

APPLICATION OF DRAMA- PEDAGOGICAL METHODOLOGY IN COMMUNICATION TRAINING SESSIONS IN HUNGARY

© Szabolcs Zalay
zalaysz@freemail.hu

The reason why training sessions, in which we use drama-pedagogical methods, are usually more efficient in the area of the development of communication competences than "conventional courses" is that in the latter the method of "planning-controlling-evaluation" is generally not elaborated on an appropriate professional basis. Drama pedagogical training however also makes it possible to acquire long-term knowledge as it ensures "cathartic learning" at a high level of awareness. On the other hand, making up for disadvantages and managing talents by the application of drama-pedagogy creates a great opportunity for building bridges between the training instructors and the training participants, who use different codes respectively. Drama-pedagogy is capable of mobilising energies, which could not appear and make an effect either in the traditional structure of the educational system or in the social discourse. This opportunity may create a special chance for drama-pedagogy to gain ground in various development programmes, thus creating a need for training drama-teachers and drama-trainers, which then may induce changes in the conservative structure of pedagogy. This may also indicate the necessity of a paradigm shift, which is bound to happen in every scientific discipline sooner or later. It is of vital importance for Hungarian society, which is seeking its identity in the globalising world of IT revolution and also in the European Union, to create a learning environment, in which children and adults are no longer engaged in studying dead knowledge during an endless row of dull lessons, but, while focusing on real problems and also trying to solve these problems, they, jointly with their teachers, may look for viable strategies for survival and development. In this way they may eliminate the tension that relates to language differences, and may free their talent.

Several communication training sessions have been held in Hungary since the changes of the political regime. There is a great demand for these sessions organised by schools, institutions and corporations. On the other hand however, there are few qualified trainers, the training sessions are extremely expensive, and there are not any special regulations for the Government accreditation or scientific research, which may create a frame for these training sessions. As we may conclude from personal experience and from nation-wide feedback, the main problem is that the professional quality of many training sessions, which have been conducted at very high prices, has proven to be rather uneven. I have conducted several training sessions at secondary schools, universities and public institutions during the

past ten years. I have also based my PhD-related research on this experience (Zalay 2006, 66). In the course of my training sessions, during which I have applied the methodology of drama-pedagogy in the conscientious "Planning-controlling-evaluating" process, I have inspired my students for democratic communication based on openness, freedom, creativity and sincerity.

While providing an outline of the basic hypothesis of my doctoral thesis, in my paper I want to highlight some features, which characterise the communication training sessions based on drama-pedagogy, and which may lead to the goals described above. In my research I mainly rely on the results of the development of communication competences, which was the subject of training sessions I conducted for adults and disadvantaged groups, and which were supported also by the European Union. The main aspects of my research were as follows: the problems related to the tackling of language difficulties; the possibilities for evolving talent; the chances for developing communication competences; the features of communication feedback processes and monitoring the changes in group dynamics. I also want to share some of my ideas related to training sessions with my readers, which may be used not only in higher education, but also in the education of younger people and adult groups, and which adequately illustrate the features and advantages of the drama-pedagogical method compared to various other types of training.

One of the basic hypotheses of my research is that training sessions, during which we have groups of participants with a given level of talent, basic education and social background, but we use drama-pedagogical methods, may be much more efficient in the area of the development of communication competences than "conventional courses", where the methodology for "planning-controlling-evaluation" is not elaborated on an adequate professional basis. During the course of training sessions based on drama-pedagogy, while high level awareness is present throughout the courses, the participants may also acquire long-term knowledge in the context of "drama", which provides an indirect learning process through the dramatic experience (Zalay 2002, 18). Optimally, following a series of games involving "dramatic" experiences, which eliminates tension, the participants freely and openly take part in special exercises and, as a result, better communication may be achieved. If all the participants accept the condition that we create a fictitious world around us during the exercises to enable ourselves to examine real problems, and that we may observe ourselves, our relations, the level of our manifestations and our communicative roles in "laboratory" circumstances, then both our formal and private manifestations may become more efficient and "humanised".

During communication training sessions inspired by drama-pedagogy we may receive especially valuable feedback from the communication acts examined in various roles, in which we may examine conflicts in a protected environment. During these exercises group hierarchy is also outlined. Since the participants, as a result of controlled dramatic process management, take part also in processes, which generate tension, in a disciplined and targeted manner, they may explore the cause of the problems, and may formulate proposals for problem solving. The exercises may even generate a demand for changes in an indirect manner. As a result communication skills may develop in an optimum way; the participants may select significantly better communication strategies, and they may tackle their language problems, the causes of which may differ widely.

The determinations of language problems and the possibilities to tackle them

The main obstacles of efficient communication are language problems, which may have multiple causes. Sociological theories related to language problems are quite adequately elaborated and widespread today. Bernstein's "code theory" has become very widely known despite its strong critical reception (Bernstein, 1992). Hungarian educators have also expressed great interest in Bernstein's concept, so this topic has been dealt widely in Hungary's scientific circles. In Hungary there have been research activities in the fields of socio-linguistics and education in the mother tongue for over thirty years (Kronstein, 1974). Hungarian researchers (Mária Pap, Csaba Pléh, Zita Réger, and Katalin Forray) have also drawn the conclusion from their research and experiences that social and economic factors have a vast influence on language development and the quality of speech (Pap, 1972).

Tackling proven language difficulties is the interest of society. By way of different educational reforms there have been several attempts in Hungary to improve this situation between the 1970s and today. There has been no comprehensive breakthrough however in the approach of Hungarian reform-minded educators, although there are frightening signals and distressing facts that warn us to bear the responsibility that we, who live in Central and eastern Europe, only have intellectual capital, which we may utilise in a "market-oriented" world. If we think of the acute problem of the Roma population concerning adaptation, or we take a look at the research conducted by Bertalan Andrásfalvy, in which he reveals that only 2% of people, who come from small villages, whose population is under five thousand, have a university degree, or if we analyse the results of the "Pisa-survey", we can see that this issue, which seems to be a purely theoretical one, has very serious practical connotations (Zalay, 2003, 16). What may make Hungary in the 21st century and the world of our children viable, and what may sustain its development if we find alternative solutions to different social problems, if we can mobilise the capital of knowledge, which is wasted because of disadvantageous situations and narrow visions, and if we succeed in implementing an "awareness revolution", a paradigm shifts also in pedagogical and scientific practice (László, 2000).

In Bernstein's opinion the immediate environment becomes interiorised in the individual through the act of speech, so it becomes a psychological constitution of the individual. Thus certain individuals become part of the educational system with a more favourable psychological constitution than others. This constitution is not given from the birth of the individual: it is shaped by environmental factors through the transfer of a communicative code. These factors are as follows: the strength of community bonds, the degree of decision-making capabilities of parents at their work, the level of "oppression", the rate of crowdedness of homes and intellectual stimuli. As an aggregate effect of all this a peculiar form of communication develops, which affects the intellectual, social and emotional orientation of individuals. Among all the codes Bernstein distinguishes two codes, the limited and the elaborated code (Bernstein, 1996, 48). The most important aspect in the comparison of these two codes is the nature of meanings transferred with the help of these codes. In Bernstein's opinion the limited code is tied to situations, and makes only the transfer of implicit meanings, which are not independent of the communication situation, possible. This communication system, however, is not poor. It has a wide set of metaphors. However the learnable things, for which this code sets its users to, are not in correlation with those, which are demanded by the school. These individuals use the

elaborated code at school, which means that the related meanings are not tied to a certain situation, the requirements of status are less enforced, the pupils learn how to tackle multiple meanings, and the system of speech requires more complex planning. In this situation the intent of the other persons may not be taken for granted, so the meanings must be elaborated to make them understandable; selection must be made among alternatives in syntax and vocabulary, and the language channel becomes of primary importance in this situation.

Consequently, in the case of those who use the limited code there is a gap between these individuals and the school since the psychological constitution created in such circumstances is in contrast with the one that may be regarded favourable in respect of education (Ferge, 1972). Therefore regardless of the fact that the limited code represents a wide variety of sophistication and meanings and the importance of imagination, it may be still devalued in modern, industrial society, it may be despised at school or, at best, it may be regarded irrelevant in respect of educational efforts. Most schools and training facilities today function on the basis of the elaborated code and its set of social relations. Even if the elaborated code does not carry any special set of values, the set of values of the middle classes permeates the whole fibre of the training context. In this way the traditional school further increases the difference between individuals from different social groups. The outcome of the original research concerning individuals from the working classes may be adapted to any disadvantaged group, whose disadvantage derives from any reason.

Bernstein's theory has been severely criticised mainly for its simplifying character. Its significance and effect however are unquestionable, which is supported also by the outcome of Hungarian research activities. The question is in which way social disadvantages may be explored, unequal opportunities compensated, and how to develop an educational system and a system of social protection, which may save our values.

Possible ways for changes

In Hungary, when the above problems were recognised, several programmes were launched at various levels of the educational system, which made an attempt to save values and to create circumstances for special development. All these programmes incorporated in their structure, as a special element, a form of developing active, practical communication skills. The "János Arany" talent management programme was launched six years ago. It is a national educational programme at secondary school level. Based on the research activities mentioned above and with the new approach, the programme tried to create a structure, in which significant opportunities were ensured for disadvantaged youths in rural areas for personal development, social success and for the harmonisation of their socialisation process (Szolcsányiné, 2001, 8). Language education is highly focussed on in the programme in a broad and narrow sense alike; in the "János Arany" schools intensive foreign language courses are conducted, and there are training courses also in informatics. Special focus is given to the development of the use of the mother tongue in order to make up for poor vocabulary, and to explore the depths of the mother tongue. As regards language socialisation, special subjects and training courses play a very important role in this process. These subjects, such as self-development, communication, the methodology of learning and drama-pedagogy, and training courses, with the help of reform-pedagogical methods, are very

successful in the area of personality development. The efficiency of the programme may only be measured in the long run, however its effect in inspiring and urging a paradigm shift in pedagogy may be experienced even today.

Besides providing support for disadvantaged and talented students, it is also significant to develop the system of "train the trainers". This has been pursued quite intensively during the past few years. With EU support several "mentor training" programmes have been launched in various parts of Hungary, which are based entirely on this training methodology, and which use the intensive character of this type of training. At the same time these training courses also provide an opportunity to influence a factor, which may be hardly influenced at all: the pedagogical attitudes, which became hard-stuck during the past few decades. The general objectives of these programmes are to restore the respect of knowledge, to create opportunities, in other words to create educational and support systems, which will provide equal opportunities for students with diverse social, cultural and economic background. Further objectives are to manage talent, and to improve the quality and modernise the content of education (Balogh & Herskovits, 1993). After all it is one of the basic criteria for inducing changes in the pedagogical system in Hungary whether we may be able to create opportunities for various groups in disadvantaged regions to make up for their disadvantages. One of the most important conditions for the development of these regions is to strengthen the group of intellectuals, who are well-trained and creative, and who are ready and willing to act for their regions, with various training courses

The chances of drama-pedagogy

These programmes, as it is reflected in the objectives described above, are promising, and may be used as particular tools in making up for disadvantaged situations. Their particular character may be seen in their relation with disadvantages and talent. Maybe it is by no accident that the number of research activities has multiplied in this topic since the last third of the 20th century, and several development programmes have been launched at various schools (Sternberg & Davidson, 1994, 12). By now a basis for knowledge and methodologies developed, which provide a firm basis also for programmes aimed at making up for disadvantages and talent management in Hungary. Drama-pedagogy is one of these programmes since it has gained strength due to the vast array of attitudes and methodologies that has piled up as a result of the fact that this discipline has become autonomous during the past few decades in Hungary. It has also become quite well-known in society due to the activities of the members of the Hungarian Drama-Pedagogical Society. This methodology is also part of the National Curriculum and the Frame Curriculum as a result of the action of decision-makers, and has become part of the general training practice as it has been applied in various communication training sessions.

One of the basic issues in the practice of education dealing with disadvantaged groups and the underlying philosophy is the correct definition of talent. The Renzulli model is the most generally accepted theory in the definition of talent today (Mönks & Buxtell, 1994, 35). According to this model the components of talent are as follows: capabilities above average, commitment to tasks and creativity. This model locates various types of talent in a social field. This is the context, in which students live: the family, the educational facility and the peers. High-level abstract thinking,

developed capabilities related to the mother tongue, good memory, effective information processing strategies, etc. are regarded as capabilities above average. The role of these attributes is naturally different in certain special areas of talent. The special capabilities lend character to talent. There are several models, which describe these special capabilities; however it is the Gardner classification that is generally accepted (Harsányi, 1981, 53). According to this seven different special groups of capabilities may be distinguished: language, music, mathematical-logical, visual-space-related, body-movement, social-interpersonal and intrapersonal. These capabilities serve as pre-requisites for special talent development. Creativity also has several components. They are: originality, flexibility, fluency, problem-sensitivity, etc. This component is also definite in the functioning of talent since talent, among other factors, may be characterised by the fact that a talented person finds new solutions in problem situations, which would be impossible without creative capabilities. Commitment to tasks involves personal characteristics, which provide energy for high level capacity. These are: interest, competitive spirit, endurance, emotional stability, etc. No matter how highly the capabilities are developed, there is no high level performance without the above background factors. We do not receive these talent-components ready-made at birth; they are the result of a long process of the development of activity. Many such components must be perfected in the process of talent management in order to develop dormant talent in the person into full-fledged capabilities with high performance. A clear consequence is that educational facilities, schools and teachers have an important role and responsibility in finding and developing talent.

Teachers or trainers, who practise drama-pedagogy, may undertake this responsibility with confidence since their basic attitude is to see the world as a network full of tension and problems, which may or may not be resolved. These teachers and trainers also have a diverse set of methodological tools, which is the key to the effective development of creativity. There are also great opportunities in drama-pedagogy for the development of interest, competitive spirit, endurance and emotional attitudes, which is the most effective way to develop commitment to the resolution of tasks. All these factors together may result in the revelation of above-than-average capabilities through drama-pedagogy by the development of thinking, mother tongue-related capabilities, the memory or strategies for information processing together with a special focus on the development of special personal capabilities in areas such as language, music, visual space, body and movement or social-interpersonal areas.

It is however still a current issue in Hungary, whether there are teachers and trainers at schools, where the traditional, "elaborated code" is used in the slowly changing training environment, who are willing to find, and whether the pedagogical demand exists for a common tone of voice with those, who use the "limited code", but are talented individuals. It is in this area, where the process of making up for disadvantages and talent management through drama-pedagogy has great opportunities. This may be able to build bridges between the individuals, who use different codes, and the trainers. It may also be able to mobilise energies, which could not appear and manifest themselves earlier either in the conventional educational system or in the social discourse. This possibility may provide particular chances for drama-pedagogy to gain space in various development programmes thus creating demand for training drama-teachers and drama-trainers, and inducing changes in the conservative structure of pedagogy. Maybe it will also be able to create attention for the necessity of a paradigm shift, which is bound to happen sooner or later in every scientific discipline. It is an essentially

important issue in Hungarian society, which is trying to find its identity in an IT revolution in a globalising world and in the European Union to create a learning environment in which young students and adults do not learn dead knowledge during endless and dull lessons, but, focussing on real problems and related solutions, they may try to find together with their teachers and trainers viable strategies for survival and further development, thus resolving tension from language differences, and freeing their talent.

Possibilities in communication training

As described above, communication training sessions may play an important role in tackling language disadvantages and managing talent through language development (Langner & Raátz, 2004, 7). The general objective of these training courses is to develop the communication capabilities of the training participants, to make their communication more conscious, which is also targeted during conventional training sessions with methodologies other than the "Prussian" educational style. This learning process, compared to the conventional school environment, takes place in a much more intensive form of common activities, in which practical exercises, the "novelty" of tasks, games and group spirit provide extra energy. Trainers also have a particular role in such training sessions. They do not occupy a higher position than the group of students, and do not play the role of educator. They act rather as moderators, who are in charge of the process, and determine tasks according to the current "status" of their groups. They list the rules, however they do not interfere in the tasks, and they do not pass judgements. "Work" progresses within the frame of commonly created goals, expectations and rules, and is not determined "from above". The trainers just help their group during the common planning process. The members of such groups are equal, they are located in a circle in the classroom, nobody is on the periphery since they formulate a circle, which represents closeness, thus, in principle, everybody is capable of maintaining contact with everybody else.

It highly depends on the professional knowledge and experience of the trainers to create an appropriate level of confidence within their groups, which is the key to every training session. They however also have to handle certain situations with due prudence since if they address confidential issues too early, some participants may refrain from the group practice, which may lead to general failure. The learning process is based on continuous, active participation. The group members participate in a series of tasks and situational exercises, which they process during case discussions thus crystallising their knowledge. One of the most essential components is that the knowledge is derived from the activities of the participants, thus it creates more profound awareness through individual evaluation and feedback since the learning process is most effective, if it is based on the direct experience of the participants. This is therefore very important that the participants act in various situations free of stress since this ensures that they reveal their real behavioural patterns thus creating an opportunity for the others to analyse these patterns and to provide real feedback. This purpose is also served by the frequent playful exercises since individuals have a playful nature, and give themselves away to playful situations thus freeing themselves from inhibitions.

The efficiency of these training sessions is further enhanced by the fact that during these sessions the participants are exposed to powerful intellectual and emotional effects during the exercises and situations. Through these effects the acquisition of the training experience also becomes

more powerful at individual level. Since the participants spend a long time together, this "enforces" permanent interaction within the groups, which on the one hand may develop a higher level of awareness in handling co-operation capabilities and human relations thus making communication capabilities more effective, and on the other hand, it may also have an effect on the development of personal evaluation and self-identity. The exercises which serve the purpose of capabilities may also develop more conscious and flexible thinking.

Individual participation and training efficiency play an important role in achieving all this. Common work and the time spent together generally strengthen individual relations within these groups, and may have an effect on individual openness with others. Tolerance, the level of confidence may develop, and the participants may familiarise themselves with consensus-seeking strategies through appropriately arranged exercises. They receive feedback concerning the strengths and weaknesses related to their capabilities for working together. They may receive an answer to the question as to what extent they may influence other individuals, how they may influence others, that organisational capabilities they may have and in what areas they may need to enhance their efficiency. With the enhancement of knowing others they may avoid situations whereby they pass judgement of others based on their first impressions.

The tasks resolved individually or commonly and the related success may help the group members to recognise the correlation between group and individual performance. The group members may see how they are seen generally, what the others say about them. They get to know how they are seen in the outside world, and, through their participation in the training situations, they may enhance their own self image with new dimensions. In this way they therefore enhance their own self-knowledge, and they enhance their awareness regarding their personal limits and opportunities. The exercises promote the communication capabilities of the participants; they may apply various forms of verbal and non-verbal communication with more awareness. They may also develop higher skills in recognising content in voice, countenance, mimics and posture, and they may be able to understand others better with the help of all this.

Such training sessions may provide help for the participants in the acquisition of various techniques of public role playing. Success or failure in interesting, peculiar exercises may help the group members to acquire skills through which they may be able to apply solutions other than usual thus inspiring them for more flexible thinking. Training sessions with adequate climate and good organisation provide deep impressions and effects, which do not only develop individual communication capabilities, but they also help the participants to mutually shape each other, and to develop personally in the area of assessing themselves and their capabilities, their way of thinking, their personal relations, thus improving their relationships at school and also their private relations. Communication training courses however are no panacea. Their success depends on several factors, and personal results may also vary widely even within certain individual groups.

The effect mechanism of a special training course

Communication training courses inspired by drama-pedagogy differ from other types of training courses as far as some fundamental features are concerned. These features mainly stem from the elaborated professional background of "drama", and correlate with the conscious application of these

features. Erik Szauder, one of the most significant theoreticians in drama-pedagogy in Hungary, is of the opinion that the most important component in the application of drama in pedagogy is the examination of individual and social values as well as the content of such accomplishment with the help of a tool named "the problemisation of thought" as Foucault called it (1986, 388). In other words, in this process drama means that the content of knowledge and types of behaviour are elevated to the level of personal knowledge in an obviously fictitious situation, which, apart from this, is realistic in all its elements (Szauder, 2001, 31).

The main features of this methodology stem right from the art-pedagogical character of this methodology since it may operate with the elaborated methods of an artistic branch, the theatre or the drama. Nevertheless, as Szauder says: "The situation is somewhat different when drama is applied in pedagogy since in a situation like this (a) the participants at the same time are "actors" and "spectators" in the process created in this way; (b) unlike written dramas, here the dramatic plot does not have a pre-recorded text, which exists independently of the intent of the participants (there is no text, plot, sets of relations)...At the same time however the participants of the dramatic plot are "compelled" to conduct continuous cognitive and social activities since only in this way may they create situations, that is these situations only become liveable and therefore understandable, if the participants evoke them in an active way. Besides emotional content, the jointly created situations and plot may also naturally convey several elements of factual knowledge. However, unlike "textbook-like", alienated knowledge, which appears without context, this knowledge always appears in a contextual frame" (Szauder, 2001, 31). Thus, unlike situations, which often happen during situational exercises in conventional training courses, role-playing in dramatic context does not mean that the players leave reality or that they "play about" irresponsibly. On the contrary: It makes unavoidable for the laws of reality and the reality of fiction to continuously correlate since despite the fact that fiction in a certain respect may open the frames of reality (for example the linear timing and limits in space of reality), the internal logic of fiction must adapt to real experience (Szauder, 2001, 32).

László Kaposi, president of the Hungarian Drama-Pedagogical Society, one of the creators of the school of drama-pedagogy in Hungary, is of the opinion that educational drama differs from other dynamic procedures in that the in it definitive elements of the created situations (space, time, players, relations, etc.) are conscientiously regulated in order to achieve its pedagogical goals in contrast with dramatic games or "situational exercises", which are usually of loose structure, therefore not so definitive and are uncontrollable, or with the theatre, where all these elements are more structured, so their pedagogical application is also more difficult (Kaposi, 2004, 6).

The key to the efficiency of communication training sessions inspired by drama-pedagogy stems from all this: besides the educational advantages that come from the practical nature of conventional training courses, these courses provide learning experience with the use of the internal regularities of drama by consciously mobilising and controlling these regularities through artistic experience. All this is conducted in protected environment. In this way the participants do not fall victims of the dubious experience of "playing about", and, in optimum cases, do not abuse the "openness" this method offers due to situations left without control.

The source of "catharsis"

The most successful training sessions however are formulated spontaneously, based on the capabilities and the composition of the group participants as well as on the training atmosphere and also on the empathy of the trainers. Even the most thorough planning process may not work, if the groups are incapable of improvising. Each training course is different, as each drama lesson is different. This, and also the new opportunities for establishing human relationships are the reasons why communication training courses have the chance of being cathartic experiences.

If the trainers conscientiously use the drama-pedagogical methods as described above during these training courses, and if they build on the professional strengths of "drama", then they may reach a very high level in the development of communication. This has been proven by the outcome of research concerning various programmes aimed at making up for disadvantages and talent management. In this way the statement seems to be justified that in tackling communication disadvantages, which may stem for reasons such as social problems, communication training courses inspired by drama-pedagogy may play a very important role.

This is a real interest of society; therefore a real attitude shift is needed in this area towards reform pedagogy. There is no time to postpone this issue: Hungary may only be viable and competitive in the age of globalisation, if we manage to find adequate, alternative solutions, which are scientifically based, which may be able to mobilise hindered or hidden knowledge capital, and in this way we may implement a "revolution of conscience" and a "paradigm shift" in thinking also in the area of scientific practice.

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