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DRAMA AS A METHOD OF TEACHING

Art of Teaching

For me teaching is an art form. If an artist goes an art exhibition, (s)he would not then never then go home and start to paint copies of what (s)he saw. In doing so, (s)he wouldn't be an artist but a copyist.

That is also the essence of my drama courses. When teachers have finished the course, I ask them always to melt in peace what they have done and learnt, then start to build up their own methods with their own goals. And if, after that, they want to use some exercises or examples that are very similar or even exactly the same as I had used, it will, however, be their art of teaching, not a copy of mine.

Different kind of Drama courses

Because the target group and length of courses, where I teach, can vary from some days to one and half year - or be 'only' 3 months, but every day for 6 hours! - the content and focus vary also very much.

My example here is to tell, how I work with a new group of teachers, who have never before done or used drama. I myself can never beforehand make a detailed schedule or curriculum of what exactly we will do and when. It depends so much on the group as a whole and every individual of it, on the atmosphere of the moment and all the practical things. So in reality the course and its workshops or lessons always more or less include improvisation, no matter how well planned it is beforehand, and how many printed copies about the aims and the content of the course we have given to the participants.

I describe here what kind of games and exercises I mostly use and why. I try to choose those examples that are the easiest to adapt to teaching. But most important is - in my thinking- always to try first yourself, then analyse what have you experienced, and only then decide, what, and especially why, you will use in your own teaching with a group.

Example of feedback

“I was a little bit angry and near to get crazy, when I realised that we participants never knew, what exactly we will do on the next lessons. I had always been used to very precise plans and curriculum during my studies. And also when I had to give my training lessons at the end of my studies in the normal school of the teacher education department, I had to give to each of the professors of the subject a very detailed, minute by minute planned structure of my lessons.

But then, after couple of days, I gave myself the permission to give up the need for a detailed plan and instead began to listen to my feelings, intuition and the impulses that came from the group after the task was given to us. Then we created, e.g. the situation of conflict, shared the roles, built up them together with the plot, made the space with necessary props and shared our presentation with the group.

The open and sincere evaluations of the experiences, both in our own small group and then with the whole group, were really valuable and gave many times totally unexpected perspectives and interpretations to the improvisations or presentations.

After the course I was first too eager to try all the games that I enjoyed myself so very much, in my own teaching. But little by little I realised that the most valuable thing for my own teaching was the very idea of giving so much space for the responses and ideas of my students and release myself from the necessity to build my lessons so teacher-centred. When my students learnt to use roles, when they studied e.g. foreign language, they learnt more effectively by when the core was not to remember the correct word but to express the thought. To make mistakes was no more any hinder for using the foreign language.”

(A teacher, training teachers who have refugees and immigrants in their classes)

Apple tree

The apple tree is a good image of the whole content of my teaching. The branches are the elements that I include in the lessons, and the apples are the different games, exercises and improvisations through which I try to gain the aim of the course.

There are always much more apples than we can take during one course. On the other hand I try all the time to give myself more material to grow new apples, or change either the order of the branches or cut off some and grow new ones. The best resources for the roots are the never-ending learning from the participants of my courses and my own faults and successes in that work, and -of course - the life itself. It is such a privilege to be healthy and have a wonderful family, an interesting international voluntary work

in IDEA and wise and nice colleagues all over the world, to be able to read books, study in courses, see theatre performances, visit art exhibitions, live in the world of music and meet interesting people from day to day and listen to their (life)stories and experiences. With these it is possible to survive, though there are, of course, lots of worms and polluting things in and around the apple tree.

I want to finish this with green thoughts: around the fruits and fixed to the branches there are hundreds of leaves to be added. They are the examples, stories, metaphors and remarks, which are results of the former roots and which will deepen the drama experiences and explain the philosophy, upon which my method is based.

The content of the course:

- * personal skills of expression
- * use of voice, speech
- * listening
- * mime and gestures
- * verbal and non-verbal communication
- * misunderstandings in communication
- * movement
- * roles and building up of roles
- * characterisation
- * role playing
- * differences between theatre and socio drama
- * differences between psychodrama and socio drama
- * own social roles
- * as an actor - as an spectator
- * different techniques of socio drama
- * adaptations of drama in teaching
- * evaluating

The wholeness should form a process where participants can learn how to use drama as a method in their teaching of different subjects. They should also find their own resources and roots, with which they can best form their trunk, branches, apples and leaves, when they start to adapt what they have learnt.

Most of my students have had very little or no experience in any kind of drama or theatre activities, except as an spectator. So we must start very carefully to strengthen their trust in their own skills of expression and at the same time to rid them of many repeated statements and beloved phrases like: I am not an actor, I cannot speak loud enough, I hate to be in front of audience, Moving is not for me - I'm too fat or clumsy, I cannot sing or dance etc.

The aim of the course is on the other hand to develop their own skills to express themselves, give more self-confidence and ability to communicate and, at the same time, to teach them, how to use these techniques in their work with a group of many different types of people. If they can first get rid of their unnecessary fears in drama activities and find their best ways to express their thoughts and ideas, then they can easier start to use drama methods in their teaching of different subjects.

It is also important to remember that the branches are by no means either steps of ladders or in any systematic order from the beginning to the end. The third branch with its apples can extend over the fifth or under the first one, and the second branch can begin from the same level than the third or first one, and point out to a totally different direction than the other one(s) or be mixed together with them. And what a joy it is to find every now and then an orange or a cherry in an apple tree...

First branch

The aims are to

- create a good group atmosphere
- get people to know each other and feel free to work in this group without any fear of failing
- let each participant find and decide his/her own limits for how much to reveal his/her private life and personality in exercises and role plays and in the analysing of these afterwards
- study the basics of group dynamic

Necessary apples:

*In the very beginning I tell briefly about myself and what are my main aims for this course.

*I explain the practical things valid during the course, such as:

punctuality in starting

necessity to inform beforehand, if possible, if you cannot come or come late or leave earlier

about breaks

why they are not allowed to make notes when doing exercises, but afterwards we'll do it together and analyse and comment and share the experiences

that I have every day the envelope for the comments of participants; everybody can write there constantly any questions, remarks, comments, wishes, feed back and it can be done anonymously.

*To study the names of all participants.

If there are about 20 participants, it doesn't take more than 10 minutes to learn their names by heart, when using a proper game and concentrating on it.

An example:

We stand in a circle and everybody thinks an of adjective that begins with the same letter as his/her name. Then I start it by saying Travelling Tintti and the person next to me on the right repeats it and adds his/her Dirty Dan and then the next person to him repeats Travelling Tintti, Dirty Dan, and adds Interesting Ingrid etc. If you don't remember someone's name or adjective, you just nod to her/him, and the next one tells it. At the end I always repeat all of them. Then we take pairs and repeat with each pair in turns all again, helping each other and thereafter we say once more only our own name and adjective without repeating.

Then we can have some games where the names like Zombie are used: If Zombie can touch a person before she shouts someone else's name, she will become Zombie. But if she shouts in time, the one whose name was shouted, will be the next Zombie. A good warming up game and crazy enough to undo any stiffness.

Other kinds of apples: exercises of forming groups, small talks in pairs, statues and movement, listening and concentration exercises

Second branch

The aims are to

- study reasons and backgrounds, why, where and when we learn to be afraid of expressing ourselves
- learn the difference between doing and presenting
- get rid of unnecessary tensions and fears in front of an audience
- learn ways to teach how to listen to each other
- find different ways to express one's own thoughts

Examples of apples: dialogues, mime exercises, storytelling, still images, body language, change of roles listening and concentration exercises,

The participants will study (mostly in pairs or in small groups) what is the difference, when they are themselves and when they play a role; how, when and why they change their gestures and voice, what is the real contact and the false one in a dialogue, how to listen to each other; what are the effects of our position, gestures and mime in communication

* An example

I give to the participants, who are in groups of three, an odd obstacle (one per group). Nobody can see it. Person A tells to B and C, how it feels and what it is like, but not, what it is (mostly they don't know it!) and then B and C. Finally they can have a look, see how much it resembles what they imagined when they touched it or heard their partners' description.

The essence of this exercise is that everybody is right, nobody can fail. If I feel that this obstacle is wooden, and then later on it seems to be glass, I am, however, right and you have to listen to my description. In the whole world the only one, who can tell how I feel, is me - and that was the task, not to tell or guess, what it really is.!

Examples of my experiences at school in the lessons of expressive skills: speech, music, movement, visual arts, theatre and the results and effects of them on my life after school. Then in small groups participants can share their own or their friends'/children's etc. experiences.

Third branch

The aims are to

- study personal ways of expression
- train every participant's own ability to use voice and movement in communication
- develop different ways of non-verbal communication
- study the scales of expression in touch, sound, voice, mime and emotions

Examples of apples: voice exercises, movement and dance, roles and role playing, shadow talks, minimum -maximum in expressions

Fourth branch

The aims are to

- study the signs and backgrounds of different status in social life and their use in drama
- learn the basics of improvisation and socio drama
- study different ways to build up a role
- practise different techniques of role playing

Examples of apples: own roles and roles in society, different kind of improvisations, analyses of role playing, simulated situations, roles in team work

Fifth branch

The aims are to

- study different ways to build up improvisations and play in roles
- adapt the examples of participant's own work in socio drama exercises
- evaluate and analyse everyone's own way to work in role and in team

Examples: teacher-in-role, simulated teaching situations of different subjects, evaluation

CAUTION: If you want to take very many apples (exercises, examples) from one branch, you have less time to pick up the other! The choice of focus and then the ability to concentrate on those apples that are essential for that focus, are the main tasks of the teacher.

It is nothing but bad planning and lack of professional skill to say in the end: "If only we had had more time, we could have been able to do also this and this..."

For me it is the same as, if I were a theatre director and going front of the audience after the first scene to say: "Sorry, but the first scene was so long that you cannot see the rest of the play because it is so late now. It would have been very interesting and solved the conflicts."

So because of the lack of space in this paper I cannot tell you more about the content of one course...

What I hear, I will forget

What I see, I will remember

What I do, I will understand (An old, wise saying from China)

Some books:

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Games for Actors and Non-Actors (Routledge 1992)
The Rainbow of Desire (Routledge 1995)

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Jackson, Tony (edit.) Learning through Theatre (Routledge, London and New York 1993)

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(Hutchinson, London 1984)

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O'Neill, C. & Lambert, A Drama Structures (Hutchinson, London 1982)

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Owens, Allan & Barber, Keith Dramaworks (Carel Press 1997)

Spolin, Viola

Improvisation for the Theatre

(Northwest. University Press, Evanston, Illinois -63)

Theatre Games for Rehearsal (- " - 1985)

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Sociodrama (Praeger 1989)