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15. DRAMA EDUCATION IN THE FINNISH SCHOOL SYSTEM – PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

ABSTRACT

Theatre is an example of an art form, which has always been part of the Finnish school system, although it has not had an official position in the National Curriculum. Nowadays we have many PhD theses that confirm that the use of drama in educational processes aids personal and social development, as well as the development of self-concept, self-discrepancy and a role-taking ability. Pupils who take drama classes enjoy school activities more, are much more willing to participate in them, are better at problem solving and better at coping with stress. They have significantly more tolerance towards other people. At the same time the potential complexity and diversity of creative processes in drama education is a challenge for teachers and teacher education. The use of drama education can be seen as an alternative to scripted schooling and also an answer to the main challenges of the postmodern knowledge culture, which aims for deeper conceptual understanding by preparing students to create new knowledge.

Keywords: drama, drama education, class teacher education, creative teaching

PAST: THEATRE AND DRAMA TRADITIONS IN THE FINNISH SCHOOL SYSTEM

The Finnish school system has a strong tradition of school theatre that still persists. The school theatre roots in Finland extend as far back as 1550 to the first monastery schools in Turku (Tiusasen, 1969, 31–32). Theatre has always been a part of the Finnish school system, although it has not had an official position as a subject in the National Core Curricula. From the 60s to 90s, there was a tradition of “Funny hours” in primary schools where pupils were able to present their own performances once a week. Also, a total of 81 school theatre play books that included almost 1400 school theatre plays were published between 1910–1979, which tells us something about the importance of school theatre activities (Tiusanen, 1969; Majapuro-Joutsamo, 1980; Toivanen, 2002).

The idea of drama in education spread to Finland from Great Britain and Scandinavia in the early 70s. The Creative Activity in Schools Association was founded on February 17, 1972. The association organized drama training for teachers and translated drama literature into Finnish (Karppinen, 1993, 82–85). Its purpose

was to support and develop creative drama as part of Finnish school education. Drama practice was influenced by liberal personal development doctrines. The development of personality and free self-expression was taken as a priority in education (e.g. Slade, 1969; Courtney, 1974; Way, 1967; Bolton, 1979). Drama activities were focused on developing teaching methods for creative expression and group dynamics instead of performing school theatre plays.

Drama teaching in teacher education began at the Universities of Jyväskylä and Helsinki at the end of the 1980s. The drama-educator training programme for class and subject teachers started at the University of Jyväskylä and the Finnish Theatre Academy's Continuing Education Institute in the 1990s, and led to the first drama and theatre pedagogy PhDs graduating in the early 2000s. Drama education has become an academic discipline in Finland. Didactics as the applied educational methodology of a subject area, and accompanying theoretical reflection about it, are at the centre of teacher training today. The concepts and forms of drama education have been structured to use *drama* and *drama education* as the basic terms in academic discipline, in teacher education and comprehensive school. Drama education is the main term and includes all forms of theatre in school education. Drama (classroom drama) is pupil-active, experiential and the socio-constructive way of aesthetic teaching and learning that takes place in actual school work (Laakso, 2004; Heikkinen, 2002, 2005; Toivanen, 2012, 2015). An exception is "Basic Education in the Arts" that differs from compulsory education in schools. Basic education in the arts system includes the following nine different art forms: music, literary arts, dance, performing arts (circus and theatre) and visual arts (architecture, audio-visual art, visual arts, and craft) and it has its own national Core Curriculum also devised by the Finnish National Board of Education. Education of theatre arts is goal-oriented, progressing from one level to the next (Curricula for Basic Education in the Arts, 2005) and in education of theatre arts the term *theatre education* is used instead of the terms "drama" or "drama education".

PRESENT: DRAMA EDUCATION IN FINNISH SCHOOLS IN THE 2020S

Systematic drama education is still not implemented in every school in Finland, even though drama education methods, forms of activity and concepts have been progressively developed and structured, especially since the beginning of the twenty-first century by many drama and theatre pedagogy PhDs (e.g. Sinivuori, 2002; Toivanen, 2002; Rusanen, 2002; Heikkinen, 2002; Laakso, 2004). Toivanen (2012, 2015) and Heikkinen (2005, 14–25) define drama education in the school system to mean all forms of theatre; performing theatre, participatory theatre and applied theatre put into practice in the learning environment. The division into different theatre genres is based on the definition of the roles of the participants and the viewers that arise from the origin or the presentation process. Performing theatre (e.g. school theatre) has traditionally been split between performers and audience. The viewers are the recipients of the actions. In applied theatre (e.g. forum theatre)

the artists involve the audience, whereas in participatory theatre (e.g. classroom drama, process drama) the border between the performers and the audience is partly or completely obliterated. The active involvement of the participants in the drama process is essential in participatory and applied drama. All forms of theatre in the field of education are called genres or, in other words, forms of activities.

The triangle model of drama in education (classroom drama) is based on combining the learning power of fictional situations and stories (what if) that enable students as participants to take on characters (presentation) in situations and stories “as if” they were real. Using drama techniques and roles turn the fictional “what if” situations and stories into a living “as if” experience for the pupils. At the centre of drama is the use of our natural capacity to imagine ourselves differently. This imagining begins from “what if”: imagining ourselves in different times, places and roles. Real-life situations and stories give us the “what if” needed for imaginative drama work to begin. They provide us with a context and with characters and problems that need to be resolved or understood. Presentation with drama techniques moves us quickly to “as if” behaviour, as if we were in a different time, place and role (Bolton, 1998, 262–265; 277; Cooper, 2010, 17–18). Being in roles enables pupils to safely try out and experience what it might feel like to speak and act as someone else. The power of drama comes from the aesthetic doubling, i.e., the possibility to pretend to be someone else. Drama offers an active dimension for learning about “as if” real-life situations in education. By taking the roles of characters in situations and stories, students are able to behave as if they were inside the situation, facing the same experiences and problems as the characters. Because there is no external audience, drama lets pupils safely play and share issues and past or future experiences that are

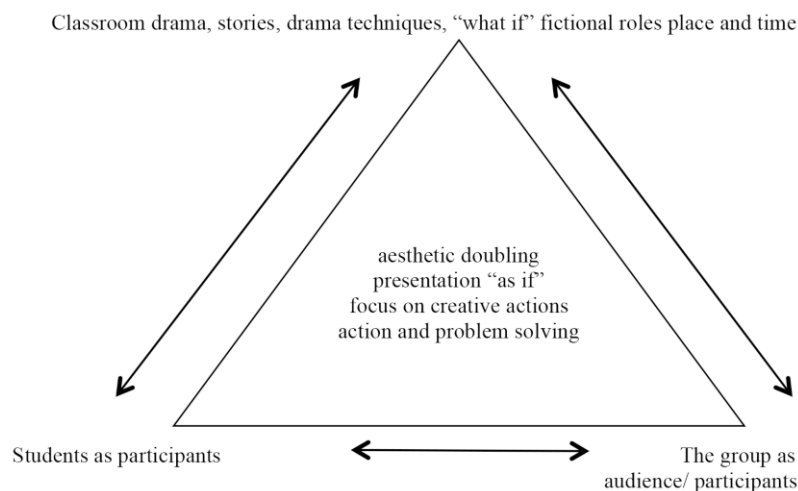


Figure 1. The triangle model of drama in education (Toivanen, 2012; Toivanen, 2015)

disturbing or exciting to them in real life, rehearsing and resolving them with the group (participants).

Drama represents the concepts of experiential and socio-constructive learning. The purpose of drama in education is to create an interactive and positive learning environment in which the participants' construction of knowledge and learning takes place through functional and interactive social relationships. This is important because although Finland has been placed at the top of the PISA rankings, Finnish results from measures concerned with thriving in school have been at the low end of the scale (Konu, Lintonen, & Rimpelä, 2002; Konu & Lintonen, 2005). By alternately acting in a role and as themselves, the learners acquire operating experiences and create new knowledge of the phenomena that are being reviewed (Kolb, 1984). The idea of socio-constructive learning is that learners are self-guided in fictitious symbolic interactions that reflect on the phenomena internally and externally (Kauppila, 2007; Rasmussen, 2010). The learner perceives the phenomena first-hand but strengthens what is being learned through social interaction. In social interaction the learners can outsource their own thinking and reflect on it with the other group members. The concept of socio-constructive learning stresses the development of identity and the perception of the values of the goals. A long-term goal in drama education is to help learners understand themselves, others and the world in which they live. Regardless of the approach, artistic learning in drama education should be emphasized because it offers opportunities for learners to create their own drama representations. This implies that the different forms, methods and conventions of drama should be taught widely and in various ways to enable learners to interpret the reality of meanings (Bowell & Heap, 2001; Heikkinen, 2002, 2005; Joronen, Konu, Rankin, & Åstedt-Kurki, 2011; Joronen et al., 2008; Laakso, 2004).

PRESENT: DRAMA EDUCATION IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Drama education is already part of class teacher education in Finland. The extent of drama studies varies in different universities from basic studies (1–5 credit points) to minor subject studies, which are worth 25 credit points. The goal of the drama educational process in teacher education is mainly to develop skills in drama methods, but also includes the ideas of developing teacher-pupil interaction skills, the ability to be present in the dialogue, and the ability to listen to the group (see Kara & Cam, 2007; Dickinson & Neelands, 2008; Toivanen, Komulainen, & Ruismäki, 2011; Toivanen & Kaasinen, 2013). Drama skills cover a wide range of drama techniques incorporating physical movement, vocal action, and mental concentration. The goals of drama as teaching methods in teacher education can be seen as (Toivanen, Komulainen, & Ruismäki, 2011):

To increase awareness of the teacher student's self (mind, body and voice) and others (collaboration and empathy);

To increase the interaction skills of teacher students; to improve clarity and creativity in the communication of verbal and nonverbal ideas;

To increase the understanding of human behaviour, motivation and diversity in educational situations.

The purpose of drama in class teacher education is to develop the skills needed to teach drama as part of the mother tongue subject and as a teaching method in other subjects in order to improve the quality of learning. Drama is also used to extend the worldview of the student teachers and deal with difficult educational situations in a safe environment while analysing them together (see *Bowell & Heap, 2010; Dickinson & Neelands, 2006; Colantonio, Kontos, Gilbert, Rossiter, Gray, & Keightley, 2008*). Student teachers gain experience in various roles (teachers, parents, pupils etc.) that explore human tensions and conflicts using drama conventions and techniques. Drama has both an emotional and intellectual impact on the participants. It holds up a mirror for us to examine ourselves and deepens our understanding of human motivation and behaviour. It broadens our perspective through stories that portray life from different points of view (*Laakso, 2004; Howard-Jones, Winfield, & Crimmins, 2008, 187–200*). By training creative teaching skills with drama in teacher education, student teachers get new experiences and through them they can reshape their mental pictures and representations of teaching reality. In their study, *Howard-Jones et al. (2008, 199–200)* highlighted that even a short drama intervention helps trainee teachers show progression in their attention to and understanding of creative cognition in the classroom.

The research project “Challenge of the empty space” at Helsinki University’s Teacher Education Department, has established that the potential complexity and diversity of creative processes in drama is a challenge for teachers and as well for teacher education (*Toivanen, Rantala, & Ruismäki, 2009; Toivanen, Antikainen, & Ruismäki, 2012; Toivanen, Mikkola, & Ruismäki, 2012*). The aim of the research project was to develop a theoretical background for drama teaching didactics and to create a teacher education programme for drama teachers’ holistic interaction skills. In most other school subjects, pupils’ working, movements and interactions in classrooms are controlled. The teacher controls the pupils’ behaviour by the layout of desks, teaching materials and scripted teaching methods (*Sawyer, 2004*). Movement around the classroom is restricted by the teacher’s instructions. In contrast, classroom drama teaching usually starts with moving the desks aside. Working in drama takes place in open spaces. In the open space, fiction, drama techniques, pupils’ and the teacher’s actions are the basic materials for the drama lesson. A teacher using drama needs to be able to manage time, space and bodies and to do so in both the social dimension of the classroom (pedagogic) and the aesthetic (subject knowledge, didactic) dimension of the drama art form (*Wales, 2009; Dickinson & Neelands, 2006, 35–41; Stinson, 2009*). As *Kansanen and Meri (1999, 107–116)* have claimed, a skillful teacher operates on two levels, the didactic and the pedagogic. The didactic level is the teacher’s relationship with the subject, and the pedagogical level is the teacher’s relationship with the pupils. The meaningfulness of education and work enjoyment is based on the mastery of both levels of education.

The triangle model, which describes drama teaching (Figure 2), is based on Kansanen's triangle model of education in such a way that it takes into account the specific nature of drama education and its working in two realities. Drama teaching (Figure 2) includes both the didactic and pedagogical levels of education. The didactic level (1) includes pre-interaction (planning learning objectives, selecting teaching content and methods). The didactic level (2) of education is connected to teachers' decision making in the teaching-studying-learning process interaction (making pedagogical decisions in action, managing fictional time, space, aids etc.) and post-interaction (reflection). At the pedagogical level, teachers need to be able to manage individual pupils and groups of students in the social dimension of education.

Toivanen, Antikainen and Ruismäki (2012) identified and explained some teaching factors that determine the success or failure of drama lessons. The main reasons teachers named for the failure of drama lessons were due the teachers' actions, e.g., being too strict in following a prior lesson plan, a lack of pedagogical courage to improvise, failure in classroom management, or a lack of presence in educational situations. The other reasons for failure were group structural factors (the engagement of the pupils, the atmosphere, norms and group size) and external factors such as a small classroom space or a lack of time. The most important variables involved the teachers' actions. The results indicate that teachers should acquire the capacity to understand the creative nature of drama teaching in order to use drama more effectively. An ability to react to educational situations only gradually develops into a quick intuitive operation (Gladwell, 2006, 133–135). Intuitiveness is one aspect of creative teaching. A beginning teacher needs routines, but he or

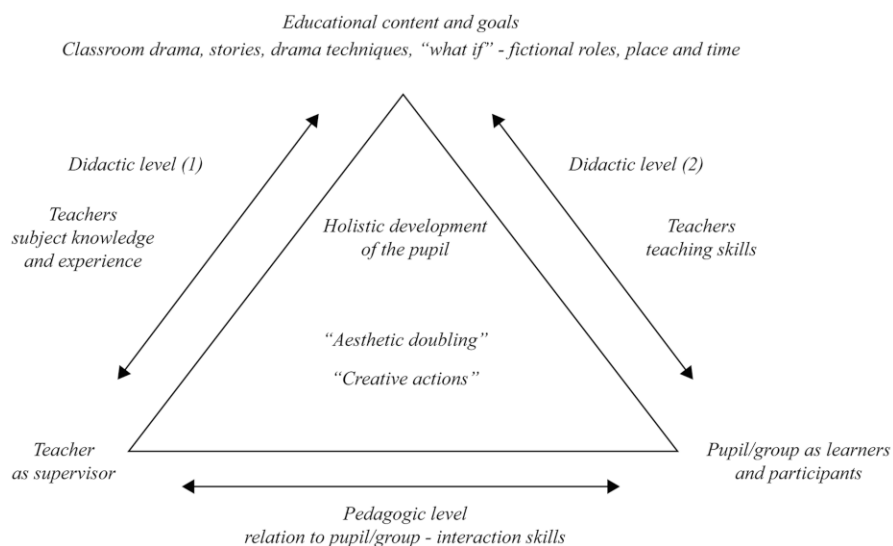


Figure 2. The triangle model of drama teaching

she also needs the ability to flexibly apply them (Sawyer, 2004, 18). Teachers using drama in education especially need the ability to move away from structured routines and lead disciplined improvisation sessions in educational situations. “Disciplined” refers to the aspects of the teaching and learning activity that are more or less fixed, and “improvisation” refers to identifying what aspects can be more or less fluid (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2011, 96). The disciplined parts of teachers’ work happen mainly in pre-pedagogical interactions (planning goals, selecting lesson structures and teaching methods, materials and activities) and improvisation is part of pedagogical interaction (the ability to be flexible with instructions, directions, lesson structure and teaching methods in a teaching situation and supporting pupils’ ownership in learning). Becoming a teacher who can use drama in education requires skills and subject knowledge of drama and group dynamics and the ability to deal with disciplined improvisation in the teaching-studying-learning process. This means the ability to make pedagogical decisions for action concerned with managing fictional time, space, aids etc. Teachers who use drama also need to be able to manage time, space and bodies in an open room and to do so both in the social dimension of the classroom and in the aesthetic dimension of the art form (Neelands, 2009, 41–42). They have to deal with recognition and facilitation at the same time.

FUTURE: CHALLENGES OF FINNISH SCHOOL SYSTEM AND DRAMA EDUCATION

The new Finnish national curriculum that will be introduced in August 2016 underlines interaction, collaboration and students’ active role in learning (The Finnish National Board of Education, 2014). Drama in the new National Core curriculum for Basic Education (2014) is placed within the subject “mother-tongue and literature”, but has also been named as a teaching method in many other subjects (e.g. history, natural sciences, handicraft and religion). Mother tongue is defined as a multidisciplinary skills, knowledge and cultural subject, which is divided into sub-areas; the ability to work in interactional situations, the ability to construct and create multimodal texts and the ability to understand language, literature and culture. The task of drama in the mother tongue subject is to confirm the subject’s functional, experiential and aesthetic character. Drama objectives and core contents are included in the sub-area of the ability to work in interactional situations. The interaction section involves the teaching of linguistic and physical expression skills with the help of discussion, narration, play, drama, improvisation and theatre. Although the objectives are still mainly focused on interaction skills, for the first time the description and objectives of the core contents of drama education in the curriculum have been formulated more precisely. So in the future every pupil in a Finnish comprehensive school should be able to work with games, drama strategies (freeze-frames, teacher in role etc.) and theatre based rehearsals to devise short pieces of fictional situations with fictional roles, times and spaces during their schooling. Drama should help pupils to express themselves and communicate their

understanding in more aesthetic and creative ways to themselves and their fellow participants (Rasmussen, 2010; Neelands & Goode, 2000; Neelands, 2009).

Comprehensive school is the place where pupils in all social classes and cultural backgrounds meet and work together. Increasing multiculturalism, digitalisation and socioeconomic differences produce segregation in societies. This is also reflected in schools and will pose challenges for the Finnish school system in the future. Teachers must be aware of the fact that their pupils may be at very different phases of their learning processes. This may also affect children and young people's well-being in schools. Schooling which is too goal oriented can lead to exhaustion in schools, cynicism toward the meaning of school and produce a sense of inadequacy in the pupils (Rimpelä, Fröjd, & Peltonen, 2010; Salmela-Aro, Kiuru, Leskinen, & Nurmi, 2009). Drama as an art subject and teaching method is one answer to the challenges of the postmodern school. Using drama can create a positive climate that can be used to shape groups in school classes' emerging structural factors as well as the social competence and social wellbeing of the group members (see Junttila, 2010; Toivanen & Pyykkö, 2012), thereby helping group members to feel secure and enable school classes to perform their basic tasks better. The structural factors of a group, i.e., its norms, roles, statuses, communication in the group and group cohesion, are phenomena that occur in the interactions between the group members and affect those interactions (Pennington, Gillen, & Hill, 1999, 358; Toivanen & Pyykkö, 2012). The structural factors are closely related to the components of social relationships and self-fulfilment, the learning environment, leadership, student-teacher relationships, group action, the opportunity to develop self-esteem and the chance to make a difference, which were defined in a school well-being study by Konu (2010, 15–18).

Several studies (e.g. Cooper, 2010, Catterall, 2009; Wright, 2006; Laakso, 2004; Toivanen, 2002; Rusanen, 2002; Gallaher, 2001) have indicated that using different forms of drama education can affect the development of an individual's social competence and also the development of groups. These researches confirm that the use of drama as an art subject and educational method in educational processes develops personal and social skills, as well as self-concept, self-discrepancy and role-taking ability. Pupils who had participated in drama education have been found to feel more confident about their communication skills and are more likely to feel that they are creative. These pupils enjoy school activities more and are much more willing to participate in them, and are better at problem solving and coping with stress. They are also significantly more tolerant towards other people. They are more empathic; more concerned about others and are more able to change their perspective. In drama sessions, the group and teacher collaborate together to determine whether to accept a proposal, how to weave that proposal into the drama process that has already been established, and then how to further elaborate on it. Drama education is based on negotiation and dialogue with a class, which can stimulate creativity and enjoyment in educational processes for both teachers

and students (see Dickinson & Neelands, 2006, 1–2; Howard-Jones, Winfield, & Crimmins, 2008). The main objectives for drama as a part of the Finnish school system is to develop social welfare, encourage, promote and develop student creativity skills so that they can express themselves and their thoughts through drama and theatre and to be able to interact constructively with different people and groups. Drama can in many ways help tackle the future educational challenges that Finnish teacher education and its school system will face. When the next generations of teachers develop the capacity to teach and understand drama in teacher education, it could also be used most effectively as a methodology for the exploration of issues and the teaching of all subjects and cross-curriculum themes, which can be used to develop pupils holistically. Drama deserves its place in the new Finnish National Core Curriculum.

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T. TOIVANEN

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