

THEATRE IN EDUCATION:

Forms, characteristics and techniques

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Theatre in education: An introduction

In recent years, more and more educators of all levels or representatives from the theatre field are turning to the research area of Theatre in Education, treating it in three forms: as an art form, as a teaching tool or as a tool of social intervention (Govas 2002, 24-27). Theatre in Education appears in the field in a variety of approaches and forms, a fact attested by the many different terms that are used from time to time: drama in education, theatre in education, drama education, process drama, inquiry drama, creative drama are some of the commonly known English terms³.

At this point it is worth mentioning some important forms of the field that we come across in Greek bibliography and education.

a. The theatrical game

The theatrical game, together with theatrical performance, are the two dominant forms of theatre that used to give content to the term Theatre in Education in Greece. Clearly, today the term has taken on broader dimensions. Theatrical game of course, since it is very familiar to the child, continues to be applied in particular, either as an integrated and autonomous form of Theatre in Education with specific phases of introduction, development, completion and evaluation, or -very often- as a preparation/introduction of pupils to theatrical or other workshops with the aim of creative warming up of the participants (Katsaridou 2014, 47).

More specifically, the theatrical game seeks to give children opportunities for communication, awareness and creative expression through play. In other words, it is based on mechanisms that are very familiar to the child, namely, the immediate and necessary activity of play. It is based, on the one hand, on symbolic game which

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³ Some of the terms we come across in Greek bibliography in an attempt to include or translate the different forms of the field are: theatrical game, dramatic game, dramatization, inquiry drama – exploratory dramatization, drama, drama in education, dramatic art in education, drama method – theatre pedagogy method, theatre in education, educational theatre, theatrical education [θεατρικό παιχνίδι, δραματικό παιχνίδι, δραματοποίηση, διερευνητική δραματοποίηση, δράμα, εκπαιδευτικό δράμα, δραματική τέχνη στην εκπαίδευση, θεατροπαιδαγωγική μέθοδος, θεατροπαιδαγωγικά προγράμματα, θεατρική αγωγή] (Katsaridou 2014, 21).

children are familiar with, and, on the other hand, on improvised theatre, to which they are introduced. It is an improvised action, a spontaneous and creative expression in the group environment, since it does not presuppose any written text. Its main elements are role and action. Thus, through the roles they choose, children are involved in imaginary situations and recreate the world (Katsaridou 2014, 48).

According to Lakis Kouretzis (1991, 70-94) the basic stages of its development are the following four:

1. Awareness raising and group building: In this introductory stage, children participate in games and exercises in order to develop creative expression and to feel part of the group. Typical activities are: relaxation, breathing, trust, observation, movement games, expression and transformation games.
2. Reproduction: Creating roles and situations: on the basis of a stimulus, children adopt roles which they constantly change during a creative game. They try out actions, form relationships with others, invent stage settings.
3. Improvised stage action: The previous free actions and improvisations take on a stage character as the children hold one of the roles they tried out in the second stage. Here the groups are stabilized and a theatrical event is staged, which is presented to another group-community.
4. Analysis and evaluation of the workshop: The theatre game is concluded through discussion and dialogue in the group. Opinions, objections, new proposals are being heard. At the end, the preceding stage actions can be transformed into images, sounds and speech.

b. The theatrical performance

Some years ago most teachers or educational policy planners or theatre educators in Greece understood Theatre in Education as a theatrical performance, which is clearly no longer the case. Today, theatre performance does not mean professional theatre performances produced for children –such as 'children's theatre' or theatre for children –but performances prepared by children themselves (Katsaridou 2014, 49).

Theatrical performance refers mainly to the stage presentation of a theatrical text, utilizing many areas of artistic creation (role taking, acting, direction, scenography, costume design, music production). Clearly, it can also arise from the synthesis of other levels of theatrical expression or as a culminating stage of dramatic approaches such as dramatization, improvisation, theatrical game, devised theatre, etc. Theodoros Grammatas refers to the theatrical performance as the "climax of theatre" with a dual role, pedagogical and artistic (Grammatas 1999, 55). It is important to note that in many cases the emphasis is mainly on the artistic product; throughout the process, objectives are set concerning the aesthetic outcome of the performance and the acquisition of artistic skills by the children. Although this particular practice does not negate the pedagogical dimension of the overall experience, sometimes, the rehearsals that precede, do not always take into account the real needs, abilities, knowledge and desires of the children (Papadopoulos 2007, 27). In this direction, there

is a need to emphasize the overall process of a theatrical performance, so that, through appropriate animation, the artistic result does not undermine the pedagogical function of the theatre.

Grammatas defines 'school theatre' as the category of theatrical performance that takes place within the framework of the school and its cultural activities with the cooperation of teachers and pupils. It concerns the pupil community as a whole, combining in a balanced way two basic parameters, aesthetic and pedagogical. It also refers to other forms of school theatre such as theatrical improvisation, pantomime, readers theatre, theatrical event (happening), sketch (Grammatas 1999, 39-62, 65-66).

c. The Dramatization

The term Dramatization is used to describe the transformation or "transcription" of any text (not necessarily literary, pre-existing or invented) into a theatrical text, through drama codes, with the final aim of its representation or otherwise its iconization and expression in the form of a theatrical event (Grammatas 1999, 46-47; Papadopoulos 2007, 26). Grammatas distinguishes two ways of approaching this form: a) the writing workshop, in which children, through activities and with the guidance of the teacher, record their ideas and judgments in dialogues and are led to the creation of a dramatic text and b) the stage performance in which pupils are led to the theatrical performance of a variety of themes (Grammatas 2004, 47-50). This process can become particularly educational if improvisational activities and theatrical techniques are incorporated (Papadopoulos 2007, 27).

Alkistis Kontogianni (1989, 10-11) defines Dramatization as a collective game, where spectators and actors alternate, choose roles, improvise, experiment and create. Without considering it necessary to have a predetermined text to be performed, she suggests a variety of texts that can be read in class and can be sources of inspiration: stories, mythological tales, fairy tales, proverbs, short stories and general themes or ideas. She distinguishes three stages in the implementation of Dramatization, namely: the *Introduction to Dramatization*, the *Actual Dramatization* and the *Evaluation* (Alkistis 2007, 43-46). After the narration or reading, the "linguistic material" is mobilized, acts and affects the children's bodies, who translate it, transform it, interpret it and express it, each in its own way. She stresses, of course, that it is counter-pedagogical to memorize texts in any way, which should only be a stimulus for children's creative action (Alkistis 1999, 17). She argues that Dramatization leads pupils to a "multiple encounter" with the Other, knowledge, time, space, persons and the self.

Moreover, it is worth noting that Persephone Sextou (1998, 31) defines Dramatization as "the transformation, reconstruction and elaboration of a narrative existing text through a dramatic code and its performance by children, without the result necessarily being a theatrical action". In fact, she proposes a method of editing and transforming narrative material into a theatrical code to make it suitable for Dramatization by groups of preschoolers, toddlers and primary school children in and out of the school environment (Sextou 1998, 51-62).

d. Theatre in Education (programmes)

According to Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton (2009, 31), Theatre in Education (TiE) programmes, together with Popular Theatre, are the two most "historical roots" of Applied Theatre.

Persephone Sextou notes that TiE programmes have their roots in England in the 1960s and in particular were first presented by the Belgrade group in Coventry, in a need for alternative theatre, struggles for freedom, equality and creativity as well as active participation of citizens in the social reality of the time (Sextou 2005, 21). Their original form was influenced by the work of Brecht, Boal, Heathcote and other important representatives from the field of theatre and drama. Nowadays, all the changes in social reality have led to the change, development and evolution of TiE programmes and their implementation in many countries of the world (Giannouli & Potamoussi 2011, 13).

More specifically, TiE programmes are based on child-centred teaching and learning and aim at empowering pupils to actively participate in collective and democratic processes and to discover new ways of approaching social issues (Sextou 2005, 21). They are created and presented predominantly by actors and drama educators or by organised professional theatre groups, which visit schools and present the programme to pupils. Clearly, children are actively involved in the whole process, so that through role-taking, discussion and reflection they can be led to an alternative approach to knowledge.

Usually, the structure of a TiE programme includes:

- A transportable and short theatrical performance that serves as a stimulus for further action or discussion or presentation of a theatrical event (Sextou in Lazaridou 2006, 72).
- An experiential workshop based on drama (Drama in Education), theatrical game, dramatisation of narrative or audiovisual material. In these workshops, children actively participate and discuss, making decisions and solving problems related to the theme of the project.
- Often followed by writing and aesthetic workshops to reflect on the overall experience.
- Finally, the theatre group compiles and offers schools a folder of educational material which can be used by teachers in their classrooms. This creates prospects for further creative hours in the classroom (follow up work) and offers suggestions and ideas to the teachers for exploring the various topics through drama and theatre activities (teachers' resource workpack) (Sextou 2007, 27; Sextou 2005, 123; Katsaridou 2014, 51-52).

In recent years, remarkable TiE programmes have been implemented in our country and their official introduction in Greek education is considered particularly important (Sextou 2007, 41-165, Giannouli & Potamoussi 2011).

e. The Drama method

The Drama method as proposed in this paper is mainly based on Drama in Education in its broader sense, but it is constantly enriched with a variety of practices and techniques from different disciplines and theatre approaches (Katsaridou 2014, 23)⁴.

More specifically, Drama in Education appeared in England in the 1950s in the context of Progressive Education, which promoted the experiential, active learning of the child and aimed at creative and free self-expression, socialization and the all-round development of his/her personality (Rohrs 1984, Avdi & Chatzigeorgiou 2007, 22). As a method it was enriched over the years with the views of different theorists, different aspects were emphasized and its basic principles, objectives and teaching methods were often revised. It was then applied in regions such as North America and Australia, while in recent years it has been continuously developed in Greece. More specifically, in Greece it has been translated in different terms, while further versions of it have been gradually developed⁵.

In the Drama method, proposed in this paper⁶, participants who are playing roles are led through various activities and techniques in a process of interaction and exploration of a topic taken from social reality (Katsaridou 2014, 24). Children search for meaning, face dilemmas, make decisions and reflect on actions, always bringing with them their experience and opinions. It is a form of dramatic/theatrical art with a purely pedagogical character and at the same time a means of learning that aims at a deeper knowledge of the self and the world (Avdi & Chatzigeorgiou and Vlachou & Papadopoulou in Lazaridou 2006, 75).

The individual objectives set through this particular dramatic method are a) the exploration of various social issues, b) the initiation of pupils into the art of theatre, c) the all-round development of the pupil as an individual and as a member of a social group, d) the development and cultivation of the child's expressive means and psycho-

⁴ For more details see Katsaridou, Martha (2014) *The theatre pedagogy method, A proposal for the teaching of literature in an intercultural classroom*, Thessaloniki: Stamoulis [Κατσαρίδου, Μάρθα (2014) *Η Θεατροπαιδαγωγική μέθοδος, Μια πρόταση για τη διδασκαλία της λογοτεχνίας σε διαπολιτισμική τάξη*, Θεσσαλονίκη: Σταμούλης Αντ.].

⁵ In the Greek literature the terms drama in education, drama, inquiry drama, dramatic art in education [Εκπαιδευτικό Δράμα, Δράμα, Διερευνητική Δραματοποίηση, Δραματική Τέχνη στην Εκπαίδευση] are used, while at the same time the relevant methodologies are analyzed at a theoretical and practical level. In this regard, see. Avdi & Chatzigeorgiou 2007, Avdi & Chatzigeorgiou 2017, Tsiaras 2014, Papadopoulos 2007, Papadopoulos 2010, Alkistis 2008.

⁶ The term that was chosen to describe the specific method in Greek language is 'theatre pedagogy method', as, on the one hand, it essentially indicates the two basic scientific fields that support the method, namely, theatre and pedagogy, and on the other hand, it is particularly broad and can cover the complexity of the method. Antonis Lenakakis, one of the proponents of this term, defines theatre pedagogy as the artistic science that combines "play and theatre as a practical art and pedagogy as a science [...] In this new dialectical synthesis, the two central terms, Theatre and Pedagogy, without losing their independence, are enriched with new fields of research" (Lenakakis, 2013, 58).

spiritual powers, e) the enhancement of the emotional world, self-confidence and self-esteem; f) the social development of the self through a collective experience; g) the development of a sense of social responsibility; h) the acquisition of knowledge and specific skills in relation to the subject being taught; i) the provision of entertainment (Avdi & Chatzigeorgiou 2007, 20-21).

For a better understanding of Drama in Education, as it appeared in England in 1950, a brief reference to its theoretical framework is important. In particular, representatives of the field have been influenced by key theories from the fields of pedagogy, psychology and theatre, which have contributed to its development. Among others, reference needs to be made to Lev Vygotsky's views on socially determined learning environments and his theory of "Social Constructivism" (Heathcote & Bolton 1995, 35; Vygotsky 2000, 151), Jerome Bruner's theories of personal engagement and meaning-making of each participant (Bruner 1997, 22) and the role of scaffolding in this direction (Davis & Lawrence 1986, 60-61; Avdi & Chatzigeorgiou 2007, 25-26, 29), Paulo Freire's "Problem-posing Education" aimed at critical awareness and social change in combination with Augusto Boal's corresponding theatrical methods (Freire 1977, 80, 88, Boal 2000), as well as personal experience of dramatic experience and emotional engagement, elements of Konstantin Stanislavski's acting method (Stanislavski 1959, 171; Wagner 1976, 33) and at the same time in alienation/distancing (the *Verfremdungseffekt*) and critical awareness of the participants, elements of Bertolt Brecht's "Epic theatre" (Brecht 2000, 93; Wagner 1976, 60-66; Avdi & Chatzigeorgiou 2007, 34, 36-37).

It is necessary to note that in the drama process the elements of theatre are used as building blocks of the whole process: dramatic environment, roles, focus, dramatic intensity, time, space, speech and movement, symbols, meaning (O'Toole 1992, 13-46).

At the same time, some theatrical forms are used in order for the participants to approach the meaning. Drama techniques or theatrical conventions, as they have come to be called, essentially structure the drama process into sections, episodes and facilitate the experiential involvement of the participants. A comprehensive proposal for the possibilities of using techniques/conventions in the drama process is offered by Jonathan Neelands and Tony Goode (Neelands & Goode 2000). According to them, techniques/conventions can be divided into four categories, each corresponding to a different goal of the dramatic action: 1) Context Building Action – Techniques that delimit or add information to the context in which the drama is to take place (space, time, characters). 2) Narrative Action – Techniques which tend to emphasize the narrative part of the dramatic story or 'what-happens-next, which serves as a motivation for the subsequent participation of the children. 3) Poetic Action – Techniques which emphasize or create the symbolic potential of drama through selective use of language and gestures, elements that lead the participant(s) to search for the meaning of each experience. 4) Reflective Action – Techniques that deepen participants' responsiveness and awareness of themselves and the world around them.

According to the model of the Drama method approached in this paper, the following structure is proposed in each planning⁷:

- 1) The phase of introducing and preparing children for the dramatic environment, prior to the class's contact with the drama story, i.e., the stimulus text. In this phase, drama games, imitative-phonetic exercises, pantomime, breathing exercises, relaxation and activation of the students are carried out. This phase is important, as the first actions, the time and space, the roles are defined and the preparation for the story to be developed is essentially done. For Cecily O'Neill (1995, 19) it is the pretext, which provides the drama with a firm basis for development.
- 2) The next phase is the main phase, where children encounter the story of the drama (stimulus, literary text, etc.) and at the same time the transition from this to the conventions of theatre and drama. This transition is particularly important, as the theatrical and dramatic conventions serve as a vehicle for experiencing and processing meanings. Children are transferred from the initial environment, i.e., the world of the stimulus-text (characters, events, story time-space) to a new dramatic environment, which they themselves create through their participation in the drama process. More specifically, based on the elements of theatre, sections or episodes are created in the story, which is analyzed and approached theatrically through suggested drama techniques/theatrical conventions. The episodes essentially offer the participants the possibility of interrupting the action at an important point, while through the appropriately selected drama techniques/theatrical conventions that mainly promote the development of the plot (narrative) and the creation of representations (poetic), children have the opportunity to experience the story, to conceptualize and deepen the issues and needs that concern them and through critical awareness and reflection to seek solutions and seek social change (Katsaridou 2014, 56-57).
- 3) The last phase concerns the group's response to the overall drama experience, where mainly techniques/conventions leading to reflection are used. In this phase, theatrical or written activities, group or individual, may be presented, which contribute to the production of

⁷ Neelands and Goode underline that their proposed classification is not hierarchical or sequential and that it has been developed in response to certain basic needs required for participation, either as a spectator or as an actor. As the dynamic nature of theatre requires several shifts to and from different varieties of action while the dramatic experience unfolds, it is suggested that there should be selected the technique most appropriate to the specific moment of the process. (Neelands & Goode 2000, 6). The tripartite scheme proposed below serves to connect the real world with the fictional one, the transition from the initial environment of the participants to the conventions of drama and theatre, as well as from the fictitious world of drama back again to the participants' everyday life, aiming at the critical awareness of the self and the world.

creative discourse by the children, to the recall of experiences and knowledge gained from the process. More generally, this last phase focuses on experiences and issues that concern and occupy the participants and their everyday life with the aim to develop critical consciousness and seek for social change. Finally, the phase can also function as a period of evaluation of the achievements as, through discussion and critical positioning, the students in collaboration with the facilitator exchange views and ideas, share difficulties and concerns and suggest among themselves possible improvements and changes (Katsaridou 2014, 57-58).

Summary of drama techniques⁸

1. Context Building Action – Techniques that define the context in which the drama is to take place

Still image: the technique is proposed in the "Image Theatre" introduced by Augusto Boal and can appear in many variations as well as be accompanied by other dramatic techniques (Boal 2000, 135). In general, children are asked to create with their bodies an image that captures a specific moment of action in the drama or a general concept or idea. This image, which must be still, involves a dynamic, as it crystallizes the whole meaning of the action.

Role on the Wall: students draw on a large piece of paper the outline of a role they are interested in. They add thoughts, feelings and characterizations about the role, give it poems, songs and advice, or compose for it, individually or in groups, texts such as letters, wishes and instructions.

Compound stimulus: It is a complex stimulus created by more than one element and is a trigger for the creation of a story. It consists of several small objects (personal items, photographs, letters and other documents), which, when students carefully juxtapose them, they make sense and a story emerges (Somers 2008, 118-128).

2. Narrative Action – Techniques that emphasize the narrative part of the dramatic story, which serves as a motivation for children's subsequent participation

⁸ The following techniques are part of the set of drama techniques summarized in the Appendix of the PhD thesis *The method of dramatization in the teaching of literature* (Katsaridou, 2011).

Interviews: Some students are selected to elicit the information, motivation, attitudes by asking appropriate questions, while others are asked to respond (Neelands & Goode 2000, 33).

Mantle of the Expert: Students are asked to take on the role of 'experts' (scientists, professionals) and with the knowledge provided by their role to undertake a specific task. As 'experts' in the subject matter, the participants acquire a higher status and at the same time they have the experience at a relative distance, since professional codes and rules are developed. The mantle of the expert enhances the internalization of knowledge, the combination of subjects, and the holistic use of children's knowledge and experiences (Heathcote & Bolton 1994, 32, 35).

Hot-Seating: a group of pupils, in or out of character, ask questions to a character who remains in character. This character sits in the *revelation chair* and usually sits opposite the rest of the group asking questions. Through the technique, the motivations, values, perceptions, attitudes, desires and behavior of the role are illuminated.

Improvisation: it can be an autonomous form of theatrical expression that is used independently by a class (Grammatas 1999, 44-45). Children participate in an improvisation in order to directly experience a part of the story. The aim is to make them aware of the situation they are facing and to move on to deeper meanings. Of course, the technique, beyond its improvisational form, can be presented in a more structured form, as some parts of the structure are predetermined by the group members or the teacher.

3. Poetic Action – Techniques involving the creation of representations, through the selective use of language and gestures, elements that lead the participants to search for the meaning of each experience

Dramatized narration: alongside the representation of the events of a story by the pupils, there is also the narration of the story by a pupil out of character or by the teacher. This allows the group to slow down the action considerably and focus on events that they consider particularly important.

Flashback: used at a critical moment, where children are asked to create scenes from the past, i.e. before the present moment. Through flashback the purpose is to illuminate events that interpret and reinforce the relationship between the present and history.

4. Reflective Action – Techniques that deepen participants' responsiveness and awareness of themselves and the world around them.

Voices in the Head: participants, either in the role of a character's conscience who is asked to make a crucial decision or is in a big dilemma, or out of role, suggest solutions to the character, give him/her advice or

express his/her thoughts. Clearly, the thoughts and advice suggested can be conflicting, so the character is asked to consider all the parameters, develop critical thinking and make conscious choices.

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