

# Drama education and children's philosophy in practice

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## Abstract

Integrating children's philosophy into drama pedagogy is an innovative pedagogical approach that integrates two separate but complementary fields. Drama pedagogy in itself is a tool for developing children's creativity, emotional intelligence and social skills, but the incorporation of children's philosophy methodology can bring additional critical thinking, reflective and ethical dimensions to the learning process. The relationship between children's philosophy and drama pedagogy is therefore an exciting and closely collaborative one, as both aim to develop children's thinking skills, but through different methods. Both methods aim to increase shared thinking, dialogue and empathy, so that when used together, children can develop more complex, deeper thinking, better self-expression and social relationships. Philosophical questions and discussions deepen the lessons learned from dramatic situations and provide children with the opportunity to reflect more consciously and deeply on the world and their own actions. This complex approach develops children's social, emotional and thinking skills and helps them develop an ethical awareness.

**Keywords:** drama, children's philosophy, drama pedagogy, drama play

## Introduction

*"Children's philosophical thinking is like a free flowing river, full of questions and discoveries about the world and themselves."* (Gareth B. Matthews)

Matthews' quote illustrates exactly how children also have a close relationship with philosophy, and it is important that they are exposed to philosophical ideas during their childhood that can help them as they grow up.

Children's thinking can be developed and facilitated through play. So, it is essential to have a method for children's philosophy that will absolutely help philosophy and children's thinking. Drama pedagogy is in itself a tool for developing children's creativity, emotional intelligence and social skills. Incorporating the methodology of children's philosophy can bring additional dimensions of critical thinking, reflection and ethics to the learning process. Thus,

the relationship between children's philosophy and drama education is an exciting and closely cooperative one, as both aim to develop children's thinking skills through different methods.

### **The relationship between children's philosophy and drama education**

The relationship between children's philosophy and drama pedagogy is an exciting and fruitful area of educational science. Both methods are effective in supporting children's cognitive and socio-emotional development, although they use different approaches. *Philosophy for Children*, also known as *Philosophy for Children*, and drama pedagogy share many common features.

Both methods encourage children to ask questions, analyse different perspectives and think critically. Both philosophical questions and dramatic role-play stimulate children's creativity and imagination. Both *Philosophy for Children* and *Drama Pedagogy* emphasise the importance of collaborative learning, where children learn from each other and work together. Both methods give children the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings (D'Olimpio, 2004).

The combination of children's philosophy and drama pedagogy offers promising possibilities for the holistic development of children. This synergy not only stimulates critical thinking and creativity, but also contributes to the development of emotional competences such as empathy and cooperation skills. Further research is needed to explore how these two methods can be most effectively integrated into educational practice (Lebuda, 2020).

### **Drama pedagogy as playful learning**

Play plays a major role in the lives of young children. Play-based education is about using playful methods to enable teachers to adapt to the changing learning and teaching needs of the current generation. In my opinion, even though new technology has changed the way we play, we still need to use the tried and tested playful methods. Children learn more easily through play and school becomes an experience in their lives. Drama education provides a space for playful learning (Kazinczy, 2023).

Drama pedagogy is a teaching method that uses the tools of drama in the learning process. This includes role play, improvisation, tableaux and other dramatic techniques. The essence of the method is that students are active participants in the learning process, rather than passive recipients of information (Dewey, 1971). This approach combines elements of drama with pedagogy to foster students' active participation and deeper understanding of the subject matter.

Drama education has many advantages. It fosters the development of cognitive, psychomotor, socioemotional and language skills through the development of a holistic approach. Through a conceptual construction, it helps students to understand and master new concepts more deeply. And through motivation and engagement, it increases students' interest in learning. It also develops creative thinking, philosophical reasoning, and problem-solving skills in children (Adams, 2006).

### **Philosophy for children: the courage to ask questions**

Philosophy for children is an exciting and increasingly popular educational method that builds on children's natural curiosity and tendency to philosophise. This approach not only develops critical thinking, but also increases children's courage to question and express their opinions. Children's Philosophy is a programme for students aged 7-16, designed to develop critical thinking skills through discussions on philosophical topics. According to Matthew Lipman, the founder of the method, children's philosophy helps children to become more thoughtful, reflective, attentive and intelligent individuals (Kariko, 2013).

A key element of children's philosophy is to develop the courage to ask questions. According to Györgyi Tamássy, children are the best philosophers, much more courageous and motivated than adults in identifying and directly formulating philosophical problems, and their tendency to philosophise is stronger. This courage and honesty is what makes children excellent philosophers (Kariko, 2013).

Philosophy for children is not just a teaching method, but an approach that encourages children to question, think critically and form their own opinions. This approach not only helps them learn, but also prepares them for the challenges of the future, where creative problem-solving and flexible thinking will be key.

The philosophy of the child has many advantages. It develops critical and creative thinking. It increases self-confidence and intellectual assertiveness, improves communication skills, fosters tolerance and empathy, and helps to develop democratic values.

### **Linking children's philosophy and drama pedagogy in practice**

Combining the two methods can be extremely fruitful in education. For example, after discussing a philosophical question, children can dramatise the different points of view expressed, or they can process the experience of a dramatic play in

a philosophical discussion. This complex approach helps to deepen understanding and integrate experiences.

There are methodological similarities between children's philosophy and drama education. The first of these is discussion and debate. Children's philosophy uses the Socratic method of puppetry, where the teacher asks questions to encourage students to think. Drama pedagogy also often uses discussion and debate when working through games. The second link is the use of fictional situations. While children's philosophy often uses educational stories to stimulate thinking, drama pedagogy builds imaginary worlds in which participants are involved as actors. Last but not least, group work. Both methods emphasise the importance of collaborative learning. Children's philosophy creates a 'community of enquiry', while drama pedagogy can be defined as a group play activity (Jakab, 2012).

In terms of developmental areas, the two methods primarily develop social skills. Drama pedagogy develops tolerance, empathy and the ability to work with others. Philosophy of Children also emphasises teaching tolerance and discussing different points of view. Secondarily, both methods develop children's linguistic expression. Philosophy for children encourages concept definition, argumentation and discussion, while drama pedagogy develops both verbal and non-verbal communication skills. Finally, the development of creativity is an important aspect. Drama education draws heavily on children's creativity through role-play and improvisation. And children's philosophy stimulates creative thinking by discussing philosophical issues (Jakab, 2012).

Overall, children's philosophy and drama pedagogy complement each other and their combined use is effective in supporting children's cognitive, emotional and social development.

### **Practical examples**

In the following, I would like to present a session that was a combination of drama education and children's philosophy. The children involved were pupils aged 14-15 years. The session was conducted in the context of a class teacher lesson .

The first aspect was to raise a philosophical question. At the beginning of the session, as the teacher, I posed a philosophical question "What is friendship?" Sitting in a circle with the children, I talked about it and the children shared their thoughts and experiences on the topic. I then read out a story about friendship. It is called "The test of true friendship", a short story by an unknown author, about two boys, Peti and Marci, who have been friends since childhood. One day they decide to go on a voyage of discovery. They come to a bridge that Peti thinks is

passable, but Marci is worried that it might collapse. When they cross the bridge, a plank under Peti gets stuck and Marci rushes to his friend's aid without hesitation. In the end, Peti thanks Marci for helping him and apologises to him for mocking him for his caution. In the end, their friendship becomes even closer.

After the reading of the story, we played an association game where the children had to verbally express feelings and thoughts about friendship. Then, in a sculpture game, they had to realize sculptures that represent expressions related to friendship. First they presented their sculptures individually, then in pairs. Finally we came to the still life game. In groups of 3 or 4, the children created still images of key scenes from the fairy tale. Each group presents their pictures and the others try to guess which scene they depict. After the scenes, we collectively analysed the students' work and returned to the philosophical question "What is friendship?" I stepped into the role as one of the characters in the story and the children could ask me questions about friendship and their choices. This gave me the opportunity to discuss deeper philosophical questions. Then, in pairs, the children improvised a scene in which two friends come into conflict. The scenes were acted out and then we discussed together what solutions were reached and why they were important. At the end of the session, we returned to the original question "What is friendship?" We discussed whether their opinions had changed based on their experiences in the drama games.

This example shows how to combine the inquiry-centred approach of children's philosophy with the experiential methods of drama pedagogy. Children not only talk about friendship, but also experience it in different situations, resulting in a deeper understanding and emotional involvement for them.

### **Summary**

Drama pedagogy and children's philosophy are related and complementary in many ways. Both methods are child-centred, seeing children as active participants in the learning process. They develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. They emphasise the importance of questioning and discussion in learning. Fictional situations and stories are used to stimulate thinking. They build on group work and collaborative learning. They develop social skills, empathy and tolerance. They improve language expression and communication skills. They stimulate creativity and imagination. Enable the exploration and understanding of different perspectives. They promote self-reflection and self-awareness. Both methods build on children's existing experience and knowledge. They support the development of emotional intelligence. They support concept formation and

the development of abstract thinking. They encourage independent opinion making and reasoning. They provide opportunities for experiential learning and experiential knowledge acquisition. They develop the ability to change perspective. Strengthen self-confidence and self-expression. Support the development of democratic thinking. They help to process moral issues and clarify values. Both methods aim at deeper understanding and integration of experiences.

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