

## ŠTRUKTÚROVANÁ DRAMATICKÁ HRA NA HODINÁCH LITERATÚRY

### PROCESS DRAMA ON THE CLASSES OF LITERATURE

*Katalin Kuklis*

#### **Abstrakt**

Hodina literat ry je kontroverzn m javom vo vyučovacom procese. Na jednej strane vieme,  e literat ra je s ce umeleck  predmet, avšak na druhej strane vid me,  e dan  objekt je pln  liter rno-historick ch faktov a liter rno-teoretick ch poznatkov, ktoré si študenti majú osvojiť. Takto ost va veľmi m lo času na hodin ch na stretnutie sa s umen m a s n m spojen  z žitky a diskusie. N sledok tohto javu je aj to,  e študenti po skončení strednej školy alebo gymn zia nemaj   iadny kontakt s literat rou (ako aj s umen m) a nest vaj  sa  itateľmi. Na t tu problematiku pon ka riešenie dramatick  v chova. Štrukt rovan  dramatick  hra, ako aj in  formy dramatickej  innosti pon kaj  mo nosť prehĺbenia sa v danom u ive. Navyše pomocou dramatick ch hier si študenti rozv jaj  kompetencie k špecifick mu pozn vaniu sveta okolo nich.

**Kľ čov  slov :** *dramatick  v chova, štrukt rovan  dramatick  hra, didaktika literat ry*

#### **Abstract**

Classes of literature are controversial phenomena in the teaching process. On one hand, it is obvious that literature is a subject about art, on the other hand we can see how much it is loaded with facts and knowledge from the fields of literary history and literary theory which have to be absorbed by the students – leaving little or no space for experiencing art itself or for discussions. As a result, students after finishing secondary school do not have any contact with literature (nor other art forms) and do not become readers. How can educational drama help in such cases? Process drama, but also other forms of dramatic activities give opportunities for a non-conventional but rather in-depth analysis of a given subject. Moreover, the various dramatic conventions also help the students to develop skills for getting to know the world around them better.

**Key words:** *educational drama, process drama, didactics of literature*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In our PhD thesis we are focusing on the interpretational aspects of using process drama on the lessons of Hungarian language and literature. This time, our scope of interest is opened to the classes of literature generally. It means that, while thinking about the above stated subject, we can also have in mind the classes of Slovak language and literature. As living in the same country and sharing common laws and rather similar concepts and problems of education the process of teaching literature can also bring up questions and experience that could be useful to share.



## 1 DIFFICULTIES OF TEACHING LITERATURE

Classes of literature are controversial phenomena in the teaching process. On one hand, it is obvious that literature is a subject about art, on the other hand we can see how much it is loaded with facts and knowledge from the fields of literary history and literary theory which have to be absorbed by the students. As a result, little or no space is left on the lessons for experiencing art itself or for discussions. It might be the reason why students after finishing secondary school do not have any contact with literature (nor other art forms).

Reading is much influenced by ones interests and motivations. Speaking about adolescents it is even more important to activate them adequately in order to draw their attention to reading – most effectively through ones own psychosocial state of development. Adolescents perceive themselves as “living people” and reject anything that is not closely connected to life – t.i. not capable to fascinate or address them (see Homolov  2006, p. 43).

On a conference organized by the Hungarian Reading Association (HUNRA – Magyar Olvas st rsas g) in Hungary, in 2002, the invited speakers were trying to find answers for the following question: how is it possible that after twelve years of literary education young people do not become readers en masse? The speakers have agreed that the question touches several aspects of the teaching process. One of the basic problems is that instead of teaching literature it is much more about teaching literary history. But there are also many other factors – such as the chronologic arrangement of the curricula, the lack of practical materials for teachers, the lack of time, etc. (v. Arat  2002) – that obstruct the student-centered way of teaching and developing the necessary skills. What is more, the most of the textbooks used for teaching literature are “an object lesson in dilettantism and unprofessionalism, what is even more tragic, they are hiding under the title of new maturita – hereby depreciating it and questioning its justness” (Vojtech 2006, p. 61 – translated by Kuklis). What is also problematic about these textbooks is their encyclopedic character, their low level of creativity and the presentation of old-fashioned and outworn theories (see Vojtech 2006, p. 63).

All these aspect are important to stress and deal with but what we see as the core problem that the artistic character of the subject has long been neglected. The aesthetic experience has been expelled from the lessons. Students seldom meet the original texts – it is its interpretation (someone else’s interpretation) what they get first. Teachers seldom read on the lessons and if they do so they mostly do not prepare the ground for reception properly.

How can creative drama help in such cases?

## 2 EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION AND CREATIVE DRAMA

We hope that it does not have to be stressed that success at school is not only about grades – progressive education should not forget about developing trusting relationships, improving social skills, enhancing self-control or building on child strengths. In his *Education and Experience* (1938) John Dewey established the philosophy of experiential education. One of his basic concepts is to understand what it means, in the concrete, “to live in a world” – i.e. to “live in series of situations” (Dewey 1938, 1998, p. 41). He goes on: “As an individual passes from one situation to another, his world, his environment, expands or contracts. He does not find himself living in another world but in a different part or aspect of one and the same world. What he has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow. The process goes on as long as life and learning continue. (...) A divided world, a world whose parts and aspects do not hang together, is at once a sign and a cause of a divided personality”



(ibid. p. 42–43.). That is why teachers cannot overlook the social, educational, family etc. background of their students but by taking into consideration all the necessary factors one has to choose the methods – the methods for a given group in the given time and space – carefully.

As Bek niov has pointed out “despite the various reforms and efforts in changing the system our educational system has still remained in the trap of the tradition” (Bek niov 2012, p. 6 – translated by Kuklis). She also underlines that school should provide their students the type of learning that is direct and experiential, which is based on reality or fiction – i.e. the way of learning that is typical for creative drama. The students who take part in such a process actively do not only gain knowledge about a given topic but also apply that knowledge immediately, build attitude towards the world and life etc.

Although drama functions as a subject on its own in our neighbouring countries, e.g. Hungary or the Czech Republic, in the Slovak educational system creative drama has rarely appeared yet. Many times it has wrongly been understood as dramatization or games played at nurseries. However, creative drama is a rather complex phenomenon which could be defined from various aspects (see Bek niov 2012 p. 10) but here we would like to turn our attention to the usage of creative drama on the lessons of literature.

Zuzana Jirsov, in her thesis labels creative drama as a way leading to literature. She names two possible ways how creative drama and literature can merge:

1. Creative drama uses literature as a resource or tool for reaching its objectives – e.g. in a process drama lesson uses a poem, or excerpts from a novel, scenes from a drama or movie adaptation.
2. Literary education uses the methods of creative drama in order to look at the given literary piece from various aspects – e.g. using several games, dramatic conventions (such as role on the wall, hot chair etc.). In such cases creative drama functions “only” as a method in the teaching process.

### 3 PROCESS DRAMA

In the following part of our study we focus on process drama which is a kind of dramatic activity being used to explore a problem, situation or theme through the use of certain dramatic conventions. This is what also might be labeled as *drama in education* (DIE) or *complex drama* (in Slovak *štrukturovan dramatick hra*, in Hungarian *tantsi drma*, *komplex drma*), or which was labeled by Bolton as Type D: drama for understanding (see Bolton 1993).

What follows is an example of process drama lesson which has been planned for a drama workshop for undergraduates.

#### 3.1 O’Driscoll – Lesson plan

Group characteristics: high school students or undergraduates; approx. 20–25 people

Time: approx. 90 min.

Conditions, appliances: an average classroom without desks (or placed on the side), chairs for all participants

Objectives: to get acquainted with W. B. Yeats’s ballad *The Host of the Air*; to see the possible effects of gambling



The story: O'Driscoll and Bridget has just got married, but problems arise as gambling appears in their life

Extras: during the lesson the teacher steps into roles so it is essential to have skills in acting

### 3.1.1 Introduction

*The teacher explains the students that they are going to read one of Yeats' ballads and together they sum up what they know about the genre. Then the teacher reads the first part of the poem.*

O'Driscoll drove with a song  
The wild duck and the drake  
From the tall and the tufted reeds  
Of the drear Hart Lake.

And he saw how the reeds grew dark  
At the coming of night-tide,  
And dreamed of the long dim hair  
Of Bridget his bride.

### 3.1.2 Narration

TEACHER: Our story takes place in Ireland at the beginning of the 20th century. Imagine the countryside, a small village in the north-western part of the country. This is where O'Driscoll lives. He is a young man in his twenties who works as a game-keeper. We do not even know his first name because everybody just calls him O'Driscoll. He is a solitary young man as his parents died quite early leaving him alone without any siblings. His parents had come from different parts of the country so there are no relatives nearby. That is why he soon becomes quite independent and self-sufficient. He is neither rich nor poor. Otherwise he is quite an ordinary young man – he has some friends, he likes playing cards with them, he also enjoys going to balls but there he never dances. He has just recently got married to Bridget, a girl with a similar fate – she was raised by her father as her mother died in childbirth. Bridget was considered as a pretty and thoughtful girl by the villagers.

### 3.1.3 Writing a diary entry/love letter

TEACHER: This time we go back in time and look at the story of Bridget and O'Driscoll. Make two groups and talk about:

Group A: the details of their first encounter (when, where and how did Bridget and O'Driscoll meet first),

Group B: their relationship and love (how do they meet, how often, where etc.).

*The students are given not more than five minutes for this task.*

TEACHER: If you are ready half your groups. Groups A1 and A2 write the diary entries of Bridget (A1) and O'Driscoll (A2) of the day they met, whereas groups B1 and B2 write love letters that Bridget (B1) and O'Driscoll (B2) have written to each other. Now, all the groups work separately.



*If they are ready, first, the groups are asked to form one big circle again. Then they tell each other what they have done. It is useful to start with group A – they tell the others about Bridget’s and O’Driscoll’s first encounter and then they read the diary entries they have written. Next, group B presents what they have done. Finally, the teacher collects the letters and the diary entries (they will be needed at the end of the lesson).*

### 3.1.4 “Freeze frames” / “thought tracking” – the wedding

TEACHER: So the wedding went smoothly. Let’s make three freeze frames of it. I am going to give you the titles of these images. While you are presenting them I might touch any of you on the shoulder – if I do so, please, tell us one sentence what your character might have thought at that moment (*called “thought tracking”*).

*This time it is a whole-group activity. For making these images the students get just a few seconds (e.g. the teacher slowly counts from 10 to 1 – by that time an image has to be ready, students have to “freeze” for a few seconds). The teacher can help them by appointing the main characters at each of the images so they would not waste any time on agreeing who O’Driscoll or Bridget should be.*

TEACHER: The titles of the three pictures:

- the wedding procession,
- exchanging the rings,
- the wedding reception – *here, the still image can “come to life” for a few seconds (the students can enjoy the wedding reception for a while) but the teacher should decide beforehand how the scene ends (e.g. the couple leaves the “merry bands”).*

### 3.1.5 “Hot Chair”

TEACHER: What do you think this marriage means to O’Driscoll? Let’s ask O’Driscoll himself. You all are his best friend who is visiting him soon after the wedding. During this game let me be O’Driscoll himself. So they are talking about...

*The teacher with his answers aims to make the image of a man who is fully in love, happy and optimistic about the future.*

### 3.1.6 “Role on the wall”

TEACHER: Let’s sum up together what we know about O’Driscoll. What kind of a person/character is he? What qualities would you name to describe him?

*The aim of this dramatic convention is to make sure that the students understand the character they are working with. The ideas that get on the board should be approved by everyone.*

### 3.1.7 Making a list

TEACHER: Let’s read the following part of the poem:

He heard while he sang and dreamed  
A piper piping away,  
And never was piping so sad,



And never was piping so gay.

And he saw young men and young girls  
Who danced on a level place,  
And Bridget his bride among them,  
With a sad and a gay face.

The dancers crowded about him  
And many a sweet thing said,  
And a young man brought him red wine  
And a young girl white bread.

But Bridget drew him by the sleeve  
Away from the merry bands,  
To old men playing at cards  
With a twinkling of ancient hands.

TEACHER: I have already mentioned that O’Driscoll loved playing cards with his friends but let’s think of this habit as a kind of addiction. Many times people cannot say “no” for such temptations. Unfortunately, this is the case with him, too. Can we think of any particular situations where it starts to matter in his relationship with Bridget? Let’s make a list together.

*The teacher should write the student’s ideas down – on the board (if there is any) or on a sheet.*

### 3.1.8 Small-group improvisation

TEACHER: Make four groups (they can be the same as those in the third game). Each group can choose one situation from the list and act it out.

### 3.1.9 “Forum theatre”

TEACHER: The problem is getting more and more serious. Bridget wants to talk to O’Driscoll and tries to persuade him to fight against his addiction. What could she say, how could she influence him? She wants to save their marriage.

During this game, called “forum theatre” any of you can step in the role of Bridget and let me take on O’Driscoll’s character. The others, who are watching the scene, can stop it anytime when they want to help Bridget. You can give her ideas what to say in order to “win” against O’Driscoll or you can even swap. But this time you cannot swap with me.

*The character of O’Driscoll this time is a rather stubborn one who does not think that he is doing anything wrong. He does not understand why it is a problem if he goes out with his friends to have fun sometimes – even if he has lost a lot of money already. He also keeps telling how much he loves his wife but by this time it sounds as an excuse only. The real aim of the game is not the “victory” of one of the characters but rather to make the students think of as many possible ways of solving a problem as they can. The teacher stops the game when s/he feels that the students have done their best.*

TEACHER: Let’s switch to the poem again:

The bread and the wine had a doom,  
For these were the host of the air;  
He sat and played in a dream  
Of her long dim hair.

He played with the merry old men  
And thought not of evil chance,  
Until one bore Bridget his bride  
Away from the merry dance.

He bore her away in his arms,  
The handsomest young man there,  
And his neck and his breast and his arms  
Were drowned in her long dim hair.

### 3.1.10 “Freeze frames”

TEACHER: Make four groups again and show us in a still image what you think as the worst possible ending for Bridget and O’Driscoll’s situation/marriage. How can their relationship change if everything turns out badly?

*The groups present their freeze frames one by one. While the students are “frozen” the teacher reads the diary entries/love letters from the beginning of the lesson (there are exactly four pieces for the four images) – the teacher asks them beforehand to keep the image while s/he is reading.*

TEACHER: And this is how the poem ends:

O’Driscoll scattered the cards  
And out of his dream awoke:  
Old men and young men and young girls  
Were gone like a drifting smoke;

But he heard high up in the air  
A piper piping away,  
And never was piping so sad,  
And never was piping so gay.

*This is where the lesson ends. If there is still some time left, the teacher can explain the students that the story they have just “acted out” can be a possible interpretation of the poem. The teacher can also encourage them to think of their own interpretations.*

## CONCLUSION

Looking at the lesson plan above we can see that such activities need detailed planning and also previous knowledge on drama education. Planning a drama lesson requires several activities – finding the topic, the focus, building the context, deepening the problem, reflecting on the topic etc. Using drama also requires a different attitude towards teaching: here, the teacher must be truly interested in the students’ thoughts, ideas – there are no so



called “correct” answers, however, during a drama lesson there are a lot of questions, a lot of thinking, co-thinking and co-operation with the classmates, etc.

In terms of drama it is the group that determines the frame of the lesson. The teacher must carefully look at the needs of the given group or its special features – or the teacher has to be flexible enough to be able to change to other activities if the situation on the lesson requires something else that has been planned. But drama teachers also need some acting skills as from time to time they need to step into roles.

The lesson above was realized on a drama workshop held for students of English language at Selye János University in Komárno, in 2011. The lesson plan did not need any changes, the participants were thinking together on questions, solving problems, arguing – through the context of a poem. And, however, this time the primary goal of the lesson was using a foreign language in an unconscious way, this lesson plan can also be used for talking about literature.

What we see as the greatest advantage of using process drama with students is that drama works vertically, i.e. it makes its participants to delve into a problem – this time the harmful effects of gambling illustrated by literary characters. We can also look at such a lesson plan as the adaptation of a piece of literature (see the adaptation theory of Linda Hutcheon) which give a possible interpretation of the given piece or can motivate the students to make their own interpretation. Such lessons also give opportunity to see and experience literary texts in an unconventional way. As the positive side-effects of using drama we can mention the development of communication or problem solving skills while it requires active participation on the lessons.

However, the implementation of process drama into our traditional teaching conditions meets some obstacles. Firstly, its time schedule requires 90-minute lessons. Secondly, it is also obvious that it conveys a kind of knowledge that cannot be evaluated by our traditional grading system, nor can it be monitored in form of tests which are so popular nowadays. Thirdly, acquiring drama skills needs a lot of extra effort from the side of teachers.

To sum it up, process drama gives opportunities for an unconventional but rather in-depth analysis of a given subject. Moreover, the various dramatic conventions also help the students to develop skills for getting to know the world around them better. What is needed, is a turn in the understanding of the objectives of education. We think it is the highest time to change for something better.

### LITERATURE

ARATÓ, L., 2002. „Tizenkét évi irodalomtanítás után miért nem válnak tömegesen olvasóvá a fiatalok?” In. Könyv és Nevelés. 2002/4. Online ISSN 2061-0912. [Http://olvasas.opkm.hu/index.php?menuId=125&action=article&id=366](http://olvasas.opkm.hu/index.php?menuId=125&action=article&id=366) (Downloaded 10. 2. 2014)

BEKÉNIOVÁ, L., 2012. *Tvorivá dramatika v edukačnom procese*. Bratislava: Metodicko-pedagogické centrum. ISBN 978-80-8052-404-3.

BOLTON, G., 1993. *A tanítási dráma elmélete*. Budapest: Marczibányi Téri Művelődési Központ. ISBN 963845704X.

DEWEY, J., 1938, 1998. *Experience and Education*. Indiana: Kappa Delta Pi. ISBN 0–912099–35–6.



HOMOLOV, K., 2006. *Komunikativn vyučování literatury a vchova tenre na současn středn škole*. In. VOJTECH, M., ed., 2006. *K problematice vyučování materinskho jazyka a literatury*. Bratislava: Univerzita Komenskho. ISBN 80–223–2229–6.

VOJTECH, M., 2006. *Vyučovanie literatry a kurikulrna prestavba*. In. VOJTECH, M., ed., 2006. *K problematike vyučovania materinskho jazyka a literatry*. Bratislava: Univerzita Komenskho. ISBN 80–223–2229–6.

### Kontaktn údaje

Meno a priezvisko: Mgr. Katalin Kuklis

Pracovisko: Katedra maďarskho jazyka a literatry, Filozofick fakulta Univerzity Komenskho, Gondova 2, 814 99 Bratislava 1

E mail: kuklis.ka@gmail.com

