

# Impact of Creative Drama and Puppetry on Prosocial Behaviour in Preschool

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**KLJUČNE BESEDE:** predšolski otroci, ustvarjalna drama, igra z lutko, prosocialno vedenje, socialna kompetenca, empatija

**POVZETEK** – Cilj naše raziskave je bil ugotoviti vpliv ustvarjalnih lutkovnih dejavnosti na socialno vedenje predšolskih otrok glede na ocene njihovih vzgojiteljev. V raziskavo je bilo vključenih 22 vzgojiteljev predšolskih otrok, ki smo jih z izobraževanjem spodbudili, da v vrtčevskem oddelku uvedejo igre z lutko po načelih ustvarjalne drame (Siks, 1981; McCaslin, 2006). Vzgojitelji so izpolnili lestvico socialnega vedenja za vsakega otroka v svojem oddelku (skupaj je bilo vključenih 460 otrok v starosti 3–7 let), in sicer pred uvajanjem lutkovnih dejavnosti in ponovno po treh mesecih intenzivnega vsakodnevnega ustvarjanja in igranja z lutkami. V tem prispevku predstavljamo del rezultatov opisane raziskave, in sicer tisti, ki se nanaša na prosocialno vedenje otrok. Na osnovi t-testa za parne primerjave smo ugotovili, da se je po trimesečnem izvajanju lutkovnih dejavnosti po ocenah vzgojiteljev izboljšalo prosocialno vedenje pri vseh otrocih, posebej izrazito pa se je izboljšalo pri desetih odstotkih otrok, ki so imeli pri začetnem ocenjevanju po ocenah vzgojiteljev najnižje ocene prosocialnega vedenja.

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**KEYWORDS:** preschool children, creative drama, puppet play, social competence, prosocial behaviour, empathy

**ABSTRACT** – This study explored the influence of creative puppetry activities on the social behaviour of preschool children, as perceived by their teachers. Through participation in the in-service study programme of preschool education, 22 preschool teachers were encouraged to introduce puppet play in their preschool or elementary school classes, following the principles of creative drama. The teachers completed a social behaviour scale for each child in their class before the introduction of the activities, and again after three months of intense, everyday creative play with puppets. We present a part of the study results referring to prosocial behaviour. Based on the t-test for paired comparisons, the results show that after three months of carrying out puppetry activities, prosocial behaviour increased, according to the teachers' assessments, with the most pronounced increase seen in the 10% of children who, before the introduction of puppetry activities, obtained the lowest scores on prosocial behaviour.

## 1 Introduction

Education with and through art is a successful method of learning and teaching in all curriculum areas (Road Map for Arts Education, 2006). This approach considers art as a medium for learning and children's research of different subjects, highlighting its meaning for social learning. Kroflič (2010) points out that upbringing and education without creativity means an impoverished experiencing of one's inner world, reducing it to dry, objective science. According to many authors (Ivon, 2010; Korošec, 2004; Petrović, 2013), puppet play supports the development of social competencies and prosocial behaviour. Kosmač Zalašček (2019, p. 103) notes that "performing art activities helps the children to cope better with their current situation." Šindić, Pribiševo Beleslin and

Rotković (2019) emphasize the efficiency of early learning through the integration of musical and dramatic means of expression through a scenic fairy tale and dramatization.

In our study, we explored preschool teachers' (hereafter teachers) views and practices in their work with puppets, and how their approach to puppetry-drama activities has changed over the course of their education, and examined the role of puppets in any changes to the social behaviours seen in class. Through participation in the in-service study programme of preschool education, 22 teachers were encouraged to introduce puppet play in their preschool or 1<sup>st</sup> grade classes, following the principles of creative drama. Before introducing puppetry activities and again after three months of intensive, daily creative puppet play, the teachers completed the social behaviour scale for each child in their class. While this study explored the influence of creative puppetry activities in the class on the prosocial, aggressive and reserved behaviours of preschool children and their ability to focus attention, the part of the results presented in this article specifically refers to children's prosocial behaviour.

The American Association of Theatre for Youth (Siks, 1981, p. 6) gives the following definition of creative drama: "Creative drama is an improvisational, non-exhibitional, process-centred form of drama in which participants are guided by a leader to imagine, enact and reflect upon human experience." The process in creative drama is dynamic. The specific nature of creative drama lies in its use of drama forms and ways of expression, in which real or imaginary events, beings, objects, phenomena and relations are presented through roles and situations that are acted out (Krušić, 2007).

One of the central advantages of puppetry-drama workshops is undoubtedly the opportunity for participation and social learning through working together on a project. Scenic puppet plays enable numerous possibilities for children's development, such as facilitating communication, contributing to the improvement of the image of one's own body and personality, helping to establish good interpersonal relations, and giving children a feeling of belonging to the group (Petrović, 2013). Tancig (2017) refers to several studies that corroborate the important role of art for the development of the brain. Studies show important differences in the social skills and learning achievements among young people who participate in artistic programmes (dance, music, drama, painting, and so on) compared to those who have not taken part in such activities.

Children need to find a way to express their strong emotions in an acceptable way, and this can be offered through puppet play. When children play a scene that allows them to express these emotions, they thereby release their emotions and solve internal conflicts. Kosmač Zalašček (2019, p. 106) states that artistic activities "satisfy a child's basic psychological, physical and social needs and rights." The author describes that using puppets and puppet play during children's stay in a hospital affects the children's mood, relaxation, and helps them to express their feelings.

Puppet play can also reflect relationships from the child's environment. A conflict is acted out with all its might, thereby losing its power and energetic charge (Bastašić, 1990).

Majaron (2012) claims that the puppet offers the child a shield, a sort of disguise behind which they can hide. Šindić, Pribišev Beleslin and Rotković (2019, p. 82) describe their research where they "took advantage of the power of the puppet to motivate

children, to attract their attention, and to create a favourable socio-emotional atmosphere and joyful activities.”

The European DICE study (Cooper, 2010) of school children aimed to identify the impact that the use of theatre or drama in education had in five of the eight key competencies outlined in the Lisbon Strategy of Lifelong Learning. Among other findings, the study showed that children or young people who participated in a specific theatre workshops programme were better at problem solving and coping with stress; they were also much more tolerant of minorities and foreigners, more able to empathise with the feelings of others, and more confident in communication.

Most definitions of social competence share a common theme of effectiveness in relating to peers. Rubin and Rose-Krasnor (1992) defined social competence as the ability to achieve personal goals in social interaction and maintain positive relations with others over time and across situations. Components of socially competent behaviour include co-operating with peers, entering groups, initiating play, asserting one's needs and prosocial behaviours such as sharing, helping, being supportive of others, friendliness, smiling, respecting peer norms and clear communication (Bennett Murphy, Laurie-Rose, Brinkman & McNamara, 2007; Griesse & Buhs, 2014).

Early on in their childhood children have to learn how to cope with frustration, and how to enjoy the company of others, to recognise danger, cope with fear and anxiety, be able to endure loneliness and develop friendships (Katz & McClellan, 1997). Socially competent children are more popular among peers and teachers (Ramaswamy & Bergin, 2009), while those who are disruptive, demanding, intrusive and aggressive are often rejected by their peers, and those who are shy and introvert are ignored (Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2001). Bukovec Krenn (2019) notes the importance of peer play in which child learns social interactions, communication, collaboration and forms of behaviour that are acceptable and unacceptable. Papalia, Olds and Feldman (2001) claim that the key element of prosocial behaviour is altruism; that is, an intentional activity for the benefit of others. Other categories of prosocial behaviour listed by researchers (Ramaswamy & Bergin, 2009; Warden & Christie, 2001) include: spontaneous expressions of affection, sympathy, co-operation, helping others, offering consolation, sharing and giving. According to Brajša Žganec (2003), basic prosocial skills include listening, friendly conversation, expressing affection and asking for help.

Bukovec Krenn (2019, p. 118) describes that “free play in early childhood is an essential experience through which children learn social, ideational and creative skills. At the same time, they increase their knowledge and understanding of the world”. Župan (2018) highlighted that children reflect their experience of the world through play, and for that reason they need to be provided with time and an environment in which to be themselves and to express their own thoughts, feelings and ideas.

To improve interpersonal relations and the understanding of others, various authors (Bratanić, 1991; Brajša, 1993; Bastašić, 1990) have highlighted the value of role-playing activities, with puppet play being considered particularly appropriate for young children. Cooper (2015) claims that drama is transferred from the stage to life. This happens in the process of emotional understanding, which is the basis of empathy, as in drama we actively feel others' passions, joys and pain. Dowling (2000) thinks that through the use of puppet play children find it easier to show both pleasant and unpleasant

emotions, and that by using puppets they can better identify and understand how others feel in different situations. Ivon (2013) claims that the use of puppet play by preschool teachers encourages prosocial behaviour among children through the use of a specific imaginary character – a puppet – that children love. Similarly, the analysis of the results of a study regarding the role of a puppet in a first-grade class, as carried out by Pečjak (2014), showed that the children had a positive experience with the puppet in terms of accepting differences and developing friendly attitudes.

## **2 Research context and aims**

The aim of our study was to explore the impacts of creative drama/puppetry on the social behaviour of children. The research involved teachers participating in an in-service study programme of preschool education. Among other subjects, the study programme comprised 30 hours of education in puppetry and drama activities in a preschool, and was delivered by one of the researchers. After this course, the participants had to perform a diverse range of puppetry activities in their classes every day over a period of three months. They were offered a variety of ways of including puppets in the children's daily lives at the preschool, including the following: the puppet included in the daily routine as a beloved friend of the class; the making of simple puppets; spontaneous play with puppets; the role-playing of scenes; integration of different areas of the curriculum with the help of the puppet; and conversations through the puppet. We expected that such work with puppets would enable the children to better co-operate and connect with one another and share ideas, and that this approach to puppetry/drama activities would bring changes in social behaviour, which would contribute to the development of the children's social competence.

This article presents a part of the study, as described above. It aims to answer the research question of whether regular and continued use of puppets according to the principles of creative drama has contributed to any positive changes in the children in terms of (increase in) prosocial behaviour (including empathy) as assessed by their teachers.

## **3 Method**

### *3.1 Participants*

Empirical research was conducted with a group of 22 preschool teachers from various regions of Slovenia who worked in preschool classes or in the first class of an elementary school with children aged 4–7 years. They were all in-service students of Preschool Education at the Faculty of Education in Ljubljana.

The teachers in our sample worked with 460 children aged 4–7 during our research: 143 children were in preschool classes for the ages of 4–5, 123 children in preschool classes for the ages of 4–6 and 95 in preschool classes for the ages of 5–6. The rest of

the children (108, or 23.4%) were in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade of elementary school. Slightly more than half of the children were girls (53%). For each child in the class the teacher had to assess his or her social behaviour on the given scale before and after the three months' intensive use of puppets in class.

### *3.2 Data collection and instruments*

The teachers' perceptions of the social behaviour of each child in his or her classes were measured with the Child Social Behaviour Rating Scale (CSBRS), as developed by the authors of this research on the basis of the expert literature (Goodman, 2001; Ivon, 2005; Katz & McClellan, 1997; Zupančič & Kavčič, 2007), which consisted of 24 items. The appraisals of the frequency of a specific behaviour in individual children were given on a five-point rating scale, from 1 (never behaves like this) to 5 (almost always behaves like this). The scale was completed by the teachers for each child before and after three months of daily and continued use of puppets.

Using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, the scale that we used was found to meet the reliability criteria. In the initial assessment the value was  $\alpha = 0.89$ , and the first factor explained 31.44% of the variance. In the final assessment (after a three months' use of puppets in the unit), this rose to  $\alpha = 0.91$ , and the first factor explained 33.90% of the variance.

The research was performed in accordance with the principles of research ethics. All the participants were assured that the gathered data would be used exclusively for the research purposes. The method, purposes and benefits of the research study were presented to the participants of the programme at an informative lecture. Each participant was coded for the purposes of monitoring and statistical data processing. Only children whose parents had signed the consent form were included in the study. The Participation Rules form was also signed by the participants of the research which included well-defined rules of participation and responsibility.

### *3.3 Data analysis*

The data were processed using the SPSS programme. The empirical data collected were quantitatively processed in accordance with their type and role (dependent and independent variables), namely, at the basic descriptive level (frequency distributions, mean values, measures of variation, and measures of dispersion) and at the level of inferential statistics.

With the t-test for even-numbered comparisons, the degree of statistical significance was established for the differences between arithmetic means for individual variables and for the summary variables before the introduction of puppetry activities and after three months of carrying out the activities. The statistical significance of differences was estimated at an error probability of  $p < 0.05$ . The analysis of changes in the children's reserved behaviour was then carried out for the total observed population, and separately for the 10% of children who had reached the lowest values in the initial rating.

## 4 Results and interpretations

Based on factor analysis, it was found that the variables whose contents related to prosocial behaviour can be classified into two groups: the first group containing two items referring to the child's expression of empathy, and the other including eight items encompassing all other prosocial behaviours.

**Table 1**

*Parameters of descriptive statistics and t-test for prosocial behaviour in the total population of children*

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Situation</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean value</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>DF</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
During activities makes agreements with peers and tries to respect others' opinion (V3).	Initial	458	3.40	0.95	-6.64	457	0.00
	Final	458	3.67	0.89			
Actively co-operates in guided activities and asks questions (V10).	Initial	459	3.35	1.21	-3.04	458	0.00
	Final	459	3.59	1.16			
His/her opinion is respected by peers (V11).	Initial	458	3.20	1.00	-6.91	457	0.00
	Final	458	3.47	0.95			
Takes initiative and the leading role in spontaneous play (V12).	Initial	457	3.06	1.15	-5.59	456	0.00
	Final	457	3.29	1.13			
Is insecure when required to speak in front of a group (V14).	Initial	449	3.30	1.29	-3.26	448	0.01
	Final	449	3.47	1.21			
Participates in play and other group activities (V15).	Initial	457	3.93	0.91	-4.88	456	0.00
	Final	457	4.11	0.82			
Is popular with other children (V22).	Initial	459	3.39	1.00	-6.44	458	0.00
	Final	459	3.64	1.01			
Quickly adapts to new things, people and situations (V23).	Initial	457	3.30	1.00	-6.91	456	0.00
	Final	457	3.63	0.95			
Total	Initial	443	3.37	0.78	-9.67	442	0.00
	Final	443	3.6	0.75			

The results show a statistically significant difference in the prosocial behaviour of children according to the teachers' assessment before the introduction of puppetry activities and their behaviour after three months of intensive use of puppets. Statistically significant differences can be noticed in both the summary variables and all individual variables of prosocial behaviour. Table 2 shows that for the summary variable empathy the initial mean value is 3.12, and the final one 3.34. For the rest of the prosocial behaviours the initial mean value is 3.37, and the final one is 3.60. Therefore, the results show a growth trend in the prosocial behaviour of children, as assessed by their teachers.

**Table 2**

*Parameters of descriptive statistics and t-test for empathy in the total population of children*

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Situation</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean value</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>DF</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Helps other children (V7).	Initial	458	3.29	0.99	-5.54	457	0.00
	Final	458	3.52	0.97			
Offers consolation to a crying child by him/herself (V17).	Initial	442	2.95	1.26	-4.81	441	0.00
	Final	442	3.19	1.16			
Total	Initial	441	3.12	0.96	-5.67	440	0.00
	Final	441	3.34	0.97			

When comparing the initial mean values of the summary variables of all research categories of social behaviour (besides prosocial behaviour, these also include aggressive and reserved behaviour, as well as the ability to focus attention; the related results are not presented in this article), the items referring to prosocial behaviour showed the lowest values in the initial assessment. Particularly low was the mean value of the initial measurement in the variable *empathy*, which in the final measurement was statistically significantly increased.

The biggest differences in the arithmetic means between the initial and final measurements are seen in the item *Quickly adapts to new things, people and situations* (0.33). A strong difference between the mean values of initial and final measurements, that is, a positive change, is also seen in the items *His/her opinion is respected by peers* (0.27), *During activities makes agreements with peers and tries to respect others' opinion* (0.27) and *Is popular with other children* (0.25).

We were particularly interested in whether there were changes in expressing empathy and other prosocial behaviours in children who in the initial measurement obtained the lowest scores in these items. The results of some studies show that the puppet particularly helps children who have poor social competence or rarely show prosocial behaviour. To provide specific support to children who lack skills for making friends, Dowling (2000) suggests that teachers work in small groups, using puppets and miniature dolls to tell a story and then initiate a discussion on the topic.

As the results show, the teachers noticed a statistically significant increase in prosocial behaviour in children that had the lowest scores according to the teachers' initial assessment of social behaviour. In this group of children, the initial mean value was under 2 in as many as four items relating to prosocial behaviour. The lowest mean value in the initial measurement is seen in the item *Takes initiative and the leading role in spontaneous play* (1.47). This is followed by the items *Actively co-operates in guided activities and asks questions* (1.60), *Is insecure when required to speak in front of a group* (1.83) and *His/her opinion is respected by peers* (1.92). The difference between the mean values of the initial and final assessment amounts to 0.30 for *empathy*, and 0.45 for other *prosocial behaviours*. Therefore, the teachers assessed that after three months mutual help among the children increased, and the children more often took the initiative and



made agreements with their peers in joint activities. The children's behaviours that point to their ability to respect their peers' perspective, and those expressing sensitivity for the needs and wishes of others, also increased significantly.

**Table 3**

*Parameters of descriptive statistics and t-test for prosocial behaviour of children in the lowest-score group*

Variable	Situation	N	Mean value	Standard deviation	t	DF	Sig.
During activities makes agreements with peers and tries to respect others' opinion (V3).	Initial	53	2.60	1.13	-3.89	52	0.00
	Final	53	3.17	1.16			
Actively co-operates in guided activities and asks questions (V10).	Initial	53	1.60	0.69	-4.90	52	0.00
	Final	53	2.23	1.12			
His/her opinion is respected by peers (V11).	Initial	53	1.92	0.61	-2.72	52	0.03
	Final	53	2.21	0.74			
Takes initiative and the leading role in spontaneous play (V12).	Initial	53	1.47	0.54	-4.06	52	0.00
	Final	53	1.94	0.86			
Is insecure when required to speak in front of a group (V14).	Initial	53	1.83	1.19	-2.42	52	0.02
	Final	53	2.25	1.21			
Participates in play and other group activities (V15).	Initial	52	2.77	0.90	-3.86	51	0.00
	Final	52	3.21	0.85			
Is popular with other children (V22).	Initial	53	2.28	0.79	-1.59	52	0.19
	Final	53	2.45	0.89			
Quickly adapts to new things, people and situations (V23).	Initial	53	2.02	1.10	-3.70	52	0.00
	Final	53	2.60	1.01			
Total	Initial	52	2.06	0.3	-6.52	51	0.00
	Final	52	2.51	0.64			

Statistically important differences in the mean values between the initial and final assessments were seen in all items of *empathy* and other prosocial behaviours, except in one. The biggest difference was observed in the item *Actively co-operates in guided activities and asks questions* (0.63). A big difference in the mean values of the teachers' initial and final assessments was also found in the items *Quickly adapts to new things, people and situations* (0.58), *In activities makes agreements with peers and tries to respect others' opinions* (0.57) and *Takes the initiative and the leading role in spontaneous play* (0.47). The only item for which no statistically significant differences were seen was *Is popular with other children*. This result is understandable, as a child's popularity among their peers cannot change significantly over a short period of three months. However, the increased prosocial behaviour in these children as a result of the



use of puppets shows that there is a high probability that it could change over a longer period of time.

**Table 4**

*Parameters of descriptive statistics and t-test for empathy of children in the lowest-score group*

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Situation</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean value</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>DF</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Helps other children (V7).	Initial	53	2.53	0.95	-2.68	52	0.01
	Final	53	2.85	1.06			
Offers consolation to a crying child by him/herself (V17).	Initial	52	2.08	0.92	-2.24	51	0.03
	Final	52	2.35	1.17			
Total	Initial	52	2.31	0.78	-2.82	51	0.01
	Final	52	2.61	0.98			

According to Vygotsky (1978), when playing a role, children find it easier to adapt and accept the rules than in real life. Eljkonjin (1981) claims that role-playing is the only real form of play activity, as it motivates the child through his/her desire to live a social life with the adult members of society. Župan (2018, p. 59) states: “A child is capable of integral development only if accompanied by constant play; therefore, it is important to enable it for children. It is also important to provide didactic materials suitable for their developmental phase with which they can assimilate new knowledge. Play and activities with didactic materials are important for a child’s integral development since both imagination and knowledge are important in life.”

Bandura (1986), in his social learning theory, pointed to the importance of the relationship that the child establishes with the imitation model. In the context of the current study the puppet can become an imitation model. One example is the use of a puppet as a beloved friend of the class, with whom the children can establish an authentic and affectionate relationship that enables them to accept the puppet as an authority more readily than they would an adult. The records of the teachers who participated in this study indicate that the children were strongly attracted by the behaviour of the beloved friend of the class, and imitated its behaviour or tried to please it with affectionate behaviour. In the teachers’ opinions, this influenced the increase in prosocial behaviour also in terms of peer relations in the class.

Our results are in keeping with the findings of Ivon (2005), which stated that there is a connection between the frequency of the use of puppets in educational work and the growth of prosocial behaviour. Harris (2005) also writes about the role of puppets in learning social skills, and in accepting oneself and the fact that others can be different from us. She reports that children discussed their own misunderstandings, conflicts and the learning of skills through metaphors seen in the stories involving the puppet – the beloved of the group.

## 5 Conclusion

Educational drama focuses on the creation of opportunities for co-operative and integrative learning (McNaughton, 2011). Creativity with puppets gives children the opportunity to work in small or bigger groups, which encourages individual and group learning. Through such creativity, children learn communication and social skills. Hohn (1995) writes that in making puppet scenes children focus on the common aim – to make a play. During this process, engagement stigmatisations, social differences and differences in communication skills are reduced and forgotten as all members of the group work together towards achieving a common goal. In his work with children in puppetry workshops, Debouny (2002) suggests that children need to learn how to listen, try to understand one another, ground their arguments, and share ideas with others. Moreover, the development of prosocial behaviour in the preschool period is of key importance for the successful inclusion of children in the school system.

Based on the results of the study presented here, the conclusion can be drawn that knowledge of the theoretical bases of creative drama and practical examples of the use of puppets are extremely important for educational work in preschool and in the lower grades of elementary school, particularly in terms of the encouragement of children's social competence or prosocial behaviour. It is very important that teachers are not target-oriented when preparing the play, as would be the case if they were to work with adults following the principles of professional work in a theatre; instead, they should follow a process-oriented and developmental approach and use the puppet according to the principles of creative drama. The results of our and other, earlier studies show that the daily use of puppets is one factor that greatly contributes to the social development of children.

*Dr. Helena Korošec, dr. Marcela Batistič Zorec*

### **Vpliv ustvarjalne drame z lutkami na prosocialno vedenje predšolskih otrok**

*Cilj naše raziskave je bil ugotoviti vpliv ustvarjalnih lutkovnih dejavnosti na socialno vedenje predšolskih otrok glede na ocene njihovih vzgojiteljev.*

*V raziskavo je bilo vključenih 22 vzgojiteljev predšolskih otrok, ki smo jih z izobraževanjem spodbudili, da v vrtčevskih oddelkih uvedejo igre z lutko po načelih ustvarjalne drame (Siks, 1981; McCaslin, 2006). Vzgojitelji so izpolnili lestvico socialnega vedenja za vsakega otroka v svojem oddelku (skupaj je bilo vključenih 460 otrok v starosti 3–7 let), in sicer pred uvajanjem lutkovnih dejavnosti in ponovno po treh mesecih intenzivnega vsakodnevnega ustvarjanja in igranja z lutkami. V tem prispevku predstavljamo del rezultatov opisane raziskave, in sicer tisti, ki se nanaša na prosocialno vedenje otrok. Na osnovi t-testa za parne primerjave smo ugotovili, da se je po trimesečnem izvajanju lutkovnih dejavnosti po ocenah vzgojiteljev izboljšalo prosocialno vedenje pri vseh otrocih, posebej izrazito pa se je izboljšalo pri desetih odstotkih otrok, ki so imeli pri začetnem ocenjevanju po ocenah vzgojiteljev najnižje ocene prosocialnega vedenja.*

Vzgoja z umetnostjo in skozi umetnost je uspešna metoda učenja in poučevanja na vseh področjih kurikuluma. Unescov dokument *Road map for Arts Education* (2006) sodi med najpomembnejše evropske dokumente na področju kulturno-umetnostne vzgoje in poudarja pomen umetnostne vzgoje v učečem se okolju ter njeno vlogo pri izboljšanju kakovosti izobraževanja. Ko govorimo o ustvarjalni drami kot eni izmed vej kulturno-umetnostne vzgoje, je njen cilj ustvariti izkušnje, skozi katere otroci/mladi lažje razumejo medčloveške odnose, se vživijo v življenje drugih ljudi in uvidijo alternativne možnosti za reakcije ter dogodke. N. Renfro (1982, str. 15) ugotavlja, "da se z vključevanjem dejavnosti z estetsko-kreativnega področja (gledališče, lutke, gib, glasba ipd.) močno poveča učinkovitost tradicionalnih metod poučevanja". Otrokova udeležba v ustvarjalnih gledaliških delavnicah prispeva k oblikovanju njegove samozvesti in mu pomaga izboljšati samopodobo. M. J. McNaughton (2011) izpostavlja, da narava odnosov med udeleženci v gledaliških delavnicah in med udeleženci ter učnim kontekstom ustvari takšno klimo, v kateri lahko poteka učenje v najširšem pomenu besede.

V okviru tega pa posebno pozornost namenjamo ustvarjalni igri z lutko. Ena osrednjih prednosti lutkovno-gledaliških delavnic je prav gotovo priložnost za sodelovanje in socialno učenje ob pripravi skupnega projekta. Scenske lutkovne igre s psiho-socialnega vidika omogočajo številne možnosti za otrokov celostni razvoj, in sicer olajšajo komunikacijo, omogočijo kakovostno organiziranje prostega časa, prispevajo k izboljšanju predstave o lastnem telesu in osebnosti, nudijo priložnost za ustrezno reševanje problemov z avtoriteto (ker se avtoriteta pedagoga, mentorja ali terapevta oblikuje na sodelovanju), pomagajo k vzpostavitvi zdravih medosebnih odnosov in odnosov v skupini ter otroku dajejo občutek pripadnosti skupini. Vse to pomembno prispeva k socializaciji posameznika (Petrović, 2013).

Vsak človek kdaj čuti jezo, strah, ljubosumje in negativizem. Otrok potrebuje način, da močna čustva izrazi na sprejemljiv način, in prav igra z lutko mu to nudi. Ko otrok zaigra prizor, kjer lahko ta čustva izrazi, se jih s tem osvobodi in razreši notranje konflikte. V igri z lutko se lahko odražajo tudi odnosi iz otrokove okolice. Konflikt se izživi z vso svojo močjo in tako izgubi moč ter energetski naboj (Bastašić, 1990). Majaron (2012) meni, da igra umetnost pomembno vlogo na različnih področjih otrokovega razvoja. Še posebno lutka nudi otroku ščit oz. neke vrste preobleko, za katero se lahko skriva. Sramežljiv otrok bo ob lutki našel pogum za izražanje čustev in bo lutki odkril svoje skrivnosti, preko lutke pa tudi občinstvu. Katz in McClellan (2005) socialno kompetentne predšolske otroke opisujeta kot tiste, ki imajo zadovoljujoče in recipročne interakcije z vrstniki in odraslimi ter skozi takšne interakcije izboljšujejo lastno kompetentnost. Kompetenten posameznik je oseba, ki zna izkoristiti svoje osebne spodbude in tiste iz okolja ter doseči dobre rezultate, ki omogočajo zadovoljivo sodelovanje v skupinah, skupnostih in širši družbi, ki ji posameznik pripada. Ali bo otrok socialno kompetenten, je odvisno od njegovih sposobnosti regulacije emocij, poznavanja in razumevanja okolja, socialnih spretnosti ter njegovih sposobnosti, da se vede v skladu s temi spoznanji (Brajša Žganec, 2003). Nesposobnost stopanja v odnose z drugimi in izogibanje le-tim pa po drugi strani lahko izzoveta tesnobo in osamljenost že v zgodnjem otroštvu. Otroci, ki se v odnosih z drugimi vedejo neodgovorno, so sramežljivi, nekooperativni ali impulzivni in veljajo za socialno manj kompetentne (Kemple, 2004).

Papalia, Olds in Feldman (2001) izpostavljajo, da je bistveni element prosocialnega vedenja altruizem, ki je namerna dejavnost, od katere imajo korist drugi. Več raziskovalcev

je prepoznalo kategorije prosocialnega vedenja (Warden in Christie, 2001; Ramaswamy in Bergin, 2009). Kategorije, ki jih navajajo, so deljenje, pomoč drugim, nudenje tolažbe, sociabilno vedenje. Nekateri dodajajo še podarjanje, sodelovanje in simpatiziranje.

Za izboljšanje interpersonalnih odnosov ter razumevanje drugih različni avtorji (Bratanić, 1991; Brajša, 1993; Bastašić, 1990) poudarjajo pomen igre vlog, pri mlajših otrocih zlasti igro z lutko. Dowling (2000) za zagotavljanje specifične podpore otrokom, ki jim primanjkuje socialnih spretnosti, svetuje delo v majhnih skupinah z uporabo lutk in miniaturnih punčk.

Vzgojitelji, vključeni v raziskavo, so sodelovali v 30-urnem izobraževanju s področja lutkovno-dramskih dejavnosti v okviru izrednega študija, nato pa te dejavnosti tri mesece vsakodnevno izvajali v svojih skupinah v vrtcu ali 1. razredu osnovne šole. Uporabljali so več različnih načinov vključevanja lutke v dnevno življenje skupine: lutka – ljubljene skupine, ki je bila vključena v dnevno rutino; vzgojitelj zaigra kratke zgodbe z lutkami, izdelava preprostih lutk z otroki, spontana igra z lutko, kratki lutkovni nastopi pred vrstniki, povezovanje različnih tem kurikula in pogovori z lutko. Predvidevali smo, da bo vsakodnevno vključevanje procesno-razvojnega pristopa k igri z lutko otrokom omogočilo več sodelovanja in medsebojnega povezovanja ter spremembe v razvoju socialne kompetentnosti.

Instrument za preverjanje vzgojiteljeve percepcije sprememb v socialnem vedenju otrok v skupini je bila lestvica za ocenjevanje socialnega vedenja otrok, ki so jo vzgojitelji drugega namenskega vzorca (22) izpolnjevali za vse otroke v skupini. Opravili smo analizo sprememb v socialnem vedenju otrok za posamezno področje vedenja za celotno opazovano populacijo in ločeno za tiste otroke, ki so pri začetnem ocenjevanju dosegli najnižje vrednosti (spodnjih 10 % otrok). Primerjali smo rezultate, pridobljene pred začetkom uvajanja lutkovnih dejavnosti, in tiste, ki smo jih pridobili po treh mesecih vsakodnevnih lutkovnih dejavnosti. Lestvico smo oblikovali na osnovi strokovne literature (Kroftlić, 1999; Ivon, 2005; Katz in McClellan, 2005; Zupančič in Kavčič, 2007; Goodman, 2001).

Na osnovi factorske analize smo ugotovili, da se spremenljivke, ki so vsebinsko povezane s prosocialnim vedenjem, uvrščajo v dve skupini: v prvi sta dve postavki, ki se nanašata na otrokovo izražanje empatije, v drugi pa je osem postavk, ki zajemajo vsa ostala prosocialna vedenja. Analiza rezultatov je pokazala, da obstaja statistično pomembna razlika v prosocialnem vedenju otrok po oceni vzgojiteljic pred uvajanjem lutkovnih dejavnosti in po treh mesecih intenzivne uporabe lutk. Statistično pomembne razlike opazimo pri vseh posameznih spremenljivkah prosocialnega vedenja.

Posebej nas je zanimalo, ali je prišlo do sprememb v izražanju empatije in pri preostalih prosocialnih vedenjih pri otrocih, ki so bili pri začetnem merjenju pri teh postavkah ocenjeni najnižje. Nekateri rezultati raziskav namreč nakazujejo, da lutka posebej pomaga otrokom, ki imajo slabšo socialno kompetenco oz. se redkeje vedejo prosocialno. Kot je razvidno iz rezultatov, so vzgojiteljice zaznale statistično pomembno več prosocialnega vedenja tudi pri otrocih, ki so imeli po njihovem mnenju ob začetnem ocenjevanju socialnega vedenja najnižje ocene. Vzgojiteljice ocenjujejo, da si po treh mesecih ti otroci bolj pomagajo med seboj, pri skupnih dejavnostih pa pogosteje prevzemajo pobudo in se dogovarjajo z vrstniki. Vedenja otrok, ki kažejo na otrokovo sposobnost upoštevanja perspektive vrstnikov, in vedenja, ki izražajo občutljivost na potrebe in želje drugih ljudi, so se prav tako pomembno povečala.

*Naši rezultati se skladajo z ugotovitvami, ki jih je podal Ivon (2005), in sicer, da obstaja povezanost med pogostostjo uporabe lutke pri vzgojno-izobraževalnem delu in porastom prosocialnega vedenja. Harris (2005) piše o vlogi lutke pri učenju socialnih veščin in pri sprejemanju sebe in drugih, ki so lahko drugačni od nas. Poroča, da so s pomočjo metafor v zgodbah z lutko – ljubljencem skupine otroci razpravljali o lastnih nesporazumih, konfliktih in učenju veščin.*

*Na osnovi rezultatov predstavljene študije zaključujemo, da je poznavanje teoretičnih osnov ustvarjalne drame in praktičnih primerov uporabe lutk izjemno pomembno za vzgojno delo v vrtcu in nižjih razredih osnovne šole, še zlasti za spodbujanje socialne kompetentnosti oz. prosocialnega vedenja otrok. Zelo pomembno je, da vzgojitelji niso ciljno usmerjeni v pripravo predstave, ki jo režirajo odrasli po vzoru profesionalnega dela v gledališču, ampak da sledijo procesno-razvojnemu pristopu in uporabi lutke po principu kreativne drame. Po naših ugotovitvah in tudi drugih že prej opravljenih raziskavah je prav vsakodnevna uporaba lutke tista, ki pomembno pripomore k socialnemu razvoju otrok.*

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*Dr. Helena Korošec, (1969) višja predavateljica za področje lutkovnega in dramskega izražanja na Pedagoški fakulteti Univerze v Ljubljani.*

*Naslov: Pod gabri 33, 3000 Celje, Slovenija*

*Telefon: (+386) 041 484 418*

*E-mail: [helena.korosec@pef.uni-lj.si](mailto:helena.korosec@pef.uni-lj.si)*

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*Dr. Marcela Batistič Zorec, (1958) docentka za razvojno psihologijo na Pedagoški fakulteti Univerze v Ljubljani.*

*Naslov: Rozmanova 18, 6330 Piran, Slovenija*

*Telefon: (+386) 041 705 723*

*E-mail: [marcela.zorec@pef.uni-lj.si](mailto:marcela.zorec@pef.uni-lj.si)*