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# **CHILDREN OF DRAMA: AN ARTS-BASED EDUCATIONAL ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT APPLIED TO A GROUP OF IN-SERVICE EDUCATORS**

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ABSTRACT

Children of Drama is an arts-based educational action research project with five drama pedagogy actions, launched in 2019 at the University of Gävle, Sweden. It aimed to explore drama pedagogy's personal and professional impacts on a group of in-service educators using Winnicott's potential space theory. The results revealed that participants enriched their teaching method toolbox with drama pedagogical techniques and theories, fostering self-exploration and motivation to use drama in the classroom. Notably, the qualities of the drama pedagogical instructor and environment enhanced safety, inspiration, and engagement. This study contributes to research in drama pedagogy and educators' arts-based professional development.

## Introduction: The Children of Drama Project

The benefits of arts-based education in students' education are discussed by many researchers, writers, scholars, and theoreticians (Colucci-Gray & Burnard, 2020; Coudriet, 2013; Dewey, 1980, 1997; Salti, 2021; Vecchi, 2014). Dewey (1980) sees the arts as a universal language and as a force that activates senses, communication, interactions, engagement, creativity, holistic and learning-by-doing experiences, and imagination. He further describes art as an act. However, the arts' use in education seems to be marginalized not only during teaching processes (Coudriet, 2013; Spohn, 2008) but even in teachers' university studies (Barton et al., 2013; Salti, 2021) and their professional development (Salti, 2021).

Barton et al. (2013) suggested that educators need to be aware of the essential role and value of the arts in preparatory teaching studies. However, thirteen educators who participated in my previous study expressed their views that arts, arts-based teaching, and arts-based education were not incorporated enough in their university teaching courses (Salti, 2021). If educators are not familiar with artistic techniques practically, they might be unable to use them when they are in service (Braxell, 2010). The more individuals become familiar with artistic techniques, materials, and methods of teaching, the more comfortable they feel using them. Educators' familiarity with the arts can be enhanced both through their teaching education studies and their professional and continuous education when in service (Salti, 2021).

Educators who participated in Salti (2021) revealed that they gained both theoretical and practical experience in arts and arts-based teaching mainly through arts or arts-education studies. Drama educators highlighted that their drama pedagogy studies have helped them get an insight into themselves (feelings, senses, voice, facial expression, body language, and the physical environment). By becoming more familiar with their individual qualities through drama, they gained a fundamental grounding for using them while teaching. The importance of educators' self-knowledge in the teaching process is something mentioned by many educators (Salti, 2021).

Andrews (2010) focuses on in-service educators' perspectives regarding teaching in and through the arts. In his study, both in-service educators and

artists participated in arts-based workshops, and the findings revealed that educators acquired both the confidence of self-expression and the willingness to teach through and in the arts. Participants developed their art-based teaching skills and an awareness of their creativity through artistic experimentation. They further recognized the value of the arts in the curriculum and their significance in students' development (Andrews, 2010).

The Children of Drama project focuses on in-service educators, aiming to investigate how and if drama-based educational actions create any professional or personal transformation for participants. Five drama-based educational actions of three hours each were conducted during weekends in Gothenburg, Sweden, and were spread out over three months from the end of January to the end of March 2019. The following research question was created to investigate the topic: *How do drama-based educational actions affect in-service teachers personally and professionally?*

## Theoretical framework: as-if experience in the potential space of drama

Winnicott (1971) suggests that each one of us lives in an inner, personal, and subjective world, a so-called subject world, surrounded by actual or external reality, a so-called object world. Between these two worlds is a potential space. Austring and Sørensen (2006) elucidate that the potential space acts like a membrane that creates a safe environment through which the child observes, explores, and understands the world and itself freely via symbols but also offers a kind of shelter where one can process and communicate experiences and impressions symbolically. Therefore, in my perspective, the potential space is a symbolic place that brings individuals closer to themselves and the world around them.

Aesthetic procedures in the potential space bridge the inner with the outer world and create a connection between the past and the present, the unconscious and the conscious. A symbolic re-creation of a traumatic, unspeakable, or forgotten experience makes the aesthetic expression therapeutic in the present (Austring & Sørensen 2006; Drotner, 1995). Through aesthetic-expressive forms (like drama) in the potential space, there is freedom in the dialogue between the inner and outer worlds, which gives individuals the

possibility of keeping several aspects of reality at the same time. From this dialogue between the different aspects of reality, individuals create a new understanding of themselves and the external world. Through this aesthetic communication, the individual can experiment with different self-understandings. Thus, “the aesthetic experience in the potential space offers to the individual the possibility to try out new aspects of oneself in a non-binding as-if-universe” (Austring & Sørensen, 2006, p. 123, my translation).

The as-if concept was first proposed by Stanislavsky as a theatrical technique where actors are simultaneously in a “here-and-now but also there-and-then process, being both oneself and another” in an as-if mode (Salti, 2021, p. 13). Grünbaum (2009) explains that “in an as-if situation and in a time-, space-, and ego-forgetfulness, the individual has the chance to land in oneself more relaxed through constructed roles... In this relaxed self, in a state of consciousness, the individual often expands their being and can explore different solutions by placing oneself in them...” (2009, p. 33, my translation). Under the protection of fiction, the individual has the opportunity to experiment and express different understandings of life and people (as if one’s alter ego) (Austring & Sørensen, 2006; Drotner, 1995).

For instance, in the role of a stepmother, individuals not only expand their understanding of her role but also understand the cultural aspects that are handed down to them regarding this role. Therefore, individuals receive an enlarged understanding of the world, themselves, and others. By working with different forms of experimentation, interpretations, expressions, and different aspects of one’s understanding of the world, one becomes visible to oneself and others, and identity formation takes place. Austring and Sørensen (2006) and Drotner (1995) explain that in the potential space of aesthetics, the individual understands, becomes aware of, and creates oneself. In my perspective, the arts and play create a potential space between an individual’s inner self and the actual world in an as-if environment whereby individuals explore and understand the world through a membrane of safety and expand themselves and their expression. Thus, aesthetics could act as a transitional object.

The concepts of a good-enough mother and transitional objects are necessary to create a potential space. Winnicott (1971) described children’s and individuals’ gradual independence and development through object relations. These objects facilitate a transition from the mother’s safe environment to

the world’s exploration. The transitional objects build a bridge between the inner and outer worlds. Winnicott explains that “the good-enough mother (not necessarily the infant’s mother) makes active adaptation to the infant’s needs, which gradually lessens according to the infant’s growing ability...” (Winnicott, 1971, p. 7). In the Children of Drama project, I drew connections between a good-enough mother and a good-enough instructor but also between transitional objects and props<sup>1</sup>.

### **The methodological framework of a drama-based educational action research circle**

The inspiration to create Arts-Based Educational Action Research (ABEAR) derived from the Arts-Based Action Research (ABAR) methodology, which was initiated by the University of Lapland in the Faculty of Art and Design. Jokela and Huhmarniemi (2021), explain that ABAR shares common features with arts-based research (ABR), artistic research, and action research and could also be conducted in the educational sciences. My study lies under the action research tradition, whose characteristics are described by Hansson (2003), and aligns with educational action research as described by Noffke (2009). In this study, I introduce the term, Arts-Based Educational Action Research (ABEAR) since my research has an arts-based character (drama in this case). It contains five actions that aim to transform participants’ previous thoughts on drama and the way they incorporate it into their teaching. It also has an educational character since it refers to in-service teachers and their professional engagement in arts-based education.

I followed ABAR guidelines regarding the circles of action as described by Jokela and Huhmarniemi (2018) in the following actions:

1. Mapping participants’ previous studies and experiences in drama education via questionnaires
2. Planning and conducting drama-based educational actions
3. Observing and documenting the actions in various forms and media to plan the next action
4. Documenting participants’ feedback regarding the impact of the action during the final group reflections via notes

5. Conducting the data analysis based on the visual and written data collected
6. Sharing the findings of Children of Drama and offering space for discussion with participants

According to Jokela and Huhmarniemi (2018), the arts could be used as a tool for data collection, analysis, and action in ABAR projects. I collected visual and textual data, such as pictures, individual open-ended questionnaires, group verbal reflections, and my notes, diaries, and drafts. During each group reflection, I kept notes on the participants' comments. My plans and drafts before each session and written self-reflections after the workshop provided a chronology of the research, which assisted the data analysis process and offered essential material for planning the next action.

Barone and Eisner (2012) describe that meaning can be represented in multiple ways, not just discursively. Leavy (2020) explained that different arts-based research methods can be used as methodological tools for both data collection and analysis. For this article, I selected thirty pictures to assist the data analysis process because they depict participants' engagement in self-exploratory, learning, expressive, collaborative, and creative processes and interactions with materials, the environment, and each other. Bryman (2012) highlights that the researcher who collects visual data needs to read images by considering the context in which they were generated and their potential multiple meanings. Visual data communicates with textual data in such a way that one verifies the other, offering a visual representation of the text and vice versa.

I analyzed the data in five steps. Firstly, I collected participants' replies for each question of the qualitative questionnaires, creating a summary of quotes without needing to give them a pseudonym. For instance, I selected all answers for question 1 and action 1, creating a summary of quotes. In the second phase, I read the gathered replies for each question and highlighted repetitive, common, or controversial views among participants' replies. Thirdly, patterns started revealing themselves regarding, for instance, which drama activities or theories they preferred, or which challenged them and why.

From these patterns, I chose those that replied to my research question and focused on the patterns regarding participants' feelings and any effect these drama-based educational actions had on a professional or personal dimension. This led to the last

step, which was the formation of thematic categories, which were later connected to the pictures taken during the actions to reassure that sayings and doings were in line. For instance, participants' feelings regarding collaboration through the drama pedagogical activities were observed not only through their answers but also through their facial expressions and body language captured in pictures during this collaboration process. Thus, in my discussion, I do not offer any pseudonyms but a part of the quote summaries as derived from the data analysis.

Jokela and Huhmarniemi (2018) highlight the value of ethics in ABAR. The Children of Drama project follows Patton's (2002) guidelines for research ethics regarding participants. Participants received an invitation letter and were informed about the purpose of the study, its aims, and other important and practical information about the action. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage of the research since their participation is voluntary. However, the dropping of participants could put the research project in jeopardy. Open communication with participants was established to reduce the risk of an internal conflict, and two extra participants were added as a precaution in case someone interrupted their presence. In the consent forms obtained for participation, participants gave their permission to be documented through pictures for the study's documentation and data analysis purposes. However, not all of the participants consented to the public disclosure of pictures where they could be identified. Therefore, since this study follows the ethical criteria of anonymity and confidentiality, as suggested by Babbie (2008, 2017), no pictures will be presented.

## **Arts-Based Educational Actions**

In this study, eleven participants were involved, comprising three neutral members (without a teacher education background), two primary school teachers, and six preschool teachers. This diverse group of participants, including educators (with no drama background) and neutral members (neither educators nor having a background in drama), allowed for a broader range of perspectives on drama-based educational actions, increasing the reliability of the study. Mapping participants' previous studies showed that the majority of them had taken at least one drama-related course during their university teaching studies, but most of them did not use drama pedagogical tools while teaching

because, as they explained, their studies had not equipped them with the practical tools needed to use drama in education. A few participants had prior experience in drama or theater groups but lacked a theoretical drama-pedagogical foundation. Based on the first feedback about the participants' backgrounds, I planned the actions to cater to the group's needs.

Acknowledging my background as an in-service early childhood and drama educator with over nine years of working experience is necessary. Due to my work experience and active professional role on social media, my network is extensive. Participants were approached by me through social media. My approach was purposeful and facilitated access to individuals with a variety of age groups, years of professional working experience, and academic studies. Participants who agreed to participate in my study provided their email, and a more detailed research invitation was sent to them. These were in-service preschool teachers and teachers who completed their teaching studies at different universities in Sweden, Greece, and Algeria.

As Zeni (1998) suggests, in an action research project, the researchers need to specify their role. I continuously delineated my dual role as an instructor (artist-teacher) and researcher of the five actions, ensuring transparency and exploratory involvement during the mapping of the issue, data collection, systematic documentation, analysis, and evaluation of the action. As an instructor, I held drama pedagogy practices whereby participants experimented in, with, about, and through drama education, applying Lindström's (2012) model. This model presents the different ways the arts could be applied in education and teaching processes<sup>2</sup>. Rasmusson and Erberth (2007), Grünbaum (2009), and Papadopoulos (2010), suggestions were considered to structure drama pedagogy practices with a focus on participants' safety, exploration, and expression.

Each action followed a common structure, commencing with a gathering circle to discuss current feelings, followed by a brief introduction to the topic and relevant theories. Drama-based educational practices, such as drama games and techniques, were then employed, leading to a final group reflection, where here-and-now feelings and thoughts were discussed to conclude the action. After the group reflection, participants also engaged in systematic individual written reflections through open-ended questionnaires, providing valuable data for analysis and improvement.

Cato's (2005) work influenced the construction of questions in the individual questionnaires, which covered participants' likes, challenges, preferences for theories, techniques, or materials to use in their classes, and perceptions of the instructor's role and venue's environment. Participants also reflected on their feelings, interests, boundaries, needs, and interactions with others<sup>3</sup>. The actions took place in an indoor venue, locally booked for this purpose, with two spacious areas: one for group discussions and individual written reflections, since tables and chairs facilitated the written process, and the other for drama-based educational practices. Table 1 provides a coherent summary of the actions, drama pedagogical practices, theories, and aims while clarifying that these theories—except for Winnicott's—were used for designing drama pedagogy practices and not for framing the research project and research questions.

In the Children of Drama project, I drew connections between a good-enough mother and transitional objects (as they appear in Winnicott, 1971) and a good-enough instructor and props. In my perspective, a drama pedagogical instructor, as a good-enough mother, creates a safe environment for the participants to interact, express themselves, and learn while encouraging their gradual independence. In addition, participants were asked to bring small personal objects that meant something to them, which were used as props during the first two actions.

Throughout the actions, participants received more space and time to co-plan and perform their drama-pedagogy works, and my role gradually passed from instructor of the actions to observer of the processes. During the last action, participants in small groups had to co-plan and present a short drama pedagogy process as if they would apply it in their classroom. To do so, they could use the techniques, games, and materials that had been explored throughout the actions. The group made further suggestions or gave further ideas and feedback for every drama pedagogy process. This provided valuable data regarding the overall evaluation of the action and an understanding of what had been learned and could be applied.

**Table 1.**

<b>Arts-Based</b>	<b>THEORIES</b>	<b>PRACTICES</b>	<b>AIMS</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup> action</b>	Gardner (1983): Multiple Intelligence Theory  Reggio Emilia: 100 languages (Vecchi, 2014)  Winnicott (1971): potential space, transitional objects	Ice-breaking and warm-up drama pedagogical activities  Drama games  Bodily expression/ interaction  Non-verbal communication  Pantomime	Welcoming  Focus on oneself (self-exploration, expression) - my bubble  Safety and trust  Team building: Get to know each other and feel comfortable.
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> action</b>	Jennings et al. (2005): Development through Play  Johnson (1982): Development of thought	Sensory/emodied, symbolic/projection-drama games with the use of participants' personal objects (transitional objects)	Focus on the senses  My bubble meets the others'  Team building: collaborations in small groups of 2-3 participants.
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> action</b>	Continuation of the previous theories  Wheelan (2013): Group development	Process-drama Puppet theater Puppet creation Abstract/verbal expression Creative writing Drawing, arts, and crafts	Team building: collaborations in small groups of 2-3 participants  Verbal expression through a character-puppet  In all actions: to experience theories in practice and explore oneself through drama-based educational processes.
<b>4<sup>th</sup> action</b>	Orff's approach by Shamrock (1997)  Sternudd (2000): drama pedagogical dimensions  Bresler (1995): Arts co-equal integration in interdisciplinary teaching	Process-drama Teacher in role Role-play Orff's music pedagogical technique	Interactions and collaboration in bigger groups consisting of 5-6 participants  Abstract/verbal expression in role (role play)  Experience interdisciplinarity through connections with other focus areas such as music, mathematics, language, and dance.
<b>5<sup>th</sup> action</b>	Repetition and summarization	Participants, collaboratively, in small groups of 2-3 participants in each, co-planned and performed a 15-20-minute drama pedagogy process as if they would do it in their classroom. The rest of the team engaged as students.	Co-plan, conduct, and reflect upon their and others' drama pedagogy processes  Conclusive group reflection Closing the action

## Discussion

Based on the group's reflections and the replies received from the questionnaires, participants expressed that the actions widened their understanding of drama's pedagogical dimensions and made them feel more comfortable and encouraged to use it in the classroom. It is a finding that goes hand in hand with Andrews's (2010) study, where after the workshops, in-service educators recognized the significance of arts in educational processes, developed their art-based teaching skills, and acquired some confidence to teach through, in, and with art. "I gained lots of knowledge and experience, which made me now feel more comfortable about drama and the classroom", one participant from Children of Drama stated.

Participants mentioned that exploring drama pedagogy techniques and theories through a learning-by-doing process makes it easier for them to understand and apply them while teaching. This was something revealed both in the questionnaires and verified in the last action. For instance, the small personal objects that participants already brought with them from the first session worked as transitional objects, which helped many of them to feel safe in the new group and environment, and gradually interact with others. By experiencing the use of transitional objects, participants both understood Winnicott's theory and came closer to understanding the value of transitional objects in children's lives. Some of the participants' comments were: "All activities were done smoothly; we used our object to gradually interact with the others"; and "Having a personal object with me to use in the drama made me relax and understand the importance it has for some children; a personal object can make an environment feel safe faster and easier."

Practicing and teaching theater is a holistic phenomenon that involves the whole person and affects both the professional and private lives of participants (Untamala, 2014). Students from the theater teacher training program at Metropolia University in Helsinki who participated in Untamala's study revealed that some drama techniques and exercises, like the Grotowski exercise, helped them learn something new about themselves. Untamala supports the idea that the participants "learn new things in practice; realizing the uniqueness of everyone and their competence" (Untamala, 2014, p. 108). She explains that participants examined and became aware of their different ways of learning, being themselves, and being teachers.

In Children of Drama, participants had the chance to self-observe, explore, and express themselves in a variety of ways and under new prisms like Reggio Emilia's 100 languages<sup>4</sup>. By focusing on themselves and their expressive languages, some participants recognized the importance of awareness of their teaching tools (such as body movement, voice, and facial expression). A participant mentioned during a group reflection: "Adopting a different dynamic and voice color and a different body movement based on the character or the situation I was in was an eye-opening experience for me. I didn't know that I could speak or walk that way." That drama studies enriched drama educators' self-awareness and -knowledge is something discussed in my previous research (Salti, 2021), as previously seen.

Hoveid (2021) explained that when we only focus on the use of words when teaching, forgetting the body and its language, we anesthetize the speaking body. The importance of body language, embodiment, and the sensory dimension of teaching is also highlighted by Salti (2021) and Todd et al. (2021). About the awareness and significance of body language, one participant from the Children of Drama stated: "It was a nice discovery for me to see the importance of body language. It inspired me on a personal and professional level."

By exploring and expressing their boundaries and having the right to withdraw from an activity if they felt uncomfortable, participants had the chance to observe themselves and their comfort zone and usually step out of it. Some participants mentioned: "Improvisation was my favorite activity because it challenged me and made me go further than what I thought I could"; and "Puppet making was the strongest activity for me. It was challenging to come up with a collaborative story in a very short time."

As Clement (2017) stated, teaching professions can be stressful, and actions should be taken for educators' well-being. These actions could be art-related. Herlinah et al. (2018) suggested that music therapy is useful for teachers' relaxation and stress reduction. Some educators highlighted that music and drawing offer them chances for relaxation and connection to a slower pace of living, while drama offers a shelter where one can be oneself and express oneself without judgment (Salti, 2021). Moreover, sand therapy and sand play increase educators' ability to handle stress, as stated by Sun et al. (2018). Some participants in Children of Drama expressed feelings of relaxation and creativity. Examples follow: "I enjoyed the calm music and

guiding voice at the beginning of the session. It felt nice to close my eyes and just breathe while traveling in an imaginary world"; and from the final group reflection: "Sometimes it was hard to leave home on a Saturday, but the moment I was here felt great. Interact, play, learn, and create something together... at the end of each session, I had the feeling that I had made a gift to myself."

In Andrews's (2010) study, participants developed an awareness of their creativity through artistic experimentation and acquired confidence in self-expression. In Children of Drama, participants also expressed feelings of happiness, playfulness, and safety, revealing that a safe environment and a feeling of trust were already established from the first action, which facilitated participation and self-expression. Some mentioned that these qualities are important both for adults and children: "I think adults, as children, need to feel accepted"; "All the activities were really playful, and unavoidably you had to reach your inner child"; and "The drama games helped me to relax, feel safe, dare to be playful, and get to know the other participants."

As Lee et al. (2020) emphasized, many researchers of drama-based pedagogies overgeneralize or overcharacterize their effects. My intention was to give participants space to experiment with drama pedagogical techniques, materials, and theories, explore their personal and professional selves, and even challenge their boundaries. In Lee et al. (2020), students who are not familiar with drama-based pedagogies find it difficult to learn a new text in a new way. In my study, one participant felt discomfort when asked to participate in a music wave, whereby they would create a musical rhythm while playing music with each other's hands. Other participants found this activity co-creative and fun.

Another participant felt overwhelmed when asked to show their personal object to someone else in a walking dramatization. The participant chose to show their personal object a limited number of times and later chose to move around with the object without showing it. After the process, the participant said it felt nice to walk among others with the personal object without interacting verbally. While other participants, as seen above, described that showing their personal objects to others in a dramatized concept made them interact easier. This is to say that not all drama pedagogy activities match all individuals and have the same effect on them.

Therefore, a drama-based educator needs to create an environment of acceptance where participants feel free to explore themselves through drama processes without the pressure of performance or other expectations, by feeling included even if they do not wish to participate, or by participating in their own ways. Grünbaum (2009) and Österlind (2011) support the idea that a drama pedagogical instructor needs to create an environment that promotes open discussions, acceptance, trust, and equality.

Participants in Children of Drama believe that the role of the instructor is significant in creating such an environment. They described the socioemotional environment as "cozy, positive, comfortable, friendly, calm, relaxing, playful, pleasant, inspiring, creative, and welcoming". Some participants also mentioned: "I explained what I could not do based on religious reasons, and the instructor respected it all the time by always asking me if I were ok with specific situations"; "I felt included and respected even when I did not want to participate in one game"; "I felt safe to express myself and include my interest"; and "I felt welcome during the whole process and that no one can judge me."

Regardless of drama's positive impacts on educational processes, some art educators, especially drama educators, do not experience their role in the educational system as equal to that of other educators (Salti, 2021). Coudriet (2013) examined the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of elementary art, music, and physical education teachers about interdisciplinary methods of teaching in elementary schools in western Pennsylvania. The findings revealed that art, music, and physical education have struggled to maintain their positions in the curriculum. Moreover, the way arts teachers perceive their content areas and their role in education is subordinate in comparison to tested content areas (Coudriet, 2013). Subservient integration occurs when a content area is used to strengthen learning in another content area, with the first one being of lower importance, Coudriet (2013) explains.

My study aimed to contribute to the field of drama pedagogy by enriching in-service teachers' theoretical and practical toolbox, challenging previous ideas about drama in education, and helping educators feel more comfortable with its use. A conclusive finding in Children of Drama is that all participants (preschool teachers, teachers, and neutral members) created a positive feeling for drama, and all were interested in continuing with further drama pedagogy workshops in the future. The findings revealed that participants were not only motivated to use drama in their professional

lives but that the majority were interested in participating in drama and theater classes. Those participants who were familiar with drama gained a deeper understanding of drama education theories and practices.

It was a challenge to see how participants, especially educators with no previous drama experience, would feel about drama during the actions. Those participants who were not familiar with drama before said that they experienced a new world with many pedagogical and self-exploratory possibilities. Examples of their comments follow: “I simply opened my eyes to a new world; I just love it, and it will definitely be part of my teaching”; and “Certainly, my idea of drama is way broader now. To be honest, in the beginning, I was feeling that drama would make me feel uncomfortable all the time, something that has now changed and I feel more comfortable using it.”

After analyzing my data, I would like to know the current ideas of the participants. What I would have done differently is to add a series of observations in participants’ working environments. However, this was difficult due to time limitations. Therefore, a longitudinal study that follows in-service teachers in their classes and observes how and if they use drama pedagogical tools after the actions are yet suggested. Additionally, measures had been taken to avoid putting the research project in jeopardy in case of participant drop-offs. However, no participant dropped the action. Participants were active, and I had high attendance in the actions —more than nine participants each time.

Moreover, organizing the workshops every other weekend gave me time to reflect on what happened previously and plan the next action. This also made it easier for participants to participate since they had free weekends in between the actions. Regarding the study’s ethical choices, Jane Zeni (1998) suggests that in action research, a researcher needs to consider the gains and losses of anonymity. Instead of anonymity, it may be wiser to seek full participation and credit for participants through an open acknowledgment. This would benefit my study because I would include pictures of the action, which, due to anonymity and confidentiality issues, were not included in this article.

## Conclusion

This study contributes to the existing research on the value of drama in education and the use of arts-based action methodologies in educational research. The Arts-Based Educational Action Research methodology employed in this study proved effective in addressing the research question, offering an innovative approach and enriching both Arts-Based Action Research and Educational Action Research methodologies. This approach will be further developed in my forthcoming projects.

The study highlights the re-evaluation of ethical criteria, specifically the consideration of anonymity and confidentiality, which, in some instances, limited the research’s scope instead of enhancing it. Emphasizing full participation and participants’ acknowledgment would have allowed for the inclusion of visual elements and enhanced the presentation of the findings. Furthermore, the importance of establishing a safe environment conducive to self-exploration and self-expression emerged as a valuable insight for future research.

The theoretical underpinning of Winnicott’s concepts, such as potential space, good-enough mother, and transitional objects, guided the practical implementation of the actions, my role, and the creation of an environment that promotes safety, acceptance, independence, and exploration. Through experimentation in an as-if space with drama-based teaching practices and theories, participants gradually had chances for planning and conducting drama pedagogical processes. Notably, the study observed increased comfort and encouragement among preschool teachers and teachers in adopting drama-based teaching methods and materials. This, in turn, enriched their theoretical and practical teaching toolboxes.

Participants gained new perspectives on themselves, their students, and the children’s world, appreciating the significance of multiple expressions, holistic learning, and fostering safety, trust, playfulness, and creativity. Overall, the positive reception of drama by all participants and their interest in participating in further drama-related workshops underscore the potential of drama in a personal and professional dimension. However, further research is necessary to uncover additional drama pedagogical qualities and explore the full value of drama in education.

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## Endnotes

**1** It is a theatrical term that means any object that is either part of the set or worn by the actor or is a stage object that an actor interacts with, for instance, a picture.

**2** About arts refers to learning about artists or the history of art and genres; in arts refers to learning processes by experimenting with artistic techniques and materials; with arts refers to the integration of arts with subject matters from other disciplines; and through arts refers to a gradual evolution of some skills by involving ourselves in arts, such as being more observant, expressive, innovative, reflective, etcetera. Participants were offered the opportunity to learn mostly in, with, and through the arts.

**3** Examples of the questions: Did I learn something new? What? Which activity did I like most? Why? Was there any activity I felt uncomfortable with? Which? Why? Which activity might I try in the classroom? How? How would I describe the instructor in this meeting? What can the instructor do better next time? What do I think about the structure of the session? How would I describe the atmosphere? Did I feel like I was part of creating a safe environment in which I could express myself? How? Were the hours of the workshop enough, too much, or too little? Anything else I wish to share?

**4** This metaphor shows that there are many different ways of learning and expression (Dahlbeck & Lagrell, 2014; Vecchi, 2014).

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