Drama in Education as an Educational Tool for the Management of Cultural Diversity in Primary Schools

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Abstract

This paper is focused on the manner drama in education may be applied efficiently for the management of cultural inhomogeneity in the classroom and in groups of children. Research shows that this specific educational methodology has a positive contribution to the development of a wide range of skills of social-emotional development. In an era when cultural diversity in classrooms is more intense than ever, this article proposes theatre-pedagogy practices that establish a collaboration culture in the group and contribute to the acceptance and respect of different religious, national, linguistic and racial identities at school.

1. Introduction

Identity, given that it expresses every person's sense of who they are in relation to other people around them, is the basis for self-definition and self-control of a person (Howarth, 2011; Patsantaras & Kamberidou, 2007). Identity may be personal, when referring to personal characteristics differentiating a person from other persons, or collective (Goffman, 2001). Collective identity is a process under continuous and dynamic development and refers to the concept arising from the knowledge of someone's participation in a social collective. A form of social identities is cultural identity, which is connected to the sense of the person that it belongs in distinct racial, linguistic, religious and national-ethnic cultures (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Hall, Held, & McGrew, 1992). Although identity includes what is identical and similar, at the same time, it refers to what is distinct, different. In this view, it is intertwined with diversity (Dragona, 2007). Therefore, both cultural identity and cultural diversity are connected to social categories such as the nation, religion, language and race.

Drama in education is an educational tool with which children may explore both the complex structure of their collective identity and the way it is formed, through their interactions with the social-cultural origins of other participants (Riviere, 2005). It is an experiential educational methodology that uses exercises and techniques from drama for the children's cognitive, social, emotional development (Alkistis, 2008; Mavroudis & Bournelli, 2019). The experiential processes (Note 1), in drama in education form the context in which children are equally involved in the activities, feel emotions, express their opinions, develop their curiosity and explore their experiences. And through *reflection* they collectively explore (Note 2) the issues the group is dealing with (Triliva, Anagnostopoulou, & Hatzinikolaou, 2008). Through the experiences of interaction with the rest of the group, a child develops active listening, empathy, social skills, a critical stance towards life (Alkistis, 2008). In their effort to identify with a role, they attempt to become the *other,* feel what the *other* feels, come in contact with the view of the *other* for things (Ball, 2012; Neelands, 2002) participating at the same time in the real and the imaginary world of drama. In this situation of sharing*,* children are encouraged to become observers of themselves by experiencing the situation of the role on the one hand, while on the other they are emotionally distanced from this experience (Avdi & Chatzigeorgiou, 2007). As a result, drama in education makes learners better understand the world that surrounds them, confirm or challenge values and identities (Stinson, 2015) playing a positive role with regard to the promotion of the values of intercultural education related to empathy, solidarity, respect of a different culture (Papaioannou & Kondoyianni 2019).

2. Aim

This paper's purpose is to show the manner in which a drama in education may be structured aiming to the acceptance of social diversity between children at primary school. The study regards every person coming in contact with pupil population from different cultural backgrounds and who is interested to use theatre-pedagogical methodologies in order to establish in the classroom or their group a culture of cooperation and acceptance that facilitates learning. Cognitive, aesthetic, socio-emotional learning. For the purpose of writing this paper a collection of data and information took place from the recent Greek and international literature. It must be noted that good practices proposed are part of the programme applied by the researcher in the context of his PhD on the role of drama in education in the acceptance of cultural diversity. This paper attempts to transfer his tested experience in the effort of managing cultural inhomogeneity of a classroom or a group.

3. A Drama in Education Programme Aiming to the Acceptance of Cultural Otherness

During the setting up of programme based on drama in education aiming to the acceptance of different cultural identities, the developmental characteristics of the participants' age are initially taken into account. If the child cannot receive a specific exercise or skill, it will be ineffective, while early compelling may lead to a result contrary to the one pursued (Bournelli, 1998).

Main pursuit of such a programme should be to diminish stereotypical perceptions and prejudice of children for different cultural identities of their classmates, through closer

interpersonal contact. Research approaches have confirmed that close *contact* (Note 4) between different groups of people reduces stereotypes and prejudice impeding communication and it leads to more positive cross-community relationships (Everett, 2013). The nature of drama activities itself is the most suitable condition to develop collaboration, empathy, substantial acquaintance and communication (Mages, 2010) aiming in a targeted manner to *optimal* contact. In this view, it is proposed that the programme is structured by activities developing socio-emotional skills, such as the expression of emotions, cultivating collaboration, trust, creativity, imagination, rhythm, active listening and critical thinking, understanding of the view of other people, opportunities for physical expression, verbal interaction, cultivating speaking and writing. And furthermore, from activities cultivation self-perception and self-esteem of children, since their capacity to create relationships, to become accepted, and also accept others, is inextricably linked with the above manifestations of the sense of self (Makri-Botsari, 2001). However, structuring certain activities has to allow gradation both with regard the difficulty in its application and the extent of exposure of each child individually, from the first to the last meeting.

The manner the activities are hosted is important. As regards the teaching-hosting of activities it is proposed that the animator participates as a simple group member, since in this way collaboration and teamwork are promoted (Wessels, 1987). The animator should cultivate a substantial relationship with the group and the activities should have to the greatest possible extend, an atmosphere of happy playing. The hearty and spontaneous emotions we want to bring out to children, rarely coexists with a rigid, serious looking appearance. The animator should also be happy and enjoy the activities in order for the teaching goals to be achieved (Katsaras, 2005; Kouretzis, 2008).

In the next chapter 4 (four) specific good practices plans, 4 (four) intervention plans are included which based on drama in education aim to the acceptance of different linguistic, racial, national and religious identities. These interventions, of a duration of 90 minutes approximately each, regard children from 9 to 12 years old. The beginning and the end of each intervention finds the participants in circle. The creation of a circle facilitates visual contact and inspires a climate of mutual acceptance and respect. In fact, it empowers the personality and enhances self-esteem, since the circle allows children to express themselves freely and accept their own errors, without feeling that they are criticised (Triliva et al., 2008). The first activities of each intervention begin with the *activation* and *warming up* of the body. Usually, these are followed by certain activities that children do individually or in pairs, and following this the pupils are randomly divided in small groups, so that every time there is interaction with different members of the class, and then there is the preparation and finally the presentation of the central event. With its completion, the group gathers in a circle to discuss and reflect on the happenings of the meeting. The end activity aims mainly to release tension. The process of *reflection* is very important, because it cultivates critical thinking and it leads to conscious acting (Freire, 2001, 2004). As stressed by Dedouli (2002), it is important that after the activities pupils are given time and inspiration to think what they did, what difficulties they faced, what they learnt, how they felt, how they collaborated with others etc. The identification, the motivation of thought, knowledge and emotions helps

children to organise their experience. In a different case the whole attempt would seem to lack orientation and it shall be characterised by vagueness and sloppiness which can easily lead to disappointment and boredom.

4. Educational Practices Based on Drama in Education

INTERVENTION PLAN 1

CENTRAL PURPOSE: The children exercise on the acceptance of religious otherness. *SUBJECT:* Acceptance of religious otherness

A. GROUP ACTIVATION

- *1ˢᵗ activity, beginning*

Special goals: Group activation, development of listening perception, sense of space, creativity, motor expression. Creation of physical contact.

The group gathers in a circle. When you listen to the music, move in the room in any way you want, without coming into contact with other children. You can walk, run, jump, rotate or walk sideways. Every time the music stops, you go closer to the child that is closer to you and you touch in the most original way you may imagine: your feet... your knees... your palms... your elbows... your foreheads... your backs ... your shoulders.

- *2ⁿᵈ activity*

Special goals: Development of the sense of space, rhythmic ability, listening perception, motor expression, motor coordination. I will now play a rhythm on the tambourine. Listening to the rhythm you will move in the room, without coming into contact one with the other. When I play louder, you will touch with your shoulder the shoulder of the child that is closer to you. Tune yourself to the rhythm you are listening to and walk in pairs touching your shoulders. Now pairs will become groups of three. All three children in the group must walk in the room coordinated as if you were one person, touching your shoulders and without touching another group. In the same way you will form groups of four and then of five children. After that, you will form again groups of four, three, and then two children. In the end you will walk alone as in the beginning of the activity.

B. MAIN SUBJECT

- *3ʳᵈ activity: Random division into groups. Unfinished material* (Note 5)

Special goals: To develop collaboration, creativity, active listening. That the children recognise the discriminations due to religion and language and their consequences, and that they attempt to abolish it.

Now split into smaller groups. Each group must be one of the groups of five children that occurred in the previous game. I will hand out some photocopies, with a story which you will read and then dramatise. The story has no end. Each group after discussing, will have to decide the end it wants to give to the story and present it on the scene.

- *4ᵗʰ activity: Dramatisation in groups* (Note 6)

Special goals: Development of collaboration, active listening, self-esteem, creativity, imagination empathy. That the children reflect on fair treatment of other people and encouraged to take action.

The story you have to dramatise and give the end you want to is the following: *Two children came in your class and they believe in a different god than the one the rest of the class's children believe. These classmates of yours at times are absent from school in order to celebrate their own religious holidays. You don't like these children. Their holidays seem weird and you do not want them to speak about them. So, you decide to make fun of them so that they feel bad and never come back to school*. Which group is ready to come on the scene...

C. EVALUATION

- *Reflection – Discussion*

Let's sit now in a circle to discuss our today's activities. Were you able to coordinate, in order to walk together as one person? Why did you end your story in this manner? Have you ever felt that some people are annoyed due to the god you believe in? Have you seen something similar happening in our school? How did you react? Why do you think there are people that are annoyed in these cases? Which religious holidays of other religions do you know? What do we celebrate in Easter and Christmas? What do we celebrate in *Bayram, Ramadam* (muslim holidays) and what in *Ederlezi* (gypsy holiday, Saint-George's)? What customs are there in your own religion?

- *End activity*

Special goals: Development of interculturalism

Before we leave we are going to listen to *Ederlezi,* a traditional gypsy song, about the gypsy holiday, by Goran Bregovic. You can get up and dance and finish our meeting in this way.

INTERVENTION PLAN 2

CENTRAL PURPOSE: The children exercise on the acceptance of national otherness. That they develop empathy.   *SUBJECT:* Acceptance of national otherness.

A. GROUP ACTIVATION

- *1ˢᵗ activity, beginning*

Special goals: Development of listening perception, intercultural communication. That children understand that every people have their own way of greeting.

The whole group gathers in a circle. Greet the person next to you by shaking your hands and giving them two kisses on the cheeks. You can also ask them "How are you?". This is the most usual manner that people greet each other in Greece. When the music starts walk in the room, without touching each other and without speaking. When the music stops greet the

person that is next to you, in the way that people greet each other in different countries in the world (Petritis, 2004):

In Malaysia: Reach out with your hand and touch the other person's fingers. Bring your hands to your heart. This means: "I greet you from my heart" *In the Middle East:* Move your hand upwards, touching your heart, then your forehead and finally making a move outwards. Accompany this movement with the phrase "salaam alaikum", meaning "peace be upon you". *In Thailand:* You bring your hands in prayer pose and you bow slightly. The higher on your chest your hands are, the bigger the respect that you show. Do not bring your hands over your head. This is an insult. *Certain groups in Tibet:* Pull your tongue to the other person. *In Nepal:* You bring your hands in prayer pose and you bow to the person you meet saying: "Namaste"

In Turkey: Shaking hands with both hands or hug or kisses to both cheeks. *In Israel:* Handshake or hug, saying "shalom".

B. MAIN SUBJECT

- *2ⁿᵈ activity: Life story* (Note 7)

Special goals: That children exercise in what it feels to be someone else, to develop empathy.

Walk around the room. While you walk without talking and without coming into contact one with the other, you are gradually transformed into another person. Into a person that is originally from another country. Think about this person and bit by bit create their life story. What is their name, is it a boy or a girl, how old are they, where do they come from, what do they do, where do they live, what is their everyday life like and whatever else you can think about their personality.

3ʳᵈ activity: Interviews (Note 8)

Special goals: Develop speaking. That children exercise in what it feels to be someone else, to develop empathy.

Let's sit on the floor in a semicircle. Every child who wants to can come before us so that we interview it. We will ask questions to learn about its new self and it will answer all questions in the first person. According to how you are seated you take turns and ask what you want to learn. The activity ends when we have interviewed all the children that wanted to be interviewed.

- *4ᵗʰ activity: Random division into groups. Improvisation* (Note 9)

Special goals: Development of collaboration, creativity, self-motivation. That the children accept the national otherness of the children next to them.

Divide into four (4) groups, based on the way you are seated in the semicircle. Two (2) children seating on each end of the semicircle (=4) will make the first group. In this way the second and third group is created. The forth group will be comprised by the children seating

in the middle of the semicircle.

You are in a school attended by children from different countries. In your class also there are children from other places. During the lessons you communicate well with them and there are no problems. However, during the breaks, every child plays with children of its own country. Make a happening out of this situation. How can these different groups of children come closer one to the other, so that all the children play together? The first time the first (1) and third (3) group will be on the scene, in order to see how they are going to come into contact among them the members of the two groups and after that the second (2nd) and forth (4th) group will come on the scene.

C. EVALUATION

- *Reflection - Discussion*

Let's sit now in a circle to discuss our today's activities. How did you feel when you became someone else? Was it easy to speak about your new self? In which way did you come closer to the other group of children? Did you encounter any difficulties? Talk to the group for your thoughts and the feelings you felt.

- *End activity*

Special goals: Identity empowerment. Cultivation of interculturality.

At the end, each child, one at a time, passes from the centre of the circle and shout out their country of origin and the city where they were born. Each time the team repeats out loud.

INTERVENTION PLAN 3

CENTRAL PURPOSE: The children exercise on the acceptance of linguistic otherness of the other children.   *SUBJECT:* Development of intercultural communication through linguistic interaction.

A. GROUP ACTIVATION

- *1st activity, beginning*

Special goals: Activation of the body, creation of a pleasant ambience.

We gather in the centre of the room and we form a circle. Each child stretches as if it has just woken up. It tries to take as much space it can with its body.   Yawn, stretch your arms, do not forget your fingers, your legs, even your neck and jaw... Give your body this pleasure: Stretch your body in the way you stretch when you wake up. Say out loud: GOOD MORNING.

B. MAIN SUBJECT

- *2nd activity*

Special goals: Develop a sense of space perception, intercultural communication.

Now move around the room, in the rhythm of the music. Try to cover all the gaps in the space

with your presence. With my signal you will say good morning to every child you meet in your own language, a language that only you know.

- *3rd activity: Improvisation*

Special goals: Develop creativity, imagination, active listening, speaking. That children understand the function of language as a means of communication.

You continue walking in the room with the music. When the music stops, whoever I touch with my familiar wand speaks for a while in this language that each child has created, and no one else knows, which we call *gibberish*. Let's see, how can we use this language. Someone comes and tries to sell us a mobile phone, speaking gibberish. We too will answer in *gibberish*. There is another one, a tourist, that asks us in *gibberish*, where the museum is. Who will try to communicate? A little further there is a cook who is showing us a recipe in *gibberish*. After that there is another cook that has next to them a translator. The translator speaks in *gibberish* and the translator translates... A football coach also speaks in *gibberish*. He is angry because his team has lost. Next to him the translator tries to translate what he is saying.

- *4th activity: Dramatisation in groups. Random division into groups.*

Special goals: Develop collaboration, active listening, intercultural communication. That children understand the function of language as a means of communication. Communication through linguistic otherness.

After that you will divide on your own in four (4) groups, according to the children that are closer to you. Each group will sit in a circle in one of the four (4) corners of the room. With every child using the language it has created, create and present a short story of your own. During the presentation of your story on the scene, each child will speak its own language. Try to communicate although everybody speaks a different language...

C. EVALUATION

- *Reflection - Discussion*

Let's talk about the games we played today. Who wants to share with us their impressions and emotions? How was it for you that today we played with languages? How easy or difficult it was to communicate and collaborate on the scene? Did you understand what other children wanted to tell you? How can we understand other people when they speak in a different language than us? What do you take from this experience of communication in different languages?

- *End activity*

Special goals: Empowerment of the group, that intercultural communication is developed.

Before we end today each child will say goodbye with its favourite word from its made up language. We will all repeat together its word.

INTERVENTION PLAN 4

CENTRAL PURPOSE: The children exercise on the acceptance of racial otherness. That children develop empathy. *SUBJECT:* Acceptance of racial otherness.

A. GROUP ACTIVATION

- *1ˢᵗ activity, beginning*

Special goals: Introduction to the subject. To develop imagination, creativity, motor expression, non-verbal communication, self-motivation. All the children should gather in a circle to start our activities. When you listen to the music, move in the room walking and without coming into contact with other people. Every time the music stops you will transform in every animal you want. The animal into which you have transformed, moves in the room, greets other animals with its voice, and tries to communicate with the animals its meets.

B. MAIN SUBJECT

- *2ⁿᵈ activity*

Special goals: Development of collaboration, of non-verbal communication, self-esteem, creativity, listening perception, motor expression. After that I will give to each child a card which will inform it about the animal in which the child will be transformed. With my sign you will close your eyes, you will spread in the room and making the sound of your animal, you will meet with your pair. Then you can open your eyes. In the group there will be two children that will be transformed in the same animal. For example, there will be two wolves, two chicken, two owls, two dogs, two cats...

- *3ʳᵈ activity: Directed improvisation*

Special goals: To develop self-motivation, collaboration, physical expression, imagination, creativity. Following this the children will be transformed into horses... monkeys... lions... tigers... snakes... sheep moving in the room, without coming into physical contact between them.   The whole group now becomes a heard of beautiful white sheep. We are very happy in our field. We graze happily and cheerfully on the green grass, we play with each other, we laugh, drink clear water from the river that is nearby, we sleep together, one next to the other so that we are not cold under the stars. However, one day all this happy atmosphere seems to be on the verge of being ruined. And the reason is that two (2) black sheep have arrived in the field and want to join our heard. Some sheep do not mind, while other express their strong disagreement, because they do not like their colour. The heard holds a meeting to decide what it is going to do. I will be the chairman that coordinates the discussion.

- *4ᵗʰ activity: Meeting* (Note 10)*. Teacher in a role* (Note 11)

Special goals: To develop speech, empathy, critical thinking, self-esteem, active listening. That the children recognise and review stereotypes and prejudice and to explore issues of racial otherness focusing on colour. At this point you will divide in three (3) groups. Each child will be in a group with children it knows the less. The two (2) black sheep will be the same for all three (3) groups. Each group will present its meeting to the other children. You will think and formulate arguments about whether you must accept or not the new sheep in

your group, you will listen what the black sheep have to tell you and in the end you will decide what happens. Take into consideration that everybody has to speak and say their opinion. I will have the role of the secretary. The group that is ready can start...

C. EVALUATION

- *Reflection – Discussion*

Let's gather in our circle. How did you feel with the games we played? Who wants to talk? The black sheep can tell us how they felt. Have you ever felt in your life like a black sheep? What were the differences of these sheep to the other sheep and what did they have in common? Which were more the differences or their similarities? What were the reasons that some people did not want black sheep in the heard?

- *End Activity*

Special goals: Emotional expression, non-verbal communication.

However, before we finish, each child must express with only one word how it feels by making this emotion into a movement. We all repeat what each child does.

5. Conclusion

Methods and practices that promote equal interaction between pupils from different cultural environments may challenge stereotypes and prejudice contributing to the crucial acceptance of the *other* (Magos, 2013)*.* Of the *foreigner,* of the people *speaking a different language,* of those of *other faith.* Given that never before in the history of the world have there been so complex and intense questions about the management of different religious, national, linguistic and racial identities in the classrooms (Banks, 2011), educational programmes based on drama in education, are an effective practice that leads to mutual understanding and acceptance. They encourage children to interact equally, intellectually and emotionally with the *other*, to communicate their own ideas and view with the ones of the *others* so that they are able to live in harmony in a world characterised by every kind of otherness(Mavroudis & Kondoyianni, 2020; Nicholson, 2000).

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Notes

Note 1. Experiential learning supports the appropriation of knowledge through experience and also promotes personal development and awareness raising for the participants as regards relationship issues (Dedouli, 2002; Kolb, 1984; Ord, 2012)

Note 2. Fact, collective exploring and the group's role for the formulation of a personal opinion and stance of the person, is also highlighted by Vygotsky (2000), who agrees that

through social interactions a child is able to develop its socio-cognitive skills that it wouldn't be able to develop on its own.

Note 3. The contact hypothesis was first set out by Allport (1954), and it represents that prejudice is partially due to the lack of personal and positive contact, between the members of different groups (Levy & Hughes, 2009). According to Pettigrew & Tropp (2006) the cross-group contact has a dynamic to reduce prejudice to the greatest extend, when two groups are treated as equal, share the same responsibilities and tasks and are encouraged by the situation to come closer one to the other.

Note 4. Unfinished material: The animator presents the children with material that is not complete. For example, an extract from a letter or the beginning of a story. This technique encourage the participants to collect information, make assumptions, try them through drama and negotiate the meaning. In this way they feel that they are the ones creating the story (Avdi & Chatzigeorgiou, 2007).

Note 5. Dramatisation in groups: Dramatisation is a complex process of structured action that interprets a story. It has a beginning, a middle and an end, pronounced speech, as well as selected roles by the members of the group. In can be structured in various manners, split in scenes, have a narrator. The aim is to create a happening on a subject as well as the participants' multifaceted development (Alkistis, 2008).

Note 6. Life story: The child writes the life story of the role it plays. It must be detailed and include as many historical, social, ideological details. The child takes information from the text. If there is no text, then it is improvised (Govas, 2002).

Note 7. Interviews: The goal is to discover the face of the hero and to express opinions and beliefs that are not reflected in the story. The members of the group interview one or more heroes of the happening created by the group (Alkistis, 2008).

Note 8. Improvisation: Starting from an idea or subject, the group represents spontaneously a story or discusses it, prepares it without writing it and in the end it presents it. Improvisation may be free without any axis, it can follow as story without any text, it can be partly planned or directed (Alkistis, 2008).

Note 9. Meetings: The members of the group gather in order to be informed about something, to plan, find a solution, to make a decision. This technique gives the participants the opportunity to examine a subject from different aspects, while developing their speech and their critical thinking (Avdi & Chatzigeorgiou, 2007).

Note 10. Teacher in a role: The teacher participates actively in the happening and plays a role, so that they intervene without interrupting and they promote action. So they have the opportunity to add elements in the way, challenge data, to encourage, ask new questions, cultivating the critical thinking of the members of the group (Govas, 2002).

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