experienced in dealing with conflicts, is good at communicating, possesses empathy, is able to make decisions firmly, has comprehensive knowledge and is able to apply it purposefully: the teacher should be able to create a new pedagogical culture”* (Hernádi, 2008, p. 27). There is no doubt that this effort does not point to a good direction. We can state that teachers face new challenges, more tasks and their role is about to be broadened. It is clear what kind of nursery, primary or high school teachers can meet these kinds of requirements. Those who are highly qualified, creative, innovative, who attend needs,

who possess high EQ. Using teacher competences means a complex approach: knowledge, ability, emotional, personal elements are all present in competences. Furthermore, it is an advantage that it is not simply made up by workers in the field of this science, but the role of a teacher is researched in practice (Kotschy, 2014). It is important to know and understand the content of competences as *„they contain all the theoretical and practical knowledge and views, with their help the level of qualification is possible to be determined, we can find the trainee’s weak and strong points; we can also discover courses and training materials so that trainees can meet the competence/standard requirements. Competences also assume specific and modern higher education approach”* (Falus, 2004, p. 368). The society’s future is established in workshops and classrooms. Nowadays in every aspect of life, creativity is preferred as opposed to be sophisticated, therefore the question is whether or not we can make use of our present knowledge in order to lead a constructive life.

I agree with Mrs Györgyi’s thoughts saying: *„in general it is not possible to define the requirements for teachers as they are in close connections with the teacher’s personality type and their role”* (Györgyiné, 2005, pp. 141). It is a real challenge to describe what an ideal teacher is like. However, there are personality traits that are considered fundamental, for instance: tolerance, understanding others, acceptance, and another significant point is the professional knowledge and teaching methods (Kollár, 2008).

Among the influencing factors to meet the requirements of teacher’s role is the ability to integrate the changes of today’s world into pedagogy. The changing circumstances determine what knowledge, skills and abilities are necessary for the future generation. It is a real challenge for children, parents, teachers and the society as well; it is not possible to determine what exactly is needed to be capable to react creatively and constructively to the challenges of the changing world. As we cannot see the future, we cannot prepare our children for the forthcoming time period. However, we can assist to develop their skills and satisfy their thirst for knowledge (Bosch, 2008).

### **3. Psychological culture and self-knowledge**

Nowadays the degree of psychological culture of today's society and people is small. The way conflicts and high level of pressure is dealt with is inadequate. Psychological culture is incomplete that stiffens communities, rules have no alternatives, and punishes any differences.

One sign of psychological culture is when people deliberately empathize so as to bridge the differences. Several research findings show – which is also conceived in everyday life – that the level of empathy is low in today's world, and the negative consequences can be seen in interpersonal relationships. People keep distance from one another and possess low level of empathy. Relationships lack compassion and this fact can be seen in their private life, at workplaces and in other communities. Today's humans should improve their skills for empathy. Parents ought to accept their children's personality so that a generation could form that already develops a high level of empathy. Compassion presumes interpersonal relationship skills that can be detected in all age groups.

What tools are there for teachers to develop empathy in children that would mean the bases for being psychologically cultured? The development of self-knowledge, paying attention and listening to others, understanding each other, improving personality is possible with the methods of drama-based pedagogy. The tools are suitable to cultivate the seeds of psychological culture in children. Drama-based pedagogy is important, its central element is playfulness. Children can best progress by playing games. Everything that children learn about the world, everything that they uncover about themselves, they do it through playing. So playing is chosen voluntarily, accompanied by positive feelings that contains its aim and diversely form the personality, and further, gaining experience and acquiring knowledge is through the act of playing. This is cognition, the path of development (Jaskóné, 2015a,b).

### **4. Teaching meeting**

Teaching through drama is a kind of developmental process that stimulates the growth of personality. It means learning together, making decisions in groups and constant evaluation together (Tolnai, 1994). Drama-based pedagogy makes children participants, develops their interaction skills, and last but not least, enables children to accept themselves. So we need to approach the child somehow, however, to develop this kind of knowledge, so teacher training should focus on “activating the trainee”, and not to overload with materials. Wake up the desire to learn new situations; if possible get them to experience the important aspect that we

find valuable, whatever they face, it needs to make them think! This experimental learning in teacher training helps trainees to see what to teach when it comes to animals, an Ibsen drama or Shakespeare, regarding that particular topic what to teach or what to understand.

It is well known that the aim of drama-based pedagogy for the participants is to discover their inner and outer world in action, to place themselves in it, to be influenced by and influence their environment. It is understandable how significant playing is through which the child is an active participant in life situations. We cannot agree more with Mérei either, who finds the usefulness of drama-based pedagogy while dealing with pressure and tension in a more social way and that it offers security. Students face sudden situations in drama. Therefore, students gain knowledge of “situation-behaviour self-knowledge” (Mérei, 1999). Playing becomes the most efficient tool in pedagogy if we consider seriously the fact that most of a child’s life should contain it. We have to understand that at pre-school age playing is not an alternative option, but the only option that a child can do, and it would be rejoicing if at schools this playful experimental learning would fill more of the students’ and teachers’ time.

Drama-based pedagogy helps certain topics become real experience in children’s life, to experience life situations and actions and to express their thoughts. While applying drama-based pedagogy, the participants see that it requires a different kind of teacher; it requires a democratic way of leadership, so the traditional teacher role is modified fundamentally. The teacher is more an active participant in the process than a controller of the events – often serves the participants’ ideas. The teacher makes students do their own thinking, to formulate their own feelings. This is how archaic knowledge is formed; the children as active participants experience the different life situations. Not the role, but the experience of fate is important. By spontaneous reactions they open their inner and outer world and during their action we learn about their individual aspiration. To achieve this, it is essential to create a stress free and playful atmosphere, full of trustfulness. Neelands highlights that *„a child is not a passive receiver, but as an active meaning giver, a creator, an interpreter who has prior knowledge and learning experience. This early learning is not by the objective theoretical learning of the world, but more like by sensing and physically experiencing it”* (Neelands, 1994, p. 12). Several aspects of drama (tales, poems, songs, traditions) can be built into education that may strengthen the identity and to help learn about and understand other cultures (similarities and differences).

To conclude we can state that the complexity of drama-based pedagogy means it activates the total personality and in its centre there is the holistic humanistic approach. The

fundamental elements of learning include problem solving and constructive management of conflicts. Through improvisations the interpersonal communication is more free and relaxed, and that contributes to the improvement of communication skills. Drama games or drama-based pedagogy is a method to shape the personality and complex skills that a teacher only applies if has experienced it himself or herself before, WHAT exactly it is LIKE.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGyBmQh4qXw> „A pedagógusi életpályamodell és a portfólió" Dr. Kotschy Beáta előadása az I.Tankerületi Pedagógiai Konferencián [2019. július 16. 12:40]

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5mpeEa\\_VZo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5mpeEa_VZo) Designing for a better world starts at school: Rosan Bosch at TEDxIndianapolis [2019. július 16. 12:40]