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“Educational Theater” – History and Functioning within the School Network in Bulgaria

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Abstract

The author, as one of the founders of the “Educational Theater”, analyzes and defines the educational model presented by herself as a form of non-formal education which is constantly changing following both her original pedagogically conceived concept and world educational practices built on a visual and theatrical basis. The paper describes the transformation from a leadership-oriented training model to an interactive theatre-educational model presented by the “Fun Science” Theater and involving the children in the performance as partners and analysts of their own achievements. The prospect of the changing paradigm is outlined - from a Watch, Play and Write model to a Watch, Interact and Analyze one endorsed by the author as interesting, desirable and meaningful for learners.

Keywords: *Educational Theatre, Educational performance, Model of teaching, Interactive model.*

Prologue

The history, the ideas and the functioning of the educational theatrical system of the “Educational Theater” as a teaching and learning model and a working service-sector organization will be presented and analyzed through a specific blending of a first-person narrative and a scientific analysis resulting from the series of events in a chronological and theoretical application order. I take the liberty of using this particular way of presenting the topic only because I am one of the authors of the concept of *Educational Theater* functioning since 1994 till nowadays through two organizations, namely: “Educational Theatre” and “Fun Science” Theatre.

“Educational Theater” as a School Education Project. Encounters in the New Environment – Spectators and Their Mediators, Competitors and Finding a Place of One’s Own.

Teachers as Mediators of “Educational Theatre”.

In the dawn of the 90s Bulgaria had turned into a new place where any new endeavor both in school and in all other spheres of public life looked like a well-forgotten old one. I was one of those people who were eager to experiment and change the spheres in which they felt professionally confident and competent.

It was in September 1995 when for the first time I entered a classroom and talked to a teacher about “Educational Theater” and the idea about students learning as they watch an educational spectacle. She was genuinely glad about it and accepted the idea as if for years she had been looking forward to its arrival. We talked as if “Educational Theater” had been abolished for years and at that moment it was coming back to life. While in fact it was merely being born.

Today, when Educational Theatre has been into existence in Bulgaria for almost 25 years, I think, that conversation, in that emotional intensity, frankness and enthusiasm is completely implausible. A large part of the teachers from supporting contributors and inspiring partners on the newly emerging projects in the area of education have gradually become business- and formally-oriented intermediaries. Their work motivation, personal interests and partiality towards certain events, projects and new formats for education have taken the upper hand when it comes to the acceptance or rejection of many ideas and projects offered to the students in schools as consumers of educational services and products. Educational Theatre has also become part of this subjectively preferred, hard-to-plan and extremely complex situation of symbiosis between formal and non-formal education offered at schools. The lack

of real change in education so far as well as the chaotic and non-scientifically based activities in the schools around the country, recommended and funded by the different governments, add up to a growing insecurity within the educational system. Probably it is not the teachers to be blamed for the doubts, negative attitudes and concerns they raise not only about the meaning of their own work but also about the array of projects created as products for supposedly educational purposes. To this day the lack of scientific criteria continues to hamper the development of school education including such projects as “Educational Theater” which have been scientifically approbated. Unfortunately, in Bulgaria it is not objectively clear which teacher is a good one and similarly it remains questionable which projects improve the quality of school education for students. This situation has allowed for the acceptance of all kinds of projects at schools and particularly of those which are financially beneficial. Anything nowadays can be presented as educational and moral and children become its spectators by the will of their intermediary.

Competitive Environment, Financial Insecurity and Solutions

A lot of actors recognized in the ideas of “Educational Theater” an opportunity for artistic expression and making a living. Resembling the created and successfully working system, several theatrical troupes, dynamic in composition and activity, have been formed and have named themselves ‘educational’.

A large number of teachers express their concern about the disappearance of the creative energy which inspires students not only during the realization of such projects but also within themselves as educators. If the teacher demotivation may be explained by reasons within the governments activity, or rather in their omission to reform the educational system, when we focus on the majority of theatrical groups touring the schools there are other points of concern that emerge. Teachers voice opinions that most of these are extremely commercially-oriented projects. It is apparent how the absence of unity in terms of scientific content, educational constructivism and theatrical creation reach an unprofessional level and in some cases lead to the emergence of a new *commedia erudita* in which the poorly tailored scenario, though it may come along with a brilliant acting performance result in a triumph of incompetency speaking in scientific and educational terms.

Another problem stems from the common in the past “theater subsidies” which used to create an environment conducive to the development of the theater. Currently, however, the funding of theatrical groups (called “state groups”) at the expense of hardly any funding for the other theatrical groups (called “private groups”) projects a lot of distortions from a competitive

aspect within this sphere. The contemporary schemes for theater funding as a free initiative (as far as they exist) are very often vitiated by the will of the institutions and organizations which provide it. The moment they decide to stop the funding for cultural activities many theaters close their activity or it is largely restricted to an extent at which they do not produce theater any more but products intended for consumption by clients, in this case, students. This dependence on external factors without a theatrically- or educationally-oriented activity is extremely unfavorable especially for democracies which are in the early years of their existence and people in these societies are still in the process of overcoming their old-fashioned attitudes about the value of theatrical art in a financial and economic respect.

How Is “Educational Theater” Moving Forward?

“Educational Theatre” is an independent, private, non-profit organization which sustains itself only by its spectators and the support of trade organizations with a so-called ‘socially responsible conduct’ gaining in popularity nowadays. Its existence has continued for so long due to the huge benefit which particularly during the last years has contributed to boosting the quality of students’ education, teacher competence and the great number of different projects developed and conducted by it with whole classes of students and schools.

The fate of “Educational Theater” is not an easy one in these days marked by the exceptional development of television, cinema, video and the Internet, all of which enjoy the generous financial support of advertising, commercial and financial institutions. Many social researchers from the fields of culture, politics, sociology, economics and anthropology foresee the end of theater as an art able to exist in the contemporary world, i.e. to be a successful cultural project but also a business which is popular, spectacular and entertaining enough to be able to bring constant and growing-in-time profit to its creators, performers and managers. This end has long been prophesied but to the pessimists’ surprise it is yet to come while history seems to repeat itself again and again and the theatre keeps coming back to life in new forms and styles. I have the chance to observe on a daily basis the great variety of young people who work in the so-called by theater researchers “*poor theaters*”. Such theaters exist all over the world – from the *Covent Garden Theater* in London to the famous opera in Sydney. Europe is full of theatrical troupes experimenting with form, text, space and play. Because of these actors, directors and scenographers who do not work only for the money, the audience have the chance to see interpretations of Shakespeare which they would not have thought of, to feel the world through their senses and to be involved into a drama or a comedy which they have not imagined in the least. A new medium is created which develops new

spaces and turns them into theatrical ones. The movement first began from the theater foyers and went out into the street where it had started in the first place ages before. Nowadays it is the parks, the cafes, the restaurants, the business rooms and the schools that are designed like theaters. The world is transforming into a large theatrical space where the actor and the spectator very often overlap. The reality formats capture the minds, the behavior and the emotional world within all the people. New links are established between performers and spectators which violate the so-called good behavior that requires the audience to silently observe the performance from the dark part of the hall. The spectator is more and more often present on stage communicating and partnering with the actors which has become part of the agreement with the audience for a performance that is good and significant for the spectator.

As Glen Wickham has noted, one of the world's most influential theater history researcher, "an educational process is under way which for the time being is moving slow because the majority of these performances lack a distinct structure." Wickham, (2002). In his opinion history repeats itself again and again. "The historical path of the "narrator" has been the same in India and in China, of the medieval minstrels and their troupes, too, as well as of the *commedia del'arte*. For the present moment it is still uncertain and pointless to try to predict the shape that these yet unstructured spectacles will take in their future development; but we may rest assured that they will evolve as long as young performers preserve their sensitivity and self-criticism, stick to what is obviously enjoyable for the spectators (especially for the kids among them) and use constructively everything they have learned." Wickham (2002).

The Initial Ideas of "Educational Theater" as an Educational System.

The Beginning and the Essence of Educational Theater.

"Educational Theater" starts as a theatrical troupe and gradually turns into an independent organization. The founders of this unique system are two: Radka Vassileva, lecturer at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", a doctor in Education teaching educational sciences and Suni Suninski (Alexander Ivanov), an actor at that time, later - an M.A. in Theater and Film Direction. A short while before that time he had received "The King of the Puppet Theater" Award from the Union of Bulgarian Actors (which unfortunately is not awarded any longer for puppet theater artistic accomplishments).

A theatre-and-education activity is initiated mostly driven by personally significant goals. The educational goal involved the creation of a mobile theater-based learning program for the elementary-school students and later for the rest of the school levels, which presented special,

educationally-designed performances on improvised school stages. It is the spectacles-system creators' wish to demonstrate that a learning process in which students study by watching and participating in specially-designed educational performances is as successful as the learning which takes place when students study from texts, teacher presentations and group reading-and-writing activities in class. This academic attitude is reflected in the early plays produced as theatrical education products.

Very soon both creators realize that the task they had undertaken was not only scientifically educational and creatively theatrical but it was a serious endeavor demanding their entire commitment if they are striving for success that would last. The work has been carried on for years in terms of taking on of actors, directors, scenographers, music editors, stage workers, organizers, as well as accounting, signing of contracts with parental associations, school boards and school principals, collaboration with other business organizations, advertising and PR companies, socially and charity-oriented programs and projects.

Every day we search for new partnerships with schools, design new plays, work on determining and enriching the image of the theater as an organization whose first and foremost aim is to collaborate with educators on the teaching of school curriculum topics, which are complex (with integrated educational content) and pursue highly-cognitive and affectively-defined objectives achievable only by visual representation.

The first few years in the system involve experimentation on every level, i.e. educational, theatrical, social and communicative. We strive to find good solutions and stability that would stem from the creation of a theater-educational product satisfactory both for the spectators and the participants in the project.

Following a series of amendments, along with the establishment of the organization as a working and prospective one in a socio-economic aspect, the first educational product is created, namely: *A Consistent Structure of the Educational Performance*, consisting of:

1. The Animated Greeting of “Educational Theater”

Technique: The greeting involves special choreography performed by all spectators in the hall. It is dynamic, different from the common greetings of everyday communication between people. It includes elements which are part of the upcoming performance. It is extended by students' suggestions.

Expected results: This greeting plays the role of introducing a new format of teaching and learning at schools designed to open up opportunities for a new kind of interaction between

actors and students.

2. Public Award Ceremonies for Students with Achievements at the Test in the 'Funny Questionnaire' Workbook.

Technique: All spectators receive a workbook with questions comprising a test for each performance. The workbook is called "The Funny Questionnaire". Children do the tests at home. The particularly interesting answers to creative tasks are shown to everybody and commented by the actors as tasks demonstrating personal student accomplishments.

Expected results: It is expected that all students would see different interpretations for the completion of the creative task which has been inspired by the performance they have already seen. An emphasis is laid upon the originality, technical precision and assiduousness in the performance.

3. Educational Performance

Technique: The performance is on a topic taught at school. Students observe the unfolding of the story which is told and visualized in an interesting and fun way by the actors. It is based on a scientific problem which is developed by the relations between characters in the play. The performance offers different options for its solution whereby some fail or turn to be erroneous. The scenarios are the author's own creation and do not make use of any classic fairy tale plots or works of other authors.

Expected results: It is expected that the students will watch the unfolding of the drama action carefully. Due to the focus on the process-development orientation approach in science, it is also anticipated for students to see the scientific processes as they are integrated in people's everyday activities. Thus, they will receive a better understanding of their meaning and applicability in real life, e.g. for the solution of problems occurring daily in their lives. It is also expected that the performance will provide them with ideas for the different options of solving a particular problem.

4. Animated Foreign-Language Component

Technique: Children with the help of the actors learn 5-10 words in English. After several group repetitions of each word following the Image Theater Model, one or more children (chosen at random, e.g. by drawing lots) go out on the improvised stage and repeat the words in front of everyone sculpturing their meaning, i.e. standing still similarly to sculptured figures or a composition of more sculpture figures. This participation on their part is awarded

a prize. These words have already been used in the performance and now the children learn them as key terms for the taught study material but this time in English as well.

Expected results: We expect that group repetition reinforces the learning of new words by heart in a foreign language taught at school which accompanied by sculpturing makes learning more interesting and fun.

5. Play with the Audience

Technique: This technique involves two plays. The first one takes place before the beginning of the performance and comprises of active sculpturing similar to the one in the language component, where students use their body, but this time following the example of actors. The technique is based on the Image Theatre Model, i.e. students use their bodies to mime images which are part of the performance they will watch as spectators. The second play is after the performance and reflects the knowledge taught through the spectacle. It is animated, i.e. the children by means of pictures or paper models put together the knowledge or process taught in the performance, e.g. a sequence of words, the chronology of events, the structure configuration of an object or a phenomenon or something else.

Expected results: In this component students prepare to use visually constructive means of expression for mastering knowledge.

What is the Essence of “Educational Theater” as an Educational Format and Its Value among the New Educational Projects?

As far back as 1966 G. Fridman in France writes a paper in the Le Monde newspaper about the so-called by him “parallel school” featuring products to become known as educational only later when they are used for study purposes. *Moglen (2014)*. The list of such products included still at that time various audio and film strips which can additionally have an educational application in some areas or environments. “Educational Theater” has not been created as a product with an independent role, parallel to education which can be used by students and teachers depending on their desire. It has been designed as an educational product meant to be presented at school to students from a particular age group. Apparently, for it a definition in the sense of parallel education is not sufficiently representative.

In a three-year scientific research *Vassileva (2002)* tests the idea of “*Educational Theater*” as a *play-based educational model* which stimulates the search and presentation of creative solutions by the spectators in the theater. Their attainment is preconditioned as a result of an active and pre-planned stage stimulation which the students receive through the ideas and the

activities presented by the actors in a specifically-constructed educational performance. For the researcher it is important that the students participate in different ways in a creativity-focused educational model in which they observe a performance, play and create their own products after the performance by working independently through writing or drawing. The study confirms the potential of this visually- and play-based educational model to stimulate students' creative thinking and creativity.

Basic Characteristics of “Educational Theater” as a Market Product and a Teaching-and-Learning Model

1. A *market-oriented product* has been created which is self-sustainable and is independent as an economic entity. It has accumulated a sufficient number of resources to be able to renew its material basis and to develop educational and theater components such as educational programs and new ideational projects by its own means through self-directed investment.

2. A *working, creatively-orientated theater-educational product* has been created with an educational potential to inspire students to think out-of-the-box or in the way the characters in each educational play act, think or feel; to communicate in the way the main characters do in the educational play and to act creatively the way their favorite characters from the spectacle would do or, alternatively, the way they can already allow themselves to write or draw challenged by the spirit of the offered teaching-and-learning model.

3. A functioning educational-theater *product with a three-component structure: Watch, Play and Write*. The separate components of the teaching-and-learning system are presented in the form of a spectacle, children participation in play-based activities before and after the spectacle together with actors and an individual written assignment which they complete independently at school or at home.

Some Limitations Noted in the Self-Determination Process

The qualification in Vassileva's research “play-based with an educational potential in the area of creativity” places “Educational Theater” among the educational tools for special purposes. In her book “Why Teach by Playing” (2002) an emphasis is laid upon the potential of the game which challenges and inspires the students towards creativity. This format of self-determination is partially self-restrictive. Be it only on the basis of interpretation, the whole educational model is reduced to an original play-based teaching-and-learning method developed by means of a series of different art, drama and theater techniques ordered in a

structured sequence which reinforce the development and manifestation of students' creative attitude.

“Educational Theater” undoubtedly is a play-based model, but it is also a model of a high cultural value due to the whole atmosphere, environment and perspective in which it shapes a new type of thinking, allows for the expression of emotions and feelings, and charges students' imagination and thinking with new ideas. Therefore, its determination should be sought after and enriched in the field of cultural education and industries in the area of educational services.

Models of Comparative Self-Determination

Although “Educational Theater” is a program of local significance (it is present in a limited number of schools, working within a formal, state-regulated curriculum) and is funded by fees paid by the client (the children's parents as their representatives) we shall compare it to systems, programs and industries which resemble it in terms of the means of expression used for achieving different educational purposes and in particular those of visual arts.

1. Cultural and Entertainment Product Models and Industries.

World Models and Industries.

Pierre Moeglin, professor and director of the Science and Information Communication Technologies Laboratory at the University of Paris (Paris XIII), in his study of trade interests in the educational sector establishes that the producers and organizers of large industries keep copying Walt Disney's strategies (1901-1966) and those of his followers, namely: the policy regarding trademarks and licenses, target segmentation, the reproduction of the same characters and narrative structures from one episode into the next, organizing events for the launching of new products, fan clubs support, provision of useful feedback on the reasons for success or failure, production of universal purpose content and high hi-tech indicators and interest in new material carriers. Many marketing orientations of separate products and systems, however, go through “the cycle of fame and oblivion”, Moeglin, P. (2014). This is especially true for those who have opted for electronics – consoles and electronic games of which customers grow tired quickly or they get replaced by others much better ones in technical terms. Much more stable is the fate of multimedia games whose turnover worldwide amounts to hundreds of billions of euro due to the introduction of smart phones and the ever growing family expenses for the upbringing of a child in Europe and the USA (These days there is hardly a student without their own smart phone). Their plots which resemble serially

produced movies keep clients' engaged for quite long.

“Educational Theater” Practice

The “Educational Theater” system as well adopts and follows the good and transferrable in this case world practice from business into education and for educational purposes. The system got its own logo to be distributed on all kinds of media for any by-products. This is the image of an owl which being the symbol of wisdom embellishes all printed materials distributed by “Educational Theater”. It is designed as a graphic image but is also made in the form of a puppet received as a present by the principals in the schools where “Educational Theater” is a guest. It is in addition a kind of reward symbolizing the support and collaboration. A new trademark is registered – “Educational Theater” which presents the idea for a structured educational performance as a standard for a good educational practice. This is the basis on which the presentation and granting of copyright is multiplied for the system's distribution in the Republic of Croatia and Bulgaria.

2. Cultural and Entertainment Educational Programs.

World Models and Programs.

As early as the 1950s a number of television and radio broadcasts in Europe, the USA and Japan draw a link between education and entertainment. In England “Muffin the Mule” series starts to be broadcast in 1946 and in America “Kuklaplitans” is shown between 1947 and 1957. The most representative model of this television, puppet, educational program framework which uses professional actors starts in 1969 when in the United States “Sesame Street” appears on the national educational television. It owes its fame apparently to the puppet theater and in particular to the marionette theater in which real characters are presented. What distinguishes this series is the careful selection and precise formulation of educational goals and objectives. They build upon one another while the series is being enriched in characters and topics. A whole industry grows out of it and the characters are commercialized in the form of goods for sale – puppet dolls, clothes, shoes, bags, toys, clocks, cookies among many others. Hayman, R., a producer at National Geographic Society in 1973, is the one who determines the programs on this popular television and those of many others which borrow the model as a new type of education based on entertainment. During the 70s new series are created among which the most famous are “The Electric Company” for the 6-9-year olds (1971-1979), Blue's Clues, Between the Lions from 2000 for 4-6 year olds, Bob the Builder, Thomas and Friends, Dora the Explorer. According to Moeglin, the cult series

Passe-Partout is considered one of the best. It is broadcast on Quebec TV between 1977 and 1998. The extraterrestrial ADI (Accompagnement didacticiel intelligent) created in 1990 is aimed at educating children between 18 months and 14 years old. Its television life is complemented by comics, a magazine, video games and again products for individual consumption with an extraordinary commercial effect such as: bags, clocks, glasses, perfumes, stationary, learning tools, etc. Despite their popularity and profitability these programs, series and role- and puppet-oriented educational models disseminated on television soon drop out of the market. The reasons lie not only in the amortization of the characters and the attitude, but also in the fact that children change too and start to have preferences which are related to the ways they want and would appreciate to acquire new knowledge and skills. Today, in the beginning of the 21st century televisions target education of children at any age. Plots, characters and roles rotate non-stop in order to meet the growing need for knowledge acquisition comprising a new type of educational attainment. The Da Vinci TV channel and the popular Baby TV broadcast educational messages 24/7 watched by millions of viewers.

The exhaustion does not seem to approach but it constantly depends on the change and the two-way influence which has to be continuously ensured, enriched and improved as an educational practice.

“Educational Theater” Practice.

The “Educational Theater” model starts as a play-based model but also as an *onstage presentation of knowledge* followed by a subsequent process of teaching and learning reinforcing the desire and effort of students for achieving a preliminary formulated objective. The stage format is inspired by the puppet show of the classical theater and the television companies to a certain extent as it creates attractive characters which enter into flamboyant fast-resolving conflict situations in order to prepare the audience for participation. This two-way interaction which the television is unable to provide can successfully be effectuated in the theatrical format. “Educational Theater” can be defined as a model in the sphere of non-formal education although it lacks the time for the typical non-formal teaching-and-learning process supposed to last as long as it may be necessary to the learner. This temporal limitation is compensated by speeding up group work in the play-based activities after the spectacle. Children participate in a series of plays which build upon one another and thus ensure that the preliminary educational goals have been accomplished, i.e. learning through watching a stage version of a scientific story (like on TV) complemented by learning through play that solves

problems evoked in the performance. This second component has been inspired by the class work during the school learning process which always accommodates for teacher presentation as well as group activity that will solve comprehension or knowledge-application problems. There comes a third component in which students test their own abilities in solving problems and tasks independently through writing. This component draws its strength from non-formal education which stimulates original thinking at a convenient for the learner time and place by the use of resources chosen by the learner. This *three-component structure for a stage, class and non-formally-oriented learning and teaching through work with the children during and after the performance* guarantees the effectiveness of the model as an educational one. Thus, the student from a passive spectator transforms into an actively participating player and after that becomes an individual seeker or creator of a new product.

This theatrically and educationally charged process with a rich and practically-shaded stage presentation; group work boosting the better acquisition and understanding of knowledge as well as publicly presented and encouraged independent work directed at testing one's own thinking and imagination make it successful and desired by the children.

We can define "Educational Theater" as a model from non-formal learning and teaching which makes use of visual play-based and theater techniques for presentation and analysis of scientific knowledge and skills aimed at new knowledge acquisition, its comprehension and application for the production of educational products which trigger children's creativity.

The Growth of "Educational Theater" into "Fun Science" Theater

In 2009 "Fun Science" Theater is established which takes over and carries on the ideas of "Educational Theater".

The Main Purpose of the Change.

"Fun Science" Theater already strives to achieve teaching-and-learning aims at high cognitive and affective educational levels employing educational drama techniques, i.e. conducting a highly effective teaching-and-learning process and accomplishing goals from the entire cognitive spectrum still during the educational spectacle. This high-set goal means that a process will be ensured where students will be engaged in three different roles: as spectators, observing the spectacle; as actors, performing etudes entering stage roles and as analyzers commenting their own experience (self-reflection) and interpreting what happens onstage, in real practice and for themselves (reflection).

The great change is in the role that is assigned to the student. They become part of the story that would go on stage (interactors) and part of the post-productive analysis as its creators. Students know still at the beginning of the spectacle that they are going to get involved into the development of the scientific story at a moment prompted by the actors. This moment is called *Interaction*.

In the interactive etude they would be able to feel the roles in a more different way than the spectators' way and to configure part of the play themselves.

The Educational Formats of “Fun Science” Theater – Characteristics, Role and Perspectives

There are two main formats which have been conceptualized, developed and disseminated through “Fun Science” Educational Theater. They are:

1. Educational Theater. Professional theater, developed for educational purposes.
2. Educational drama. Theater made by children for children, organized by the whole class for educational purposes.

1. Educational Theater. Interactive Educational Performance with a Planned Discussion-and-Analysis Part.

This performance differs from the “Educational Theater” one in the way it is conducted. It comprises planned interactive components allowing students to enter into roles in the course of the action. On the one hand this makes for a performance with a planned development though with inbuilt improvisational elements which, however, do not impede its structure but instead just add a slightly different shade to it depending on the spectators' participation. The planned audience interactions in the course of the performance are several. Usually they are both group and individual ones. Every performance finishes with an opportunity for the audience to share, discuss and reflect upon the questions and problems raised within the play or by the audience members. Sharing does not imply looking for a unanimous opinion. The aim is for every spectator who would like to take part to be able to express their opinion and be heard.

The teaching-and-learning model disseminated by “Fun Science” Theater already possesses another kind of orderliness and conceptuality. It includes the components: Watch, Interact and Analyze. This new component structuring of the performance serves as a justification of the idea for the actual students' interaction in the teaching-and-learning process and for their

creative collaborative work with professional actors. It is our belief that students will think of the learning process as one created especially for them exactly because they have been permitted to participate and influence the way it is conducted. It transforms into a creation of theirs, too. It is a well-known fact both in science and in our everyday life that any one thing in whose creation we have taken part, we value more and tend to accept and vehemently defend as our own position.

Structure and Description of the Interactive Educational Performance.

1. Learning-and-Teaching Objectives

The setting of specific and measurable objectives in the beginning of the performance is an obligatory component for “Fun Science” Theater. Several of the objectives are planned within the field of the cognitive levels, i.e. it is planned that the students should know, understand and be able to do something specific. At least one of the objectives is of affective nature, i.e. it means that we will strive to form an attitude, position or opinion in the students that they would adopt as their personal, important and desired. The setting of an objective allows the students to expect and focus on specific positions that will be presented in the following 30-35 minutes, i.e. the timeframe of the interactive onstage activity.

Example: Imagine an objective, in which you are told that if you watch the spectacle carefully, take part in an interaction and the follow-up group analysis, you will learn three reasons which have been scientifically tested and proven for the extremely dangerous water pollution; three ways for its purification and you will also learn why this problem is one of the most important for the entire human race.

Expectations: The expectations are that students will know what to observe during the performance. They will be able to take part in line with the completion of the objectives already set and will transform the experience they have into one they are able to experiment with.

2. The Educational Play

A drama story and a drama process. The process is based on a story told by means of consecutive etudes from real or quasi-real relationships and everyday-life activities. Actors communicate among themselves and with the audience using expressions typical of adults’ speech and routine business communication which includes whole explanatory schemata with terminology, naturally put into use without unnecessary clarification.

Example: It is often the case that the stories are about business, travels, competitions and contests, professional impediments, social and personal problems which children observe or experience firsthand. The fairytale plots are avoided and when employed, they are always interpreted by means of real-life characters from the children's lives. Words are used which we know that they often hear and understand in their own way, i.e. during the performance we do not talk to them in a special way, i.e. as-for-children way (as if they are small, uncomprehending creatures). The characters' lines include words and expressions such as: "I am depressed", "tolerance level", "obsession", "jealousy", "unfair competition", "business strategy", "verbal assault", "pleasure", "infatuation", etc.

Expectations: When the performance is played in this way it begins to represent a particular students' personal interest. Treating the students as clever young people gives them a feeling of recognition for their individuality, boosts the level of understanding and the subsequent acceptance of the staged problems as well as of the ways for tackling them during and after the performance.

3. Onstage Interaction

This component suggests student interaction during the performance. When the participation is a group one (all spectators do something together as part of the action in the spectacle) we will call it a group interaction. When it is individual, then everyone enters into a specific role and plays it the way they see it in their imagination. When performing the interactive component, students use stage costumes or only some elements of the costumes.

Example: The students stage a court before which two clients and their lawyers appear. A judge is selected who will make a decision about who will win the case related to a copyright dispute. On stage there are five students who take the roles of: the clients (two); the lawyers (two) and the judge (one). During this interaction the audience plays the role of audience at the court hearing and also participates in the taking of the court decision by voting for one of the clients. The judge makes an independent decision.

Expectations: When the students get involved in the interpretation it is more likely to result in making both the decision making process and the execution of the decisions real and plausible because they have been personally proposed and played out in a drama context.

4. Analysis and Self-Reflection.

This is the last part of the spectacle where students share what they have learned. The analysis suggests getting an answer and posing questions related to the spectacle seeking to explore the specifics and the meaning of the knowledge received. Thus, knowledge is revealed in a new, thought-out and student-interpreted way. The self-reflected propositions foster the acceptance of the stories told as personal and significant for the ordinary human practice and personal life. This is an important part from the performance which transforms the spectator from an instructed-into-definite-and-socially-accepted-models student into a learner who has achieved high cognitive levels, i.e. who is able to analyze what they have seen and experienced during the performance as direct participants and to offer new reasoned decisions. They have also achieved high affective levels because they have an opinion they need to share and pass on to the others. The spectator is not expected to follow the main characters' models of conduct in the performance but to critically assess it and choose their own behavior. This is what constitutes one of the key differentiation lines between the projections on children in the two models – the leader-instructive one of the “Educational Theater” and the interaction-analytic one of the “Fun Science” Theater.

Example: Let's take for interpretation and analysis the interaction in which the students stage a court hearing and assume the roles of a judge and clients. After the unfolding of the etude, students share their opinions about the justice of the court, the clients' behavior, give personal examples of times when they have been unfairly accused or have witnessed something that they find frustrating in other people's assessments. All opinions are accepted and commented as important for the discussion on justice between people in society.

Expectations: Students learn how to analyze significant phenomena happening not only in the drama context of stage experience but also in real life. Educational attainment changes its aim – from the learning of something which has already been established by others and we either accept it or reject it to a specific analysis and a detailed, relative-to- what-is-happening-here-and-now assessment of the phenomena we encounter and interact with. We establish this approach in order to know how to use everything which we accept as significant for improving our existence.

Educational Perspectives Ensuing from the Structure and the Spirit of the Performance

This repetitiveness of the events during the educational performance creates the attitude in the students that they should watch carefully in order to be able to participate adequately and play

the roles successfully; roles that will lead the way forward to the solution of the problem at issue. Students also prepare throughout the whole process of activity to make a comment on what has been happening that will reflect a clear and personal standpoint on a very important issue. Students know that the “Fun Science” Theater actors are their partners and never defend any opinions as firmly as other adults would often do. Tolerance towards the different opinion forms the basis of communication and children rest assured that any opinion they express will be heard and taken into consideration and, if possible, will be included for a comment by the others. In the communication there is no irony, underestimation or rejection. This style of acceptance encourages the children to share different thoughts, feelings and experiences. For us this is part of an education that turns into an important and desired one by the children. In addition, it is significant in a personal, social and public aspect.

Epilogue

We outlined the main stages in the creation, production, dissemination and the basic application of the system of educational performances famous as *Educational Theater* and presented by “Educational” Theater and “Fun Science” Theater. This is a system that has been functioning as the author’s original learning-and-teaching model since 1995 till nowadays in Bulgaria. Its history begins as a project orientated by the desire of its creators to transform it into an original, innovative model for teaching and learning that gives a central place to the educational performance and its capacity to teach elementary-school students by accomplishing the high levels of cognitive and affective goals. This system comprising over 20 educational performances may be defined as a format of non-formal education which changes continuously following both its own original, educationally-conditioned conceptuality and world educational practices built on a visual and theatrical basis. Its viability is affirmed due to its potential for continuous change. Thus, in the years following 2009 it transforms from a typical leadership-based teaching-and-learning model, disseminated initially as “Educational Theater”, which guides and instructs the student, into an interactive theater-educational model disseminated by “Fun Science” Theater which involves the children into the performance as partners and analyzers of their own achievements. The viability of the shift in the paradigm from “Watch, Play and Write” to “Watch, Interact and Analyze” is clear-cut and continuously proves to be more and more desired and significant for the learners.

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