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Drama and the Kolb Cycle: a Solution for the Inclusiveness of Children with Special Educational Needs in the Preschool and Elementary School Education Spectrum. Research Report

Abstract: The article deals with the application of drama, a solution for inclusiveness in teaching children with special educational needs in the pre-school and elementary school education spectrum, with the use of the Kolb cycle in the construction of classes. It presents the main principles of a training which was provided to a group of 78 students of pre-school and early school education, including forty-two professionally active teachers. Subsequently, in order to diagnose the application in practice of the acquired skills, a questionnaire of the author's own design was used in a survey conducted one month and one year after the training. The results revealed that, according to the assumptions, professionally active teachers generally use drama in pre-schools and at school; what is more, the Kolb cycle is used creatively in combination with other educational and preventive techniques.

Keywords: values, the meaning of life, purpose in life, conference.

Introduction

One of the main goals of the modern education system in Europe is to create equal opportunities for all children. Children with special needs encounter rejection by peer groups already in kindergarten and primary school. Drama is one very effective method of working with a group and can be used for prophylactic, revalidation and inclusion purposes. During

drama classes, a participant assimilates the correct social behavior and the most important aspect of drama is emphatically 'being in the role of' someone in a difficult situation, seeking a solution.

Children with special needs and drama

The term *drama* derives from Greek *drao* and means I work, I am trying. In Poland it began to develop in the mid-1980's and came to us through the English educational theater. Unlike the theater, in drama the task of the participant is not to play for others but the personal experience of a given situation (Aichinger and Holl, 1999; Way, 1995). In the theater we are mostly concerned with the division into the audience and actors while in drama there is no such division and all participants should be engaged. The actor receives a finished scenario while in drama participants improvise without a script, based on their own strategies for dealing with difficult situations, hence the possibility of their development and possible correction under the influence of, among others, empathy and observation.

Therefore, the objectives of drama are the versatile development of personality, expression and emotions of a young man; the development of the ability to talk about their own feelings and inner experiences, states, fears, troubles and joys; becoming aware of their own individuality while respecting the autonomy of others. Also important is the development of a given social behaviour and shaping the abilities to resolve social conflict and group problems as well as preparation for active participation in culture: developing vocabulary, phraseology, a range of concepts (McCaslin, 2006).

Drama is used to activate the development of children and youths. Acting out various social roles in improvised situations, situations from events that in reality are associated with strong emotions, is a pretext to re-live them in secure circumstances and explore the possible reactions of others under the supervision of an educator (Manowska, 2005).

The advantage of drama is the team nature of work on the problems of children in the peer group. For the child, the peer group is as important as

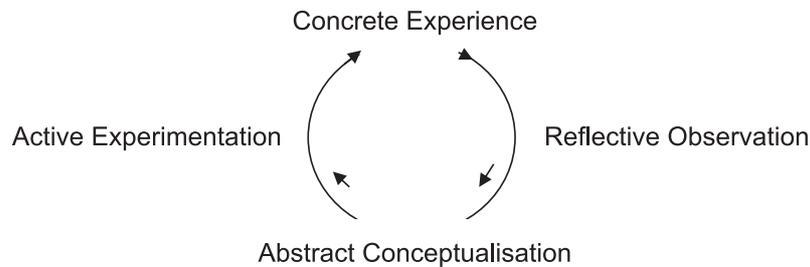
the family. At a younger age it gives the child the opportunity to experience conflicts in the fun. It contributes to effective communication and co-operation, which in turn allows the child to overcome egocentrism, to train and learn new roles. Children can play themselves or their loved ones, which allows them to better understand them and verify the existing social norms. Activity in the group requires the determination of one's attitude towards others and one's role in the group as a whole. In child psychodrama, the group becomes a testing ground to exercise the ability for the proper articulation of expectations, claims, signaling various changes, and in the communication process it creates the conditions to establish norms, rules and sanctions (Pankowska, 2013; Szymik, 2013; Winston and Tandy 2009).

An analysis of difficult and conflicting characters is conducive to acquiring the basis for moral judgments. Drama gives the educator the possibility of unique contact with the child and is an effective way to know the peer group, to observe inter-group relations and strategies of coping in social situations.

An interesting suggestion of application of the drama method in a pre-school and elementary education would be to incorporate the Kolb cycle into the class scenario.

Kolb Cycle

Developmental psychology shows that children and young people have considerable potential and abilities to learn. Didactics offers many creative methods to activate students. Kolb (1984) proposed an alternative to lectures and talks. His method refers to experience, so the first part of the training is to provide the students with experience in solving problems, achieving goals and getting to know a new phenomenon. Drama seems like a perfect source of such an experience which would influence the course of the training. The students' experiences are considered valuable and useful during training, the participants can express themselves without fear of being judged, they can make mistakes which further adds to the experience.



Source: D. Kolb(1984): *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*,
Prentice -Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 1984, p. 47.

According to David Kolb's method, in order to learn effectively, man should go through all four phases of the proposed cycle. The didactic process of training should be designed so that participants can freely start learning on their chosen stage.

1. Concrete Experience

Participants experience something, they can observe how they act and what effects it brings. We refer to what participants have already lived through, or create new experiences, if they do not have them and this activity is on the side of children and adolescents. It is at this stage that the drama is introduced and the children experience specific, concrete situations which will then be the subject of all the subsequent stages of the Kolb Cycle.

2. Reflective Observation

Through appropriate questioning and conducting a discussion, the moderator enables the group to analyze what happened and why it happened. This is an important stage, because the group members have an opportunity to speak out, a person who (possibly) has made a mistake has an opportunity for self-reflection and drawing conclusions for the future, like the other members of the group who need it. The group draws its own conclusions and activity is on the side of children and young people.

3. Abstract Conceptualisation

Now is the time to confront them with theory. This is a part of the process which largely belongs to the coach, although he can also use the activity of the group here, e.g. to write the rules of conduct, important lessons, etc. In this part of the process the coach allows the group to learn, to recall, to name, depending on the level of knowledge, the theory that underlies the explanation of the observed phenomenon.

4. Active Experimentation

Now the participants have the opportunity to test the acquired knowledge in practice. Under the guidance of the coach, they verify whether they can apply the new knowledge in practice and introduce possible corrections. This is the stage at which they give themselves, and receive from the coach, a lot of feedback.

Revalidation, prevention and inclusion

Both for fully healthy children and those with developmental deficiencies, the use of drama techniques, such as exercises developing the senses, moving exercises, intonation and facial expression exercises, various types of improvised or staged scenes and situations, activating and integrating games and plays, facilitates a comprehensive development. The preventive advantages of using drama have been confirmed by the results of an international research on the drama in 2010, conducted within the framework of the DICE project (Drama Improves Lisbon Key Competences in Education).

In revalidation and inclusion work the most often used activities are socio-dramatic ones (Lewicka, Korona i Lesiuk, 2013). The main subject of the sociodrama is a group, not particular individuals, and such activities are also used as a means of removing disturbances within the structure of the organization and dynamics of the group, which may lead to its decomposition, causing conflicts within the group and related disorders in the behavior of group members. The purpose of these actions is to

eliminate, correct and enrich the various functions of the group. In sociodrama the aim is to improve the existing situation in the classroom and in this case one of the main aims is the development of the group.

Postulates for research

In summary, since both drama and the Kolb cycle are highly valued and effective methods, the following question was adopted as the primary research problem: What will be the attitude of teachers to the use of drama in groups of children and young people in conjunction with the Kolb cycle?

The training of a group of pedagogy students was assumed as the main problem task. The aim was to teach scenario-building activities in accordance with the rules of the Kolb cycle using drama and implementation skills training classes. The training program was built according to the four elements of Kolb cycle: experience, conclusions, knowledge and action. The experiment included a group acting out of a drama, according to the topic given by the teacher.

Then, the students shared their own conclusions from the experience and knowledge about the differences between the drama and theater classes. In the third stage, a lecture on drama and Kolb cycle was delivered. In the last stage of the training the students, working in groups, wrote their own lesson scenarios and conducted classes on this basis (tab. 1).

Method

Teaching drama and the construction of scenarios according to the Kolb cycle as well as practical skills necessary for the realization of the classes to students of pre-school and early school education. The study was conducted between 2013 and 2015.

The study was conducted in two stages: one month and one year after the completion of the training. The total sample was 78 third year

extramural students of a Master's Degree in teaching. The age ranged from 25 to 53 years ($M = 28$, $SD = 0.72$). In the group studied, 42 people were employed as teachers: either of pre-school education (12 people) or early school education (30 persons), while 36 people worked as social workers.

The author's questionnaire was used on the opinion on the application of drama and the Kolb cycle in educational practice 'SDiCK'. The questionnaire consisted of 10 closed questions and 5 open-ended ones. To answer the closed questions, subjects had to select a point on a 7-point scale, where 1 meant "completely disagree" and 7 – "completely agree", attached to each of the questions and answer open-ended questions. Some of the terms used to describe drama include: "ineffective", "commonly applied", "appreciated by teachers".

Results

Over 95% of the respondents used drama classes in the first month after the completion of the training and concluded that drama is quite useful in pre-school and elementary education. After a year, this group decreased to 65% of those still using the drama method. At least one class per month constructed in accordance with the cycle of Kolb was realized by nearly 78% of the respondents. The Kolb Cycle was more often used by social workers than pre-school and early education teachers. Twenty-five people introduced drama in their work for the first time. Lack of time and a preference for other theatre forms were cited as the main reason for the infrequent use of drama in pre-school and elementary education (45% teachers). Over half of the respondents were of an opinion that drama is an effective method when working with children. According to 20% of the subjects, drama met with significant interest from the parents. During the training, a total of 23 scenarios were created for pupils both in pre-school and elementary education. An example class on the subject of inclusion can be found in table 1.

Table 1.

<i>Example scenario of classes</i>
<p>Training Title: Together or separately? Date of realization: Venue: common room / small gym Duration: 45 minuts Target group: children aged 6–10 Coach / teacher: Educational objectives:</p>
<p>Main objective: Working through the ability to trust and the responsibility skills of children in the group.</p>
<p>Detailed objectives:</p> <p>KNOWLEDGE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the child knows the importance of the notions of trust and responsibility – the child knows known types of trust and responsibility – the child knows the causes and effects of the lack of trust and responsibility <p>ABILITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the child can properly define trust and responsibility – the child is able to enumerate all known types of trust and responsibility – the child can properly explain the causes and effects of the lack of trust and responsibility <p>BEHAVIOR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the child can easily perform the tasks with eyes closed – the child safely carries his friend through an obstacle course – the child properly defines and classifies the known types of trust and responsibility and the causes and effects of their absence <p>ATTITUDE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the child is open to trust their peers in a group and interested in taking responsibility for his or her own behavior.
Psychological contract
<p>The coach sits in a circle with the children and they agree on a contract in which they jointly determine the rules of the behavior of educators and children during classes. The contract should be written down and all participants in the training (including the coach) sign it.</p> <p>Example elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – We listen to each other: when one person is talking the others are listening – We try to talk to each other politely, in accordance with the rules of good manners – We speak calmly, loudly and clearly – We address the teacher 'Mrs. Jola' and other children by their names – The principle of trust: all personal confidences and behaviour remain in this room. We respect other people's confidences.

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Concrete Experience: FEELING
<p>Structure of the exercise: an obstacle course is prepared in the hall. The difficulty is adapted to the age and abilities of children. Before entering the room, the children draw chips of different colors.</p> <p>Then the children are looking for the person who drew the same color. The coach ties the eyes of one person from a pair with a sash. A child with open eyes is to lead their friend through an obstacle course to get past all the obstacles and other teams.</p> <p>During the exercise, participants are not allowed to talk to each other. Then the roles are reversed.</p>
Reflective Observation: WATCHING
<p>After completing the exercise, children sit in a circle with the coach. The coach asks children evaluation questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How did you feel in the roles you have played? - What was easy? - And what was difficult? - What is the difference in being the lead and the leader? - Which role was easier, and which one difficult? - What do you think is trust? - Who do you trust? - Who can't you trust? - Why do you find it difficult to trust certain people? - What is, in that case, the responsibility? - What are you responsible for? - Who are you responsible for? - When is it difficult to take responsibility for one's own behavior? - Who is responsible for you?
Abstract Conceptualisation: THINKING
<p>The coach presents the definition and types of trust, responsibility and the causes and effects of lack of trust and responsibility in accordance with current data. We should be based solely on scientific studies.</p> <p>The aim is to confirm or correct children's responses to evaluation questions.</p>
Active Experimentation: DOING
<p>The coach, sitting with the children in a circle, asks transfer questions :</p> <p>You have learned a lot about the trust and its absence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tell me, who from now on will you trust in pre-school / school (the house, the yard, on the street)? - What are you going to take responsibility for from today in pre-school / school (the house, the yard, on the street)? - As a responsible person, how are you going to behave from today (in the house, in the yard, on the street)? <p>What will change in your behaviour?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who are you going to tell and explain what trust and responsibility are? - How are you going to behave towards people who it is difficult to trust?

Business indicator
<p>After completing the training, children in conversations with each other and adults adequately apply the concepts of trust, responsibility, lack of confidence and lack of responsibility.</p> <p>Children inform teachers and parents about their level of trust in other people and the need or difficulty of taking responsibility for their own behaviour.</p> <p>In the readings children find characteristic features in the heroes associated with trust and responsibility.</p>

Source: the author's own creation

Discussion of results

Professionally active people, pre-school and early education teachers as well as social workers, mostly use drama in pre-schools and at school. Moreover, they use the Kolb cycle more creatively, also in combination with other educational and preventive techniques. A teacher with fifteen years of experience wrote: 'I believe that drama method is very effective because it enables children to solve not only others' problems, but also their own. Through acting out a role, it is easier to make decisions, children begin to believe in their own abilities, thereby developing their own personality'.

Ms A., working at a pre-school for a year, introduced drama into her classes: 'Before me no one had ever used drama in my institution. I think that this is due to the fact that sometimes teachers are not even aware that they are using drama. This stems from ignorance (...). I conducted the first drama class from first aid in my pre-school. The children were to present situations which make us give the first aid.' Ms. N. confirms this view, 'I admit that the use of drama as a method of education in the institution where I worked was not too popular, theatrical classes being more often used, which does not change the fact that drama is a great way to learn by experience, which gives the pupils the opportunity to develop'. Over 80% of respondents reported a lack of time as the reason for the infrequent use of drama. One of the respondents drew attention to the parents' requirements and needs: 'A theater performance or a concert is better

received by parents because they can see them and what the drama classes are is not fully understood and they cannot see them’.

Ms. Z. emphasizes the educational value: ‘drama method makes pupils speak a nicer language, in their own words, without book schemas. Due to acting out a character, they better understand literary characters and motives of their behavior. They achieve certain skills faster, e.g. they quickly learn nursery rhymes and multiplication tables.’

The classes in which we use drama and the Kolb cycle require openness on the part of the teacher, giving up the role of evaluator and corrective teacher. As Ms. J wrote: ‘I believe that every teacher conducting classes in drama should take part in a course, a training or a workshops on this particular form of work with children, according to the Kolb cycle. It is such a special experience, when you yourself check out ‘how it works’ before proposing it to the kids. I liked the classes in drama very much, they were very creative and to some extent helped me to overcome my own shyness in front of the group’. In the opinion of Ms B.: ‘Participation in drama is a kind of invitation to develop our own sensitivity in ourselves; it makes children get used to expressing their own emotions hidden in somewhere. Certainly, working with drama is somewhat more difficult because the theater is just acting out with the division between actors and roles, while drama depends on improvisation. The children themselves create it. The teacher’s role is different. I do not direct, I just watch. I can help only through the use of questions. It was a little bit difficult for me.’

I will conclude with the words of Ms. O., a director of a pre-school, with over fifteen years of experience, who introduced drama and Kolb cycle classes at the institution which she administered: ‘I think the drama method is very effective because it enables a child to solve not only others’ problems but also his own. Through acting within a role, it is easier to make decisions, children begin to believe in their own abilities, thereby expanding their personality. Drama also has an educational function, because thanks to it it is possible to change bad habits. Drama also teaches independence of thought, action, activity, and openness. It also allows the development of emotion and imagination, eloquence and plasticity of the body. Owing to the team nature, it teaches cooperation and collaboration

with peers, coping with one's own and other people's emotions. We could say that drama shapes the personality, enriches the sphere of experience and sensitivity. Drama directed by the teacher well makes the children learn to make their own, independent decisions and find answers to questions about their identity. For a careful observer it is an invaluable source of information about the group, relationships, conflicts, liking and disliking among the pupils. Drama gives you the opportunity to correct these behaviors."

Conclusion

A great advantage of drama is appealing to cooperation with other people. Drama classes in pre-school group and a school class always have an integrative nature. The modern school should consciously and consistently organize such activities which will awaken in every child their natural activity and ability to cooperate. Correcting behavior is much more burdensome for children and young people. A new look at the prevention and inclusion of children with special needs is an ideal place for the use of drama and the Kolb cycle. This is particularly important in the preschool and elementary education spectrum, because the 'Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience' (Kolb, 1984, p. 25). Therefore, let us start as early as pre-school, thinking of future adults in the society of the future.

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