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DRAMA AND THEATRE IN SCHOOL EDUCATION - HOW AND WHY?

Ni Sa Bula, dear friends,

First I'd like to tell you warm greetings from the snow covered and cold Finland. Secondly I want to express my best thanks to the organisers, who invited me to come here and gave me this possibility to tell you about my dearest theme, drama and theatre in education, as well as about the European regional meeting in Helsinki 2003.

I think that the whole life is an improvisation - and every day is a first night. Happily we all have our own main roles in this big performance.

This congress has also the elements of improvisation, but at the same time it is also a well planned performance and each of us has got an important role in it. And from the point of view of an actor, this is like a dream: we can write our own monologues! In theatre rehearsals actors are so eager to tell to their director, how to make the text better than author wrote it, and very seldom they are allowed to change it. Thanks to the organisers, we can speak here exactly what we want to. And this is not improvised, as I was asked to write and send this already beforehand. I think it is a very wise and useful method to get presenters talk shortly and stop in time!

WHY DO WE NEED THEATRE IN THE SCHOOL? AND WHY IT IS THERE A STEPCHILD IN THE FAMILY OF ARTS ?

I have here now a little bit similar feeling as if I were a priest in the church, when he or she tries to convince the listeners, how important it is to go to the church. I assume that the audience there does not necessarily need to hear that message.

In this congress it might also be quite difficult to find any person, who is not fond of arts or who thinks that there is no need for such subjects in the curriculum...

The problem is elsewhere and has something to do with the lack of knowledge and/or time. In almost every country there is a big gap between the desires of all different subject teachers or specialists, and the possible amount of hours that can be added to the curriculum of different school levels. I have never met a teacher – in Finland or else where – who says that his or her subject has too many hours per week in the curriculum!

But I have met thousands of teachers, who claim that their subject has too few lessons per year, and they can always compare their catastrophic situation with the enormous big amount of lessons, which their dear subject has in some other, more civilised countries. If all those teachers were right,

there should be many schools in this world, where children are working 24 hours, seven days a week, twelve months a year - without any holidays.

What about drama and theatre teachers?

(On the pedagogical perspective, theatre and drama are terms that are used in different cultures with almost the same conceptual meaning. To make this shorter, I use here either drama or theatre.)

The first important difference is that there are still many countries, where drama is not at all taught in the school. I don't know any country, where mathematics or mother tongue or history or music etc. are missing in the school curriculum.

HOW WE STARTED DRAMA EDUCATION IN FINLAND

In Finland we have had a long and strong tradition for amateur theatres all around the country. If they are accounted per inhabitants, we have the first place in the world champion, because we are only 5 millions altogether!

So in the early seventies we based an association to promote drama also in the education, both as a method and as an independent art subject. Today our FIDEA – Finnish Drama Theatre Education Association – has about 300 members around the country and we have also some local associations. But, but and once more but: After 30 years intensive work there is not yet, in most elementary and secondary schools, an independent subject called drama. It is mainly taught as a part of mother tongue lessons or as a method in other subjects like history, foreign languages etc.

We have had only little more than 10 years some senior high schools that have taken drama as an independent subject into their curriculum. And its status is among other volunteer choices, so there are many pupils, who have had no drama, when they finish their school. But happily on the other hand, we have some schools that are specialised for drama, communication and skills of expression, as well as some for music education and some for visual arts.

Six years ago we had in Finland also first experimental schools, where students could perform a Final school diploma in drama and theatre and also in other arts like dance, music, hand craft and visual arts. Since –99 this was no more an experiment, but an official diploma, and in four years already 1577 Final School Diplomas have been accepted in different arts, 273 of them in drama. The amount is rapidly growing, because drama - as well as other arts - is a very popular subject in school.

A little example: After student exam, it is statistically more difficult to get into the Theatre Academy to study acting or directing or dramaturgy or dance, than to start studies in any other subject in universities.

HOW TO GET DRAMA FROM STEPCHILD STATUS INTO PRINCESS

When I attended Arts in Education congress in Brazil a year ago, one of the most important and pleasant thing among all educators and artists there was that all arts – music, dance, fine arts, theatre etc. were seen equally valuable and important in the education. They were not seen as competitors, on the contrary, they need and fulfil the content and meaning of each other.

I worked there in Drama and Theatre group, and this is a short cut of our main arguments: “Drama is an area of acquisition and construction of knowledge in school. It should be present in the school curriculum attributing to it the same importance as the other areas of knowledge. Drama – as well as the other arts – has its special task in the worthy education of a human being and it cannot be substituted by any other subject.

In early childhood and primary education drama should be an integrated and interdisciplinary subject and considered also as a method in teaching.

In the higher levels of the primary and secondary teaching, theatre should be considered as an autonomous subject to be developed in an articulated way along with other artistic languages.

The education of drama teachers should emphasise the relationship between theory and practice and give to teachers a good combination of pedagogical and artistic competition.

The keys for good drama and theatre education in schools are these well trained and motivated teachers, who should be encouraged to participate also in continuing education in different ways like workshops, conferences and seminars.”

We had also a very good example of the value of congresses as one form of continuing education for teachers, when we had a Scandinavian Drama Boreale in Finland –97.

The congress was such a big stimulus for our drama teaching at all levels, and gave also a good survey to our ministry of education about the situation both in practical work in schools and in research done in universities. The press helped us a lot by giving so much publicity to that congress, which first time made the whole country aware that drama is not only a free time amusement in theatres, but also a seriously taken subject in the school curriculum.

A year ago we had also a big program called Katarsis in our main TV channel. It was made in collaboration with the Finnish TV and Radio Company/Educational department, drama teachers, Theatre Academy, Jyväskylä University and The National Theatre. A drama book was also published to complete this program, where Cecily O’Neill was running a workshop and interviewed as well as some experienced drama teachers from Finland. Each of the six parts of Katarsis was shown three times a week. One of the best part was a description, how a drama group in a school prepared a theatre performance called West Vanda Story (Vanda is the name of the city where this school locates.) It was all done by pupils: manuscript, scenography, lights, sounds, acting. Only the director was their drama teacher Maissi Salmi, who was also some years the president of FIDEA..

There are so many ways, how drama and theatre teaching in schools can be used and enriched. Some examples that we pointed out in our report last year:

- collaboration with local museums and use of drama to bring history and culture alive
- co-operation with professional theatres by permitting students to follow the process of

- producing a theatre performance and to work on the same theme in their drama lessons
- to perform in hospitals, old persons' homes, factories and other community venue
- present theatre performances on local issues, historical events and other features
- explore traditional games, songs, proverbs, poems etc. and use them in the drama

I started by saying that here it is not necessary to convince the audience of the importance of drama and theatre in education and as part of life. It is -however- important to remember that human creativity can also be used in a very negative way or for undesirable purposes in all areas of life. Unfortunately theatre and other arts are no exception.

Therefore I want to finish this part of my presentation with two opposite lists. The first one reminds us about the dangers, what theatre can do, when it fails. The second one points out, what theatre can do, when it succeeds, as it hopefully mostly does! Obviously most of the arguments are true also in other art forms:

THEATRE CAN - WHEN IT FAILS -	THEATRE CAN - WHEN IT SUCCEEDS -
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - strengthen old prejudices - give the model of a very superficial way of life - solve all the problems with violence and convince the audience that there was a holy right to do so - create the illusion of a black and white world - teach the idea of stars, gurus and gods, who know everything better and whom others are to follow and obey - show fighting to be more fascinating than negotiating - claim that life is nothing but a competition, where the weak ones must disappear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - give new points of view about "old truths" - show the emptiness and pain included in such lifestyle - give us deeper knowledge of the real effect of violent behaviour - reveal the whole rainbow of human life - introduce the idea of responsibility, which we all share - reveal that in a battle there are always suffering victims – and that the winners are victims and suffer, too - convince that life is co-operation and we all need each others

There is no doubt that our aim is to make the right side list to be the real one.
That is why drama is so valuable, important and beloved form of art and subject in schools and life.

Finally just shortly about the European Congress ARTS IN EDUCATION, 9 -12 August 2003

The congress is focused on the theme How to use drama, theatre, dance, music and arts in young people's education in collaboration with refugees and immigrants. The aim is especially to find new ways to benefit and learn from the peaceful coexistence with the different artistic and cultural backgrounds and knowledge that are presented by refugees and immigrants in European countries. Arts play the most valuable and effective role in the education, when handling such important, but non-measurable elements of life as love, fear, friendship, desire, dreams etc.

The arts are also by nature focused on differences and different ways to experience this world and its phenomenon, and therefore they are also one of the best way for peace education and to learn self-confidence and social skills.

In international drama, music, dance and visual art congresses we have had workshops for children, youngsters and grown-ups from different cultural backgrounds. In artistic work they have understood each other and enjoyed of the collaboration with new people, whom they had never before met and with whom they had no (other) language in common.

In this ARTS IN EDUCATION -congress 2003 the experienced teachers of different arts will gather together their experiences, increase and deepen the integration and publish the results afterwards to the benefit of education in all European countries.

The target group will be those, who are grass root art educators as well as those in charge of the training of teachers of different arts. Approximately 50 participants altogether, including specialists and observers from other continents.

The venue will be Hanasaari - Culture Centre for Finland and Sweden, which has very good facilities and equipment's for high level congresses.

I wonder, how many of you know that Father Christmas (called also Santa Claus) lives in north of Finland, at Korvatunturi , in English "Mount Ear". It is not as high as Mount Everest or your Voma. But just now there is a high season, when children around the world write to him and ask for Christmas presents. My advice to all of you is that you should ask an air ticket to come to our European Congress next summer. And if you don't like flying, you have time enough to travel by boat.

And don't worry about the difficult word Korvatunturi in Father Christmas' address - mere Finland will do - every postman knows in our country, where to send the letters.

Thank you very much and warmly welcome to Finland! Our weather might be rather cold, sometimes even in summer. But we have the sauna, which is a really warm place, and you'll find them everywhere! There are absolutely no hotels in Finland without sauna ! So thanks and welcome!