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POSIBILITĂȚILE TEATRULUI EDUCAȚIONAL ÎN ÎNVĂȚĂMÂNTUL PRIMAR. UTILIZAREA PREVENTIVĂ A DRAMATIZĂRII POVEȘTILOR

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Justification of the Topic Choice and Research Objectives

This study focuses on one of the most socially and pedagogically sensitive areas of the Romanian education system: the school integration of marginalised Roma children, with particular attention to the lower primary grades of Hungarian-language educational institutions in the Târnava Mică and Upper Niraj regions of Transylvania. The topicality and scientific relevance of this theme is supported not only by the ethnic and regional distribution of educational inequalities, but also by the deeper social processes and structural patterns of discrimination underlying these disparities. In addition, the compensatory and equalising role of education in society stands out as a major argument.

The school segregation of Roma children – regarded as one of the most visible indicators of social marginalisation – is not an isolated phenomenon, but the result of a complex interplay of social, economic and cultural disadvantages. In many cases, these children start school at a considerable disadvantage, a situation that cannot be explained solely by the curricular and methodological characteristics of education, but also by the gap between school norms and expectations and the pupils' home and cultural background. In such socially vulnerable environments, it is particularly important to develop and implement interdisciplinary pedagogical approaches that respond sensitively to pupils' needs and foster the creation of an inclusive school climate.

The research focuses on the question of how theatre in education, drama pedagogy, and methods based on the dramatic adaptation of stories can contribute to improving the educational opportunities of disadvantaged Roma children, strengthening their identity, and promoting their social integration. In recent decades, theatre in education has emerged as a promising alternative in the field of education, capable of engaging students emotionally, cognitively, and socially. Such pedagogical tools not only develop cooperation, empathy, and self-reflection, but also help foster a more tolerant and inclusive school atmosphere.

The research objectives can be understood on several levels.

The primary objective is to investigate how the methodology of theatre in education and drama pedagogy can be applied in lower primary education for disadvantaged Roma pupils. Through case studies carried out during the research, the practices that facilitate pupil integration, help process emotional difficulties, and contribute to the development of an inclusive school attitude will be identified.

A secondary objective is to explore the pedagogical potential of stories and narratives. The power of stories to enable emotional identification, along with their identity-building and self-reflective functions, is particularly relevant for groups of children who, because of their family and cultural background, often feel distant from the world of school. The dramatic adaptation of stories allows pupils to express their own experiences, emotions, and internal conflicts – a process that can not only enhance learning motivation but also reduce anxiety and foster a positive relationship with school.

A tertiary objective is to map the emotional, cognitive, and social effects of drama games and educational games with a developmental focus. Play-based activities are inherently suited to the child's way of life, while supporting the comprehensive – emotional, cognitive, and social – development of personality, especially in school contexts where traditional pedagogical methods cannot adequately address the diverse and individual needs of pupils. Working together in play can develop pupils' cooperation skills, improve the quality of social relationships, and provide opportunities to learn constructive conflict management strategies.

The research hypotheses:

1. The regular and reflective application of theatre in education and drama pedagogy contributes to the school integration, personality development, and strengthened learning motivation of disadvantaged Roma pupils.
2. Story-based dramatic activities help pupils explore their emotional world, process negative experiences, and foster the development of empathy and integration into the school community.

The research questions:

1. How can the toolkit of theatre in education and drama pedagogy be integrated into the teaching–learning process, particularly for disadvantaged Roma children?
2. To what extent do theatre in education methods prove more effective than traditional educational approaches in pedagogical work with Roma pupils?
3. How can story dramatizations foster pupils' emotional engagement, self-reflection, and the processing of negative experiences?

The dissertation thus adopts an interdisciplinary approach, examining the interconnections between theatre, education, and social integration, with particular attention to the specific challenges of Hungarian-language minority education in Romania. The aim of the research is not only to broaden the theoretical framework, but also to formulate practical pedagogical recommendations that can support the academic success of disadvantaged pupils – by creating an engaging, inclusive, and personality-developing learning environment.

Theoretical Directions of the Research

The theoretical foundations of this thesis are defined by various interconnected approaches to theatre in education, drama pedagogy, and their pedagogical applications. Throughout the research, special attention was paid to authors who, as recognised experts in these fields, play a significant role in both Hungarian and international scholarship, and whose theoretical and methodological insights directly contributed to clarifying key concepts, establishing the methodological framework, and defining the analytical perspectives of the study.

Two significant definitions served as reference points in the theoretical grounding of drama pedagogy. Katalin Gabnai interprets drama teaching as an educational–research situation, focusing on the purposeful application of drama pedagogical methods and tools (Gabnai, 1999). This approach was relevant to me because it treats drama not merely as an aesthetic category but also as a pedagogical and developmental method aimed at shaping personality, fostering creative thinking, and developing cooperation. This holistic perspective fundamentally shaped the theoretical framework of the thesis, especially in how I integrated drama into the learning process.

By contrast, László Kaposi defines drama pedagogy as a group-based, play-oriented activity in which participants collaboratively create a fictional world and act within it as characters (Kaposi, 2008). Kaposi emphasises the importance of play and improvisation, which enable active participant engagement and the experiential realisation of learning. His approach was important in my research as it helped to highlight the interactive and action-centred nature of drama pedagogy, especially during the design of experimental workshops. Together, these two definitions offered a nuanced, multidimensional interpretation of drama pedagogy, applicable in both the theoretical and practical parts of the thesis. Clarification of the concepts of Theatre in Education (TIE) and Drama in Education (DIE) was based on the works of key Hungarian scholars, such as Ádám Cziboly and Ádám Bethlenfalvy.

In his works, Ádám Cziboly presents TIE as a complex, interactive theatrical form serving deliberate pedagogical goals through the integration of theatrical arts and the structuring of the learning process (Cziboly, 2010). This concept was particularly important in my research because TIE provides an interdisciplinary framework in which artistic and educational objectives reinforce one another.

Ádám Bethlenfalvy's work focuses on the methodological differences and points of connection between TIE and DIE, emphasising the importance of context-building and the active involvement of the spectator–participant (Bethlenfalvy, 2015). This perspective was crucial in my study because, in my programmes, participants were not merely recipients but also active shapers of the process.

The writings of Dániel Golden complemented the theoretical framework by highlighting the possibilities of pedagogically adapting theatrical language (Golden, 2018). His insights helped me creatively integrate theatrical elements tailored to pedagogical aims. The second major analytical framework of the research was formed by fairy-tale theory and the phenomenon of fairy-tale reproduction. From both a psychological and pedagogical perspective, Annamária Kádár interprets the fairy tale as a tool for emotional education (Kádár, 2012). Her work was important to me because it emphasises that fairy tales can provide a safe symbolic framework for processing emotions, thereby supporting the development of children's emotional intelligence.

Ildikó Boldizsár's therapeutic approach presents the fairy tale as a healing and self-discovery process, in which narrative structures and symbols help interpret individual life situations (Boldizsár, 2010). This perspective was especially important in my work with Roma children, where the role of fairy tales in strengthening personal and community identity was also evident.

When analysing participants' behaviour, I paid special attention to non-verbal cues. The work of Joe Navarro and Marvin Karlins helped me recognise and interpret subtle, often unconscious, body language signals (Navarro & Karlins, 2008). This was important because participants' verbal expressive skills varied, making the observation of non-verbal signs key to understanding group dynamics. Allan Pease offered systematised and easily applicable categories for pedagogical interpretation of gestures, facial expressions, and posture, which I was able to integrate directly into the analysis of the workshops (Pease, 1991).

As the participants in the research were of Roma origin, it was essential to gain a deeper understanding of their cultural background and identity. The historical–sociological research of Michael Stewart and Viorel Achim revealed the social situation and historical experiences

of Roma communities, helping to contextualise participants' experiences (Stewart, 1997; Achim, 2004). The writings of Chelcea Ion, Chris More, and Katalin Forrai emphasised the pedagogical significance of Roma identity, traditions, and values, showing how cultural resources can be transformed into positive learning experiences (Chelcea, 2005; More, 2010; Forrai, 2012).

In the "The Eternal Tale" chapter, the cultural and pedagogical interpretation of Roma folk tales was based on the works of several folklorists (Szapu, 1994; Eperjessy, 1988; Ámi, 1975; Babos, 1989; Rostás & Csenki, 1986; Benedek, 1998; Nagy, 2003). Collections of Beás tales by Magda Szapu and Ernő Eperjessy, Romungro tales by Lajos Ámi and István Babos, and Olah Roma tales by Mihály Rostás and Sándor Csenki served as primary sources. Katalin Benedek's bibliography provided a systematic overview of the written traditions of Roma storytellers, while Olga Nagy, through transcribing János Czifra's tales, contributed to the analysis of narrative structures and motifs.

The methodological framework of the classroom case studies in chapter four was inspired by the works of several authors. Géza Máté Novák's drama pedagogy planning model provided a structured basis for preparing the sessions (Novák, 2016). Zsuzsanna Tölgyessy's study on interactive processing based on live storytelling offered a direct methodological example (Tölgyessy, 2014). Szabolcs Zalay presented alternative currents of constructive drama pedagogy that strengthen students' self-reflection and cooperation (Zalay, 2015). Neelands' classic convention system offered practical guidance in structuring drama games (Neelands, 1984).

Research Methodology

The aim of the research conducted in this study is to examine how drama pedagogy and theatre education methods can be applied effectively in primary education, particularly for socially disadvantaged students of Roma origin. The research was carried out within an interdisciplinary framework, incorporating pedagogical, psychological, anthropological, and theatre-theoretical perspectives. The chosen methodology is qualitatively oriented, following the traditions of case study-based pedagogical research. The methodological approach focuses on analyzing practice-based, reflective pedagogical activities and interpreting the participants' experiences.

In exploring pedagogical practice within its socio-historical context, my aim was to achieve a deeper understanding of meaning-making processes, especially in situations where

disadvantaged students engage with theatre education tools. The research falls within practice-oriented pedagogical investigations and is based on the qualitative case study methodology. This approach allows for context-sensitive exploration of pedagogical phenomena, interpretive observation, and the reflective and value-based processing of experiences. The research does not aim to produce generalizable quantitative results but rather seeks a deeper understanding of complex pedagogical phenomena that shape children's learning paths and personality development through the mechanisms of theatre education and drama pedagogy.

The research sites were Hungarian-inhabited settlements, where a significant proportion of students in minority Hungarian classes in primary schools are of Roma origin. The research period spanned from September 2021 to June 2024, covering three school years. The possibility of longitudinal data collection was ensured by the fact that during these three years, I had the opportunity to teach and carry out fieldwork in different school environments each year. In my work, I took into account the specific social and cultural conditions of the region, paying particular attention to the internal structure and traditions of Roma communities, as well as the local particularities of pedagogical relationships. The research was based on the principles of participant observation and interaction-based pedagogical experience collection.

I applied multiple qualitative data collection techniques, with the following main methodological elements: case studies, participant observation, interviews, and document analysis.

The main methodological pillar of the research was the case studies, during which I conducted drama pedagogical activities in five primary school classes with groups of children from different socio-cultural backgrounds. During the case studies, I documented: the preparatory phases of the activities (objectives, focus, context, role assignment, frame game); the structural organization of the activities; students' reactions, participation levels, verbal and non-verbal expressions; pedagogical reflections and evaluations, as well as parental feedback.

Through the five detailed case studies, I provide insights into the practical possibilities and challenges of theatre education, with special attention to the specific needs of Roma students. The activities were led by me during classes and extracurricular activities. I took notes and later made audio recordings, which I analyzed using content analysis and thematic coding. The purpose of the activities was to explore the impact of drama pedagogy tools on children's participation, communication, cooperation, and emotional states.

The main topics of the interviews conducted during the research were: parental expectations regarding respect for traditions and customs, understanding Roma family culture, children's school integration, learning motivation, attitudes toward studying, and attitudes

related to theatre education.

As part of the research, I analyzed: the schools' pedagogical programs, legal regulations on minority education in Romania, curricula and lesson plans, students' work produced during the activities (drawings, drama scripts, student reflections), and the national and international literature on theatre education programs. This document analysis contributed to the deeper integration of the theoretical and practical layers of the research.

The qualitative data were processed through theme-based data analysis, along the following main analytical categories: characteristics of student participation; emotional responses and expressions of empathy; development of social competencies; teachers' attitudes and role perceptions; parental perceptions; and the pedagogical functions of stories and dramatic play. During the data analysis process, the reliability of coding was ensured through multiple checks, comparing data from different sources (observation, interview, documents).

Special attention was paid to ethical norms throughout the research. Activities with children were conducted solely for pedagogical purposes, age-appropriate, and with parental consent. During data management, all personally identifiable information was encrypted. The research also faced certain limitations, such as the fact that qualitative research does not allow for generalizable statistical conclusions, the specific social and cultural characteristics of the studied regions do not fully represent the spectrum of Roma communities in Romania, and the openness of the schools and parental motivation strongly influenced the depth and success of the research. Despite these limitations, the methods applied in the research allowed for an in-depth interpretation of the possibilities for integrating theatre education and drama pedagogy into the education of disadvantaged students.

Research Results and Analyses

One of the most prominent effects of drama pedagogy activities was observed in the development of students' social competencies. Through the applied role-plays, dramatic improvisations, and group creative work, children became more open toward each other, asked for and offered help more frequently, and the proportion of empathetic behaviors within the class community increased. Participant observations indicate that, in the case of Roma students, significant progress was seen in emotional expression, conflict resolution strategies, and self-regulation. The "safe space" created during role-play activities allowed for the playful, indirect processing of internal tensions, which facilitated the release of negative emotions. The emotional connection with the characters acted as a form of internal reflection, contributing to

the development of self-reflective thinking.

Situations presented in fairy-tale dramatizations (exclusion, acceptance, injustice, redemption) resonated with the students' own life experiences, providing opportunities for emotional processing and community-level discussion. The children's narratives (e.g., "I am like the outcast prince") highlighted that through dramatic identification, they recognized themselves, and their internal patterns were gradually shaped.

As a result of the series of activities, noticeable attitude changes occurred regarding school, learning, and relationships with others. According to my observations, the level of student passivity appeared to decrease, while active participation gradually increased; students showed greater courage in taking on roles, especially during public speaking and dramatic situations. Several children who previously remained on the periphery strengthened their position within the community space, primarily due to the democratic nature of playful activities, where cooperation and creativity were valued over academic performance. The activities also had a positive effect on school attendance: absences decreased in the weeks when drama sessions took place. According to interview feedback, children "looked forward to the story sessions" and "were happy to be main characters," indicating a positive change at the level of self-esteem.

Participation in playful exercises developed self-control, reduced impulsive behavior, and increased rule-following. A particularly important observation is that conflict situations frequently emerged during role-plays and dramatized scenes, and processing these situations contributed to behavior correction. Students' behavior became more structured, and a group dynamic gradually developed in which mutual trust and acceptance among students were strengthened.

The pedagogical application of fairy tales was of particular significance in the research. Students engaged with the stories not only as listeners but also as creators and participants. The fairy tale as a symbolic language, and dramatization as a pedagogical method, proved particularly effective in addressing children's inner worlds. Based on children's drawings, scene rewritings, and verbal reflections, it can be concluded that during the processing of fairy-tale content, students gradually showed more nuanced emotional reactions and expanded their emotional vocabulary. Students often incorporated their own experiences into the stories (e.g., "what if the poor child went to school instead of the king"), indicating cognitive and emotional transfer. The emotional identification observed during the dramatizations contributed significantly to the development of empathy and perspective-taking. By identifying with the moral dilemmas of the characters, children formulated moral reflections and gradually moved

beyond dualistic, black-and-white thinking, becoming more open to complex meanings and emotional nuances.

Drama pedagogy not only helps children but also provides a new perspective in teaching. My observations indicate that students participated in classroom activities with great enthusiasm after the sessions, which took place in a more relaxed atmosphere. The activities also influenced the teacher–student relationship: I became closer to the students' inner world, more sensitive to their needs, and responded in a more differentiated way to behavioral difficulties.

The research results show that the application of theater education and drama pedagogy: sensitizes the community to acceptance and cooperation; strengthens self-reflection and identity formation; reduces the experience of exclusion and promotes social integration; develops communication and social skills; and increases learning motivation, especially among disadvantaged students. Based on these findings, it can be stated that theater education methods are not merely supplementary but potentially transformative tools for inclusive pedagogical practice.

Conclusions

In my doctoral dissertation, I undertook to examine how the concept of theatre education can be integrated into pedagogical practice, particularly in the case of early primary school children, where personality-shaping influences are especially prominent. During the research, I aimed to map the structural and content-related points of connection between theatre and pedagogy, and to demonstrate how these two – distinct yet synergistic – disciplines can mutually reinforce each other to impact children's development.

Based on the experiences gained during the research and the observations documented in the case studies, the following main conclusions can be drawn:

The Integrative Power of Theatre Education in Multicultural School Environments

Theatre education not only facilitates the development of students' personalities but also provides an integrative framework that promotes the acceptance of cultural differences and the creation of an inclusive school environment. This is particularly significant in institutional contexts where children from diverse ethnic, cultural, or linguistic backgrounds learn together—for example, in classrooms that include children from Roma communities (Romungros, Olah Gypsies, Beas, Kelderars, etc.).

By their very nature, dramatic activities rely on collaborative action, in which participants are not merely spectators but active creators of the stories. This shared meaning-making allows students to incorporate their own cultural experiences into the creative process. Cziboly Ádám (2009) emphasizes that one of the primary pedagogical values of theatre education is that it creates a symbolic space where children from different backgrounds can connect as equals, on the same "playful" level. Shared dramatic situations promote intercultural learning (Banks, 2006), as students can reflect on their differences through their own and their peers' experiences while forming common experiences. The "patterned reality" realized in theatre education (Kaposi, 2007) allows playful yet profound engagement with another perspective—one of the main drivers of empathy and social sensitivity development (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995).

Particular attention should be paid to the fact that the cultural representation of Roma children in theatre education practice appears not merely as an "object" but as an active cultural code system. The incorporation of Roma folklore tales and narrative motifs (Vajda, 2014) serves not only to strengthen cultural identity but also supports social acceptance within the community and improves interethnic relations.

In practice, I observed that dramatic activities conducted in the classroom—particularly when based on collaboratively selected stories and culturally relevant motifs—reduced the intergroup anxiety previously observed. During sessions built on cooperation and creation, relationships among children strengthened, and certain role conflicts (e.g., dominance, rejection) appeared to dissolve. This is supported by the findings of Gallagher and Freeman (2011), who argue that the shared management of space and time in drama play can generate a collective sense of identity that overrides divisions stemming from social stereotypes.

Overall, it can be stated that the integrative power of theatre education lies in the fact that it does not hide cultural differences but incorporates them as creative elements into a shared experiential world. In this way, it serves not only individual development but also contributes to the inclusive and accepting functioning of the classroom community.

The Complex Developmental Impact of Storytelling and Dramatic Play

Stories, especially in early primary school, provide not only aesthetic experiences but also serve as a prominent medium for children's cognitive, emotional, social, and moral development. Narrative structures, symbolic characters, and moral dilemmas presented in plots help children understand and process their own life situations while experimenting with various roles and solutions in a safe context (Bruner, 1990; Bettelheim, 1976).

The dramatic processing of stories—for example, through drama play or theatre education activities—offers children the opportunity to be not just external observers but active creators of the story. This active participation fosters reflection, enhances self-awareness, and supports the development of emotional regulation and empathy (O'Toole, 1992; Wagner, 1998). Therefore, stories as dramatic material function as an interdisciplinary tool, simultaneously serving linguistic, social, and moral educational purposes.

Particular attention should be given to the incorporation of Roma folk tales into pedagogical practice. These stories, with their unique symbolism and structures rooted in the culture of communal orality, not only provide cultural representation but also allow Roma children to strengthen their identity and positively reflect on their own social position (Vajda, 2014; Neményi, 2000). A characteristic of Roma folk tales is their strong moral message, the confrontation with social injustices, and the frequent depiction of the hero as a socially marginalized figure who triumphs through cleverness, perseverance, or moral superiority. This can particularly resonate with children who themselves come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Dramatic play enables them to embody these story roles, experiencing success, victory, and recognition—experiences that are often rare in their real lives (Bognár, 2009).

During the dramatic processing of stories, it was observed that students—particularly children of Roma origin—participated in the learning process with greater activity, intrinsic motivation, and emotional engagement. Elements of the stories drawn from their own cultural heritage reinforced the authenticity of the experience, while the opportunity for dramatic enactment allowed suppressed emotions to surface and be safely processed (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995). From both pedagogical and psychological perspectives, it can be confirmed that the complex developmental impact of stories and dramatic play is observable not only in the development of individual competencies but also in the strengthening of community relationships. Shared successes experienced in cooperative play situations, the practice of social roles, and the identification with another's story all contribute to increased social cohesion (Slade, 1998).

The Teacher's Personality and Methodological Openness as Key Factors

The pedagogical effectiveness of theatre education does not depend solely on the technical application of the methodology, but on the personal and professional qualities that the teacher brings to the process. Dramatic methods work most effectively when paired with an authentic, empathetic, and reflective teacher attitude. The teacher is not merely a transmitter of the method but also its active and personal interpreter (Claxton, 2008; László, 2012). In dramatic learning situations, the teacher's presence becomes decisive in three primary roles: as

an interpreter, helping children make sense of the experience; as a facilitator, structuring and guiding the process; and as a role model, demonstrating behaviors and values for students through their own example (Neelands, 2009; Heathcote & Bolton, 1995).

An effective teacher's personality is characterized by methodological openness—the ability to flexibly apply various pedagogical strategies in response to learners' needs. In theatre education, tolerance for uncertainty, receptiveness to student initiatives, and continuous self-reflection are particularly important. These qualities enable the teacher to act not merely as a facilitator of learning but as a facilitator of shared creative experience (Brookfield, 1995; Kaposi & Bethlenfalvy, 2013).

The research highlighted that student engagement—especially among disadvantaged learners or those with low self-confidence—was closely correlated with the teacher's personal attunement and emotional presence. Empathy, sensitive use of nonverbal communication, and culturally responsive approaches all contributed to children feeling comfortable and secure in dramatic situations (Noddings, 2005).

The Development of Teacher Attitudes Is Not Merely an Individual Competence Issue

The development of teacher attitudes, however, is not solely a matter of individual competence. Teacher training and professional development must provide frameworks in which educators have the opportunity to cultivate their reflective thinking and evaluative attitudes while gaining practical experience with the tools of theatre education. The evolution of the teacher's role is thus not only a function of accumulating professional experience but also the result of a conscious, self-reflective developmental process (Schon, 1983; Gönczöl, 2021). This approach is particularly important in school environments where diverse cultural backgrounds intersect, and where the teacher's role extends beyond knowledge transmission to acting as an interpretive mediator between different cultural realities.

Parental Background and Community Context Influence Educational Effectiveness

During the school-based application of theatre education, it became clear that the effectiveness of pedagogical interventions is significantly influenced by the socio-cultural characteristics of the students' environment. In the case of Roma children, understanding family socialization patterns and community norms is particularly crucial, as these determine the child's value orientation, motivation, and attitude toward schooling (Fóti, 2017; Radó, 2001). The research results confirmed that the impact of school interventions becomes durable and effective only when implemented in cooperation with the family and community environment.

In Roma communities, the family—especially the mother and extended family network—functions as the primary socialization sphere, often exerting stronger normative control than the school (Forray & Hegedűs, 2003). Consequently, one of the keys to educational success is building a relationship of trust with families. Theatre education methods—particularly storytelling and dramatic play—can be effective tools for earning community trust and engaging parents. These methods allow children to connect with school content through their own cultural heritage while providing the teacher with a bridge between the family world and institutional expectations (Povedák, 2014).

Building trust is not solely a professional matter: structural factors underlie pedagogical success, such as the school community's atmosphere, the commitment of the teaching staff, and the institution's social sensitivity. These factors determine the extent to which parents feel like partners in the educational process. When a school approaches Roma culture in a respectful and non-stigmatizing manner, it can often be decisive for the child's educational trajectory (Németh & Fehérvári, 2011).

The Importance of the Community Context

The significance of the community context is especially pronounced in regions with a high proportion of Roma population. In these areas, the school serves not only an educational role but also a community-organizing function and can act as an important catalyst for social mobility. In this sense, theatre education is not merely a didactic tool but also a social intervention, contributing to the enrichment of cultural competencies and social relationships.

The Impact of Drama Pedagogy on Emotional and Behavioral Changes

The systematic study of the drama pedagogy sessions I conducted—particularly dramatic play and collaborative performance activities—clearly supports the notion that these methods have a significant impact on the emotional processing abilities and social behaviors of primary school children (Heimann, 2007; Salas, 2010).

Analysis of five case studies highlighted that dramatic situations not only allow children to safely express negative emotions (such as fear, anxiety, or anger) but also, through their structured processing, promote the development of emotional self-regulation (Lilley, 2012). This process helps children become more open to handling conflict situations and less likely to respond impulsively.

In terms of shaping behavioral culture, dramatic play teaches children the skill of role-switching, which fosters the development of empathy and the understanding of others' perspectives (Booth, 2009). Simultaneously, practicing community roles strengthens the sense of belonging to a group and the adherence to social rules, which are essential for harmonious

cooperation and the formation of positive communal attitudes (Krasner, 2014). Measurements indicated improvements in frustration management, the development of social skills, and an increase in positive social interactions among participants (Goldstein & Winner, 2012). These findings are consistent with international literature, which documents drama pedagogy as an effective tool for supporting children's socio-emotional development (Catterall, 2009).

Aim of the Doctoral Dissertation

The aim of this doctoral dissertation was to examine the integration of the philosophy and methodology of theatre education into pedagogical practice, with special attention to multicultural and disadvantaged student environments. The starting point of the research was the mapping of structural and content-related connections between theatre and pedagogy, during which I analyzed the role of drama pedagogy and dramatic play in the personality development and social competence formation of primary school children.

The Integrative Power of Theatre Education in Multicultural School Environments

The integrative power of theatre education was particularly pronounced in multicultural school settings, where children from various Roma groups—Romungros, Olah Roma, Kelderash, Gabor Roma, and Beas—study together. Dramatic situations provided opportunities for experiencing cultural identity while, through shared actions and meaning-making, contributing to the reduction of social stereotypes and prejudices (Banks, 2015; Boal, 2008).

The Role of Folktales and Dramatic Play in Development

In examining the complex developmental effects of folktales and dramatic play, I found that folktales—especially Roma folklore—are not merely entertaining content but serve as crucial media for social learning, emotional processing, and the formation of moral values. The rich symbolism and narrative structure of folktales offer children opportunities for self-reflection through their own cultural heritage and for processing life experiences (Bruner, 1996; Dundes, 1997).

The personality and methodological openness of the teacher emerged as a key factor in the effectiveness of theatre education. The presence of an empathetic, reflective, and authentic teacher—acting as both interpreter and facilitator—is essential for active student engagement and the successful application of the methodology (Schon, 1983; Rogers, 1961).

Parental and Community Influence on Educational Effectiveness

The influence of parental background and community context on educational outcomes also received significant attention. A deeper understanding of the family and community socialization of Roma children is indispensable for achieving educational goals, as effective

school interventions without collaborative family relationships are likely to have limited success (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Epstein, 2001).

Findings from Case Studies

Finally, the analysis of five case studies confirmed that drama pedagogy sessions have measurable positive effects on children's emotional processing abilities, behavioral culture, and community competencies. Dramatic play facilitates the expression and management of negative emotions, supports the development of empathy, and contributes to the formation of constructive social relationships (Heimann, 2007; Goldstein & Winner, 2012).

Conclusion

Overall, the research highlights that the methods of theatre education carry significant pedagogical potential for creating inclusive, experiential, culturally sensitive, and reflective learning environments. This approach is especially important in school communities where students' diverse cultural backgrounds and social disadvantages pose complex challenges to education.

Recommendations

Based on the experiences of the research, the following recommendations can be formulated:

One of the key conditions for the realization of inclusive education is that teachers, already at the early stages of their training, become familiar with teaching strategies adapted to the diversity of students and develop methodological sensitivity. Accordingly, integrating the methods of theatre education and drama pedagogy into teacher training curricula, as well as into in-service training programs for practicing teachers, is an essential step toward renewing pedagogical practice. Theatre education is not merely an interdisciplinary, experiential form of learning; it represents an approach that interprets the teaching-learning process as a human-centered, reflective, and collaborative space.

One of the greatest challenges in contemporary education is creating learning environments capable of responding to the diversity of students and ensuring opportunities for their active, personal participation in learning. This is particularly relevant for disadvantaged children, who often lack prior knowledge, communication patterns, or learning strategies essential for successful functioning within the formal school system. In this regard, experiential learning—especially through the methodological tools of theatre education—offers outstanding opportunities, as theatre pedagogy provides a complex, interactive approach that

emphasizes students' emotional engagement, creative participation, and active collaboration.

Dramatic learning situations—such as role-playing, improvisation exercises, and dramatized storytelling—create a safe learning space where students can deepen their knowledge through experiential, personal engagement rather than traditional knowledge transmission. This is particularly beneficial for those who struggle with abstract or verbalized content or who have low learning motivation. Such learning approaches also enhance critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and communication skills—competencies that are crucial not only within the school context but also for social integration and broader life participation.

The research findings indicate that experiential learning is particularly effective in engaging Roma children. Dramatic situations provide opportunities for students to incorporate their own cultural experiences, stories, and perspectives into the learning process, thereby strengthening their self-identity and reducing the sense of alienation in school. Additionally, the shared experience of creative collaboration fosters peer relationships, strengthens community feeling, and promotes a positive attitude toward school. This approach not only enhances learning effectiveness but also contributes to a more open and inclusive school climate, particularly for disadvantaged learners.

In the case of Roma communities in Romania, the Roma groups living throughout Transylvania—such as the Lovari, Kelderash, and Hungarian-speaking Roma—have diverse historical backgrounds, social statuses, language practices, and interpretations of identity. For Roma children attending Hungarian-language classes, it is not sufficient to rely solely on knowledge or presentation of a generalized "Gypsy culture" in the educational process. Instead, pedagogical programs rooted in local contexts are needed, which approach the realities of these communities with sensitivity and nuance. According to the theoretical frameworks of intercultural pedagogy (Banks, Gay, Nieto, Ladson-Billings), respecting students' cultural backgrounds and integrating these backgrounds into teaching enhances school success, strengthens identity, and, in the long term, fosters social cohesion. Pedagogy based on local cultural characteristics can contribute to reinforcing students' sense of self, building a positive self-image, and mitigating experiences of school failure. Simultaneously, the school—as one of the primary sites of social integration—can function not as a space that reinforces assimilation pressure but as one that promotes value-based recognition of cultural diversity.

Inclusive pedagogy cannot be confined to the institutional boundaries of the school: its effective implementation requires the active involvement of the broader social environment, especially the cultural and civil sectors. Successful school integration of disadvantaged Roma students is a complex educational task that can only be achieved through broad collaboration,

intersectoral partnerships, and community participation. Theatre education, as a community-building and socially sensitizing pedagogical approach, is ideally suited to bridge the gap between school and society.

Stories function as a fundamental cultural expression of childhood. They do not merely entertain but organize experiences, make internal tensions manageable, and convey social, moral, and emotional content in an accessible manner. These complex functions—particularly the cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions—make storytelling exceptionally suitable for the development of students from disadvantaged or marginalized communities. Therefore, the conscious and regular use of stories in educational practice should be considered not only from an aesthetic or linguistic perspective but also as deeply pedagogically significant.

The psychological characteristics of lower-primary students—dominant symbolic thinking, a magical worldview, and the importance of emotional engagement—particularly justify the incorporation of the structuring and personality-shaping power of stories into the teaching process. Processing stories should not be limited to traditional "reading aloud"; students need to actively engage with the narrative through dramatic and cooperative methods. From a practical implementation perspective, it is recommended to:

Integrate story dramatizations regularly into the teaching process, particularly in subjects such as Hungarian language and literature, ethics, environmental studies, or visual arts (ensuring that selected stories are culturally relevant and age-appropriate).

Apply story-based cooperative techniques (e.g., story chains, collaborative story writing, alternative endings, "inner voice" exercises) to enhance creativity and active participation.

Promote cross-curricular integration (stories and their dramatic processing are particularly suitable for interdisciplinary activities; related drawing, music, or movement exercises can address diverse learning styles).

Ensure culturally sensitive story selection for Roma students. Incorporating the Roma narrative heritage into the school curriculum not only strengthens students' identity but also provides majority students with the opportunity to learn about the values of other cultures, fostering mutual respect and acceptance.

In summary, storytelling as a pedagogical tool creates a bridge between the child's inner world and the structured expectations of school, simultaneously supporting the learning process and promoting social integration.

The regular and intentional use of storytelling and dramatic play, particularly in lower-primary education, can significantly contribute to strengthening students' emotional security, sense of identity, and learning motivation—especially in contexts where formal pedagogical

tools fail to adequately address the diverse needs of learners.

The findings of this research clearly demonstrate that theatre education and drama pedagogy offer not only an alternative approach to traditional teaching practices but also enable profound structural and conceptual changes. Particularly for children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, these methods serve as a bridge between the school environment and the child's home life, contributing to the realization of equal opportunities, dignified treatment, and genuine inclusion. This dissertation aims to contribute to this shift in perspective, firmly asserting that in the pedagogy of the future, theatre education will become not merely an opportunity, but a necessity.

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