

Book Review



**Shifra Schonmann (ed.), 2011. Key Concepts in Theatre/Drama Education. Rotterdam (The Netherlands): Sense Publishers**

Hungarian Educational Research  
Journal  
2016, Vol. 6(2) 118–122  
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<http://herj.lib.unideb.hu>  
Debrecen University Press



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Why can teacher learn drama only in their in-service period, or postgraduate courses? This question was written by John O' Toole, an Australian professor, but we can ask it in Hungary either. On one hand, the situation of drama education is good: the first few schools started to use it 30 years ago, there have been excellent workshops and trainings since then. On the other hand teacher can learn drama only in the frame of postgraduate specialization. It had worked this way before the Bologna-system, and it is working this way now. During the Bologna-system there was Hungarian literature Bachelor (BA) with drama education specialization from the beginning. For the accreditation of drama education Master (MA) we had to wait until 2012 – and a year after the Bologna system was abolished.

The most important conclusion of the book *Key Concepts in Theatre/Drama Education*, that we are losing the sensitive and valuable period of pre-service training this way. Drama education gives teachers articulacy, confidence, oracy and performance skills necessary to be a good classroom teacher. Drama also helps become aware of the cultural and sociological contexts of classrooms. The interaction – as defined in a dialogical or reciprocal relationship – is crucial between teacher and learner, and drama can help become a mastery of this connection.

However, it should be mentioned that this book is not for pre-service teachers or beginners. The title promises concepts, and the book gives concepts. But drama is always learning by doing therefore some examples would have been great in every section. After a lot of theoretical question it was refreshing to read Debra McLauchlan's

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study. She examined students' motivation, and wrote about this unique analysis. McLauchlan visited six drama classrooms in Ontario, Canada, and asked students about drama education, drama teacher, etc. According to her results, Grade 9 students selected drama as their compulsory arts credit. So drama itself an optional subject, but some students choose it instead of music or visual arts. They said "this is more fun" or "I am not really good with art". Others had good experiences with drama earlier e.g. "We had drama in Grade 7 and I enjoyed it".

Grade 12 students were motivated by four major factors: the opportunity to work with peers, the teacher, the opportunity of public performance and the drama classroom's unique opportunities. By the last one they mean a place of emotional safety.

About the good drama teacher they said: "has to have the right enthusiasm". He/she has to have knowledge about drama education, skills and techniques, and display passion for and commitment to drama and his/her students.

Emotional safety is a key concept in the whole book. Drama education is good way of learning about emotions, inquire and express emotions, in a society which constantly teaches us, how to hide emotions. In general schools should develop students' identity but in many cases there is room only for increasing knowledge. In connection with this in the second study we read Sarason's opinion: "teachers are victims of their training in that they are taught only instruct and not to engage".

In the opening the editor says "the book was created in an evolutionary way". She asked her colleagues who work in the field of drama education to create this book together. The main questions were: "What is the present role of drama education?" and "What is the future of this field?" As she writes the creation was an organic process of identifying, creating, engaging a community of scholars willing to share their wisdom and knowledge in an open process of negotiating meaning. As result there are inter-dependent topics, and the variety of colorful issues.

The book is divided into ten sections. Four of them can be interesting and understandable for almost everyone, the other six rather for experts of a specific area.

The "Narrative and pedagogy" is mostly about theatre and theatre in education. The authors define theatre as competence, as subjective experience, as cultural practice. The second chapter of this section focuses on relationships: with the context, with peers and with the teacher. Theatre in education is democratic and values-based, therefore a good way of working on these relationships.

One section is about Shakespeare and Brecht, and talk about how to use these classics in drama education.

The section “Modes of theatre, expressions and performance” is about methods such as applied drama or forum play. This is the section which really would be required more examples for those who are not so familiar with all these methods.

The section “Theatre for young audience” is about drama education – or more like using dramatic play – for babies, Latinos and children in hospital.

The section “Different populations and their needs” is rather for the specialist too, but there are some important states which we all should consider. Drama education for students with special needs be equated with drama therapy in the most cases. It is based on a specific belief that if a child has some kind of learning disability, the only type of drama for them must be designed to help them. But drama can be a tool not to categorizing children. Drama is always developing more than one sense, so we don't have to narrow its possibilities. The other way of connection of drama and disabilities of course, that young people can learn about disabilities through drama.

The section “Ways of research and methodology” can be extremely interesting for educational researchers in Hungary. The arts-based and drama-based researches were generated in the early 90s. There are various approaches under the umbrella of arts-based research nowadays. Despite of this fact there are only a few researches in Hungary which were done by one of these methods. One form of the drama-based research is examining the presentation of self and models of social drama; another is a way of communication. In this case data collected through traditional qualitative methods, and then the audience learns about them and reflects them in the frame of performance. The self-study inquiry practices can be used in teacher education; it can focus the relationship between the self and the practice.

The section “Learning, teaching, curricula and teacher education” is mostly about the teachers. The second chapter draws our attention the importance of understanding of self. It must be a process, through different experiences, in words and music and moves. It also emphasizes that theatre can be a good inspiration for teachers to expose the professionalism of teaching.

The third study is about a very important aspect of drama education. The individual and the collective aspects are always being present at the same time, which is useful during the learning process. It is also a tool in a problematic situation, e.g. in a conflict. The author cites Gadamer: “[in drama] dialog needs to be characterized by an openness that helps each participant to be freely inspired by other to discuss their own”. In this way,

the final tableau is always a collective creation, in the learning process a collective learning.

The fourth study is also focuses on teachers' role – it says that teachers always have to support and stimulate instead of control. She or he has to model some roles and also has to be in a role.

The fifth study is about the method Mantle of the Expert. This is well known in Hungary too, but this study tells us a lot of curiosity about this from the beginning. In Great Britain this is far more widespread than here. The chapter also emphasize the dialogic way of this method.

The most interesting point in section “Aesthetics and Ethics” is that aesthetic is a discourse, or interpretable as a – cultural and social – discourse. Within the field of aesthetics and specifically in aesthetic education we can learn the relationship of cognition to intuition, negotiations and the hegemonic implications of a dominant cultural aesthetic. Drama educators can give room to multiple perspectives, questions and experiences.

An important part is the chapter about distancing. It says drama can give us a safe space, so our experiences are less threatening. This is associated with protection, but this is also a poetic device.

The last chapter of this section is about ethics. Not the ethics of drama education, but the ways how drama can use in education of environmental ethics. In our global culture this can become more and more important subject, but it would have been great to read about place and role of ethics in drama education either.

The section “Creativity and technology” is a little bit tricky in a similar way. Only the last chapter is about technology: the ways of using new technology in drama education. This is a useful part in these days, when we all have to learn new literacies (digital, scientific, etc.). Teachers have to use new styles of teaching, and involve these new communication platforms to teaching. It combines drama and media, in story creation and understanding. But there would be good to read more about the connection (or the possible connection) between ICT and drama education.

The other chapters of this section are about creativity, try to define it, and emphasize, that children are imaginative by nature, but it needs encouragement.

The section “Identity, culture and community” is about a very important and specific aspect of drama education, especially Forum Theatre. Schools replicate the socioeconomic divisions, and perpetuate the society's problems. To develop students'

identity, schooling should burst constructs of traditional power roles. Drama is a good tool to explore unequal power dynamics, and develop the whole community. Students can be in powerful roles (leaders, experts, etc.) and this enable them to act more effectively as students, both individually and as a group.

In the last century the society has had contradictory expectations towards schools and teachers. They should moderate the gap between rich and poor, people of different gender, color and religion. They also have to select and measure children's qualities in grades. They should develop the person and the community in the same time, which is sometimes almost impossible. This book draws our attention that drama education is capable of both. We only have to use it.