

Session: Teaching Techniques

Thursday (6 May) 15:00 – 16:00

Whole-School Change and Teaching Techniques

Krajnyák Magdolna (from Nyirtelek School),

Drama in Education

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What is the task of a primary school?

Teaching skills (reading, writing and counting) and abilities (i.e. knowledge that pupils can apply in practice), enabling pupils to continue their studies at a secondary level. For this, it is also important to prevent children from dropping out.

STARTING PRIMARY EDUCATION (1st and 2nd grades)

“To provide equal opportunities at the start of schooling!”

Running a separate class for backward children can only be successful if (within a period of 2-3 years) the abilities of the children improve to an extent that makes it possible for them to **integrate** into “normal” classes when they start learning in the 3rd grade. INTEGRATION!!!

CONSOLIDATION, MONITORING (3rd-6th grades)

- establishing small groups (Within the traditional framework based on working in traditional classes)
- differentiating

COMPLETING PRIMARY EDUCATION (7th-8th grade)

- working in small groups based on the pupils’ choices concerning their secondary education (from the 7th grade on)
- preparatory courses in the subjects relevant for the pupils’ secondary education (in the 8th grade)

Drama In Education (DIE)

The three main characteristics of **DIE** are:

- a) *learning through activity;*
- b) *problem resolution in the classroom;*
- c) *revealing hidden meanings through self-experience*

The most significant aims of drama are to get the students taking in consideration different viewpoints and achieve *deeper understanding*. Sub-goals are *forming groups and communities built on partnership, development of communication-skills and different forms of non-verbal expression*.

The method helps the students (through active involvement) to build their global social knowledge from information that seemed to be separate before.

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Drama In Education (DIE)

A short introduction

“Education is concerned with individuals; drama is concerned with the individuality of individuals, with the uniqueness of each human essence.”

/Peter Slade/

Definition

“Educational drama is anything which involves people in active role-taking situations in which attitudes, not characters, are the chief concern, lived at life-rate (that is discovery at this moment, not memory based) and obeying the natural laws of the medium. These laws aim at suspension of disbelief; agreement to pretence; employing all past experiences available to the group at the present moment and any conjecture of imagination they are capable of, in an attempt to create a living, moving picture of life, which aims a surprise and discovery for the participants rather than for any onlookers” (Heathcote, 1993). “The process evokes all relevant knowledge possessed by *any* of the participants, but when this information is shared it becomes part of a *common* knowledge” (Szauder, 1998).

“Big Guns” of the methodology

With his first book, *Child Drama* (1954) **Peter Slade** shook the British educational field: after many years of “desk and chalkboard”-type education he suggested that children should play in schools, for *play is learning*.

Brian Way thinks about the “person” as something that can be viewed – and therefore developed – in different segments. The key words for Brian Way are *exercise, experience* and *individuality*. As he writes: “...*moments of direct experience, transcending mere knowledge, enriching the imagination, possibly touching the heart and soul as well as the mind. This, in over-simplified terms, is the precise function of drama*”.

Gavin Bolton formulates arguments supporting the idea of placing drama in the curriculum as a means for creating basis for a socially concerned education. His main concept is that drama is a mental activity that can effectively enhance empathy, and by doing so it can contribute to shared understanding among people: “[drama’s] main purpose then can be stated as: *the development of common understanding through the exercise of basic mental powers*”.

By **David Hornbrook** dramatic sort of education “must be theorised within culture and history as a demonstrably social form. Production, then, is the making of dramatic text, by writing, improvising, acting or role-playing. ... As an extension of this formulation, we may usefully describe the dramatic realisation of existing text... as *re-production*. At its most sophisticated, re-production may involve a range of non-acting skills as well.” He also made an interesting note on the role of the teacher in the process: “...while it may not make sense to talk of the teacher ‘making’ meanings for the group, he or she can nevertheless participate ... in the process whereby interpretations are produced ... to reach *temporary satisfaction* with a shared understanding of how things are.

Dorothy Heathcote believes and teaches that teaching is not only a “passing on knowledge” activity, therefore the teacher has to be deeply involved in the process. However, to do so, first we have to look at ourselves:

Before we can relate to people successfully, we must first come to terms with ourselves. ... We need, too, allow ourselves to be restless spirits – to be in the process of becoming. Everything that has happened to humanity Dorothy Heathcote has something common with; ... she helps children find that they ... too, belong to humanity.

Characteristics of DIE

The three main characteristics are:

- a) *learning through activity;*
- b) *problem resolution in the classroom;*
- c) *revealing hidden meanings through self-experience*

As Dorothy Heathcote stated: “In a classroom drama, the end point is the discovery of human experience, the reaching of a deeper insight about the significance of the act or situation in the drama. ... The teacher can show them [i. e. the children] the significance of things that might otherwise seem insignificant. The teacher can move the class from a general idea to a dramatic focus and then to a universal.”

Gavin Bolton takes for granted that: “...the children’s assumption is that the activity is ‘for itself’. Indeed if this were not the case no drama would ever get started, for it is the pleasure in making believe for its own sake that provides the critical motivation for doing it.” Nevertheless, others believe in sharing even the “play for the teacher” with the pupils, possibly right at the beginning of the devising process. This could not only raise the importance of the dramatic event for the children but would also share the responsibility over the material and the process between the children and the teacher. This “sharing” can also strengthen the trust between the teacher and the class, and can lead to the recognition of drama as a meaningful activity.

Objectives

The most significant aim of drama are to get the students taking in consideration different viewpoints and achieve *deeper understanding*. Sub-goals are *forming groups and communities built on partnership, development of communication-skills and different forms of non-verbal expression*.

The method helps the students (through active involvement) to build their global social knowledge from information that seemed to be separate before.

Methodology

1. *Exercises* (short, closed, obvious, demonstrative type of activities of small groups or individuals, requiring high level of concentration)
 - Getting direct experiences (observatories) from several parts of the students’ physical and social environment (together with the teacher).
 - Development (plays) of dramatic skills: perception; interaction; concentration; speaking in different styles; vocabulary; intonation; etc.
 - Situation exercises: non-verbal interactions; making interviews; role-playing.

- Drama plays: through physical exercises; concentration; skilfulness or building group-cohesion.
 - Using other art forms to complete the drama in progress: story-telling; writing an essay; drawing; song-composing; making a choreography; taking photos or video films.
2. *Dramatic plays* (no time-restriction, determined aim or end; emphasised continuous and spontaneous action, defined context and hidden topic);
- situations of particular sites;
 - situations from family or other social spheres;
 - tense situations before fighting or any catastrophic event;
 - situation determined by a concrete story;
 - role-playing determined by special characteristics.
3. *Basic dramatic knowledge of the teacher* (meanings and usage in practice): skills and methods to create and ease tense situations):
- contrast;
 - focus;
 - time - of the plot and how to deal with it;
 - scene - ways of the usage;
 - the plot;
 - different models of complications of actions;
 - conflict;
 - situation;
 - creating, understanding and dealing with symbols;
 - dramatisation and editing life-plays.
4. *Suggested topics to work up in drama lessons*:
- tales (legends, myths);
 - real historic event;
 - relationships in the classroom; - with the aim of group-development;
 - drama built on students' favourite stories or interests (Indians, cowboys, Robin Hood, bank-robbers, etc.);
 - concrete social problem-investigation;
 - understanding works of art (music, literature, painting);
 - moral problems (through consequences of decisions);
 - l'art pour l'art;
 - functioning of social organisations.

References:

*(With special thank to **Erik Szauder Ph.D.** for providing information of his writings and the background of DIE)*

- Bolton, G:** Drama as Education
Brian Way: Development through Drama
Heathcote, D. keynote speech at the NATD Conference, 1989.,In: Byron, K. (ed.): The Fight for Drama - The Fight for Education, NATD, 1990
Hornbrook, D.: Education and Dramatic Art
Slade, P.: An Introduction to Child Drama
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“We are all different”
after the Gypsy tale
God Almighty and Pharaoh, king of the Gypsies

Focus

How can differences of value and life-style be reconciled?

Skills to be developed

Techniques of conflict-resolution, development of debate-strategies, find out the ways to live in peace with people from a different culture.

Frame

People from a “different” culture face the unacceptable demands of the sovereign.

1. Narration of the teacher

“I would like to play an old story with you. Once upon a time there was a king, whose name was Pharaoh. He had such a great power that he was not afraid even of God Almighty. All his people had to honour him and to work hard in the fields. They had a very bad fate, the Pharaoh did not spare them at all, people had no time to do anything, but work. Let’s have a look a closer look at his empire. I brought some pictures to you, in which you can see what these people looked like and how they lived. Try to imagine in more details how they made their living and how they felt in this empire.

2. “Role on the wall”

Let’s figure out together the most important features of the Pharaoh’s people (suggestions):

- how do they live/in what kind of houses (financial status)?
- what do they eat/cook?
- are they healthy/what sort of diseases do they usually have?
- how do they work?
- do they have any free time/what activities do they do?
- do they have celebrations?

- do they have school?
- do they have army?

3. Suggestions for taking roles - narration of the teacher

The children are sitting (or lying on carpets) relaxed, with eyes closed, while the teacher is going on with the story. Quiet, pleasant music is played during the second part of the tale:

“However, there was another nation living in the empire as well. The small community found its home in the Pharaoh’s country after a long-long time of wandering. So far they could live here in peace, but their way of living was very different from that of the Pharaoh’s people. Blue sky, rich meadows and clear fountains gave them everything they had ever wished. Their children were happy to live there, they were all equal and worked only as much as they should not lack anything. Women were collecting herbs in the meadows and in the woods, boys were pursuing girls all day long. The young girls put wonderful flowers into their long, shiny hair. In the evenings all of them were sitting around the bonfire, under a big tree, where they were singing, dancing and telling “nice stories” to each other.” Now, I would like you to become these people.

4. Improvisation in small groups

We have to know that our nation and the Pharaoh’s people are not on very good terms with each other. Consequently, they rarely meet and there are some conflicts between them. Let’s give a name to our people and perform three events from their everyday life.

- a girl from the Pharaoh’s people and a boy from our community meet at the fountain, on their way to get some water (improvisation);
- collecting herbs, processing and selling them on the market (fixed pictures);
- process and features of a celebration in one family.

5. The teacher takes a role

After the three scenes are over, the teacher arrives, while imitating clatters of hoofs. He/she stops among the children has a look at them abusively and drops a letter to the floor. Then he/she turns back and runs away with clatters of hoofs again.

Let us see the letter:

Strangers!

You are not from my race! You do not work as hard as my people do! You are cunning fellows who do not honour the sovereign!

The two communities cannot live together. Neither me nor my people can tolerate parasites in the empire!

You are useless, worthless and inferior people. Unless you can prove the opposite, all of you have to leave my country!

Tomorrow, when the Sun is getting the top of the Pyramid, I am inclined to give you a hearing, if you want to convince me. But no doubt it will not be successful.

Then, I will torture all of you to death.

This is my last word!

Pharaoh

Sovereign and Emperor Over All

6. Gathering - the teacher taking a subordinate role

The teacher suggests that they organize a meeting (brainstorming) on how to persuade the Pharaoh about their value (they are not more useless, than the other group). They would like to live the way they used to and cannot go anywhere else (they live on an island). The students should find something common in both nations, which may convince the sovereign.

7. Panel - theatre

A delegate is appointed to visit and convince the Pharaoh (the form of “panel-theatre” means that all the students work together to prepare the delegate for the successful meeting). The teacher assumes the role of the Pharaoh and receives the delegate. However, he refuses to accept the arguments the group gives for their life-style and values. After a long and hard debate, the Pharaoh finally suggests that the aliens should live in peace with the other nation, without any conflict or debate for one day. If they are able to fulfil his demand, they can stay and live in their former homeplace.

8. Brainstorming

In the form of a gathering we do some brainstorming about the situations, which usually might lead to conflict situations between to nations. Let’s think of everyday situations, where different people must meet each other, such as travelling, shopping (marketplace), celebrations, free-time activities, education, etc.

9/a. Role-play in small groups (the teacher in role)

Let’s perform some acts based on the brainstorming. The teacher takes a role either as an authority against the group or a member of the team as a secondary commander.

9/b. Role-play in small groups (the teacher in role)

In the case the group did not manage to find a suitable situation to show the conflict, the teacher may suggest some alternative ideas. (The role of the teacher in both cases is to emphasize that the students have to solve the conflict and make peace.)

- The empire is going to celebrate the 500th anniversary of its foundation. Our nation is going to participate in the celebration as well. We have been working on a performance of our songs, poems and dances for a long time. At the time of the celebration the guard at the door (the teacher) does not want to let them in, he also tells them off. His reasons are that they cannot behave properly, they would drink too much, turn everything upside down, moreover, they would steal the belongings of the participants.
- A girl and a boy are wondering in the meadow, holding hands. Another guy is approaching them from the other direction and is offending their feelings, behavior and appearance.
 - we may ask the whole group to give suggestions to the couple - how to cope with insult;
 - possible strategies: undertake their difference (strangeness) as something natural; unexpected (pleased) response to the rude words; looking for common (shared) points, problems (both nations are tortured by the Pharaoh); the same consequences in case of fighting (prison)
- The National Museum of Fine Art is going to organize a new exhibition They are going to collect the works of art and articles of personal use, which are interesting, valuable and represent the nations. Our group is starting to collect their works for the exhibition.

The students sit down in a circle and pass a basket around in turns. Everyone “puts” his/her product into it (which looks as if we put something into the basket). All of them have to explain in details, what is the object like, what is it made of, what is it for, in order the others could imagine those exactly.

10. Meeting the Museum Director

Somebody from our group introduces our nation and our products to the organizer in chief. When looking at the products, the reaction of the director is:

“Your nation must be very stupid and clumsy, if you make such waste. How many years did it take to prepare this worthless stuff? Even the materials are very rubbish!

But what could we expect from a useless nation like you? If you could work hard, you would not make so ugly things! It is obvious that you cannot imagine anything because of your easy and rest life. You must have never learned anything, otherwise you could have some talent to an art form.“

11. Discussion of the whole group, “What happened?”, Closing

The Students (from outside of their roles) evaluate the scenes they have played. They discuss which situations they managed to solve and how, which one was the most difficult and why. What alternative forms might have been worked out? We may show some parts again. Some can comment on the act (news, police report, documentary film, history-book, etc.) while others are playing.

Notes on Drama Session

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A visit in the Magyarmecske school