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The Dramatization of Stories and Role-play in the School Environment

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to highlight the important position of methods of creative drama with a focus on dramatization and role-play which enable a child to acquire new knowledge and skills through personal, emotional and practical experience in the educational process in active drama activities. Creative drama is based on experiential learning and it enables creative work with kids, builds their confidence, creates a space for self-fulfillment and builds on the creative potential of the child. Activities which create space for self-expression of a child and bring joy and a sense of accomplishment are proposed at the end of the article.

Keywords: creative drama, experiential learning, dramatization, role play.

Introduction

The pre-primary period of education forms a major milestone in the education of children. Children start their path to acquiring a complex education in kindergartens. Every level and type of school that children participate in, enriches their knowledge and brings new experiences. The learning that a child gains in a kindergarten forms the basis of his or her personality.

The pre-primary childhood period is characterized by considerable activity, spontaneity, interest in getting to know themselves and their

environment (Rochovská, 2011), as well as the desire to experiment, explore and constantly look for something new in life. The activity and responsiveness of children manifest themselves primarily in activities that engage their speaking, observation and listening. Every teacher needs to be well prepared for working with children in this early period of their life. The teacher is a facilitator, organizer, and creator of the educational process. It depends on him or her what form and method he or she will use to catch the children's attention and motivate them, and what environment he or she will create to increase their engagement, active participation with their peers in the creative process, as well as openness to communicate and enjoy the experiences and lessons learned.

The paper stresses the importance of methods of creative drama – focusing on dramatization and role play – which make children interested and offers them by acting in the role of someone else the opportunity to travel and explore the unknown world, and actively address and perform different tasks which positively affect the development of their personality.

Experiential learning and the creative playwright

Building on the children's natural desire for knowledge, we must help them to create a comprehensive knowledge system, attitudes and universal human values. They adopt such competences in the best way through experiential learning – which educators and psychologists classify to effective types of learning. According to I. Rochovská and D. Krupová (2015), it would be the most ideal if an all-day stay of a child in kindergarten would become an unforgettable experience.

Experiential learning is one of the most effective forms of learning. A child gains learning through experiences that happen in his or her own active work. A child acquires new knowledge, experience, creates a proper idea and knowledge of the world, creates a relation with nature, society, but also with himself or herself – and all this based on their own experience (Švábová, 2007). Experiential learning accentuates inner processes of a child, builds on his or her emotional and personal experience, and

attaches significance to his or her activity. I. Rochovská and D. Krupová (2015) are convinced that it is possible to support the development of child's emotional side naturally through experiential learning. A sense of understanding and the ability to express emotions affect thinking and behavior of children in kindergartens.

M. Horňáková (2010) stresses that the affectionate relationship in a group also forms the basis of child's development. As E. Petlák (2006) claims, children value activities that are free from stressful situations, where they have possibility of self-fulfillment and feel accepted, as well as experience success and joy from their activity.

The importance of experiential learning is based on the personality development of every child which:

- Enables them to acquire new knowledge through their own creative activity,
- Helps to keep long-lasting attention and concentration,
- Motivates them towards openness of expression,
- Brings the joy of acquirement of new experience through his or her own creation,
- Increases interest in group work,
- Provides an opportunity for self-fulfillment, self-expression, and self-reflection,
- Helps them to learn new skills in a way that cannot be lost in their further development,
- Leads to independence and development of free personality (Švábová, 2014).

The success and quality of the various activities performed by children depends not only on their internal condition and appropriate environment. They are also a result of the ability of a teacher to motivate children, the methods and strategies he or she uses, and what he does to help to form, develop and transform their personality. As reported by Janoško P. and S. Neslušanová (2014), responsibility for children can be initiated and encouraged by constant communication, participation and

interest in what children are experiencing, what they desire, what they want and need, but also what may or may not do.

The use of activating methods, both creative and experiential, leads to the creation of a space where children may work on their self-realization and self-regulation and where they have the possibility to seek different approaches to problem-solving through mutual communication, thus gaining new valuable personal experience necessary for life.

Creative drama is considered to be one of the alternative methods for the development of children's creativity from early childhood. Its methods allow us to find the way to a child and, to a large extent, it contributes to the formation and development of children, both in terms of their cognitive and non-cognitive ability.

In the past, we have had the opportunity to meet creative drama as a method of education in the area outside of the classroom. It appeared in children's theater, in work with artistic text, and in various drama activities at school. Currently the method is irreplaceable and indispensable in kindergartens as it develops the direct and spontaneous expression of children. B. Way (1996) emphasizes this change and describes creative drama as "*the practice of life*" which should be included in creative work of every teacher. In primary schools, creative drama can already be taught as part of a curriculum – but only with the assumption that a teacher is an expert in the field of creative drama.

A number of authors deal with the issue of creative drama in the specialist literature (Machková, Valenta, Way, Benešová, Bekéniová, Kollárová, Kovalčíková). A unifying feature of all definitions of creative drama is that the aim of education is to nurture the free and comprehensive development of the personality of a child.

According to J. Valenta (2008), the basic roots of creative drama are drama and theatre. We can understand creative drama as a system of driven, active, artistic and socio-anthropological teaching of children or adults that is based on the use of the principles and practice of drama and theatre. However, such teaching in schools takes into account creative-artistic and teaching requirements, as well as individual and common options for the further development of the participating individuals.

E. Machková characterizes creative drama as learning from experience. It is based on an examination, learning and understanding of human relationships, situations and the inner life of people from present time or the past, real or imaginary. This examination and learning occurs in fictional situations through the utilization of role play or dramatic negotiations in an induced situation (Machková, 2000). It is based on communication and contact. Children participate in various practical exercises based on the principle of understanding, cooperation, interplay and team creativity.

Creative drama is based on learning by experience as:

- an emotional phenomenon that is limited in time (e.g. the experience from hearing music, reading a story, or pictures we work with),
- the phenomenon as a dynamic-process where the diversity of feelings and emotions is observed in the course of time,
- the result of combination of both the emotional and dynamic experience which remains in long-term emotional memory (Bekéniová, 2012).

Creative drama is an educational system that focuses on personal development as a whole, as stated by L. Bekéniová (2012). Its learning content is largely interdisciplinary and organized into concrete situations that carry the element of story and the problems that need to be tackled. Creative drama is not a dramatization of a literary text, work with puppets or a role play. It is primarily active learning based on practical experience which comprehensively develops the whole personality of an individual. Experience is gained by solutions to fictional situations – often coming from a real life. In creative drama, the child becomes the subject of education, and has the opportunity to actively participate in the educational process. Thus he or she gains the opportunity to understand oneself and his or her environment. He or she becomes a source of knowledge and acquisition of various life experiences.

Methods of creative drama

Creative drama is a creative process in which variable methods of creative drama are applied when working with children in kindergarten. It is important that a teacher selects the best methods in order to raise the enthusiasm and interest of children in active work.

Teachers currently have the opportunity to utilize a myriad of methods of creative drama. According to E. Machková (1998), a number of methods were developed in the last 80 years of creative drama, as well as different variants arising from the educational situation where the methods of drama education were applied. Some methods were taken and processed from acting; others were created in related fields, such as social training, others from children's games, creativity trainings and fields of art in education. Many methods originated directly from the practice of creative activities.

Creative drama is a dynamic and creative process that encourages spontaneous activity on the part of a child. The essential and most frequent methods of creative drama are classified as: role-play, improvisation, interpretation, dramatic play, dramatization, pantomime, puppet and marionette shows. Game is the core method which leads children to openness, relaxation, spontaneity, creativity, joy, and deepens their interest in reality.

Experience learning is the most natural and effective form of learning for children. The method, when adequately chosen, enables children to act in various roles and acquire the ability to work in groups with their peers. It improves their communication skills, confronts their own attitudes to attitudes of the others, and strengthens their self-confidence in drama situations.

To successfully achieve an effective educational objective, a teacher selects a combination of several methods of creative drama. Methods are not used separately. It is important to respect the target focus of education and also the specification of the content. Methods that encourage the socializing of children, their self-realization and learning through personal experiences are prioritized. creative drama methods and their ap-

plication brings an amazing opportunity to lead children to the observation of reality, the development of their ideas and feelings, and helps them to express themselves through movement, facial expressions, gestures or words.

Improvisation and interpretation

Improvisation and interpretation are essential methods of creative drama that significantly affect the development of children in pre-primary education.

Improvisation is part of the daily activities in kindergarten. As stated by B. Way (1996), it is a spontaneous activity that all children can handle – regardless the age or the level of abilities. It does not need a pre-prepared scenario as it is not a game which depends on the ability to read or learn dialogues. It activates all mental functions and depends on the application of own individual resources.

Improvisation is a creative method where a teacher plays an important role. He or she - in accordance with educational aim and content – prepares a story in advance and evokes a situation in which a child has the opportunity to express himself or herself individually. The advantage of improvisation lies in the emotional and acquired experience. According to M. Benešová and D. Kollárová (2000), creative drama is not a play act and neither a preparation of children for the stage. It is a preparation for life.

One of the basic methods of creative drama includes the method of interpretation. It is a creative work with literary text including all means of expression. When an inspiring literary text is close and understandable for children, and has a quality content and formal side, it creates space for children to express themselves and to inspire their own creativity. It brings excitement and unforgettable experiences which has a positive influence on their personality. Stories that children have a close relation with are the ones which enable them to unleash their imagination and fantasy; stories – which develop their verbal and non-verbal communication,

stories – where they can play a role which allows them to discover, experiment and win. The teacher is the one who provides children with this opportunity to explore their environment and surrounding nature in creative and playful activities through realization of various stories.

Role-play

Role play is a key method of creative drama. According to J. Valenta (2008), role play is an educational method that leads to the achievement of aesthetic-educational, personal and social development goals on basis of improvisation and subsequent reflection of dramatic situation with valuable educational content. This situation is conducted through the role-plays of participants who represent more or less fictional objects (various creatures or natural phenomena) through their behaviour and actions. It includes the possibility to play himself in some degrees of authenticity.

Children like to impersonate someone else and express themselves in the drama situations which they identify with. A positive atmosphere helps them to develop their communication with a community. This method of creative drama is popular in schools.

Creative drama understands role-play as a social concept and thus it is a way of specific social behavior which is expected and presumed from the respective role. According to E. Machková (2005), a role-play is an activity in which a player takes something other than an inherent role (in terms of social role, not theatrical).

Regardless of age and experience, role play empowers a full range of communication techniques, builds confidence, creates space for self-expression, and promotes interaction in the group. It increases the incentive to work and learn, has a facilitation function and it is a means of relaxation.

In creative drama, role play is usually undertaken as collective improvisation. In such an act, everyone plays a role of someone else (e.g. an animal) or represents a thing (e.g. a magical scarf). It involves also children

who are timid, less creative, including individualistic players. In this way children get the opportunity to gain different experiences and eventually manage to empathize with different roles without any obstacles. According to V. Hašková (2014), teamwork leads to the removal of barriers that exist between children and their coexistence is improved in such a cooperative atmosphere.

Role play can have several levels in drama activities:

- a) *Simulation level* – in which a child plays himself or herself in some fictional situation and has the possibility to act and play according to his or her own decision.
- b) *Alteration level* – the child acts in a different role, acts in a role of someone else, thus not in a certain attitude he or she might have in such situations, but with an attitude of a character he or she portrays.
- c) *Characterization level* – the most difficult type of role play, in which a player represents a character, having a complex picture of him or her – the psyche, and understanding of inner world under the influence of the drama text (Valenta, 2008).

We work with children in the pre-primary period mostly at the simulation and alteration level. As reported by D. Kollárová (2005), a symbolic game forms the basis of the first two role-play stages. It enables children to escape into a fictional world. It is familiar as they know it from well-known creative and thematic games. It allows them to implement their observations from the world of adults, as well as fairy tale heroes in literature or television.

Dramatization

Dramatization is considered one of the popular methods of creative drama. It is based on the analysis of the long-term results of research on the methods of creative drama used in activities with children in schools.

It represents the top phase of creative drama. Teachers approach dramatization after practical experience with improvisation, interpretation, role play and drama activities.

Dramatization is a creative process rather than the memorization of the literary work. Dramatization represents a rendition of a particular story, in which various kinds of tools or puppets can be used. Drama texts, which encourage children to be naturally physically active and express themselves verbally, must create a space where they can express themselves in a way which brings joy and sense of accomplishment from these situations.

Preparation of dramatization and its procedures

Dramatization means primarily a good selection of literary artwork in which the principle of the simplest to the more complex text is applied. According to D. Kollárová (2005), in a hearsay interpreted text, a child will accept only what he or she with his or her intellect and emotional maturity is able to cope with. Therefore teachers must begin with simple drama games and exercises which do not comprise the difficult situation. Thus children can express themselves in the form of simplest movements in a role play. In the following exercises, children mimic the various sounds of animals, wind, storms, north wind, motion portrayal of the situation, animal walk, fairy-tale characters (princess, prince, witch). Example of activities:

1. Move freely in a room in the rhythm of a rhyme. Mimic the walk of an animal as a role-play (e.g. frog, elephant, stork, bear, and rabbit).
E.g. *Stork went around the house and said number (5)*. Children perform a slow walk with knees lifted up to the waist. They imitate the long beak of a stork with their hands outstretched in front.

Present a well-known rhyme (e.g. a rhyme in which a blacksmith forges a horseshoe). Imitate the role of a blacksmith and make horseshoes with a hammer.

2. Rendering content of children's songs and expressing it through movement.
E.g. Children may sing a traditional song about musicians. They play the roles of musicians playing on drums and violin.
3. We also meet with dramatization in activities with music, movement and motion. Children may move around space and express roles of dancers, animals, snowflakes and various natural phenomena with use of body movements (e.g. wolf and three pigs, funny bunny with big ears, weaving of a daisy-chain, etc.) (Lysáková, 1989).

The smaller children are, the more we look for literary templates that create a space in which children may release their creativity and learn to connect words with movement and thus support their natural development. Gradually it moves to templates with rich variety of characters and situations, initiatives with a simple conflict, clear dialogue and storyline enabling creative work in the group.

Dramatization of fairy tales

A fairy-tale is irreplaceable in activities with children in kindergarten. They can address each child individually. If a teacher chooses to dramatize a fairy tale, he or she has to make sure that the children are familiar with the story and are able to imitate movements, sounds, words, situations and characters that are part of the story. Not every fairy tale is capable of satisfying child recipients and of evoking the same experience. To get the full attention of a child, a fairy-tale must:

- Be clear,
- Complexly encourage curiosity,
- Encourage perception, imagination, and fantasy,
- Help to develop cognitive skills,
- Bring joy and deep emotional experience,
- Involve and motivate to participate in creative activities.

When choosing the fairy tale, a teacher takes in regard *pedagogical objective, topic, age of children, the composition of the group, their level of experience, and the way they work with the story* (Švábová, 2014, p. 50).

A fairy tale has an educational character and prepares the child for life through the stories. When children understand and connect with a fairy tale, it has a positive influence on their communicativeness, responsiveness, sensitivity and ability to answer various questions. Dramatization of fairy tales enriches their language and the ability to express themselves independently.

We meet also with free dramatization in practice. In free dramatization, children are involved in the creation and transformation of the original story and the teacher reduces or expands texts, especially if he or she wants to involve all children in activities. The creative teacher likes to amend and change a story together with children, and combine the original story with a new one. In this way, a different environment is created and new situations arise with new characters. Children have a great joy when they can be actively involved in the educational process.

Children like to dramatize fairy tales they know well and whose motives they have already spontaneously used in creative games, with some parts almost being known by heart. The informal atmosphere and conditions which make children comfortable have a great importance in dramatization. Teachers need to encourage every child and clarify that everyone has something which may have enriching and developing effect on a group. A teacher coordinates communication in the group during drama activities which influences how immersed the children are in their roles and how well they identify with their character.

Below you may find an example of an activity (based on a well-known fairy tale in Slovakia). The story empowered children to express their feelings in an active and creative way – which arose from problems tackled in the activity and their role play.

Express with a movement, motion and words a situation from fairy-tale stories.

Danka and Janka fairy tale (based on the fairy tale written by Maria Durickova, 1990).

Initial text: Danka and Janka are twin sisters who are quite the same. They are so identical that when Janka looks in the mirror, she is not sure if she sees herself or her sister Danka. They often quarrel. When Janka says that something is white, Danka will argue that it is black or pink. But they agree on the main things. Going to a circus – it fits them both. And both of them like ice-cream. However, while Janka likes vanilla and Danka prefers strawberry, they enjoy fairy tales both the same. They just need to hold their hands, make a jump and suddenly they appear in a fairytale.

Tasks:

1. Create pairs and act out a dramatic situation in which Danka and Janka stand in front of a mirror and look back and forth. Look at your hair, nose, and eyes. Suddenly you are surprised. You are exactly the same. Change your mood, become happy, sad, laugh, then cry, cover your eyes, cover your whole face. In the end give yourself a round of applause, jump from joy and shout: "We are the same!"
2. Act out a dramatic situation in which children are in the role of Danka and Janka and seek answers to questions, such as:
 - a) Why is everything around us white, black or pink?
 - b) What would happen if everything around us was just white or black, pink, blue, red, green, or yellow?
3. Play out a drama situation in which children express their satisfaction from walking to an ice-cream shop in the role of Danka and Janka. Tasks:
 - a) On the way lead a dialogue about which ice-cream you like the most.
 - b) Ask an ice-cream man to sell you your favorite ice-cream.
 - c) Taste the ice-cream. Suddenly one of the ice-creams falls to the ground and messes your shirt, pants, and skirt.
4. Play a drama situation in which Danka and Janka go to a circus. Tasks:
 - a) Express joy or fear of meeting the animals (and imagine what animals are in the circus).

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- b) Act in a situation when animals are preparing for their performance. Suddenly a clown blows a trumpet, animals appear and start dancing in front of Danka and Janka.

Questions at the end of activities:

Why do Danka and Janka look in the mirror, what do they see? What would happen if everything around us was just white or black, pink, blue, red, green, or yellow? Danka and Janka love ice cream – do you remember what flavor? What animals did Danka and Janka see in the circus? What did they like in the circus the most? What animals did the girls like the most?

Work with fairy tale characters is interesting for children in kindergartens. Through participation in role plays, dramatic stories and fairy tales, children experience a joy from satisfaction; they get to know each other and their environment. According to Z. Hlaváčová (2014), we should allow children to have as much joy and positive incentives as they need to make their lives full of laughter, success and happiness – because there is nothing worse than the sad face of a child.

Fairy tales and their dramatization deserve to have the attention of teachers and children.

Conclusion

Creative drama belongs to alternative, non-traditional forms and methods of education in the contemporary creative – humanistic educational process. It is based on the involvement of children and the encouragement of their creativity and independence. Experiential learning is an important asset when working with methods of creative drama as it emphasizes the personal experience and activity of a child.

Dramatization of stories engages children in role plays through which they become more engaged, experiment and open up, and start believing in themselves and collaborate with others in a friendly and

peaceful atmosphere. Drama activities allow children to experience success through their own involvement, and to gain new knowledge and experience necessary for life.

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