



Development of Children's Communicative Competence through Drama-Activity: Attitude of Teachers

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Abstract

With the development of multicultural society, the role of a person's creative and communicational powers assumes more significance. There is pursuit to develop all a person's powers and capabilities in their entirety in order a person was able to understand and create the flow of verbal and non-verbal information. The development of communicative competence is one of the most distinct priorities in contemporary education system in EU [2, 11]. Lately, the questions of learning effectiveness have received a considerable attention at political, institutional and individual levels. It appeared that one of the factors denoting effective learning is good teaching based on meaningful and stimulating creative process.

Researchers emphasized the child's creative potential at a junior school age. As stated by J. Piaget (2002), a junior pupil was characterized by discoveries, creativity, vivid thinking, imagination, and modeling of one's own world, as well as self-expression in verbal and non-verbal ways. The significance of the cognitive creative activeness (the understanding and imagination of the object of discussion) as an indispensable prerequisite for the formation of pupils' communicative abilities was emphasized both by researchers and educators.

The content of the primary school pupils' speech development were short poems or prose texts which were read, retold, and understood. Role-playing during the lessons of Lithuanian undoubtedly deepened the understanding of the beauty and value of the prose and poetry texts and helped children to better memorize the vivid speech of the heroes and to convey their dialogues, character, and mood [8].

The objective to enhance effectiveness of the processes of the development of communicative competence induces turning back to the opportunities proposed by training through arts, specifically through drama/theatre [1, 3, 9]. Drama activity is the field of cultural values creation, of individual reliving and comprehension thereof. It maintains close ties with interpretation and communication processes and it arouses the activity of all spiritual and physical powers [7, 12]. Effectively applied, drama activity methods can play important role in transforming and supporting teaching [4].

The article discloses the conception of the drama activity, presents the attributes of its expression, and analyzes drama activity methods of development of junior pupils' communicative competence. On the basis of the data of the research with the participation of 150 primary school teachers, the character of the development of children's communicative competence through drama activity is discussed and the results of discussion with primary school teachers (3 focus groups (24 teachers)) in the context of the building of the communicative competence are analyzed. The research was conducted in different educational institutions in various regions of Lithuania and performed in 2013. The outcomes of the survey of primary school teachers and the results of the discussion were juxtaposed. It is important to analyze, to identify the drama activity methods to be employed in the development of children's communicative competence. The outcomes of the research will contribute to the better understanding of the analyzed phenomenon and, therefore, to the theory and practice of the development of the communicative competence through drama activity.



1. Introduction

The competences were defined as the totality of the knowledge in certain fields, abilities and attitudes necessary for an individual to assure their personal development, improvement and social integration [2]. Communicative competence is identified as a major competence in the context of general competences (learning to learn, awareness, social and civic competences, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship and personal competences) [11].

Researchers argue that only through creative activity it is possible effectively to develop junior pupils' communicative competence [1, 3, 9, 12 and et al.]. Development is understood as an active process in the course of which proactive techniques and methods inducing thinking, creativity, cooperation, and enabling teachers to differentiate and individualize education and training are proposed as priorities for the development of junior pupils' communicative competence [5, 6, 8].

It is obvious that drama activity as develop children's artistic excellence, creativity, imagination, attentiveness, tolerance and linguistic skills too [1, 4, 7, 15, 16]. Through drama activity, the purposes in the classroom teaching process become more attractive, vibrant and opening for new ways of understanding. It is noted that younger school-age children acting is as creative as that which applies to the educational process. Moreover, drama as a creative activity involves school age children in the interactive and dynamic process of communication [3, 8, 10, 14].

Consequently, it is necessary to organize and implement children drama activity insomuch that it would realize the idea of every child's personal development and socialization by its aim system, content, organizational forms, technologies, nature of educational systems - their internal and external features. Therefore, potentially revelation of communicative competence development through drama activities is a relevant pedagogical problem.

The key research questions are: how to specify drama activity by identifying the methods of drama activity relevant to the development of communicative competence and how pedagogues employ the drama activity in the classroom to developing children' s communicative competence.

2. Theoretical background

Researchers study the facilities of educational potential through arts in diverse aspects and indicate their close links to the development of pupils' creativity, sociability self-reliance, and value-based attitudes [1, 3, 5, 12 and et al.]. They were noted that younger school-age children' acting is as creative as that which applies to the educational process.

The authors also discuss the characteristics of employment of drama activity as a method in the education process. It is particularly important to organize junior pupils' drama activity to make it a solid means of person education, which development of its artistic quality and, in this process, gunning positive communicational, social and emotional experience [4, 7, 16].

A number of researchers analyse separate powers of drama activity: acting/creativity games and improvisations as a method of language ability development [9, 15, 16], acting performance with in dialogue involving dolls as a method of activation of verbal creativity [4] and others have conducted in-depth studies of the theory of didactic games, social drama and training of social skills [8].

Drama activities as a basis of active development methods reveals developmental potentials and opportunities offered by drama activities for the purpose of training and educating language skills, attentiveness, the power of imagination, attention, and courage. With help of dramatic action - pupils are encouraged to act, look, explore, observe, respond, shared thoughts, ideas, feelings, opinions [3,12].

Without dispute, drama activity is a syncretic artistic activity combining verbal and kinaesthetic expression, when creative imagination and reasoning are transposed into the actions and embodied in creative games, improvisations, role-playing, dialogues, etc. It is not the development of acting skills of



children that were deemed to the goal of drama activity, it is rather an investigation of experience and dramatic feelings of participants in drama activities, trying to help them perceive the experience they possess, develop social abilities and skills, and build value-based attitudes.

From an our viewpoint the scope of drama activity may be briefly explained in the context of verbal and verbal-kinaesthetic activities. The group of verbal activity including: reading poems, declamation, recounting fairy tales, inclusive storytelling, role-playing, language games and verbal-kinaesthetic activity are creative and plastic games improvisation, dramatization, psychodrama, acting dialogue with puppets and acting educator.

3. Research Methodology

To disclose the specificity of the development of junior pupils' communicative competence through drama activity, research was conducted with the participation of 150 respondents – Lithuanian primary school teachers (all-female).

With the aim to assess the methods of the development of the pupils' communicative competence, teachers were presented with the description of the development. They were asked to mark how frequently they used one or another method for the development of the pupils' communicative competence. The versions were the following: very frequently (each lesson); frequently (every 2 or 3 lessons); sometimes (depending on the situation or the subject of the lesson); very seldom (in cases of conflicts or when preparing presentations, etc.), and never (never before the survey).

200 questionnaires were sent to the teachers, 150 questionnaires were returned which makes 75.0 %, of feedback. It is interesting to note, that the majority of teachers had the experience of 15 and more years of work at primary school.

Supplementary and more specific information about the development of junior pupils' communicative competence was obtained in the discussions with the primary school teachers. (3 focus groups (24 teachers).

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis of the acquired information on the methods of the development of the junior pupils' communicative competence and the frequency of their employment proved that the teachers used tradition (presentation, reproduce and practical-operational) methods (see Table 1).

Table 1: Frequency of employment of the methods of the development of junior pupils' communicative competence (%)

Methods of education	Very frequently	Frequently	Sometimes	Very seldom	Never
Tradiconal methods					
<i>Presentation methods</i>					
Telling	17,0	62,9	20,1	0	0
Explanation	49,0	38,8	10,0	2,2	0
Talk, discussion	0	9,7	73,3	17,0	0
Demonstration	5,7	59,6	19,2	15,5	0
<i>Reproduce methods</i>					
Narration/paraphrase	39,3	50,6	10,1	0	0
Reciting	41,3	23,6	19,8	11,3	4,0
Iliustration	30,2	40,3	24,2	5,4	0



Exemplification	60,1	33,0	6,9	0	0
<i>Practice-operational methods</i>					
Reading in unison	52,8	40,3	6,9	0	0
Practical training	50,9	39,3	9,8	0	0
Reading the text aloud	53,1	40,7	6,2	0	0
Answering to the textbook/ peer/ teacher's questions	60,3	29,2	6,2	4,3	0
<i>Heuristic methods</i>					
Heuristic conversation	10,1	34,9	35,2	19,86	0
Search	15,7	34,6	20,1	19,5	10,1
<i>Explore methods</i>					
Observation	0	9,1	72,9	17,9	0
Explore conversation	7,2	25,8	53,1	13,8	0
Contemporary education methods					
<i>Drama activity methods</i>					
Poem reciting	11,9	21,4	47,8	18,9	0
Recounting fairy tales	5,4	28,3	30,5	5,5	5,6
Artistic storytelling	10,4	20,5	28,3	30,8	10,0
Reading dialogues in roles/role-playing	4,7	29,9	9,8	50,0	5,7
Language games	10,1	24,8	27,7	27,7	9,8
Creative games	12,3	26,4	52,8	8,5	0
Improvisation	5,0	16,7	60,1	16,2	2,0
Dramatization	4,7	15,1	37,2	33,0	10,0
Psychodrama/social drama	0	8,5	52,0	19,5	20,0
Plastic games	8,5	14,2	28,3	37,0	12,0
Acting dialogue with puppets	15,7	46,4	21,2	11,0	5,7
Acting educator	0	2,0	3,2	5,0	89,8

The discussion of the methods applied by the respondents proved that traditional (presentation, reproduce and practice-operational) methods (for example, explanation, answering to the questions, reciting, etc) were employed more frequently. Thus, e.g., as many as 60.3 % of the teachers used the method of answering to the questions, and did it very frequently, while 29.2% did it frequently; 53.1% of the respondents taught their pupils to read aloud very frequently, and 40.7 %, frequently. In the field of presentation-information methods, 49.0 % of the respondents explained the rules of communication very frequently and 38.8 %, frequently. Teachers shared their own experience very frequently (60.1 %) and frequently (33.0 %).

Meanwhile, drama activities and techniques are rarely employed in class. More often educators prefer acting dialogue with puppets (15,7%), creative games (12,3%), recital or reading/reciting of a poem (11,9%). However, because of the curriculum requirements and a shortage of time in the lesson, such



methods as acting educator, reading in dialogues, psychodrama, plastic games were used sometimes, very seldom or never.

As proved by the survey results, the primary school teachers preferred traditional methods.

The results of group discussion with primary school teachers showed that drama activity (or several methods of it) in classroom are a challenge for many teachers. This is due to several reasons. First, teachers have assumed that to organize drama activity is necessary feature excellent skills (including good looks/beauty, stage courage, self-confidence). Second, drama activity often disrupt the normal education process and are difficult to control it. According to teachers, the use of drama activities is a process which is hard to manage and control, and which requires a teacher to possess relevant training and skills. Majority of participants in the discussion see drama activities as pursuit of artistic result, while a teacher is assigned the role of a director/manager.

Development of communicative competence of primary school age children through drama activities is not given adequate consideration in the process of training and education. Education providers insufficiently employ proactive techniques based on drama activities, methods of traditional education being prevalent. Drama activities in class normally are limited to reading of texts (prose and poetry), focusing upon memorization and reproduction of a text. Drama techniques are used seldom and not always in a suitable manner, i.e. failing to take advantage of the opportunities provided by drama activities. Educators lack knowledge of and experience in employment of drama activities for the purpose of development of communicative competences of pupils, they are uncertain of their acting abilities, and lack self-confidence.

5. Conclusion

Summarising the research findings it possible to conclude the following:

- Drama activity is combining verbal and kinaesthetic expression, when creative imagination and reasoning are transposed into actions and embodied in games, improvisations, roles, dialogues, etc. This activity is not the development of acting skills of children, it trying to help them perceive the experience they possess, develop social abilities and skills, and build value-based attitudes.
- Drama activities and techniques are rarely employed in class. More often educators prefer acting dialogue with puppets, recital or reading of a poem, creative and language games. Educators lack expertise in drama activities and their developmental potential, and estimate their acting skills poorly. Educators hold a view that employment of drama activities is a process, which is more difficult to manage and control, and which requires an appropriate training of a teacher and bigger efforts, as well as special accommodation of the class environment.

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