

## **Creative drama in both school and after-school musical education**

### **Abstract**

The author exposes theoretical substantiation as well as practical utilization of new integrative musical-dramatic activities which have become a part of the latest textbooks and methodical handbooks of musical education in Slovak elementary schools. He brings forth basic information on the method of creative drama as well as its application in both school and after-school musical education.

*Key words:* creative drama, interpretation, socialization, musical activities, musical-dramatic activities, communication, theatricalization, experience learning, conflict, tension, cooperation, poly-esthetic formation, moral education, creativity, children's theatre

### **1. Creative drama - basic expressions**

The idea to utilize elements of theatre in educational processes is not a new one. Its present renaissance primarily draws from medieval closed theatre; however, it first relates to Jan Amos Komensky's (Comenius) efforts. During his stay in Hungarian city of Saros Patak, he worked out his book *Orbis pictus* in a dramatic way and, under the name Schola ludus, he stage-managed it with local students. Komensky's goal was not to picture a dramatic conflict but to dialogize curriculum. However, linkage to American pragmatic pedagogy is more significant. Coming out of these ideas, Winifred Ward worded basic goals of the method called Drama in Education in her book *Playmaking with Children* from 1947 as follows:

- any child should be given a chance for controlled vent of emotions;
- children should be given possibility for self-realization;
- children should have chance to independently think expressing their thoughts without fear;

- they should experience various models of behavior and relationships in model situations that exclude risks of real life.

Brian Way (1996) enriched these goals especially by the use of experience learning. Eva Machková (1980) tried to define this method; she also suggested its name - "dramatic education" (while the term "creative drama" is preferred today). She especially emphasized wholeness development of child's personality, a possibility to both practically and exemplarily embrace social roles, means of communication, models of human interaction, group dynamics.

Creative drama also relates to personalistic theories of education, for instance by its emphasizing non-directive education, experience, authenticity of both pupil and teacher, of new quality of their attitude when teacher is "the first among the equal" (Lat: *primus inter pares*). Creative drama and open pedagogy are bound together through conviction that people (and therefore children too) are unique beings, feelings are equally important as knowledge and the prerequisite of personality development is freedom. Naturally, creative drama is mainly linked to theatre. There is, however, one basic difference: theatre points outwards - to a spectator; creative drama is directed to a playing subject, e.g. to a child, which takes shifts through the play progress; it socializes itself. Formcreative goals (*mise-en-scene*) are most important for theatre; formative (educational) goals are most important for creative drama (dramatic play). In theatre, all serves the goal (spectators as well as critiques success); in creative drama, both process and outcome, both goal and the way to it, are equally important.

... Content and goals of creative drama

Two basic circles form the content of creative drama:

- a) human being and his attitude to environment:
  - a child discovers its inner sources, develops and tries to control them;
  - it learns to become sensitive to others, it discloses environment;
  - it enriches both itself and others through group interaction;
- b) dramatic art:
  - it gets acquainted with drama structure through own experiences;
  - it learns the meaning of word, gesture, visual aids as well as music when creating a complex picture of reflected reality taking part in its creation;
  - it tries out various behavior models as well as social status while playing roles.

The goal of creative drama can be derived from its content; it should be human being:

- well informed in him/herself as well as in the world;
- competent, actively and responsibly using his/her abilities;

- able for self-development and adaptation, resilient in changes;
- conscious of his/her possibilities and limits.

### 1.2. Basic principles of creative drama

Improvisation - a performance not prepared in advance. It emerges from an *ad hoc* idea; it is a reaction to unexpected impetuses that remodels practical life. It is a play without scenario, not bound to a written text, therefore children in all age categories can master it. It excludes audience and, especially in its initial phases, it does not permit critique and evaluation of ideas. During improvisation, children

- discover themselves, their ability; they get rid of their uncertainty and stage fright;
- they examine various ways of mutual communication;
- they learn to perceive feelings of others, understanding as well as tolerating them;
- they get new pieces of knowledge through nursing, not through memorization;
- they feel joy over experimenting with objects, stories, own body, voice, melody while realizing their uniqueness as well as value.

Interpretation - a meaning explanation of the content of text, of action or of musical piece as well as of research results or of different ambiguous activities. It supports divergent thinking because it allows variety of equal solutions. It may be put together with improvisation - if it precedes improvisation, this is about a directed process in which we operate in a certain framework of rules, style, character, art technique, tone-space. If it follows improvisation, it may verify previous improvisations. During interpretation,

- children find various possibilities to explain reality expressed in either literary model, or in an art work, or in a song, or in a musical composition;
- they find parallels between both experienced and mediated information trying to grasp them on basis of their experiences and convictions;
- they perceive art as a possible interpretation of their own personality;
- they learn how to defend their convictions while respecting others.

### 1.3. Creative drama in a system of education

Creative drama belongs to esthetic-educational subjects, and it is closely linked to dramatic art. It borrows procedures typical for theatre from it: it works with interpersonal attitudes and situations through which they exhibit

together with "reincarnate" into different roles, it makes use of conflict situations integrating also other Muses like literature, motion, music, visual art, but it also works with esthetic views. Neither art nor creative drama relies on rational knowledge only; they also use subconscious and intuition. Dramatic education can exist as a separate subject (especially in England); in that instance it integrates our traditional subject such as musical and art education which then becomes to function as its both chill-out and motivational addendum. We can see in this fact one of the reasons of insufficient application of this method in musical art mainly. More frequently, we find creative drama as a cross curricular method, as a medium enabling integration of art subjects in dramatic story in particular. During results presentation for public (children's theatre, production), creative drama overlaps into after-school education. Here a danger arises: theatre criteria will be given precedence to educational ones while creative work will transform into a tiring one which tends to fulfill the directorial ambitions of the stage group leader.

An environment of traditional class does not help creative drama since it reflects teacher's dominant position. When considering modification of such little motivating milieu, the following principles are recommended:

- a smaller room that gives a better voice contact and it also gives intimacy as well as it supports inner assurance to children of young school age in particular. Inadequate is either a dining room, or a gymnasium, or a traditional theatre hall with an "opera glasses" stage;
- necessity of privacy, no observers;
- to remove desks (those can be utilized in a different context: the space under them, in them, over them, creating various groupings, corners ... ); - a carpet is inevitable for at least a part of the floor;
- a possibility to shade as a presupposition for creation of imaginative world, and of releasing fantasy;
- accessibility of musical instruments, puppets, masks, fabrics, paints, brushes, papers, inspirational images;
- a circle arrangement (respecting limits, of course, for example while singing).

Creative drama naturally lays its specific requirements upon the teacher who is the decisive factor in every educational system. Here we cannot hide ourselves neither behind the authority of classification nor knowledge nor age superiority. A teacher continually builds his authority through a creative confrontation with pupils. His strength can be found in arguments, not the arguments in strength. If he is to lead towards creativity, he himself must be creative, but his ideas must not limit the children. Besides teaching competences, the theatre-related competences are required: mastering speech technique (in music, playing an instrument), an ability to improvise, creative reaction to impulses,

the use of non-verbal communication as well as motion, an ability to "theatrically" think, to perceive latent conflicts, to choose an appropriate artwork for his group (class) or to direct their interest upon really good dramatic literature.

Creative drama brings a complex of the following principles into the educational process:

1. Theatralization - an exercise of some theatre elements such as dialogization, playing of situations and roles in them, working with various kinds of requisites (real, substitutionary, imaginary), public presentation of work results what requires creation of certain dramatic forms. All that is not theatre because the goal is not to create a preventative piece; the goal is to influence a child as well as a group.

2. Preferring an experience - it is a creation of such a pedagogic situation in which certain activity becomes to be an inner need and inevitability. Literature, picture or music is a means of communication. In its first plan there is feeling, experience, nurturing, rationalization while cognitive goals are hidden, they appear as though unwittingly. The teacher has not a function of an almighty mover, a center of events, and a matrix to be copied; rather he stimulates, facilitates, together with children he looks for as well as he ranks ideas.

An experience is authentic, often complex; it simultaneously gives various kinds of sensual associations. Participants are lonely in their feelings even during mutual experiences in a group since an experience is not transferable and, quite often, it cannot be satisfactorily expressed. A dramatic play works with an awareness of such risk, it gives the children an opportunity to understand their originality without hiding it. In a traditional school, however, originality, difference, dissimilarity is the source of ignorance as well as bullying.

3. Conflict ... a ground of drama, an initiator of action, a catalyst of thoughts. In every dramatic action there is a tension, a thrill, coming out of the relations among the play participants, out of the need to decide even when knowing the lack or ambiguity of information - that in fact is a real life simulation. Such a tension as well as consequent conflict does not exist in a traditional school; information is unambiguous (proved as well as approved), solutions are advanced through a teacher even if they are uncovered by pupils themselves, it always is in accord with a textbook. To say it with Kasikova: "Tension is the third dimension; it is what drama really is about - not a story but a promontory edge. Teacher's task is to bring children to this edge and to leave them there: they must wrestle to find way to safety" (K a s i k o v a, 1995, p. 27). In order that tension creates dramatic effect, it must be alternated by its counterpart - by relax. It points to another aspect - rhythm as a part of conflict. It is a bearer of dramaticness, polarity, unrest, but it also is a ground of security sense as well as trust in a group.

We therefore count with opinion conflicts in creative drama, a teacher even supports them and he himself initiates them. At the same time, he builds in children an ability to respect different opinions, to be both assertive and emphatic at the same time.

4. Multidimensional character of a product - theatre is a synergy of various media, what then transfers into educational process where there acoustic, visual, tactual, olfactory and gustatory stimuli mutually act together with both verbal and non-verbal communication as well as "language" of intonations, emphases, breaks. A complex experience penetrating deep into subconscious of participants is created.

5. Team character of work - theatre is a team work and the result is dependent on mutual cooperation, respect and trust of all those taking part. In creative drama, an influence of so called "better" pupils (of those faster reacting and better remembering) is eliminated and individuals with wild fantasy as well as those manually skilled find their place.

Let us try to conclude by a recapitulation:

Dramatic education (creative drama, Drama in Education) is a summary of various exercises and expressions in which children play fictive roles in dramatic plays through improvisation and interpretations; in them they test various life situations without consequences. They experience sort of another life; they enter into a different reality. That is why creative drama is directed inwards a group (an individual) and it basically is not aimed for public display;

- they examine various ways of mutual communication, they learn to empathy;
- they gain self-confidence because their pedagogue does not try to change them to his own picture but he develops them as whole original beings;
- they get new information in such a way that they experience them and feel at once as important for life.

Creative drama brings into the educational process specific features from the area of theatre in particular. It does not give way to talented children only as it finds activities to develop each one's skills.

## **2. Musical-dramatic activities**

### **2.1. Musical activities traditionally understood**

Musical didactics, out of which Slovak textbooks and teaching method of musical education come out, divides musical activities as vocal-intonational, musical-motoric, instrumental and perceptual. Other grouping takes in the musical expressions of children; it divides activities as reproductive and productive. Besides, musical knowledge is a part of musical education, understood

as basics of musical literacy. Such grouping reflects the principles of activity-oriented musical education which brought mighty impulses in the 70s, but it nevertheless represented traditional understanding of school based on encyclopedic knowledge and on centralism of teaching schedules and plans emphasizing rationality. Present trends point to a complex personality development, to plurality, cooperation, subjects' integration emphasizing experience and processuality. These challenges cannot be fully answered in frame of today's musical activities; they lack activities that would integrate all others in themselves and moreover, they would be open for impulses from other, especially esthetic-educational subjects. From among arts, such an integrative ability has mainly theatre and that is why we considered it logical to introduce procedures of creative drama into musical education being a dramatic activity.

These are activities in which musical and verbal expressions are integrated, together with art and motoric expressions in ethical education intentions through creative drama and experience learning. They therefore are a superstructure, a synthesis, an opportunity to again unite what used to be homogenous in children's world, even with no respect to lessons taught.

Divergent tasks are preferred in musical-dramatic activities; their solutions children produce in partner cooperation with the teacher based on improvisation. Musical activities do not pursue musical-educational goals only; they are a part of dramatic story in which children play their roles and the means of communication becomes to be music. They often have a character of projects overlapping boundaries of a teaching unit, but, in case of a musical theatre, the boundaries of a school class too, so becoming to be a connective element between school and after-school musical education.

## 2.2. Musical-dramatic forms of activities

Even though we support the opinion counting it impossible to determine exact boundaries between musical activities, we nevertheless give a few criteria for musical-dramatic activities to fulfill:

a) inspiration by theatre: it means that music becomes here a part of a more complex entity, a performer (a group) creates certain character through music entering into certain relations with others what means communication through music;

b) elements of creativity: creativity and its development is an immanent part of these activities, not facultative as it is in a traditional school;

c) their result is music in any form, possibly in connection with word, picture, motion ... No cloze, no crossword, and no knowledge quiz;

d) music is a subject of a dramatic processing; through a change of its ex-

pressive means its effects change. We do not deal with a musical illustration, embellishment of action - on the contrary, music reacts to dramatic situation or it creates that.

Forms of use of these activities reach from the exercise over etudes, roles' and dramatic plays to projects and musical theatre.

### 2.3. The content of musical-dramatic activities

In musical education, these activities are closely linked to creativity development. The aim of creative choir activities is to develop and fix intonation education; it is an improvisation in a limited tone space (mode), but it also is a rhythm improvisation, rhythm "conversations": each time, of course, in a given story frame. In instrumental activities, improvisation based on feelings comes first together with utilization of modality, bitonality, aleatorics, tone clusters, later modes are used, sound and "dramatic" attributes of intervals, timbral similarity and difference of instruments. The highest classes can take on improvisation in a given mode or on a harmonic motif. In the area of perception, we look for music to literature or graphic arts; we simulate musical producers as well as we try connection of music and motion, through scenic action in integral units.

#### 1<sup>st</sup> grade

Creation of own area - tone space - for improvisation. Songs on two tones. Playing an echo: similarity and identicalness. Change of expression and tempo as a means to characterize the story. Musical instruments are dramatic figures. Musical expression of a contrast in the story.

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> grade

Improvisation in three-tone space. Scenery on three tones. Connectedness of tempo and content. Creation of space through music. Sound characteristics of figures. Various interpretations of a song and its consequences. A simple story with an integration of both vocal and instrumental improvisation, of playing the echo, of a question and answer. An attempt to reach scenic solution.

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> grade

Improvisation in an area of four (five) tones. Shifting of the motif, music characteristic. Playing a lost melody. Intuitive adding of melody according to harmonic source. Change of metric structure (even - odd). Stories on fairy-tales figures from the textbook (Mopkovia). Rhythm as a means of characterization. A simple story to use the play for the lost melody. Integration of dramatic verse text, music and motion.



4<sup>th</sup> grade

Improvisation in six-tone space. Change of key - a means to characterization in connection with changes of tempo and rhythm. Song instrumental support. A song as a means to characterize a figure. Music as an initiator of action. Music dramatization of a simple story from an animal life. Integration of music and motion, space and art solution.

5<sup>th</sup> grade

Development of skills gained in previous grades. Harmony in a dramatic function. Making use of folk songs and ballads in a drama meaning. Musical-dramatic interpretation of the music heard. Musical dramatization of a fantasy folk fairy-tail while using functional interpretation of folk songs.

6<sup>th</sup> grade

Musical interpretation of a dialogue. Instrumentation as a means of musical characteristics. Musical-dramatic participation on motif (Ravel: *A child and magic*). Musical-dramatic adaptation of either a folk or artificial fairy tail. Utilization of various functions of music for presentation. Story enhancing through music. Music expression through graphic and picture-like means.

7<sup>th</sup> grade

Music expression by motion. Musical-motivic story. Selection of suitable music for a literary text. Painted music - resounding picture. Musical-dramatic expression of literary motif with an expressive message (H.Ch. Andersen, O. Wilde, S. Exupery). Author's formation of musical staff. Publicity and presentation of either own music or loan music.

8<sup>th</sup> grade

Creation of scenic music on selected motifs. Musical-dramatic projects. (Musorgskij: *Pictures from an exhibition*, Botto: *A yellow lily ...* ). Setting a text to music (a monolog, dialogue) as a part of musical-dramatic piece. Musical-dramatic interpretation of appropriate compositions (Korsakov, Musorgskij, Debussy, Ravel.). Musical-dramatic composition and story making up with distinctive ethical message and its actualization (U. Löffgen: *Harlequin*). Publicity of work results.

9<sup>th</sup> grade

Musical-dramatic projects (Gershwin, Paris, Jazz, spirituals ... ). Complex musical-dramatic composition of a story using various musical styles and genres (Biblical story about Lazarus ). Author's modification of a story. Participation

on musical part using improvisation. Utilization of various functions of music in *mise en scene*. Attempts to set more demanding dialogues to music.

Ali mentioned requirements are necessary to be understood as general.

They are no standards whose fulfilling somebody monitors. The fulfillment of content is determined by cooperation of teacher and group while we consider process to be the primary. In no case we present sort of obligatory practicing of musical theatre and its public presentation. We at the same time presume that a creative teacher together with children will seek for new themes to be worked on. Creative drama (in musical education as well) is to help children be well informed in their own problems - and those are individual.

#### 2.4. Creative drama in after-school musical education

Despite all possibilities and motivation, creative drama in school is limited by a teaching lesson. Especially during more demanding musical-dramatic pieces and projects there arises a real danger for a teacher that he shortens or omits initial phase aiming to reach the final result because there is not enough time to sort and evaluate children's ideas. Children are not able to quickly adapt for a different style of work (especially when other lessons are taught traditionally), they are not relaxed and sufficiently motivated. It results in a low production of ideas, the so-called better pupils are preferred again or ideas are simply given by teacher from "outside". Lastly, in the musical education textbooks any form of after-school activity is assumed, especially when we decide to work on a presentation. In musical theatre we see continuation and completion of school musical-dramatic activities. Such activity holds distinctively polyesthetic, integrative character because it compels children (a teacher as well) to answer questions:

What shall we play? - a selection of a text, its modifications; integration with literary education.

Why shall we play that? - our message, interpretation; integration with ethical education.

What room, costumes, masks in? - integration with graphic education. What sounds, what music do we need? - integration with musical education.

When the story took place, in which country, - integration with history, geography.

Who will make requisites? - integration with handicraft teaching. How shall we move? - integration with physical (motoric) education.

How to make use and "change" finished items? - a development of fantasy, imagination.

## Conclusion

These considerations, besides others, open the problem of training future teachers. Unless every future teacher (but also practicing teachers through either postgraduate or specialized study) completes such or similar training in creative drama, unless its methods each one actively tastes, we remain only on a theoretical level at faculties of pedagogy and teaching will not become an exciting experience for teachers (and also for pupils), discovering, but it will remain a difficult, boring (and poorly paid) job.

Our long-time experiences with the application of creative drama in musical education give us the right to claim that this method leads children (and teachers as well) to an enhanced activity, it improves their communication abilities, it motivates to self-reliance, it develops divergent thinking, it strengthens self-confidence. In musical education, it motivates and develops creativity; it enables children to participate in small pieces composition as well as bigger ones and scenic music too. It is true that due to present system of educational portioning into precisely determinate lessons, we hit the time barriers. However, musical-dramatic activities create ground for integration of various subjects as well as for projects' creation. Yes, when using classical procedures we may do more, more songs, dances, heard pieces; but without creative participation of children, without their emotional response. Is it really most effective way to say:

A blind man is that one who does not see? Or in its ultimate meaning we see it is more effective, efficient and meaningful to prepare such conditions that a child may feel like a blind man, to put him/herself into his feelings in order to let him/her come alone to know what a blind man can be provided by someone who can see. To have a good sight does not always mean to see. Perhaps Antoine de Saint Exupéry is right:

"We can see best by heart only. The essential eyes cannot see."

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