

## **LET THE WORLD GO – DRUG PREVENTION WITH DRAMA**

Conflict Management and Prevention for the violence free school – the model  
project of The 21st Theatre in Education Association

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### **ABSTRACT**

The tender put out by the Secretariat of the National Crime Prevention Board has provided an opportunity for us to improve and develop our activities – such as health pedagogy, conflict management and conflict prevention with the help of drama pedagogy – within the framework of a larger 8-month long project.

Drama in education and in the process of learning helps to develop openness, tolerance, a democratic way of thinking; it helps mutual understanding and empathy. It develops analytical skills, teaches how to ask questions. It helps us find our way in our world's communication labyrinth. Our aim is to make children, who come from different families with different backgrounds and ways of thinking, be able to communicate through drama and theatre. To make them be able to share their everyday experiences and feelings with each other while playing together or while creating a story. We would like to help them find the way to get over stress and conflicts.

The success of drama programmes could be enhanced by using pedagogical methods that have been designed and realized according to special educational needs, by professional improvement work and by school reforms. Drama can be an effective and powerful tool if it is

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used to ask questions about the quality of relationships at the school. This naturally asks for help in changing the attitude of teachers in conflict management.

## **21<sup>ST</sup> THEATRE IN EDUCATION**

The 21<sup>st</sup> Theatre in Education Association was founded in 1998. Its aim, as a non-governmental organization which taking part in public education, is to educate children and young people through theatre; drug prevention through drama pedagogy; and to create alternative, experimental theatre performances.

### **ABOUT METHODOLOGY**

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### **DRUG PREVENTION WITH DRAMA (1999-2004)**

#### **Lie Low World!**

Drug prevention drama program for 13-16 year-old students (2.5 lessons)

The lesson is lead by three drama teachers and there is only a framework of a story which develops according to the decisions of the class. It also means that no two lessons are the same, so each class can have the feeling that the program is their own. The lesson aims to awaken the individuals' responsibility, especially to draw attention to the problem of asking for and giving help. Our experience shows that the class as a community is able to help the classmate who is in crisis.

The participants of our drama program say that our drama work is effective because it does not act as a deterrent but it is based on such interactive role plays and creating stories in which the player has an opportunity to have their own viewpoint.

A national study on the effectiveness of this program has also been done.

## **CONFLICT MANAGMENT AND PREVENTION FOR THE VIOLENCE FREE SCHOOL – THE MODEL PROJECT OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> THEATRE IN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION 2006**

The tender put out by the Secretariat of the National Crime Prevention Board has provided an opportunity for us to improve and develop our activities – such as health pedagogy, conflict management and conflict prevention with the help of drama pedagogy – within the framework of a larger 8-month long project.

### **PROGRAMME ELEMENTS OF THE PROJECT**

#### **Relationships (drama workshop)**

'Relationships' is a 135-minute series of drama activities including classroom dynamics, skills, relaxing, concentration and trust. The class receives exploitable feedback from the leader. The form-master may be present at these occasions as an external observer.

When we first meet we familiarize the students with the framework and the basic rules. During the play two different spheres come into play – one of them is the actual level of words and activities; the other is the level of meaning, how the participants interpret the situation. The play is a process of creation set within certain rules. The play is an activity offering freedom through reducing tension, getting to know ourselves and others. *The aim of the drama play here is to evolve creativity, to develop the personality.* One of the criteria is to gain experiences since this is how the emotions of the participants come to surface level. The concrete play reproduces the basic emotional problems of the group (co-operation, rivalry, self-assertion, 'clinging together', elimination/exclusion)...Playing together offers a shared experience and through that something special that can very rarely be detected in schools in such a primary way.

We act around and think about selfishness; the reasons for not noticing other people's intentions. If we do not consider each other we will not be able to cooperate. When, why and how does this happen? If we would like to resolve this problem then what do we do about it as a member of a community?

### **Teresa – complex drama workshops about aggression**

The theme of the activities is aggression – physical and emotional abuse towards each other in the classroom, the peer community. The relationship, the game, the battle between the leader (the boss) and their victim. We would like to examine what causes crisis situations within a group of children based on fear and aggression, using theatre and drama pedagogical tools. It is often the case that the children themselves are not aware of who is responsible, who the victim is, who acts in complicity and who is silent in these situations. Drama plays and the roles offer a framework for these young people which protects them from being identified and yet allows them to study and gain a deeper knowledge about the problems they have.

To prevent drugs, alcohol and aggression abuse interactive methods have a primary role – with the use of them young people can understand the motivation for actions that are driven by their temper. This is the aim of the second block in our prevention package which includes drama activities about bullying and aggression in schools. The benefit of the programme called *Teresa* is that we learn about the mechanism of singling out and / or excluding someone in a way which does not make it necessary to get the actors as far as the appearance of aggression in schools, in other words to the manifestation of actual physical aggression – not even in the fictional reality of acting. The point is not what happens if somebody hits another person but rather what happens *inside us before* this happens. And what happens in those who are accidentally there as an innocent third person.

At the end of the activity a short story is read out to create a sharp contrast between the – serious and yet possible – consequences of the possibilities that are acted out and those that are only imagined. It is a painful experience that reality is sometimes more brutal and shocking than the possibilities visualized by us about reality...

### **Intoxication – a complex drama programme about taking responsibility**

This new programme – within the framework of drama and theatre education - stimulates young people to be able to weigh up the consequences of their actions. Actions when they are

looking for risks and actions that are aggressive. We would like to offer help in creating new schemes in their culture of behavior that avoid risks.

Although the programme makes the actors face the possible consequences of an intoxicated night, and it emphasizes the importance of awareness, it does not dispute anybody's right to passion and intoxication – yet it offers an alternative that avoids and rejects the world of drugs and aggression.

This alternative may be being part of a community or the realization of a long term relationship – based on a strong love relationship. Or it can be the role of arts that shape personalities and communities. The first phase of the project ends with the realization of three drama programmes and it involves 900 young people from those ten educational institutions that cooperate.

### **What are the possibilities of a drama teacher in prevention?**

*What does prevention mean in drama work?* Why do we tell young people so many times: this programme does not intend to draw attention to the harm from and dangers of using drugs. We do not wish to force out 'correct' answers to our questions. It is not necessary to resolve the conflicts of the fictional stories suggested by the actors – neither in a good, nor in a bad way. All in all: we should not *manage* our conflicts, we should only be able to understand them.

We think about the same situation in a different way depending on whether we are boys or girls, or if have been through it or not. We should try to teach something about what it means to look at the world through someone else's – all within the safe framework that drama offers the group. No impact study can show if a young person decides to avoid risks and decides not to use drugs based their decision on the experiences of the drama programme. What is important is that their repertory of actions and behavior expands and that they are able to get to know themselves and each other better.

We use 'learning through actions' in our workshops that are well-prepared and well-designed: the reality that the group creates is sacred and infrangible, agreed on as true and protected by the roles that have been offered. The drama teacher has the opportunity to direct the creative process of the group and he or she can also direct attention towards the more important problems by remarks. It does not mean manipulation: the drama teacher usually uses a role, acts as an active character of scenes – this way he or she can direct attention

towards deeper learning contents, maintaining tension. It is important to note at this point that it is enough to meet a class three times to be able to create the chance for drama – as the learning process conforms to the abilities of the class. The drama here must have a role in enhancing the helpful attitude of peers.

At the moment in Hungary it is rare for an educational institution to employ a team consisting of a school psychologist, a drugs coordinator, a youth protection expert and a spare time coordinator in order to protect and take care of the mental health of students and staff.

The success of drama programmes could be enhanced by using pedagogical methods that have been designed and realized according to special educational needs, by professional improvement work and by school reforms. Drama can be an effective and powerful tool if it is used to ask questions about the quality of relationships at the school. This naturally asks for help in changing the attitude of teachers in conflict management.

*Growing*<sup>2</sup>

I can grow peace.

I can grow war.

I can grow tall  
as my own front door.

I can grow dark –

And you will find

I can light candles  
in the mind.

I can grow gentle,

I can grow sweet

as grass and buttercups

Round my feet;

Or I can slash

And stamp and shout

And drive the Bird of Kindness

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<sup>2</sup> Jean Kenward: I Hate and I Love

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