Abstract

The study aims at fathoming some aspects of didactic communication and their effects upon building communication skills at first graders. By their graduation from the first cycle, students should be able to use these skills in different learning situations and interpersonal relationships. The research approached this issue from a less applied perspective in Romania: the role of drama for students in building communication skills, highlighting certain ways to increase the formative-communicational efficiency upon students through drama techniques and expression games, as well as the possible impact of school drama as an optional discipline upon the manifestation of multiple intelligences at lower-elementary students.

Keywords: communication competence; multiple intelligences; dramatic techniques; didactic techniques

1. The concept of communication

Communication is the essence of interpersonal connections due to its ability to decode the meaning of social contacts, with a view to obtaining stability or changes in individual/group behavior. The Encyclopedia Britannica, mentions communication as “the exchange of meanings between individuals through a common system of symbols”.

The same source points to one of the most common approaches to the communication process, as defined in 1928 by I.A. Richards: “Communication takes place when one mind so acts upon its environment that another mind is
influenced, and in that other mind an experience occurs which is like the experience in the first mind, and is caused in part by that experience” (2013, p. 1).

1.1. The communication process

Functionally, communication is the process of sending information between two or several persons via a channel. We spend about 75% of our sleepless time communicating (or preparing a message). Through communication we send our messages, receive the others’ messages, initiate, build and maintain relationships, solve conflicts. Communication is a social act, which may be performed willingly or involuntarily, consciously or unconsciously – gestures, mimicry, bodily posture, dressing style, even silence are able to send meanings.

1.2. Types of communication

An extremely complex phenomenon, given the variety of codes, channels, situations and ways in which it occurs, human communication benefits from diverse typologies. According to the number of participants and the type of relationship between them, there may be: intrapersonal; interpersonal; group; public, mass communication (Dorina Sălăvăstru, 2004). Although each of these has its well-defined role and meaning, interpersonal communication is relevant for social integration. Moreover, skills in interpersonal communication become a key of future professional success (Koponen, J., Pyörälä, E. & Isotalus, P., 2010).

A typology of communication relies on the criterion of the tool with which the information is encoded and the channel for sending the resulted message. We shall further analyze: verbal (oral, written) communication, where contents are sent by means of language; non-verbal communication, where gestures, mimicry, body language are speechful; paraverbal communication, where intonation, rhythm, accent, tonality are relevant.

2. The communication competence in the school educational context and the issue of multiple intelligences

The linguistic universe of the lower-elementary student, aged 6-7, is in full expansion. Teachers have to constantly stimulate communication among, and with, students, take into account their spontaneous need to communicate, cultivate this tendency by opening it towards a wider universe, that of multiple intelligences.

2.1. What does communication competence mean?

According to L. Ezechil, communication competence is defined as the “ability to deliberately use certain relations and dependencies to increase the magnitude of the impact and interpersonal change and to convert the respective determinations in actions well oriented towards a pre-established direction” (2002, p.100). Building it is a complex process, which implies the functional and applicative approach to elements of communication structure, acquiring basic knowledge about it, practicing it on an optimal motivational and emotional background. The communication situations created during the didactic process should be meaningful for children’s daily life, truthful, nuanced, persuasive and efficient. They should be conducted in agreement with all the rules of civilized communication, demanding thinking and expression autonomy. These situations contribute to the building/practicing of skills in storytelling, describing and summarizing, presenting and arguing, analyzing and reporting. The primary school teacher, aware of the rigors and difficulties of learning the mother language and the building of communication competence through classic approaches, would be interested in innovation, using authentic strategies to exploit the technology of modern teaching. In this process, introducing the optional of school drama and exploiting dramatic techniques generates significant educational effects.

2.2. Communication competence and multiple intelligences

Given the lower-elementary student’s pronounced availability towards communication, the difficulty of building the communication competence and the theory of multiple intelligences, we have attempted to find a didactic
strategy which may enable, additionally and simultaneously, interpersonal communication and exploitation of multiple intelligences. H. Gardiner emphasizes the fact that multiple intelligences support us in explaining better the human cognitive competence in terms of a set of skills, talents, mental aptitudes which all people have to a more or less degree, but which manifest differently for each person, due to the proportion of aptitudes and the nature of their combination (2006). In this respect, introducing a new drama optional could be a positive influence from all the perspectives invoked.

2.3. Theatrical techniques and their educational valences

The systematization of didactic methods (2006, p. 306) helped us to select those centered on action and, from these, the techniques of drama, role-play, scenarios and creative dramatization.

The issue of school drama was debated by the literature to a quite significant extent in recent years (Ferris, G., K. (2003); Boggs, J., G., Mickel, A., E., Holtom, B., C. (2007); Wee, S., J. (2009); Jensen, Petersen, A. (2008); McFadden, B., L. (2012); Sutton, P. (2012) and others). All the studies argue for the indisputable formative value of the dramatic process integrated into the didactic process. Drama techniques provide an attractive and efficient educational alternative. They enable the experiencing of real-life situations, without the associated risks, implying, according to Schechner (1985) the “finding of ways to collaborate by sharing tasks and playing certain roles. Once the task has been fulfilled, individual products are integrated into a whole” (apud Pânișoară, 2006, p.367). An obvious advantage of drama techniques is that they take into account the diversity of individual skills, adjusting themselves to the students’ multiple intelligences.

The students’ social life makes them simultaneously play the role of child to their parents, the role of school mate, the role of brother or sister. All these roles may be played simultaneously, intersecting each other, remaining independent or in conflict. Communication is a role-playing process. Campbell, Campbell and Dickinson suggest the fact that, unlike the method of formal drama (the staging of a play), the “method of role-play provides more freedom in learning and creation. This method also brings, besides enhanced learning, development in building relations, intra- and interpersonal communication skills” (apud Pânișoară, 2006, p. 371).

Unlike role-play, the technique of creative dramatization is a less formal technique, its actions being the result of the actors’ improvisation. A simple way to start a creative dramatization is to play group characters: for example, an old person, a little girl etc.

Drama is a syncretic art which obliges the child to an exercise of synthesizing the knowledge, abilities, skills and behaviors assimilated from different domains. Also, it trains the child to work in a team, develop creative personality together with his colleagues. These objectives are more difficult to achieve by means of classic methods. It results that drama techniques provide an alternative to approaching the educational act.

Many of the stories or texts for school age are very suitable for dramatization. Every scenario carries, at its core, a story which will be staged in moments and accurate actions. The characters and dialogues will be established for each moment, taking into account the chosen transposition technique. These are some of the arguments supporting our formative option.

3. Study methodology

The study was conducted during the 2011-2012 school year, on a group of 7 first-graders (2 boys and 5 girls), from the Romanian-American School of Bacău. Its purpose was to develop the first-graders’ communication skills, by designing and transposing didactically the optional discipline of school drama: Small Artists in the World of Drama. Hypothesis: introducing the optional may generate significant transformations in the hierarchy of the types of multiple intelligences discovered initially at students and during their evolution.

We shall highlight only the objectives which we shall illustrate, in agreement with the research stages:

- Identifying the types of intelligence manifested by the first-graders before the optional and their degree of manifestation (initial evaluation);
- Systematic realization of the optional drama course Small Artists in the World of Drama, with a view to building and practicing the communication competence (introducing the progress factor);
• Identifying the types of intelligence manifested by first-graders at the end of the course and their level of manifestation (final evaluation).

The methods used during the study were the questionnaire, the analysis of the activity’s products, direct observation. The questionnaire for identifying the type of intelligence manifested by first-graders (Kline, P., Saunders, B., 1993) was applied in September 2011 (pretest), respectively June 2012 (posttest).

4. How it was achieved

During the 2011-2012 school year, we introduced the optional discipline Small Artists in the World of Drama at the first grade, with one hour/week. We shall illustrate the main types of activity conducted within this optional discipline, in agreement with their educational valences:

1. Presentation of the universe of a professional theatre and the associated jobs – orientation into the universe of professions;
2. How do we watch a performance? (debate upon a performance viewed by the entire group) – developing communication skills; aesthetic education; developing thinking through analysis, comparison, argumentation;
3. Drawing a scenario: by the adult for the children and by the children for the children – developing thought, imagination, creativity and empathy;
4. Presentation of the steps of staging a scenario drawn by the children, by covering the specific stages – builds team spirit, will, anticipation skills;
4.1. Selection of the dramatic transposition technique: dramatic art – correlating the children’s interests with their objective realization possibilities;
4.2. Casting the roles and the tasks related to staging a show: staging, scenography, scenery, costumes, props, organization of the show – builds the ability to know and appreciate each child with a view to assigning tasks; develops aesthetic taste, communication and relation skills, practical spirit and anticipation skills;
4.3. Understanding the characters and memorizing, playing the roles – builds empathy;
4.4. Practicing the tasks assigned, creating scenery, costumes, puppets – builds communication and critical thinking skills; facilitates tolerance and patience; builds team spirit, mutual help and responsibility; enables emotional balance; builds manual skills;
4.5. Performing the show – an occasion for the child to be seen and valued by the community and also, possibly, a key moment in the child’s life, an opportunity for memories, a point of reference in relation to the future achievement of more difficult tasks;
4.6. The Drama alphabet; Presentation of theatrical signs; The dramatic text; The Actors’ performance; The Drama costume; Music; Light – children will understand the fact that staging a dramatic show is a logical activity which implies covering certain specific steps. Beyond logic, there should always be a story, a message, which may emotionally touch the receivers.

5. Presentation, analysis and interpretation of results

Following the application of the questionnaire before and after conducting the optional discipline Small Artists in the World of Drama, we obtained the results presented systematically and comparatively in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparative analysis of the pre- and posttest results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of intelligence</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Number of ticked answers – column I, pretest evaluation; column II, posttest evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical - mathematical</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What does the analysis of the data from the table reveal? Horizontal data analysis:

- From the total of the 112 elements of identifying multiple intelligences (8 intelligences x 7 students x 2 sets of data (initial and final evaluation), the results are distributed as follows: 1p – once – 1%; 2p – 4 times – 3%; 3p – 28 times – 25%; 4p – 30 times – 27%; 5p – 49 times - 44%;
- There prevails the maximum development (5p) of some of the multiple intelligences at the level of the groups of students;
- The lowest scores in the initial evaluation of one of the multiple intelligences is 1p, spatial-visual intelligence, and 2p, musical-rhythmical intelligence (once), naturalistic intelligence (twice) and intrapersonal intelligence (once);
- The progress recorded by all the students in all the types of multiple intelligences is visible, within an interval of 1p at its lowest and 2 points at its highest;
- The greatest progress was recorded for interpersonal intelligence where, in the final evaluation, all the students obtained the maximum score (5p);
- On the second place is linguistic intelligence, with a progress of 6p compared to initial evaluation and an average score per student in the final evaluation of 4.57p;
- The lowest progress was recorded for intrapersonal intelligence, only 4p and an average of 3.71p;
- The score which remained constant for all the students (although with different levels) was recorded for the logical-mathematical and naturalistic intelligences;
- The maximum score from the final evaluation is 38p out of 40, 1p higher than in initial evaluation;
- Out of the 7 students, 6 recorded a progress from the minimum of 1p to the maximum of 8p;
- Out of the 7 students, 1 displayed constant multiple intelligences, with 36p from 40 possible points;
- The lowest score from the final evaluation is 30p out of 40, 1p higher than the initial evaluation;
- The final evaluation general scores are high, 1 student with 38p, 3 students with 36p, and one student each with 32p, 31p, respectively 30p;

What does the comparative analysis between initial and final evaluation reveal? Vertical data analysis:

- Out of the 7 students, 6 recorded progress in the development of multiple intelligences, one remaining constant in manifesting them;
- Their evolution differed: 2 students (Ș.R.; A.A.) – 33,3% progressed in 1 intelligence by 1p; 1 student (O.E.) progressed in 2 intelligences by 1p; 1 student (M.R.) progressed in 3 intelligences by 1p; 1 student (T.I.) progressed in 4 intelligences, 1 intelligence by 2p and 3 intelligences by 1p each; 1 student (O.S.) progressed in 5 intelligences, 3 intelligences by 2p each and other 2 intelligences by 1p each;
- Student O.S. is the only student who did not obtain a maximum score in the pretest (5p) for none of the multiple intelligences and obtained the only minimum score of 1p in spatial-visual intelligence;
- Student O.S. had the lowest initial performance and recorded the most relevant progress, 8p, in the greatest number of intelligences (5);
- The students with the highest scores (O.E.-34p, A.A.-35p, M.A.-36p) showed no progress (M.A.) or obtained the lowest scores (O.E.-2p, A.A.-1p) with an evolution for 2, respectively 1 intelligence;

What does the analysis of the data from the table show? Crossed data analysis:
The pretest and the posttest show the presence of all types of multiple intelligences at all the children, with different scores, between 1 and 5 points;

After introducing the drama optional discipline, the students progressed from 219p obtained in initial evaluation to 239p, representing a growth of 20p, respectively 7% compared to the maximum score;

In the initial and final evaluation, the highest score belongs to interpersonal intelligence (35p; 38) and bodily-kinesthetic intelligence (31p; 34p);

However, the best highlighted progress in the development of multiple intelligences is partially situated in another order, respectively, at the level of interpersonal intelligence, 6p; intrapersonal intelligence, 4p; musical-rhythmic intelligence and bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, 3p.

6. Conclusions

Introducing the optional discipline *Small Artists in the World of Drama* and exploiting drama techniques led to improving the intercommunication, interknowledge and sympathetic relationships inside the group of students. The practical value of the study consists in highlighting the fact that school drama may become an efficient pedagogic tool in building the students’ communicative skills.

The study’s hypothesis is not confirmed. In terms of the group, the hierarchy of intelligences is preserved. In terms of individuals, for some students the hierarchy of intelligences changes without the possibility to tell whether the modifications are relevant.

References


