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## COMPARING BODY AWARENESS BETWEEN ACTORS AND DRAMA TEACHERS

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### Abstract

The teacher's role in drama is to facilitate the pupils' work. The teacher has to use strengthened ways of vocal and visuospatial interaction in order to obtain the attention of the pupils when needed, to inspire the pupils in their drama work and to encourage the pupils to find their own creative solutions. At the same time, the teacher must keep the process under control. The teacher's presence plays an important role in the drama teaching (see Toivanen, Mikkola & Ruismäki 2012, Toivanen & Pyykkö 2012a, 2012b). Voice, gestures, facial expressions, body posture and use of space may together be understood as constituting avisuospatial modality (Stivers & Sindell, 2005) or as we call it in this article - psychophysical actions (e.g. Stanislavski 2008; Zarilli 2004). The purpose of the study is to introduce theater perceptions of the body awareness from psychophysical point of view. What are the connections between the work of an actor and a drama teacher in field of body awareness?

*Keywords:* Body awareness; drama education; drama teacher education, Finnish teacher education

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## 1. Introduction

Drama teaching includes the complex relationships between the teacher's understanding of content (*subject knowledge*), the pedagogical actions (*relation to students, group management*) and the actual teaching actions (*interaction, instructions, directions, teaching methods and lesson structure*). The challenges of pedagogical interaction in drama are related to the teacher's nonverbal communication, presence and use of the body and space in an educational situation (Toivanen & Pyykkö 2012b). With use of these tools, the teacher attempts to strengthen his or her educational and interactive purposes with the group in drama education. The paradox of body awareness is that one's own body is rarely the thematic object of experience. When the teacher concentrates in teaching drama, his or her own bodily state may be the farthest thing from his or her awareness (Zarilli 2004). The lack of teaching experience makes it even more difficult. A novice teacher plans the drama lessons very strictly. Strict adherence to the lesson plan can lead to lack of presence and spontaneity in creating pedagogical interaction with pupils and the teacher does not interact responsively to the pupil's proposals but ignores, interprets, or dominates the activity (Lobman 2005; Sawyer 2004; 2006; 2012; Toivanen, Mikkola, & Ruismäki, 2012).

## 2. Problem Statement and Research Questions

This article seeks to contextualize body consciousness theory in theatre to the context of drama teacher education.

What are the connections in the work of actors and drama teachers in the field of body awareness?

This theoretical review is part of the research project undertaken at Helsinki University Department of Teacher Education. The research project is focused on classroom drama teaching practices (e.g. Toivanen, Pyykkö, & Ruismäki 2011, Toivanen, Antikainen, & Ruismäki 2012, Toivanen, Mikkola, & Ruismäki 2012, Toivanen & Pyykkö 2012a; 2012b). The aim is to develop the theoretical background to the teacher's body awareness so that teacher would be aware of the interactional part of the drama teaching. The holistic presence in an educational situation means skills for quick pedagogical decision-making, intuition and spontaneous response to pupils' actions and proposals in order to create pedagogical interaction.

## 3. Body awareness and psycho-physicality

Konstantin Stanislavski (1863–1938) who is considered to be a creator of the realistic theatre, introduced the term "psycho-physical". In acting this means that the actor should

have an idea why he or she is acting in a certain way on the stage. The aim of psycho-physical exercises is to establish a connection between the actor's inner intentions and his or her physical actions (e.g. Evans 2009; Stanislavski, 2008; Zarrilli 2009). Stanislavski wanted to find a solution to the problem that arose from the conflict between the internal and external elements of acting. By analysing these elements, he found ways and tools for acting and for teaching it. He tested his ideas open-minded and developed little by little his theory which we know as the "system" (Benedetti, 2008; Pätsi, 2010; Stanislavski, 2008). Through the psycho-physical training the actor student learns to understand and master the process of his or her bodily experience. The actor will be able to transform the fictional experiences to a new form and then express them on his or her own body (Evans, 2009, p. 3.) An aesthetic "inner" body mind is discovered and shaped through the long-term practice, and an aesthetic "outer" body is constituted by the actions of a performance score that body offered for the spectator (Zarrilli, 2004).

#### **4. Findings – similarities in the work of an actor and a drama teacher**

According to Cohen (2002, p. 19) an actor's approach to acting is a series of steps *including exploring, feeling, trying, and doing*. Together these steps form a set of experiences. Every actor re-creates the process of acting in every performance. The actor's approach is therefore a process of self-transformation – of moving out of oneself and getting into a role or into a work of art.

A drama teacher's work is not acting even if all teaching is performance related. The teacher takes on professional role of a teacher which is not necessary the same with his or her more private persona. With professional "role playing" created by controlling one's voice and other gestures, the teacher makes himself or herself more confident and extrovert (Dickinson & Neelands 2009, pp. 48–49). On the other hand in drama teaching the teacher can use of his or her role playing skills to create positive climate for drama work or fictional drama world to the pupils.

Cohen (2002) named four principles to a basic method for acting approach (*goal, other, tactics, expectable*) which we connect to the drama teaching.

*Goal of the character is the principle quest actor assumes*. In the pedagogical world we may call it the drama teacher's intention. The teacher's action and interaction with pupil is always intentional and it is based on educational goals and purposes.

*The other is the person (or persons) with whom, for whom or from whom actor, playing character, seeks the goal*. There is always an "other" also in teaching. Drama teaching is intentional activity with pupils, for pupils and from pupils.

*Tactics are variation of actions which a character uses to achieve his or her goals.* The drama teacher's tactics are based on motivating, inspiring teaching methods, variable lesson structure etc. With his or her tactics, the teacher is trying to win the interest of the pupils and to create positive climate in the drama class.

*Expectations gives tone, excitement to the dramatic pursuit of goals and quest for victory for character.* The drama teacher has also expectations of success – winning the pupils' attention and trust, to make them learn and work together with respect for one another.

## **5. Conclusions – teaching body awareness to drama teachers**

Stanislavski wanted to develop a working method which would enable actor to create his or her inner creative space. With “external work on oneself” Stanislavski meant that actors needed to train and sensitize their bodies so much that they would be able to express their inner intensions through the physical action as precisely as possible (Benedetti 1982). In the context of drama teaching Stanislavski's “internal work on oneself” could be seen as the need to improve the didactic side (*teaching ability*) and the “external work on oneself” could be seen as the pedagogical side (*relation to students*). Stanislavski (2008) divided his thinking into three statements on which the actor must base everything he or she is doing during the creative process. The statements are;

*The art of the dramatic actor is the art of inner and outer action.* Teaching drama is a composition of the teacher's inner action (goals) and teacher's outer action (pedagogical interaction).

*Truth of the passion, feelings that seem true in the set circumstances.* The credibility and effectiveness of the teacher's action in the given circumstances (pupils, space and time) and prevailing circumstances (learning atmosphere).

*The subconscious creation of nature through the conscious psychotechnique of the actor.* The teacher's “external expression” of his or her internal educational purposes in teaching-studying-learning situations by using consciously practised body messages.

Stanislavski (2008) names three components which steer an actor's mental life: *intelligence, will and feeling.*

The actor's inner world contains personality, creative mechanism, capabilities, natural gifts and habits. Stanislavski divides this inner world more specifically into fourteen elements. (Stanislavski 2008) We have chosen ten elements we believe to be essential in relation to drama teacher education; 1) *imagination* (creativity), 2) *bits and tasks* (the goals and consistency of teaching), 3) *concentration and observing* (circle of attention),

4) *action* (the teaching event in which the teacher must be active participant), 5) *a sense of truth and belief* (creating the fictive worlds of drama), 6) *inner tempo-rhythm* (lesson structure), 7) *contact and communication*, 8) *adaption* (here-and-now way of working), 9) *inner presence* (presence, status) and 10) *ethics and discipline*.

The purpose of this article is to point out theoretical connections between the work of an actor and a drama teacher in the field of body awareness. Our previous studies (Toivanen et al., 2011, 2012) show that the teacher's presence and multimodal behaviour play an important role in the drama teaching. Our next research goal is to design a goal-oriented tutorial training program to improve teacher's body awareness based on the ten elements of Stanislavski we chose above. This is a very challenging task, as creating a connection between the inner aspiration and the body awareness is a long process that requires discipline and regular practising. Is there time for such training in the drama teacher education programme?

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