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Play it Out Loud. The use of drama when working with shy children¹

Abstract: The article presents the result of an attempt to use drama when working with shy children. It describes individual cases of shy children and how drama affected them and helped them to overcome their shyness. The second part of the article outlines the general findings of the study and offers tips for teachers as to how to work with shy children using drama. Finally, questions for further research are formulated.

Keywords: drama, shyness, social development

Introduction

The article discusses the specifics of applying drama in working with shy children. It is the result of a two-year international Erasmus+ project – ‘Play it Out Loud’ (<http://playitoutloud.eu>). The main aim of the project was to encourage the social inclusion of shy children. The idea of the Play it Out Loud Project was to explore the impact of drama lessons on shy children based on an assumption that performing roles, which

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is the basis of a drama lesson, might allow children to feel secure enough to participate actively. The project involved teachers observing shy children during drama lessons and reporting the outcomes.

Drama and shyness

The motivation for pursuing this project arose from understanding the risks of child shyness in the context of participating in social situations, especially the fact that shyness can do a lot of harm – it makes it difficult to meet new people, make friends, express an opinion or demand their rights.

Shyness relates to interpersonal inhibitions – the tendency to avoid social situations, and physical or mental escape (withdrawal) from this type of situation. The timid are those people who are experiencing social anxiety, which motivates them to avoid situations arousing their concerns or to behave in an overly protective and unsure way while participating in a social situation.²

Coplan and Rubin³ present a theoretical model of loneliness taxonomy that organizes the sources of loneliness and the mutual positioning of related concepts, such as rejection (isolation), withdrawal or shyness. Behavioural loneliness, defined by Coplan and Rubin as the lack of social interaction in the presence of peers, according to the researchers, has its internal or external source. Loneliness resulting from internal factors is caused by social withdrawal, and from external factors – by social rejection – by active isolation, exclusion from social interactions.

Behaviour internalizing disorders cause social withdrawal, which can be further divided into two groups based on the motivation of the person withdrawing from the interaction. The first group consists of people who have non-anxiety motives to withdraw at the root of their withdrawal. This group includes children who engage in less social interaction because they are socially disinterested (or unsociable) and may simply prefer to play alone. The second group includes people with anxiety-related social withdrawal. Here, several related conceptual categories have arisen, among which there is also shyness. Shyness is conceptualized by Coplan and Rubin as “(temperamental) wariness in the face of social novelty and/or self-conscious behaviour in situations of perceived social evaluation”.⁴ Shyness is a correlate of social anxiety,

² W.E.Jones, S.R.Briggs, T.S. Smith, *Shyness: conceptualization and measurement*, “Journal of Personality and Social Psychology”, 1986, pp. 629–639.

³ R.J. Coplan, K.H. Rubin, *Social withdrawal and shyness in childhood: History, theories, definitions, and assessments*, 2010, Retrieved from Research Gate: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286178832>.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 8.

a symptom of fear of social evaluation, and is associated with low self-esteem, which may arise on the basis of various, subjectively assessed deficits by a given person.⁵

The consequences of social anxiety may be as follows:

- the lack of interpersonal relationships;
- the lack of friends and their support in difficult situations;
- avoiding asking for help;
- pessimistic style of explanation, resulting in depression;
- avoiding challenges;
- social inactivity;
- difficulties with expressing own opinion;
- the lack of self-realization;
- inability to demand their rights;
- solitude;
- social phobia.⁶

In light of the risks resulting from shyness – social anxiety and interpersonal inhibition should be considered a handicap, ballast or load, which does not allow you to use your full potential and realize your capabilities.⁷ Shyness becomes a social disease that brings negative effects to the cognitive and psycho-social development of children. The problem of shyness is now very common and can have a very negative impact on children's development.⁸

Fortunately, we now have extensive empirical material, which indicates that proper psycho-educational activities can help fearful and timid people to face social challenges with greater confidence and efficiency. The psycho-educational activities may include: cognitive therapies, social skills training (drama exercises), relaxation techniques and interaction exercises.⁹

Drama defined as a method supporting socio-emotional, cognitive and psycho-physical development through taking on a role may be a very successful tool for reducing shyness and social anxiety. The factor that allows crossing their own limits in

⁵ See, e.g. P. Smółka, *Konieczność bycia aktywnym i przebojowym, a lęk społeczny i nieśmiałość. Metody redukcji lęków społecznych i zahamowań behawioralnych (The necessity of being proactive and go-getting, and social anxiety and shyness. Methods of reducing social anxiety and behavioural inhibitions)*, 26.10.2005, Retrieved 29.09.2020, from Psychologia.net.pl Portal psychologiczny: <http://www.psychologia.net.pl/arttykul.php?level=143>; P. Zimbardo, *Shyness. What is it. What to do about it*. Da Capo Lifelong Books, 1990.

⁶ See, e.g. W.E. Jones, S.R. Briggs, T.S. Smith, *Shyness: conceptualization and measurement*, "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology", 1986, 51, 3, pp. 629–639; M. Leary, R. Kowalski, *Lęk społeczny (Social anxiety)*, GWP, Gdańsk 2001; P. Zimbardo, *Shyness*, op.cit.

⁷ P. Smółka, *Konieczność bycia aktywnym...*, op.cit.

⁸ J. Gładyszewska-Cybulko, *Wspomaganie rozwoju dzieci nieśmiałych poprzez wizualizację i inne techniki arteterapii (Supporting the development of shy children through visualization and other art therapy techniques)*, Impuls, Kraków 2007.

⁹ See, e.g., M. Leary, R. Kowalski, *Lęk...*, op.cit.; P. Zimbardo, *Shyness...*, op.cit., P. Smółka, *Konieczność bycia aktywnym...*, op.cit.

drama is fiction, providing participants with a kind of protection, a sense of security. According to Philip Zimbardo, entrance into a role is a way of overcoming shyness, precisely because it is encased fiction. The person in a role has a feeling that it was not their own “I” exposed to the assessment, but the role, in addition sanctioned by the circumstances.¹⁰

The base of drama is a fictional role. ‘Indeed, the fundamental activity in any type of drama is taking a role – that is, imagining that you are someone else in a fictional context and exploring a situation through that person’s eyes.’¹¹ Drama is physical, emotional and intellectual identification with a fictional situation.¹² ‘Dramatic activity is concerned with the ability of human beings to “become somebody else”, to “see how it feels”, and the process is a very simple and efficient way of crystallising certain kinds of information.’¹³ Drama can be defined as a method of teaching and upbringing through active identification with fictional roles and situations. Active identification means intellectual, emotional and psychomotor involvement of the student. ‘The essence of the educational drama consists in playing different situations in which participants in a specific convention behave as if they were in a different context and in different interpersonal interactions.’¹⁴

Drama is a natural way of playing, behaving and thinking for children. Cognitive therapies are less useful for children than drama. It is not easy to explain and teach a small child to think and behave in an expected way without action and role playing.

Drama exercises are also very useful for classroom application because it concerns a group process and drama can be used for more purposes: learning knowledge, skills, creativity, attitudes and values.

The experience of the partners of the project consortium (who use drama as a method for learning and development) indicates that drama can help children to deal with their shyness and social anxiety.

¹⁰ P. Zimbardo, *Shyness...*, op.cit.

¹¹ P. Howell, B.S. Heap, *Planning Process Drama. Enriching teaching and learning*, Routledge, London and New York 2013.

¹² C. O’Neill, A. Lambert, R. Linnell, J. Warr-Wood, *Drama Guidelines*, Heinemann Educational & London Drama, London 1977.

¹³ D. Heathcote, *Drama*, “Research Journal of the National Association for the Teaching of English”, 1969, Vol. 3 Issue 2, p. 58–63.

¹⁴ K. Pankowska, *Drama. Konteksty teoretyczne (Drama. Theoretical Contexts)*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2013.

Use of drama when working with a shy child. Analysis of individual cases

Methodology

Over a period of 4 months, about once a week, every teacher (of 22 teachers previously trained in drama and shyness) led a drama lesson with children and observed the behaviour of one chosen shy child in the play *It Out Loud* project. The method used was the case study method utilising the observation technique. The child was classified as 'shy' by the teacher and the teacher's observations were put down in a research tool – Questionnaire For Teachers About Shy Children, containing the teacher's and child's basic data, the socio-emotional indicators scale, physical signs of shyness – blank space, preferences and competencies – blank space, and blank space for comments. During the process each teacher was to complete the second research tool – Case Study Patchwork, containing:

- Social Behaviour Register – rating social behaviours of children in the scale from 1 to 6, where 1 is for the lowest social behaviour and 6 is for the highest.

Tab. 1. Social Behaviour Register categories

1.	Lonely The child stays outside the action. He/she is not interested in the lesson.
2.	Spectator The child observes but doesn't take part in action.
3.	Play in parallel The child takes part in action but doesn't make contact with other children.
4.	Play in proximity with contact The child plays only with one chosen child.
5.	Make new contacts The child makes contact with children he/she has not had contact with before.
6.	Play in a group The child actively takes part in the lesson in contact with different children.

- Classroom diary – a blank space where teachers could write down any important observations, dialogues, or tips for further work.
- The most influential drama exercise/lesson and why – a blank space
- Plan for future actions: drama activities (what forms, how often), actions concerning the child's preferences and competencies, other – a blank space.
- Important suggestions for working with this particular child – a blank space.

All the tools used in the research were proprietary ones. The study is of a pilot nature, and the results obtained are used in the ongoing research project on the impact of drama on the social behaviour of children with internalizing and externalizing disorders in behaviour.

Basic demographic data of the children

As part of the Play It Out Loud project, 22 children aged 6 to 12 years were observed and described in case studies. Most children were between 6 and 8 years old. In total, 18 children out of 22 were in this age group, which is 82% of the children examined. One child was 9 years old, two were 10 years old and one was 12 years old. The sex of the researched children was evenly distributed between boys and girls. Exactly half of them were boys (11 people) and half were girls (11 people). The children came from five European countries. 5 children were from England, 5 from Greece and 5 from Poland, 4 children lived in Spain and 3 in Ireland.

Case study descriptions

All the cases of shy children are described in detail in the *PLAY IT OUT LOUD Using drama for the social inclusion of shy children REPORT*, which is available on the project website: <http://playitoutloud.eu/outputs> and also on Research Gate: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342847236_PLAY_IT_OUT_LOUD_Using_drama_for_the_social_inclusion_of_shy_children. Three examples of the case study description are presented below.

Case study No1

CHILD1: Ola; girl, 10 years old; Poland

What is Ola like?

Ola is a shy girl (19/40 points on the scale of socio-emotional indicators).

She rarely initiates games. She almost never asks questions. Display of emotions and needs is poor. She can't give opinions. She doesn't volunteer. She is never a group leader.

The girl is happy to share with others. She is helpful. She is attentive to the needs of others. She has good hearing and sings well, but preferably in a group. She is joyful and always smiling. She likes people. She likes to watch people. She has a positive attitude towards her friends. She is interested in telling stories. She is good at listening to others, and singing, helping others.

What happened during drama classes?

During the first drama lesson, Ola observed but didn't take part in action (level 2), she also took part in the lesson but did not make contact with other children (level 3). During the sixth drama lesson she took part in action but did not make contact with other children (level 3) During the twelfth drama lesson she also made contact with children she had not contacted before (level 5).

During the twelfth drama lesson she played only with one chosen child (level 4) but also made contact with children she had not contacted before (level 5). Progress is noticeable.

The girl needs group activities that will give her a chance to advance her social skills. The girl experienced the pleasure of her own social activity during classes, but she still needs to try different behaviours, overcome inhibitions, and go beyond her own limits. She needs activities that will increase her faith in her own abilities and the feeling that what she proposes to others (e.g., in terms of games) is just as valuable as the proposals of other people.

One should cultivate the girl's positive attitude towards people and the world, but at the same time give her the opportunity to look at herself and her needs in relations with other children.

Tab. 2. Social Behaviour Register – Child 1

CONDUCT	LESSON1	LESSON6	LESSON12
Lonely The child stays outside the action. He/she is not interested in lesson.	1	1	1
Spectator The child observes but doesn't take part in action.	2	2	2
Play in parallel The child takes part in action but doesn't make contact with other children.	3	3	3
Play in proximity with contact The child plays only with one chosen child.	4	4	4
Make new contacts The child makes contact with children that he/she has not had contact with before.	5	5	5
Play in a group The child actively takes part in the lesson in contact with different children.	6	6	6
EVALUATION <i>The behaviours are ordered from minor to major social contact. 1 being "Solitary" behaviour and 6 being "Play in group" behaviour. As the student achieves a greater number of high-scoring behaviours, his/her evaluation increases progressively and positively.</i>			

The most influential drama exercise/lesson and why

Happiness classes. The girl played the role of a queen wandering around her country. In the role she was interested in her kingdom and the people living in it. She was intimidated by being "out of sight" a bit, but she was helped by the figure of the queen's adviser – a teacher in a role that animated the situation in such a way that the queen could enter into relations with her subjects (including children as animals and plants). It was easier for the girl to talk to characters from the world of nature in the role.

Building a house: This was a very good class for the girl. We built her a house at the end of the class. The girl could talk about her dog, which gave interesting tips for other children to take on the role of a dog.

Plans for the future

The teacher is planning one-and-a-half-hour classes once a week, integration games and process drama games and process drama.

She is also going to organize: games and exercises on the drama of the world and people – developmental drama; activities that would complement drama classes – happenings for other children at school (in small groups, for parents); social campaigns; and exhibitions.

Keeping an individual and class “book of drama”, in which children can record, in the form of drawings, cut-outs, notes, etc. their experiences, e.g. who they are, what happened?

The girl needs constant and systematic work in a drama space, awakening the imagination and social courage by playing with props, creating stories and playing them. The role of the teacher is very important, because through interventions the teacher can support the girl, give her space to try out a new activity, to express thoughts and feelings. The girl has great potential for creativity and imagination but it is dormant. The girl, through her uncertainty, does not develop her potential, which is large and unlockable – as demonstrated by drama classes.

Case study No2

CHILD2: George; boy, 6 years old; England

What is George like?

George is a shy child (17/40 score on the socio-emotional indicators scale). George stands out as by far the shyest child in a Year 2 class. He rarely engages with others in lessons. He needs prompting during ‘talk-partner’ times (with limited success). He is very quiet and usually very neutral emotionally. Sometimes he is sullen or unhappy looking. At times he explodes with emotion, anger or crying. The reason is usually something quite minor (such as someone touching his coat or book). He smiles occasionally, but rarely. At times he also ‘shuts down’ and will not answer anyone. He does not like sharing his feelings.

George has other difficulties stemming from his home life and this is likely part of the cause for his shyness.

George likes his own company. He plays creative games at play times with small groups of friends. He loves the characters of the Marvel universe and will often discuss them when prompted (when unwilling to talk about other things). He is secretive and often keeps things to himself. However, he will sometimes disclose things presented as ‘secrets’ and he enjoys this. When no adult is present he becomes louder and more confident and will speak voluntarily more often. He shows more enjoyment and interest in maths and PE than in other lessons.

Academically, he is able in all areas. His writing is poor often due to learning behaviour, effort and handwriting. He is creative and makes up games linked to his interests (Lego, superheroes and villains). He shares very perceptive views that most other children of his age would not think of, such as when thought tracking during drama. Whilst he is not good at controlling thinking about his own emotions, he is excellent at thinking about the feelings and emotions of others during reading, discussion and drama (when prompted to share his opinions).

What happened during drama classes?

During the first drama lesson, George took part in the lesson but did not make contact with other children (level 3). During the sixth and twelfth drama lessons, he managed to make contact with a child he had not previously made contact with (level 5). Progress is noticeable.

Tab. 3. Social Behaviour Register – Child 2

CONDUCT	LESSON1	LESSON6	LESSON12
Lonely The child stays outside the action. He/she is not interested in lesson.	1	1	1
Spectator The child observes but doesn't take part in action.	2	2	2
Play in parallel The child takes part in action but doesn't make contact with other children.	3	3	3
Play in proximity with contact The child plays only with one chosen child.	4	4	4
Make new contacts The child makes contact with children that he/she has not been in contact with before.	5	5	5
Play in a group The child actively takes part in the lesson in contact with different children.	6	6	6
EVALUATION <i>The behaviours are ordered from minor to major social contact. 1 being "Solitary" behaviour and 6 being "Play in group" behaviour. As the student achieves a greater number of high-scoring behaviours, his evaluation increases progressively and positively.</i>			

Session 1

George was alone at the beginning (as required). The teaching assistant observed that he was not fully joining in with the activity but began to do so more once included in a group of similar "animals".

He was happy and involved throughout. When working independently, he did so properly with very minimal/no interaction with others.

During the exploratory/play element of the lesson, he did interact and try to find others to be part of an animal group with but was unable to do so (he was a slug)! With teacher support he joined a group with the two snakes, being animals that 'slither' along the ground, and they were happy to include him.

He performed a basic role with the group, slightly behind the others (they led and he followed slightly) but he was happy and involved. He answered questions at a basic level. He decided that he preferred to work as part of a group than to be alone but when asked why said, "I don't know." He was not able/willing to give any extra reasons.

Session 6

George was keen to be in the middle of the game 'The world according to'. He asked questions and threw and caught the ball well. He enjoyed joining in and also evidently enjoyed hearing what others were saying (he smiled and laughed appropriately and maintained eye contact). During 'My partner's imaginary life', the boy again joined in well. He volunteered to introduce an imaginary friend and spoke clearly (but briefly) and could not provide much extension beyond the basic introduction (he declined to elaborate).

Session 12

George participated fully and played the game 'Zip, zap, boing' with tactical astuteness! He was not caught out and played the game using all three words appropriately to move the energy around the circle. During the warm up, he found different partners to match body parts with. All participated in this. Some chosen freeze frames were hard to balance in for him. He chose more sensibly after this.

The most influential drama exercise/lesson and why

Lesson 2.5 – Social Skills. This showed that George could speak clearly and confidently to the group. He also engaged well in the less structured social interactions of 'Going to market' – better than many of his peers. The lesson 'Lost Happiness' was also pivotal. Full notes on this are attached in the 'Drama Planning' document but George as the king was celebrated by other children and he really seemed to enjoy having the role of king – and created his own ritualistic behaviour during the royal visits!

Plans for the future

The teacher is planning, in the future, regular use of 'Drama for Learning' and 'Drama for Writing' based around quality texts. Use of drama for topic learning where possible and quick-fire drama games for PSHE and similar. To be used (ideally) every week and more regularly in certain units.

Strategies from the Play It Out Loud course have already been shared during a staff meeting and were well received.

There have been many chances for George to work with others in drama, games and other group activities. Future opportunities could be linked to his interests where appropriate (superheroes) though he is showing an interest and enjoyment in all drama lessons. George should continue to have THRIVE interventions.

The teacher needs to have high expectations of George to:

- Value his own ideas and continue to volunteer his involvement;
- Speak clearly and with increasing volume so everyone can hear;
- Work with a range of partners whom he may not usually choose to work/play with;
- Have opportunities to lead small group drama to develop leadership skills;
- Improve his self-esteem and self-respect;
- Understand and express deep issues relating to texts, topics and PSHE links.

Case study No3

CHILD3: Lily; girl, 8 years old; Ireland

What is Lily like?

Lily is a shy child (18/40 score on the socio-emotional indicators scale).

Lily is withdrawn most of the time and usually has her hand or finger near her mouth, frequently with her head down. She fidgets with her hands and turns away from people when they are talking to her. She has a very low voice when she is talking, which is almost inaudible.

Lily is a very sweet child and enjoys playing games in a solitary way, which are always very imaginative, in her own imaginary world.

When she does play with other children, she tends to create her own story within the story being played but is also quite happy doing what others tell her to do or tell her to be.

Lily does not like confrontation or more energetic children. She is very serene and will usually withdraw from any physical or loud activities that the other children are involved in.

Lily loves art and is often sketching some very imaginative illustrations and characters. She likes playing fairy tales with a small group of other children and often plays the role of a princess who likes to help others. Lily often narrates the story as she plays and seems to enjoy being led by others.

Lily has a vivid imagination and is always creating stories verbally and often talks out loud when she thinks no one is watching. She is very good at writing and is very neat in her presentation and when asked to write some news or for a writing task she has a very good vocabulary but will often speak very quietly when asked to read aloud.

Lily is an avid reader and often brings the book that she is reading into school to show the class. She does not like reading aloud, however.

Lily is good at skipping when the children go outside but other than that Lily will generally go around the outside space exploring and looking for objects that she can add to the stories that she makes up, which are often very creative.

What was happeneduring drama classes?

During the first drama lesson, Lily observed but didn't take part in action (level 2). During the sixth drama lesson, she played only with one chosen child (level 4). During the twelfth lesson, Lily made contact with children she had not contacted before (level 5). Progress is noticed.

Tab. 4. Social Behaviour Register – Child3

CONDUCT	LESSON1	LESSON6	LESSON12
Lonely The child stays outside the action. He/she is not interested in the lesson.	1	1	1
Spectator The child observes but doesn't take part in action	2	2	2
Play in parallel The child takes part in action but doesn't make contact with other children.	3	3	3
Play in proximity with contact The child plays only with one chosen child.	4	4	4
Make new contacts The child makes contact with children that he/she has not had contact with before.	5	5	5
Play in a group The child actively takes part in the lesson in contact with different children.	6	6	6
EVALUATION <i>The behaviours are ordered from minor to major social contact. 1 being "Solitary" behaviour and 6 being "Play in group" behaviour. As the student achieves a greater number of high-scoring behaviours, his/her evaluation increases progressively and positively.</i>			

Lily was initially very hesitant to get involved in the drama activities in the first two lessons. However, because of the sense of fun that was created, her curiosity got the better of her and she became less self-conscious. The structure of the lesson plans began as very low focus exercises and this was very important for Lily and the other children to make them feel comfortable with each other and the work that was to follow.

Drama has made a big impact on Lily and her ability to be socially engaged with other children. It was very interesting to see the class become less inhibited and feel more valued as each student was able to make a contribution. It was very important for them to be able to feel comfortable in the space first and this was done by using the image theatre techniques and creating still images first. The teacher thinks this really helped Lily foster a real sense of curiosity for the work that followed, which was very imaginative and quite spontaneous.

The teachers would like to bring some more drama games into the classroom that really use the imagination and encourage team building elements to the exercises as

we feel that this will benefit the children the most now that they are comfortable with improvising in the space and with each other.

The most influential drama exercise/lesson and why

Lily was slow to participate in the games and exercises but, once the teacher introduced games that required plenty of imaginary play, she became very excited.

Initially Lily would partner up with someone she knew during the first warm up exercises of image work, which included a lot of moving around the space, in lessons one and two. During the second lesson, Lily became more relaxed and more comfortable working with other children, which was really good to see.

When they brought in the 'magic paintbrush exercise', she excelled in contribution verbally and physically and it was almost like watching a different child in the classroom. She had some great ideas and the children used them in the game which really made her happy. This game really appealed to her vivid imagination and it allowed her to go beyond the obvious that normal school work would usually require. This in turn made Lily feel like part of the group, and gave her confidence and a sense of belonging. Interestingly, she developed relationships with her peers whom she would usually shy away from.

Plans for the future

Every morning rhythmic exercises will be used for ten minutes. These include clapping exercises and passing the bean bag around the circle. This allows the class to come together and creates a real sense of the group. In the circle they will also create gestures of emotions and speech, which really get the body stretched and help expend the high energy in the morning before classwork begins.

In a drama lesson once a week, the class will develop imaginary play and role play by creating different scenarios and characters in smaller groups, such as in 'The King or Queen of the land' or the 'Zookeeper', and they will learn how to freeze movement. They will then present these stories to each other in their small groups, where they will then be given the opportunity to reflect on the improvisations. This allows different questions to be asked which, in turn, offers the children a chance to express themselves with the objective of raising topics about feelings, emotions and friendships, and possible solutions may be offered and discussed.

As Lily is so fascinated with books, the teacher thought that it would be nice to use story books as a stimulus to develop improvisations and really encourage more discussion by introducing the terminology; 'I wonder...what is going on here' with a given book.

This will encourage an interest in the games and exercises as Lily can relate them to the book and her imagination.

Drama in the classroom proved very effective in balancing the relationships within the group of children. There will be one forty-minute drama lesson weekly as a result. This will incorporate some of the games and exercises from the Play It Out Loud

booklet. These will be adapted to the needs of the group and also incorporated into the learning activity that the class are engaged with in their schoolwork.

Lily is shy but it seems to stem from a place of uncertainty. When working with Lily, if there are games that offer plenty of scope to imagine, she will work more confidently. She will also relate to others more comfortably as her place within the group is reaffirmed through her own contributions in the drama.

General findings and tips for teachers on how to work with shy children using drama

The cases of Lily, Ola and George described above are 3 of the 22 cases presented in the Play It Out Loud project. Each of them is different and at the same time there are some common elements, similar reactions of children and particularly powerful drama exercises. General findings and tips for teachers on how to work with shy children using drama are presented below.

(1) There is progress in the social behaviour of children during drama lessons

Analyzing the register of social behaviour, it should be stated that in all cases there is progress – one or two degrees. Most children during the first drama class are at level 2 or 3 on the social behaviour register, so they are spectators – the children observe but do not take part in action, or they play in parallel – the children take part in action but do not make contact with other children. During class 12, most children go to level 5 – make new contacts – the children make contact with children they have not had contacted with before, and some of them even reach the 6th level – play in a group – the children actively take part in the lesson in contact with different children.

(2) Drama and excessive self-criticism

- Based on the analysis of individual cases of children participating in the project, it can be stated that some shy children are very critical of themselves. This is often combined with high intelligence and great knowledge. They are perfectionists, not allowing themselves to make mistakes. Therefore, they do not undertake activities or they withdraw from activities if they do not feel competent enough to carry them out.
- Such children feel good about activities that are not judged. Drama, by the very fact that it assumes fictitious roles and actions in a fictitious world – defers judgment – or rather transfers it from the child to the character they play.
- Because such children feel the need to be appreciated at the same time, there was a change during “Lost Happiness” classes, during which the shy child had a high-status role and at the same time was not evaluated, but assessed the ideas of others.
- At the same time, it turned out that children who display aggressive behaviour reveal their aggression in drama activities. The same mechanism works here – deferring the fear of judgment and allowing yourself more. This was revealed, for example, in the lesson “Birds”. One of the surveyed teachers says:

‘We had some problems with lesson 3.2 (Birds), as Jaime’s behaviour was really bad and he hit other children in his “bird family.”’

The teacher describes the boy as tending not to obey when asked to do anything, and says that the boy’s behaviour changes rapidly from soft and affective to violent with others.

Another teacher said in the mid-evaluation that during the lesson “Birds” another child, not the shy one, began to behave aggressively – hitting other children and pushing them during improvised flying. It was a new girl in the group, not familiar with the rules, who revealed aggressive behaviour also in other situations.

Drama can therefore be a diagnostic tool that reveals aggression. This is definitely a difficult situation for the teacher and requires reaction and redirecting the revealed aggression to other pro-social activities.

- It was also stated that the suggestion for working with a shy child is to use a low/middle status character when using teacher-in-role so as not to intimidate the child. Allow them to pick a character and explore it with a small group away from the others to build their confidence. Do not pick them as first to present, but allow them to come in when they are ready. Allow them to pick whom they work with, to begin with.

(3) Drama and leaders, and their influence on a group and on shy children

It has also been stated that leaders block the activities of other children, especially shy children, during drama classes. Children do not show their own initiative, but imitate the actions of leaders.

One of the teachers says:

‘While working in a group, I noticed that drama classes are new to children. At first, the children imitated each other and repeated the gestures and actions of the group leaders. A very strong influence of leaders on the rest of the group is noticeable. At the beginning there was also a big problem with drama tasks in the group. Each child insisted on his/her idea or the leader tried to push his/her case. The group could not work out one solution without the help of the teacher.’

It is important here to plan dramatic activities that strengthen the roles of all the children not only the natural leaders (according to personality types). The theory of functional situation requirements¹⁵ can be used here – the leader is the one who in a given situation has the best competence to perform the task. Drama lessons may be designed in such a way that the topic and problem to be solved require the use of the knowledge and skills of a shy child who is not a leader.

¹⁵ R.G. Brown, *Group Processes: Dynamics Within and Between Groups*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford 2000.

(4) Teachers want to continue drama lessons or short drama activities in their future work.

Teachers plan to conduct drama lessons in the future on average once a week. In several cases, teachers conduct drama exercises every day. In one case the group spend ten to fifteen minutes every morning before their main lesson, doing warm up games and exercises that the teacher has taken from the Play It Out Loud booklet. The teacher says:

‘This really gets the class focused on the work that is to follow as, when pupils start their day, they are often “not present” and concentration levels are poor.’

Another teacher is going to use rhythmic exercises for ten minutes every morning. These include clapping exercises and passing a bean bag around the circle. This allows the class to come together and creates a real sense of the group. In the circle they will also create gestures of emotions and speech which really get the body stretched and help expend the high energy in the morning before class work begins.

In addition, teachers participating in the project proposed other activities related to drama, such as:

- games and exercises on the drama of the world and people – developmental drama
- happenings for other children at school (in small groups, for parents),
- social campaigns,
- exhibitions
- keeping an individual and class “book of drama”, in which a child would be able to record in the form of drawings, cut-outs, notes, etc. his/her experiences, e.g. who he/she is, what has happened.
- use more drama activities across the curriculum where they can promote creative thinking and sharing ideas.
- use daily drama starters in English to engage and stimulate children.
- have weekly storytelling/drama sessions on Friday afternoons to promote confidence and social skills.

Teachers share or plan to share acquired knowledge and experience with other teachers.

Summary

To sum up, the presented research indicates the great potential of using drama when working with shy children. The supposition that drama might allow shy children to feel secure enough to participate actively because it is role-based proved to be correct. The next question is how this is happening and whether there are any factors that support the process of getting over shyness through drama.

It also turned out that children who display aggressive behaviour reveal their aggression in drama activities. I suppose drama can also be a tool for working with children displaying aggressive behaviour. Since the drama experience is close to the natural experience (social situations), and some of the basic elements of drama are role, fiction, conflict and tension¹⁶, I believe that one could design drama classes that contain a certain level of frustration and that challenge a child with externalizing behaviour disorder. A child prone to aggressive behaviour, being in a group role, would have the chance to solve a difficult situation together with other children, could observe their behaviour in a given situation, that is, presumably, behaviour would be modeled by more competent peers creating for him/her a zone of the closest development.¹⁷ More research is in progress.

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¹⁶ K. Pankowska, *Pedagogika dramy. Teoria i praktyka (Pedagogy of Drama. Theory and Practice)*, Wydawnictwo Akademickie „Żak”, Warszawa 2000.

¹⁷ See, e.g. L. Wygotski, *Myslenie i mowa (Thought and language)*, PWN, Warszawa 1989; A. Bandura, *Teoria społecznego uczenia się (Social Learning Theory)*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2007.

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