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THE INFLUENCE OF STAGE DOLLS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMPATHY IN YOUNGER SCHOOL STUDENTS

Abstract

In today's time of global change and recessionary crises, the importance of the "little man" in the context of understanding his existential needs and for the purpose of self-realisation is often overlooked. In the torrent of adaptation to these changes of world proportions, man seems to be lost. Neoliberal capitalism, with its culture of narcissism and the cult of individualism, we dare say, creates a culture of ruthlessness and indifference in which we become immune to social tragedies and observers of human suffering. By permeating aesthetic-artistic and empathic features as essential components of what constitutes the essence of man, it is possible to achieve harmonious interpersonal relationships as prerequisites for the first steps towards more successful growth and adaptation of the individual. It is necessary to mention the role of empathy and empathetic and caring thinking, which, along with critical and creative thinking, is an indispensable trinity when it comes to children's educational process. What constitutes the essence of empathy itself, as an act of humanisation of man, is the imaginative leap, which is a prefix for overcoming social and political obstacles, limitations, marginalisation and distances that are a brake on indulging in other people's feelings. One of the ways to help express feelings in children is a stage puppet. Through play, the child spontaneously takes on roles to express his or her thoughts, efforts, desires, wills, and feelings in a creative way. Puppetry education

Pannoniana, vol. VII, no. I (2023): 125-153

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is an important component of the child's overall development, starting from the earliest age when the newborn exercises motor skills all the way to psychosocial development in later life. The application of the stage puppet is wide, so it is used in resolving peer conflicts and discovering new artistic inclinations. This also contributes to education for empathy, mutual respect and the development of social skills. This paper will attempt to show the importance of its use and influence on the development of empathy at a young school age. After the theoretical framework, which explains the importance and role of puppetry and empathy in children's lives, the methodological approach to action research will present the practical part of the work. This includes drama workshops, as a presentation of the impact of puppetry on the development of empathy in lower grades, with and emphasis on he need to nurture an imaginative leap by indulgence. Through the discussion, we try to expand and re-examine the hypothesis and offer answers appropriate to the problem.

Keywords*: caring thinking, drama therapy, empathy, empathic thinking, puppetry education, stage puppet*

Introduction

"If it is not softened by compassion and empathy, reason can lead people into a moral abyss."

(Karen Armstrong)[1]

In the modern conception of the world, today's man is a victim of global changes on a large-scale in which he loses his identity, metaphorically swimming, and sometimes fighting for a basic survival and his own existence. From climate change as a result of inhumanity towards nature to the growing poverty in most countries, there arises the question of diagnosing the "world disease" caused by the culture of narcissism and individualism in order to find a "miracle vaccine" that would cure the entire population of the planet Earth (acc. Žalec, 2019). In a whirlwind of misunderstanding, selfishness, lack of time, haste, inequality, discrimination, separation, and dichotomy, the need to reach for the mechanisms by which the ordinary man will rise to *the throne* and be enveloped in a cloak brings to the surface moral principles, caring for loved ones, and empathic thinking. Although empathy is synonymous with the relationship

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1   URL: https://najboljicitati.com/emocije-citati/

between individuals, it is necessary to liberate, expand and root it in public life. With the imaginative leap of the mass of people into the lives of others, it is possible to influence the initiation of an empathic revolution in response to the great changes that are happening around us (Krznarić, 2014: 186).

Awareness of the importance of education for empathy, as a prerequisite for global change, begins in the family and the community in which the individual grows up. Rifkin (1945: 8) states that empathic awareness from the earliest childhood until adulthood is a good foundation for socialisation and acceptance of the individual in society. The deepening and development of social-emotional status continues through education in the context of training young, moral, caring and empathetic people to implement in a multicultural society, in which they will contribute to the benefit and well-being of humanity and the world. The acquisition of new student competencies is preceded by the use of innovative teaching methods, by which the modern teacher will lay a solid foundation for building a new, modern and stable teaching structure. The question of school modernity opens the question of a new paradigm of integration, orientation knowledge and thinking that is based on sensitivity in the form of bioethical sensibility, in the form of ethics of care and empathy (Rupčić Kelam, Steiner Jelić and Kelam, 2019: 230). In the book Poetic Justice, Nussbaum (2005: 107) states that emotions are based on a true view of the facts and importance of the different types of suffering and joy experienced by participants, which are good guidelines for making important decisions. Authors like Goleman (2022) point out that it is necessary to involve the emotional part of the brain to create the precondition for a reasonable decision, which supports the fact that the emotional and cognitive aspects of empathy are intertwined and connected. By taking into account the emotional component of empathy, we will get a broader picture of the overall situation and adapt more easily to current conditions.

The process of sensitising a child in all areas of their psychophysical development begins from birth and continues in school and through lifelong learning. During schooling, the complexity of shaping a young person raises the question of the importance of using modern teaching methods, such as dialogue, research and play methods, for the purpose of multidimensional thinking, whose main components are creative, critical and caring thinking. Lippman states that it must develop from preschool age so children can develop into independent individuals at a later age.[2] One of the methods that aims at the development of

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2 See: URL: https://zmusk.wordpress.com/od-zrnca-mudrosti-do-filozofije/za-zivot-u-kojem-ostaju-oci-sirom-otvorene/, Retrieved 2022-06-27.

empathy and multidimensional thinking in students is the method of using a stage puppet in the teaching process. It is one way to help children express their feelings. Through play, the child spontaneously takes on roles to express their thoughts, efforts, desires, wills, and feelings in a creative way. Puppetry is an important component of a child's overall development, starting from the earliest age when a newborn exercises motor movements all the way to psychosocial development at a later age. The application of the stage puppet is wide, so it is used in resolving peer conflicts, and discovering new artistic inclinations, and it also contributes to how we have emphasised education for empathy, mutual respect and the development of social skills.

In this direction of the development of multidimensional thinking, we emphasise the purposefulness of the play and the need for its implementation in the teaching process. As a phenomenon that connects human existence and the world and creates synergy with the spiritual state of the man himself, it is the starting point for opening new possibilities for unleashing imagination and creativity as essential components for thinking about its importance in all segments of the educational process (acc. Uzelac, 1987). Duran (2001), as stated in the work of Duka and Berbić-Kolar (2022: 541), suggests that symbolic play close to children, in the context of imaginative role play, is a bridge that connects the concept of developing and nurturing empathy in primary school students and the use of stage puppets in regular teaching process. By modifying the relationship to reality, as an important feature of the symbolic play with a puppet, the foundations of the imaginary leap are laid (Ivon, 2005: 7). The necessity of puppet improvisation in the regular teaching process is reflected in its multifunctionality as a stronghold for the development of social and emotional skills.

This paper emphasises the significance of empathy education as an art of imaginatively stepping into another's shoes within the context of comprehending another's feelings and adjusting one's actions accordingly. The theoretical part of the paper describes the basic concepts of empathy, with an emphasis on the imaginative leap and the importance and role of play and stage puppets in education for empathy in younger school-age students. Action research within a group of nine students aged 8 to 10 seeks to show the real impact of drama therapy on caring and empathetic thinking. The aim is to shape dramatic and puppet improvisations, which are based on the correlation of introspection and extraspection, with the clear purpose of an imaginative leap through the use of symbolic play with a puppet. Through the discussion, we try to expand and re-examine the hypothesis and offer answers appropriate to the problem.

The notion of empathy

This brings us to the elucidation of one of the key concepts of this paper, and that is empathy. The novelty we offer in this direction is its rootedness and connection with the use of the stage puppet in the development and nurturing of empathy, which will be discussed later.

The word empathy (en-u, pathos "feeling", indulgence; empatheia = "feeling from within) comes from the ancient Greek language and means literally indulgence.[3] In the psychoanalytic literature, Freud used the terms Einfühlung, Einfühlen and Sichhineinversetzen, which literally means to feel in something or someone and to settle in something or someone (Kulenović, 2016: 29). The same author states that Theodor Lipps also analysed the concept of Einfühlung in his many books, and the original translation of the word into English was given by the novel's writer Violeta Paget, under the wrong meaning of the word "sympathy". Only at the beginning of the 20th century did the word sympathy cease to be used as a translation for enjoyment, and "empathy" began to be used, defined as "the desire to unite the activity of perceiving the subject with the qualities of the perceived object" (Kulenović, 2016: 30). Lipman (2003) believes, as stated in work Rupčić Kelam, Steiner, Kelam (2019), that empathy is an important component of caring thinking, because it encourages care for others, develops respect and love for oneself and others.

Empathy, by definition, cannot be equated with sympathy or compassion because it combines feelings of compassion and care for others, especially in the state of suffering of an empathetic person (acc. Hoffman, 2003). TEDWomen speaker Joan Halifax warns of the dangers that arise as companions of compassion. These are most often pity, moral condemnation and fear.[4] In order to avoid moral condemnation, it is important to develop empathic morality, and thus moral education, in order to transcend boundaries and achieve empathy outside one's group (cf. Hoffman, 2003). In analysing and comparing ancient tragedies and novels, Nussbaum (2005: 96) points out that reader compassion transcends empathy and describes it as a complex state of mind in the function of understanding the suffering and suffering of others, essential to overall social rationality. The author further states that Aristotle also concluded that people who feel compassion believe that "their own abilities are broadly similar to those who suffer."

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3   URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empathy, Retrieved: 2021-06-04.

4   URL:https://www.ted.com/talks/joan_halifax_compassion_and_the_true_meaning_of_empathy/transcript?language=hr#t-114071, Retrieved: 2021-7-2.

According to Krznarić (2014: 10), empathy is: "the art of imaginatively entering another person's skin, understanding their feelings and views, and using that understanding to direct one's own actions." It is inherent in human beings to respond to the emotions of others (Hoffman 2003: 14). The notion of empathy is associated with prosocial behaviour in the context of an empathetic person's feeling of discomfort when observing another's distress and causing the empathetic person's pleasure by prosocial behaviour (acc. Vasta, Marshall, and Scott, 1998). The interactive action of the affective and cognitive components of empathy creates a precondition for the prosocial behaviour of the individual (acc. Hoffman, 2003). Empathy requires us to empty our minds and listen to others with our whole being (Rosenberg, 2006: 107). In order to achieve freedom of consciousness at all, it is necessary to immerse oneself in one's essence. In the process of observing how our mind works, it is necessary to succumb to the separation of the natural world from the content of consciousness.[5] This process of self-perception and introspection has been intriguing to many philosophers and pioneers of experimental psychology. According to the philosophy of mind, the process of introspection involves immersion and awareness of one's own mind, perception, emotions, beliefs, imagination, thoughts and other psychic phenomena that possess introspective assessment and consciousness, which creates a fertile ground for liberation and relief from personal psychological imbalances.[6] The relief of the personal mind creates enough space for extraspective action, which certainly does not exclude introspection but intertwines and correlates with it (acc. Krznarić, 2014).

The entire 20th century has been marked by a trend of introspection in the context of the need to work on oneself, immerse oneself, observe the inner world, and focus on one's own feelings, desires, experiences, attitudes, and values. The philosophy of individualism promotes calming in one's own being and finding one's own peace, as a fertile ground for empathy (acc. Krznarić, 2014). A safe and calm person, who starts from the feelings inside their being, is able to establish deeper contact with people from his environment (Jasper Juul, 2020: 10). The author explains empathy as a form of calming oneself and communion with others. He also emphasises the development of group empathy in response to the problem of resolving interpersonal relationships. By thinking about ourselves, we create a precondition for liberation from prejudice, condemnation, authority

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5   See: URL: Introspekcija ili samoopažanje – primjeri, ekstrospekcija, opažanje i retrospekcija (dnevnik.hr), Retrieved: 2022-5-5.
6   See: URL: Introspekcija ili samoopažanje – primjeri, ekstrospekcija, opažanje i retrospekcija (dnevnik.hr).

and everything that is a brake on the development of empathy. We are born with empathy, but we learn and develop it all our lives, which supports the fact that it is never too late to make an imaginative leap, which will create an interactive connection between an individual and not only their environment but the whole world (acc. Krznarić, 2014). Socrates states that "knowing oneself" is the best way to live wisely. He believed that he would improve his fellow citizens if he taught people how to think and speak with themselves and by listening to their inner voice and questioning it (acc. Rupčić Kelam, Steiner Jelić, and Kelam, 2019). This approach of peeking into one's own soul opens up a greater possibility of moving away from oneself and getting to know other people, other peoples and cultures.

Introspection is contrasted with extraspection in the context of observing one's surroundings beyond the comforts of the personal mind. In the process of analysing personal reactions in interaction with other people (which are the subject of empathy), extrospective persons delve into the area of introspection, which proves their correlation.[7]

According to the definition of psychologists, empathy has a cognitive and affective dimension, where "empathy is cognitive awareness of another person's inner state, his thoughts, feelings, perceptions and intentions", while from an affective point of view, it is explained as "an emotional reaction to another person" (Hoffman, 2003: 37). The same author emphasises and proves the importance of empathic anxiety as a prosocial motive.[8] Spreng et al. (2009: 2) state that "cognitive empathy involves an intellectual or imaginative understanding of another's emotional state, which is often described as overlapping with the construct of mind theory (understanding the thoughts and feelings of others) and used alternately by some authors". From a multitude of definitions and understandings of empathy, Krznatić (2014: 31) recognises the common characteristics of extremely empathetic people.[9] *Involving your empathic brain* implies accepting a new understanding of human nature. Empathy is a part of our genetics; it is in our essence, and we are born with it. We also develop empathy throughout life, which is considered the foundation of emotional intelligence

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7   See: URL: Introspekcija ili samoopažanje – primjeri, ekstrospekcija, opažanje i retrospekcija (dnevnik.hr).

8   Hoffman (2003) states that the empathetic anxiety of the observer is related to helping other people, moreover it must be positively correlated and preceded and contribute to helping and ultimately the person helping, after helping should feel a weaker intensity of empathic anxiety and should feel better.

9   See more: Roman Krznarić, in his book Empathy, advocates the importance of extraspection as an important component of the imaginative leap, in the process of empathizing, stating that extraspection does not exclude introspection.

in children. Mary Gordon believes that empathy is crucial to creating new citizens of the world who will be able to solve with interest the world's social and political problems, which the world is increasingly facing.[10] Another crucial habit for empathic action is the *imaginative leap*, divided into several steps. Humanisation involves developing awareness of the people around us, thinking about each individual, their desires, feelings, thoughts, and possible roles in our lives. Imagination helps us to play the game of characters, with which we can change our perception of the individual and their influence on our world. In this interaction, with our attitude we free ourselves from prejudice and indulge in a different image of the man with whom we are in conflict or unfavourable communication. The next step of the imaginative leap is to find common ground with the people we empathise with. This explains that we will find it easier to get into a person's shoes in a particular situation if we have experienced a similar one ourselves. In doing so, the function of the critical observer, who is able to omit part of the emotions that arise from personal interest and well-being, is emphasised (Nussbaum, 2005: 106). In addition to striving to act the way we would like to be treated, we should strive for the concept of treating the way an empathetic person would like to be treated. By finding common points of interest or those that are different, we will become aware of the individuality of the individual we are empathising with. The process of empathising involves stepping out of the comfort zone.

Empathising the enemy avoids moral condemnation, which certainly has an impact on our overall psychophysical development. The concept of compassion is also advocated by Karen Armstrong, a TED Award winner, who unveils the 2009 Charter of Compassion, based on empathising with all human beings, even those we consider enemies.[11] Empathising an enemy is the highest level of imaginative leap into someone else's skin. Achieving a level of empathy for dissidents, whether at the political, racial, religious or national level, means laying a good foundation for positive action at the global level (acc. Krznarić, 2014).

Extremely empathetic people, furthermore, *seek experiential adventures* (acc. Krznarić, 2014), which raises empathic action to the level of multiculturalism. This form of behaviour is manifested through charity in the face of natural disasters, and the reasons may be different. Unlike those who have a need to satisfy their selfish urges, true empaths who have made an imaginary leap in the context of

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10 URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DIrrlaA1wbAP, Retrieved 2021-5-8.
11 See: URL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charter_for_Compassion, Retrieved 2021-2-11.

seeking points of contact with a person in need will truly do so with the goal of improving the quality of the victim's current life. People who have achieved a high level of empathy are also able to empathise with an enemy, a murderer, a war criminal, or a political dissident. In doing so, communication skills with empathic characteristics should be developed and practised (Krznarić, 2014). *Practising the art of conversation* implies "nurturing curiosity directed at strangers and radical listening and removing emotional masks" (Krznarić, 2014: 15).

The fifth habit is *empathising from one's armchair* (acc. Krznarić, 2014). This habit involves sensitising receptors based on artistic expressions, such as fine art, literature, film, or social media. *Inspire revolution* (acc. Krznarić, 2014) is the highest level that can be the denominator for all social change. Dissemination of personal empathic skills plays a key role in this. Therefore, it is necessary to emphasise that a school is a place for acquiring competencies for prosocial behaviour, where the main role is played by education for empathy. Implementing empathic thinking as an essential component of caring thinking in school systems has a beneficial effect on strengthening students' self-awareness in order to meet basic needs and cope with basic life needs (Rupčić Kelam, Steiner Jelić, and Kelam, 2019: 245). The modern notion of teaching does not exclude traditional methods, which are more prevalent in preschool students, such as play in the context of a symbolic play with a stage puppet. Due to its characteristics of imagination, symbolic play is a fundamental link between social and emotional development and the environment in which the student grows up, and it is essential to reflect on its representation in the classroom (acc. Ivon, 2005).

Philosophy of the game and symbolic play as a component of the imaginative leap

An important segment of a good and developed human life is the recognition of its inner world in the eyes of others, and one of the ways in which this process takes place is through art (Žalec, 2019: 207). The same author states that it plays an important role in empathy because a harmonious and non-antagonistic relationship is established. The human experience is most sincerely channelled through art, on which, after all, rests the need to find methods that will be suitable for the upbringing and education of future citizens of this world. Modern schools call for experiential learning by which students will acquire critical, creative and caring thinking, interwoven with indispensable empathic thinking (acc. Rupčić Kelam, Steiner Jelić, and Kelam, 2019). The methods often used in

teaching require monitoring of innovations in the world, but we always return to the values of play as the original expression of each child's experience. Perić Kraljik (2009) believes that play is indispensable from the earliest childhood and is a basic component of life and creative literacy.

Starting from the fact that the game of young animals is crucial for their survival and survival in nature, because by playing and taking on the role of attacker or prey, they learn different skills, emphasis should be placed on children's play as a prefix of life experiences in the face of all life challenges. (acc. Alexander and Sandahl, 2022). Drawing a parallel between the play of cubs of animals, such as primates and humans, it is concluded that in both cases, it plays an important role in sensitising the senses responsible for further social development. In primates, the imitation of movement in the game is attributed to the function of mirror neurons, as well as in newborns, as seen in newborns who imitate each other's crying. Hoffman (2003: 69) calls this form of imitation egocentric empathic anxiety, which occurs at the end of the first year of a child's life. True empathic anxiety occurs in the middle of the second year when the child becomes aware of themselves and the environment (Lewis and Brooks-Gunn, 1979; Rifkin, 1945: 8). Following the developmental stages of empathy in children, we come to the realisation that empathy is not closely related to mirror neurons and mimicry, but is proportional to the development of the self in human beings. It can be said that play and empathy are as old as the human race.

The notion of play has been the subject of debate and various interpretations by many philosophers since ancient times. While Heraclitus described the game as a symbol of the world, with the flow of the world being a child, Plato resisted the notion that the world is a pointless game and the inconceivable emergence and disappearance of all that is transient. According to him, the world was a mental order, and the game belonged to the gods. He separated play from the secular and placed it in the sphere of sensory appearance as a prototype of truth (acc. Uzelac, 1987). Plotinus believed that man was able to imitate the creative power of the gods because God created him as his toy and object of creative enjoyment. Medieval works of art depict Christ or Emperor Augustus with an apple or the Earth in his hand, which, as balls, represent symbols of play and harmony. Their size over that ball represents supremacy over the world (acc. Uzelac, 1987). Kant opposes work to work and describes it as liberation from goals and the need and struggle for survival (acc. Uzelac, 1987). Gadamer presents the game as the foundation of human freedom and a way to get to the art of living, giving the game an essential aesthetic dimension. Among many 20th-century

philosophers, Johan Huizing speaks of play as an unreal activity rich in meaning, free and self-sufficient, and that it has its own time and space and allows for the possibility of repetition. The game creates order, and in it, every man is in his natural state. Uzelac (1987), in his book Philosophy of the Game, mentions Caillois's categories of play. He distinguishes between competitive games (agon), fate games like gambling (alea), acting games (mimicry) and adrenaline games (ilinx). He puts all these categories between two extremes: leisure, improvisation of uncontrolled fantasy (paidia) and subjection to arbitrary conventions and improvisations (Ludus). Just like play, works of art build an imaginary unreal world using real human props (acc. Fink, 2000). In all philosophical reflections, from Antiquity to the present day, play, art and the world are inextricably linked and create a synergy with man. Art is the highest form of play, and their connection is the world of the imaginative (acc. Uzelac, 1987). By playing, one learns about the real world,[12] just as the game world uses the real world, and their intertwining cannot be put into the two-dimensionality of space and time (Fink 1957: 37).

Imagination is important to students, and it is possible to realise it through a symbolic game with a doll. With its characteristics, the stage puppet in the game provides support and comfort and encourages each individual to interact with the group or the puppet itself.

A symbolic game with a doll and encouraging empathy

Entering the sphere of modern teaching, the creativity of teachers is released, and the focus is placed on the importance of the psychophysical and social-emotional development of students. Teachers are often subject to enslavement to the prescribed work plan, so any departure from classical teaching is a major step towards improving the teaching process (acc. Bognar, 1999). Kindergarten children learn and upgrade the acquired skills through symbolic play, therefore, the game should be implemented in the daily teaching of younger students. By sensitising and enriching the overall development of students through symbolic play with a puppet, good foundations are created for encouraging and developing empathy in the classroom (acc. Ivon, 2013). The same author states that playing with a puppet and taking on one or more roles, the student moves away from egocentrism and creates fertile ground for extrospective interaction with the environment. Duran (2001), according to Ivon (2005: 7) classifies symbolic play

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12 See more: URL: https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/152447, Retrieved 2022-06-28.

into two large groups, depending on whether they are related to a structure that encourages cognitive development or a change in content, responsible for social, emotional, and motivational development.

By stimulating the imagination, the stage puppet helps to convey the elements of behaviour, which is reflected in the teacher's motivation of children to play. The teacher, educator or workshop leader should develop empathic communication that implies a willingness to dialogue with the student, free from prejudice and condemnation. "Empathic abilities and imagination of educators are prerequisites for his successful communication with children because they help him to get to know the child better, discover his interests and needs and thus find an appropriate approach." (Ivon, 2010: 76). With his originality, tenderness, playfulness, clarity and humour in improvising with a puppet, the teacher/leader achieves the full pedagogical value of the game (Glibo, 2000: 137). The characteristic of a stage puppet is that it does not make mistakes, it is strange, it comes to life in the hands of the actors and thus enables the easier expression of opinions and emotions (acc. Paljetak, 2007), which is a good precondition for a successful imaginative leap and incarnation. The puppet helps the participant to easily offer imaginative ideas for various solutions, so it can be said that it becomes a powerful means of expression and, as such, enriches educational values and encourages reflection, and the richness of expression depends on how much the teacher believes in the strength, power and potential of the puppet as a teaching tool (acc. Pavlinović, Nemeth-Jajić, 2010). The stage puppet is used "in developing interest in various branches of art, as well as in developing students' creative abilities" (Pokrivka, 1980: 48). Its application in resolving peer conflicts contributes to education for empathy, mutual respect and the development of social skills.

Many studies have been conducted on the therapeutic effectiveness of the puppet, most often with the aim of encouraging and developing empathy as the main premise of prosociality. Ivon and Sindik (2008), in their research on the connection between educators' imagination and empathy with some characteristics of preschool children's behaviour and play, come to the conclusion that there is a positive connection between educators' emotional empathy and imagination with children's prosocial and aggressive behaviour, and with children's play, regarding its diversity and social form. Empathetic and imaginative teachers assess children as prosocial and more often conduct games that encourage the development of empathy and prosociality. In a later study, the same authors (Ivon and Sindik, 2011) reached results that showed that educators in the experimental group, who often use a doll in their work with children, rated

the behaviour of children in their groups as more prosocial and less aggressive in relation to to the control group, in which educators rarely use the puppet in educational work. In his research on the impact of a doll on the development of empathy in children with autism spectrum disorders, Rezayi (2020) came up with results that showed that the intervention programme of Adlerian doll therapy significantly (p<0.05) led to a change and increase in the empathy quotient of highly functional autistic children in the experimental group.

In class, a stage puppet can be used at any stage of the lesson. It does not have to be technically perfect, and any object from the environment will serve for spontaneous improvisations (Kroflin, 1995: 204). If, for example, a puppet plays the role of a sad girl, she will not necessarily have a sad face, but she will arouse the emotions of the participants with her movements, voice, personality and generally magical projection (Paljetak, 2007: 18).

Therefore, any form of stage puppet is suitable as a teaching tool that will provide the participant with security in the context of expressing personal emotions. The indirect interaction of the participants and the puppet and the participants with each other creates a favourable atmosphere in which empathic communication will be encouraged.

Action research

The empirical part of this paper is based on a series of puppet workshops as a component of action research. It is conceived through four main phases that include planning, action, observation and reflection (acc. Mužić, 2004).

Action research is an area that is evolving rapidly and is a significant means of empowering teachers (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000: 241). As a powerful tool for change at the local level, action research can be conducted by an individual teacher or in collaboration with a group of teachers working in the same school with the goal of improving educational practice (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000: 226). It is the teacher who has the best insight into the problems of pedagogical practice, so this knowledge is the basis for asking a specific research question. Through action research, the teacher-researcher seeks to improve their pedagogical work and the competencies of all participants. Among other things, an important feature of these is that they contribute to science in education but are also useful to the participants themselves (acc. Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000).

Teachers are increasingly confronted with class communities where rivalry, dissatisfaction, selfishness, envy, and general disagreement reign, and the outcome is often a conflict within the community. In an effort to explain these clashes of diversity as problems rather than the benefits of student adaptation and socialisation, modern schools are crying out for new methods to encourage students to think about empathy. Motivated by the problem, the idea of designing different workshops, reaching for what frees the imagination and extorts the deepest emotions - a stage puppet, emerges. After the diagnostic phase, the workshops are designed in collaboration with a playwright and have a therapeutic effect. They are conceived based on the relationship between introspection and extrospection.

The aim of this action research is to focus on the influence of the stage puppet on the development of empathy in primary school students, with an emphasis on the imagination embodied in the symbolic play with the puppet. The thesis we want to prove is that the stage puppet has a direct impact on the development of empathy in lower primary school students. Following the Ethical Principles for Conducting Action Research (acc. Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000), a group of nine students was formed, and the consents required for further stages of this research, such as photography and filming, were collected. The students' ages range from 8 to 10 years, of different socio-economic statuses and intellectual abilities. A student diagnosed with ADHD and mild intellectual disability was also included. It is worth noting that the same students have already participated in various drama and puppetry workshops and are familiar with the rules of conduct during the performance of improvisations. The school principal is also familiar with the workshops; our critical friends are the class teacher, the teaching assistant and the school psychologist, and weregularly comment and submit reports with our mentor. Data collection procedures include photographing and filming with a camera, an evaluation sheet, interviewing students, discussions with critical friends and mentors, and a research diary.

Discussion

As part of the initial action research phase to encourage empathy in primary school students, five workshops were created based on motifs from reading works precisely because literary works are directly related to emotions. They encourage fear, compassion, and anger, but also joy and happiness, and affect the participants' feelings (acc. Nussbaum, 2005). The common denominator of all fairy tales used in the first workshops is the characterisation of their

characters. They are polarised (acc. Šimunović, 2016) according to good and bad qualities and deeds, and as such, they are usually the main characters at the centre of the whole plot. In the struggle between good and evil, the supreme, rich, dominant villains most often clash with good, gentle, wounded, poor, generally marginalised characters, who overcome evil despite succumbing to the violent appearances of superior characters and emerge morally untainted. By imaginative leaping and entering the roles of marginalised fairy tale characters, students are taught correct moral actions. Entering the roles of Ugly Duckling and Anka goose keeper – Goldilocks and Sad Handkerchief – encourages the deeping of empathic thinking based on the characterisation of these characters. Their common points are suffering and sadness due to rejection, isolation, abuse and oppression by superior characters who socially exclude them (acc. Šućur, 2004). All designed workshops took place after classes, in the Elementary School Popovac, in the Regional School Kneževo, in a classroom that was adapted and prepared for that purpose.

The first workshop, entitled "Ugly Duckling", began with meditative breathing for the purpose of introspective immersion and relaxation, according to a template from the book Empathy (acc. Juul et al., 2020). After the students calmed down, a monologue of the Ugly Duckling followed, which, after a few questions, turned into a dialogic act. Through the monologue, students learn that the Ugly Duckling is sad because of rejection. As the embodiment of a marginalised character, he is subject to even more severe forms of psychological and even physical abuse than individuals who show him by their actions that he does not belong to their community just because he is different. Their actions act on him self-destructively (acc. Juul, 1998), and the outcome is despair, sadness, and withdrawal. Students empathise and stay sober until a student with ADHD distracts them with his forced laughter. He did not immediately recognise the emotion of the ugly duckling's sadness, so his reaction is instinctive and sincere. After the Ugly Duckling told his sad story and left room for participants to think, letters of support followed. Of the nine students, two relied on previous experience gained while reading the fairy tale about the Ugly Duckling, so they encouraged him with the fact that he would become a beautiful swan. Five students wrote words of support in the context of unnecessary grief, highlighting the beauties of diversity. The two students identified with the duckling and pointed out that they were sad about his fate and that they would feel like him in that situation. The students read their messages of support, and some hugged the Ugly Duckling. The workshop ended with anonymous evaluation sheets, which

provided feedback on the participants' feelings and opinions about the workshop. The evaluation sheet, based on an existing template (acc. Komesarović, 2010), contains seven groups of questions related to students' feelings about the group they are in, the topic they covered, and their relationship with their friends and family.

The second workshop, "White Deer", occurred over three days. The students watched the play of the same name, followed by an analysis of the work in which we looked at the characters and their characteristics. At the centre of the discussion was Goldilocks, who represents a gentle but brave girl. Her kindness and sacrifice surpassed the evil she had suffered from the infamous Prince Bod. Despite the conditions set for her by members of the Forest Council, she empathises with the poor, vulnerable, and socially isolated characters who appear in her life's journey. As the good Spirit of the forest, because of her actions, she is condemned but also rewarded. At the end of the denouement, Prince Urlih falls in love with her, who is guided by morally correct actions. In analysing the character of Anka-Goldilocks, on the one hand, we emphasise her suffering as a reason for compassion, and on the other hand, we emphasise her deep empathy for marginalised characters. Her empathy transcends the goodness of all positive characters in a fairy tale and the wickedness of negative ones and is transformed into a constant of the highest form of empathy. Based on evoking the emotions evoked by the sad scenes, the students independently selected and directed the scenes that evoked the strongest emotions of compassion and sadness in them. They determined the narrators and characters and subsequently designed flat puppets, and in collaboration with a Croatian language teacher, they created the scenography. After performing the selected scenes, the students gave feedback to the evaluation sheets.

The third workshop, "About the Sad Handkerchief", began with the Game of Mirrors of Emotional Faces and continued with solving a questionnaire about the initial empathy of students. An already permanent questionnaire was used, the purpose of which was research for the thesis (acc. Komesarović, 2010). The first group of answers (a) is of the most empathic character and, in addition to emphasising the empathic attitude, also includes action. The second group of answers (b) shows an empathic reaction without action, while the third group (c) represents a non-empathetic, vicious, indifferent, insensitive action without action. The fourth group of answers (d) reveals a non-empathetic, vicious, intrusive and violent form of behaviour. The graph shows the share of empathic behaviour in the group (Graph 1). 74% of students think empathetically, while

21, 91% show empathy without action. Only 4.11% of students in certain situations show malicious behaviour towards their peers or younger family members. According to previous experiences and previously performed puppet workshops, as well as everyday situations, the teacher-critical friends and we concluded that the same students show much less empathetic behaviour in everyday situations. It is evident from this questionnaire that students ultimately know socially acceptable forms of behaviour; it is only questionable how much they apply them in practice. It is certainly important to encourage and support students in empathic action on a daily basis.
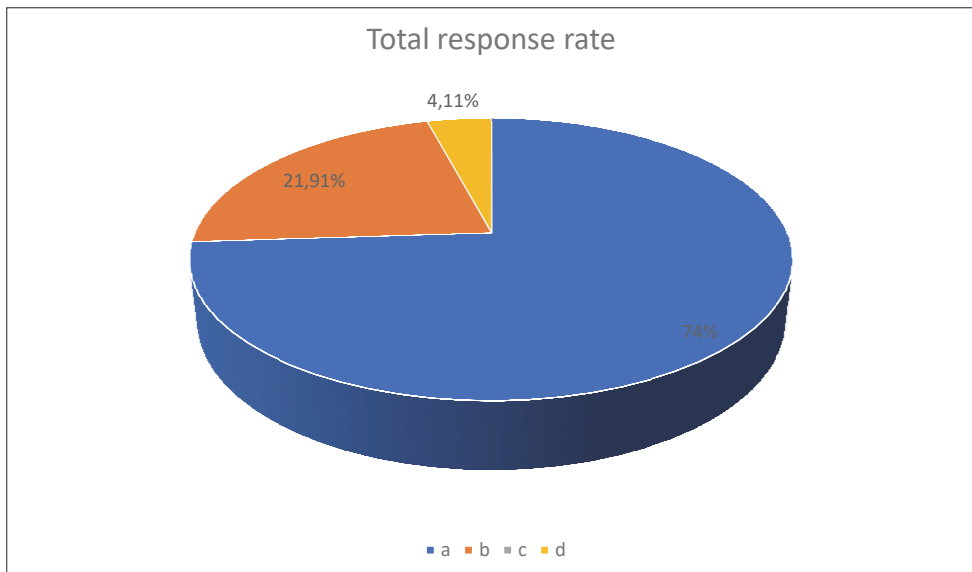
Graph 1. Questionnaire results.

The questionnaire was followed by the play "About a Sad Handkerchief" in which the boy lost his handkerchief in the park. In addition to empathising with the Handkerchief, students are focused on reflecting on the feelings of a careless and clumsy child who has lost a handkerchief. Handkerchief's interlocutor is Rabbit, who does not show sympathy for both of them and invites Handkerchief to live with him. It would be said that Rabbit follows socially acceptable forms of behaviour, which can be seen from the dialogue in which he encourages Handkerchief to reject the boy who, according to his story, rejected him. Analysing the characters, we come to the conclusion that there are several explanations that support Handkerchief's loss. The students were given the task of creating their own doll made of socks. It served as a means of communication

with the Handkerchief. In dialogue with him, all students in the group expressed regret that they were careless and clumsy and took the Handkerchief back to them. The evaluation sheet provided feedback on the workshop.

The fourth workshop, entitled "Good Hearts", was based on empathising not only with human beings but also with animals in need. In the introspective stage, the students were read a meditative story based on a workshop template (acc. Bognar, 1999), after which they presented their experience with a drawing. Not all the students in the group dived deep and stared into their hearts, as evidenced by the description of the external experience. In the second stage, care for children but also for animals and basic living needs were discussed. On the worksheets, they filled in the amount of their satisfaction with colour if all their life needs were met. In the third stage, the students watched the puppet show "Good Hearts", after which they decided for themselves what good deeds and bad deeds are. The focus of the plot is two boys who find a box of puppies. After adopting them, they find out that their friend's grandfather rejected them. After the unfolding, the students were given information about the adoption of animals and led a discussion based on personal experiences. The puppet socks, which the students made themselves in the previous workshop, took part in the analysis of the play. By embodying themselves in their character, they found it easier to express their opinions and feelings. Finally, all students filled out an evaluation sheet.

The aim of the fifth workshop, entitled "Conflict", was to encourage the participating students to think more deeply, not only about their feelings and the wounds caused by the conflict but also about the person they are in conflict with. In the introductory part, the students wrote associations on the topic of conflict with a storm of thought. They clearly linked the term to negative and bad actions. After a short presentation, they reflected on their personal experience and, with the help of a previously made puppet, performed a monologue or dialogue of their situation that involved conflict. All students in the group recognised that each of their conflicts ended in reconciliation with the person they were in conflict with. The most common are parents, siblings and friends with whom they are in conflict. From this, we concluded that the conflict as such is not bad if it contributes to solving the problem, but also that it is better not to get into conflicts. We place emphasis on assertive communication. In the interaction of the participants, their doll socks also participated. They allowed them to express themselves more freely and express their opinions independently. We have described the conflict as an iceberg, where the top of the ice is the conflict

itself, and everything under the water is the cause of the conflict. In this way of thinking, the students immersed themselves in their hearts and concluded that they should also, before the conflict, re-examine the problems of the person with whom they are in conflict. We ended the workshop with an example of a useful conflict, which was resolved exclusively through open communication. With the evaluation sheets, the students expressed their most sincere opinions.

Evaluation

After each workshop, students gave their feedback by filling out evaluation sheets. It was compiled according to the existing template (Komesarović, 2010), with a modification to make it easier for the participants to find their way. On the Linkert scale, they expressed their feelings about the group in which they are, their attitude towards other participants, their contribution, their opinion about the workshop itself and how they behave after participating in the workshops.

The students mostly felt comfortable during the first four workshops, during which only a few were talkative, while the fifth workshop caused discomfort for as many as eight students, especially when they evoked memories of a personal experience of conflict as can be see at Graph 2.
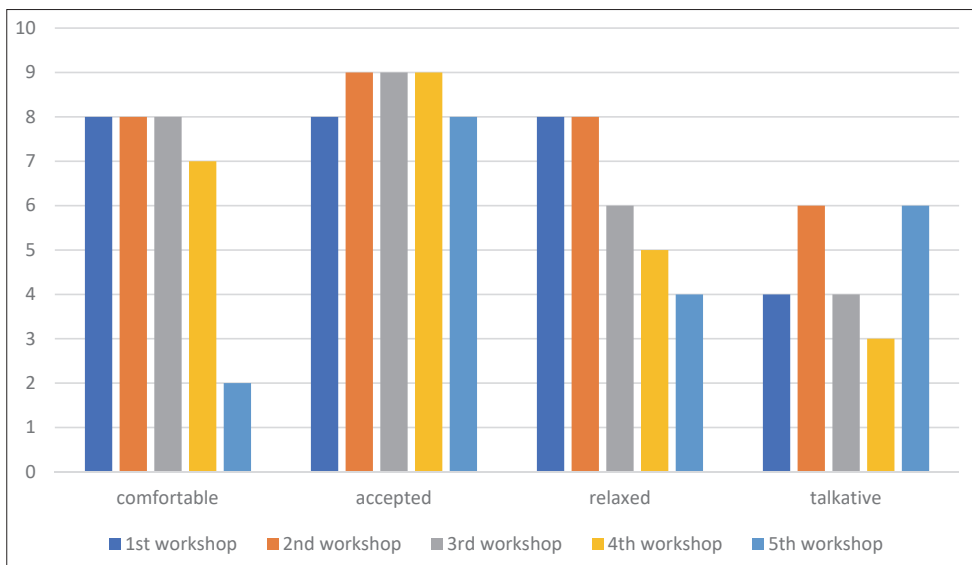

Graph 2. How the students felt during the workshops.

In all the workshops, the students were very cooperative, and most of them contributed to the work with their constructive discussions. Already in the second workshop, progress was visible in students with ADHD because he realised that he was directly involved and especially animated in the creation of dolls, which encouraged him to enjoy the role through which he will interpret the experience (Graph 3).
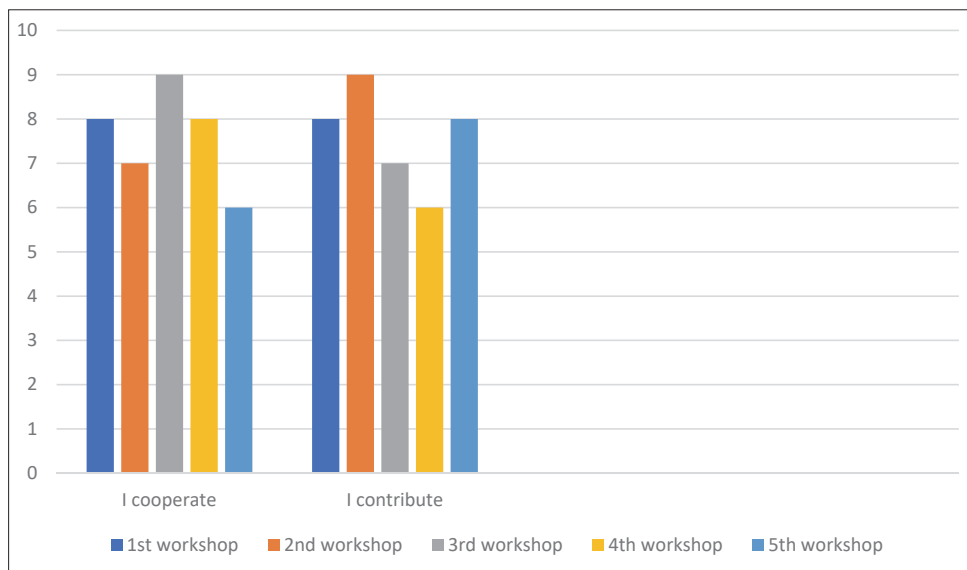

Graph 3. Student assessment on cooperation and personal contribution in workshops.

According to personal assessment, the workshops were interesting for all students, and they proved to be useful. The dynamics and variety of customised activities on which the workshops were based contributed to a more credible experience for all participants, as shown by the reflection obtained from the evaluation sheets. Despite the discomfort they felt when expressing their negative experiences at the fifth workshop, as many as seven out of nine concluded that the workshop was interesting, and all of them felt that it was useful to them (Graph 4).
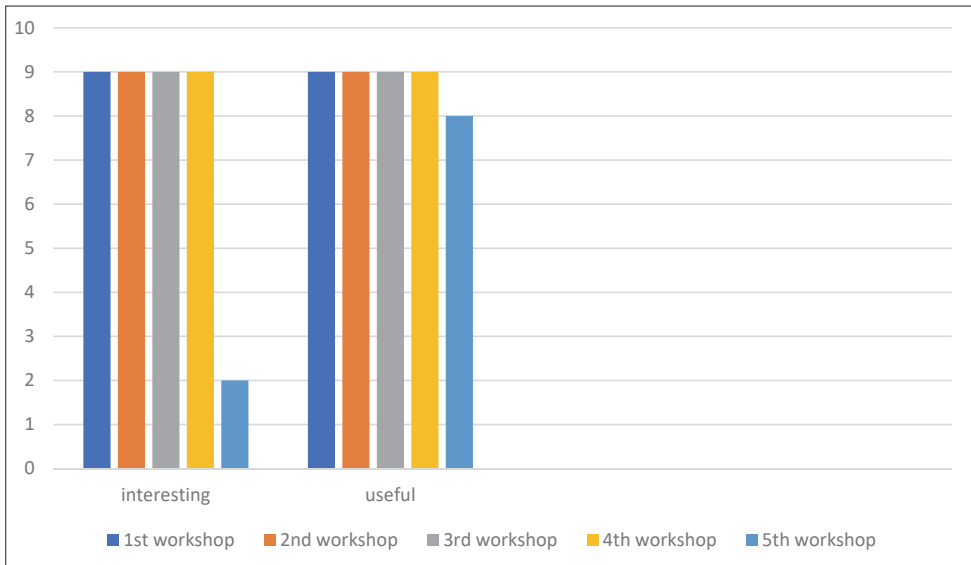
Graph 4. Student assessment of the interest and usefulness of the workshops.

From Graph 5 and Graph 6, it can be seen that students are on good terms with their peers as well as with their parents and that they feel better and more useful in their community. From the interview with the class teacher who was involved in the above activities, we learned that the evaluation sheets do not show the true picture of the situation in which some of the participants find themselves. Namely, one student in that class has inappropriate behaviour towards peers, teachers and family members. He is prone to ridicule systematic verbal humiliation, and even physical attacks on classmates. The same student was very active in all workshops; in analysis and interpretations, he gave socially desirable answers and even expressed his emotions through facial expressions. When we talked about the conflict, the first one stated that he did not know what the conflict was at all. By the end of the fifth workshop, he showed signs of nervousness.
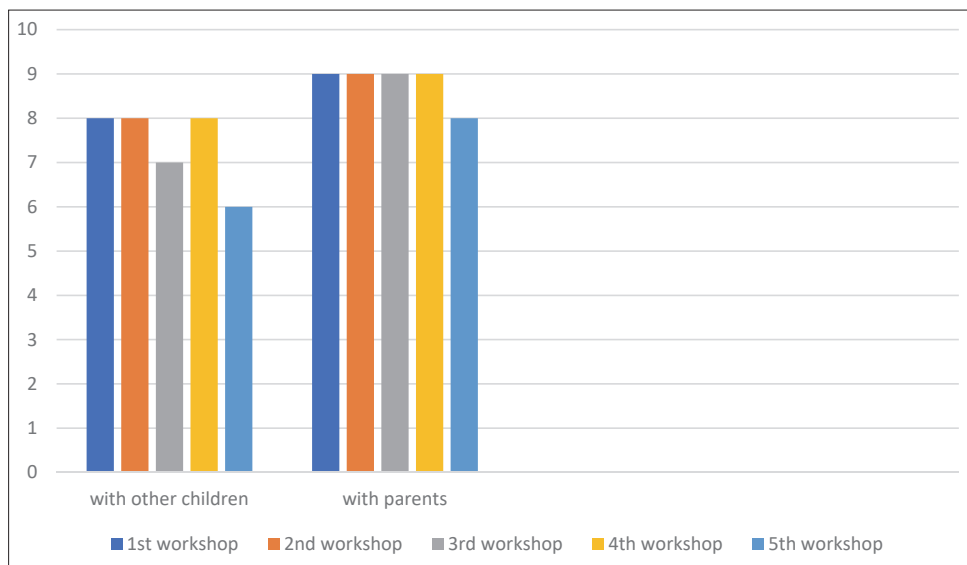
Graph 5. Assessment of personal relationships with other children and with parents.
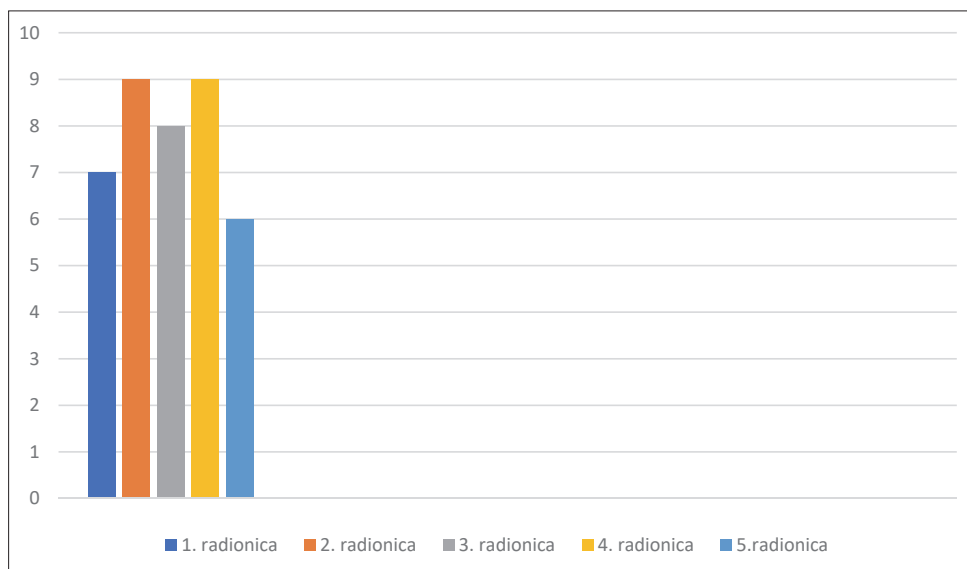
Graph 6. Students feel better after participating.

Conclusion

Empathy, a term many psychologists and philosophers have explained as a process of immersion in someone else's shoes, takes on new dimension in the

form of an imaginative leap, a precursor to solving many global problems. We are witnessing great changes spiralling out of control, so we often put ourselves in the role of an observer left to the current turmoil in the world around us. Instead of passive observation, it is necessary to focus on the needs of the little man and create a world in which the voice of even the quietest individual will reach those who hold the strings of the world in their hands. The solution to the problem lies in the revolution of empathy, and the precondition for such a courageous endeavour is the education for empathy at the earliest age of a child, from birth to adulthood.

On the path of growing up of each individual, the school should be the main nursery of moral citizens, who will be trained for critical thinking based on emotional-rational judgments through later life situations. The task of the modern school is to create preconditions for the world of adults by implementing modern methods in the school curriculum. One of the key methods, which is often associated with the kindergarten age of the child and almost forgotten in the classroom, is play. Subject to the prescribed curriculum, teachers often become slaves to the imaginative eyepiece of plans and programmes, which is often arbitrarily imposed. The teacher is an innovator; they will break free from the shackles of the prescribed provisions and will become the first voice in creating new methods by which the expected outcomes will be achieved. The game is rooted in the very existence of living beings, both in animal cubs and in children, for the purpose of training for a cruel world and survival. The game, in the context of philosophical notions, has occupied an important place in the reflections of the great philosophers from the time of Antiquity until the present time. It was associated with the relationship of humans and gods and gods and the inner being of man who exists as such in interaction with the gods. The game also connects with art and creates harmony in the life of each individual. In the context of the present man, the play is placed in the context of a happy childhood rather than higher cosmic actions in solving the problems of the world.

An important segment and means of communication in the symbolic game is the puppet. The stage puppet has great power to conceal all negative emotions and reveal the child's deepest thoughts. In addition to being used for the purposes of psychomotor and socio-emotional development of the preschool child, it serves as a powerful expressive teaching tool in the later age of students. Due to its characteristics, the puppet behind which the student hides while interacting with other students, but also the puppet itself, gets the opportunity to get rid of the fear of exposure to the group and more easily project their emotions.

With the help of a doll, which becomes alive in their hands, they will be more successful in making an imaginative leap into someone else's skin and thus begin empathic thinking and action. Through freer communication, they will establish a better emotional connection with everyone around them and encourage their surroundings to think about empathy. By dilating empathic veins, the door to an empathic revolution opens.

The methodology of the work includes five workshops through which students acquired new communication skills and were encouraged to reflect on their position within the community. The students who participated in the activities are residents of rural areas and spend much time together and outside of school. Most of them are prone to condemnation and taking "justice into their hands", following the example of the adults they grow up with, and students who reject because of undesirable behaviour are put aside and reject any other option to be accepted. The only argument for rejecting students who find it harder to socialise is their malice and disobedience. Appropriate activities in which students are happy to participate and their implementation in the curriculum could open new horizons for students to learn about the broader picture of the problems in which their peers are, thus building the foundations for true empathic action. The starting point of empathic thinking is upbringing in the family, from which the first steps towards immersion in another's being start, and this requires a huge commitment from parents and the immediate environment that will focus not only on their needs but also the needs of all citizens of this world. Starting by sowing the seeds of empathy in our family, school and local community, we will create a quality precondition for rooting global empathy.

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UTJECAJ SCENSKE LUTKE NA RAZVOJ EMPATIJE KOD UČENIKA MLAĐE ŠKOLSKE DOBI

Sažetak

U današnje vrijeme globalnih promjena i recesijskih kriza često se zanemaruje važnost "malog čovjeka" u kontekstu razumijevanja njegovih egzistencijalnih potreba, a u svrhu samoostvarenja. U bujici prilagodbi tim promjenama svjetskih razmjera čovjek kao da se gubi. Neoliberalni kapitalizam sa svojom kulturom narcizma i kultom individualizma, usuđujemo se ustvrditi, stvara kulturu bezobzirnosti i ravnodušnosti u kojoj postajemo imuni na društvene tragedije i promatrači ljudske patnje. Prožimanjem estetsko-umjetničkih i empatijskih značajki, kao bitnih sastavnica onoga što čini bit čovjeka, moguće je postići harmonijske međuljudske odnose kao preduvjete prvim koracima prema uspješnijem odrastanju i prilagođavanju pojedinca. Neizostavno je spomenuti ulogu empatije i empatičnoga i skrbnoga mišljenja, koje uz kritičko i kreativno mišljenje, čini neizostavno trojstvo kada je riječ o odgojno-obrazovnom procesu djece. Ono što čini bit same empatije, kao čina očovječenja čovjeka, i imaginativni je skok koji predstavlja prefiks za prevladavanje društvenih i političkih prepreka, ograničenja, marginaliziranja i udaljenosti koje su kočnica za uživljavanje u tuđe osjećaje. Jedan je od načina pomoći izražavanju osjećaja kod djece i scenska lutka. Kroz igru dijete spontano preuzima uloge kako bi na kreativan način izreklo svoje misli, nastojanja, želje, htijenja i osjećaje. Upravo lutkarski odgoj predstavlja važnu sastavnicu cjelokupnoga razvoja djeteta, počev od najranije dobi kada novorođenče vježba motoriku pokreta, sve do psihosocijalnog razvoja u kasnijoj

dobi odrastanja. Primjena je scenske lutke široka pa se koristi u rješavanju vršnjačkih sukoba, otkrivanju novih umjetničkih sklonosti, a pridonosi i odgoju za empatiju, međusobnom poštivanju i razvoju socijalnih vještina. Ovim će se radom nastojati prikazati važnost njezine upotrebe i utjecaja na razvoj empatije u mlađoj školskoj dobi. Nakon teorijskoga okvira, koji objašnjava važnost i ulogu scenske lutke i empatije u djetetovom životu, metodološkim pristupom u okviru akcijskoga istraživanja prikazat će se praktični dio rada koji obuhvaća radionice dramaterapije, kao prikaz utjecaja scenske lutke na razvoj empatije kod učenika nižih razreda, s naglaskom na potrebu njegovanja imaginativnoga skoka uživljavanjem. Raspravom nastojimo proširiti i preispitati postavljenu hipotezu te ponuditi odgovore primjerene problemu.

Ključne riječi: empatija, empatično mišljenje, lutkarski odgoj, scenska lutka, skrbno mišljenje, dramaterapija