

# Drama Pedagogy and Teacher Training

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In drama 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 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 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.

In drama 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 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 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. It is thinking embedded in action, and its goal is creating meaning by mediating between two contexts.

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 pedagogy and its tools. To agree with Katalin Gabnai, I would say yes. All teachers should learn about drama 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.” Gabnai emphasizes that while learning about the different tools of drama pedagogy competent trainees are capable to learn and later to teach the subject in a much shorter period of time, and by this „to raise interest regarding the values that they consider important.” Further, their self-knowledge becomes richer; understand their personal power and learn how to manage their energy to convey knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

Among teachers learner centred approach is a common topic, however, one aspect of this approach is often neglected that is the prior knowledge of language, experience and value system of the learner. Therefore, it is important to note the following: drama 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.”<sup>2</sup> According to Neelands’s drama approach and our drama pedagogical concept it is relevant for me what summarizes the art pedagogy. 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 is of great value.”<sup>3</sup> 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 if poor.

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

Nowadays the degree of psychological culture our today’s society and people is poor. The way conflicts and high level of pressure is dealt with is inadequate. Psychological culture is incomplete that stiffen communities, rules have no alternatives, and punish any differences.

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<sup>1</sup> „Hódolni kell a padlízsnak. A találkozás tanítása”, Gabnai Katalinnal beszélget Prezsmer Boglárka, *Játéktér*, 2013. tavasz. Online: [jatekter.ro](http://jatekter.ro) – October 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan NEELANDS, *Dráma a tanulás szolgálatában*, (Budapest: Magyar Drámapedagógiai Társaság, 1994) 13.

<sup>3</sup> DEMETER LÁZÁR Katalin, *Játszó társ (Drámajátékok és kreativitás a fejlesztőpedagógiában 5-10 éveseknek)*, (Budapest: Geobook Hungary Kiadó, 2008) 15.

One sign of psychological culture is when people deliberately empathize so as to bridge the differences. Several research findings show – it 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 work places and in other communities. Today's human 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 pedagogy. The tools are suitable to cultivate the seeds of psychological culture in children. Drama 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.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. *Teaching meeting*

Teaching through drama is kind of a developmental process that stimulates the growth of personality. It means learning together, making decisions in groups and constant evaluation together.<sup>5</sup> Drama 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 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, so regarding that particular topic what to teach or what to understand.

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<sup>4</sup> JASKÓNE GÁCSI Mária, „A gyakorlati képzés szemléleti háttérének és kereteinek meghatározása: a pedagógus-idea”, *Sárospataki Pedagógiai Füzetek*, (2015) Különszám, 11–32.

<sup>5</sup> TOLNAI Mária, *Dráma és nevelés*, (Budapest: Korona Kiadó, 1994) 13–14.

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It is well known that the aim of drama pedagogy is for the participants to discover in action their inner and outer world, 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 find the usefulness of drama pedagogy in dealing with pressure and tension in a more social way and that it offers security. Student face sudden situations in drama. Therefore, students gain knowledge of "situation-behaviour self-knowledge".<sup>6</sup> 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 students' and teachers' time.

Drama 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 pedagogy the participants to 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 way 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 create a stress free and playful atmosphere, full of trustfulness. Neelands highlights that „a child is not 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.”<sup>7</sup> 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 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

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<sup>6</sup> MÉREI Ferenc, „A pszichológiai dramatizálás. Szociodráma, pszichodráma, szerepgyakorlatok”, in *A pszichodráma csoport*, szerk. VIKÁR András és SÁFRÁN Zsófia (Budapest: Animula, 1999) 19–37.

<sup>7</sup> NEELANDS, *Dráma a tanulás szolgálatában*, *op.cit.* 12.

interpersonal communication is freer and more relaxed, and that contributes to the improvement of communication skills. Drama games and drama pedagogy is a method to shape personality and complex skills that a teacher only applies if himself or herself had experienced it before, WHAT exactly it is LIKE.

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