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Final Master's Thesis

**Can drama courses contribute in developing employability
skills? A diary study**

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Abstract

The increasingly competitive workplace environment requires not only content-based skills but also process-based skills such as creativity, communication skills and the ability to cooperate. Enterprises invest heavily in training programs in order to develop the existing skills and abilities of their staff and create a culture of collaboration. Effective collaboration among colleagues can positively have an impact on the workplace environment and as a result their psychological well-being and productivity. Another field for which collaboration and communication skills are of vital importance is theatre. Drama courses include a number of exercises that can lead to better communication among the participants and they use almost purely collaborative methods to achieve the final goal of every exercise so that the team learns how to cooperate effectively. This method has great potential as a way to improve process-based skills in the workplace. This type of lessons offers the opportunity to the participants to build and develop their existing skills and abilities in an enjoyable way, free of stress and as a result it is easy to convince individuals to participate. For this reason, this research aims to explore the techniques that are used in drama courses in order to better develop the collaborative communication skills of adult learners and what other generic employability skills can be developed. For the research we used the diary technique to explore the way that skills learnt in the drama course, influenced the personal and professional lives of individuals. The diary technique is particularly suited to such exploration as it allows the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. The idea of the research is based on the author's experience of drama workshops, and thus the authors experience will be reflected upon within the research.

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Introduction

The 21st century was characterized by the technological development and the easy access to all kinds of information that led to changes in the economic sector. In addition to this, the recent years are characterized by a worldwide economic crisis that led to unstable working conditions. Both the enterprises and the employees need to be adjustable to the continuous changes and flexible. Enterprises change the sectors they are active in or the way they are working. Employees need to follow these changes if they want to be employable and in order to do that they have to be qualified and add new skills in their portfolio. Creativity and initiative are key factors that will lead to the economic upturn (Nissley, 2010) and so they are considered as vital competences for managers.

As far as employees are concerned, they need to have the content based skills that are relevant to each job. Technical knowledge though is not always enough in order to perform a task. The generic employability skills are going to make the difference between the candidates with the same technical knowledge. Some examples are team work, problem solving, communication skills, creativity and so on. This type of competences are applicable to more than one job and that helps the employee to remain employable no matter if he/she stays in the same job or even more, in the case he/she has to change it. In addition to this, they are not only important for the career of a employee but also for his/her personal life. Developing someone's generic abilities is actually a means to develop his/her personality.

The adaptation of new or the development of existed skills is a matter of lifelong learning. But in the twentieth century the workers have the responsibility for their career development and as a result they have to manage their training (Kanter, 1989a). There is a distinct change from the organizational career management in the self-management of one's career (Adamson, Doherty, & Viney, 1998). The new career type is called «protean» because according to Hall (1976) the worker is adaptive and self-directed and his/her career “. . . consists of all the person's varied experiences in education, training, work in several organizations, changes in occupational field, etc. . . .” (as cited in Claes, 2003, p. 57). Given the new data, employees are required to care for themselves and develop their skills.

Taking into consideration the special characteristics of adult learners, the training programs should focus on experiential learning. Rogers (1969, p. 5) defined the essence of experiential learning as: “It has a quality of personal involvement-the whole-person in both his feeling and cognitive aspects being in the learning event” (as cited in Gentry, 1990, p.10). Drama is a powerful mode that can draw students into an experience (Boggs, Mickel & Holton, 2007)

since the participants take part in full-body exercises and this way they get fully involved in the learning experience. It engages the participants emotionally and rationally making the learning process more memorable. Moreover, it provides information and entertainment, or as it is called “infotainment” which is motivating and helpful when it comes to teaching “soft skills” (Gibb, 2004, p.741). Drama schools provide workshops for everyone who wants to be trained in improvisation techniques but does not aim to be an actor.

The purpose of the current research was to examine whether there is a chance to develop employability skills when attending a regular drama workshop. The training program of this workshop was based on the techniques that are used in drama schools. The lessons included warm up exercises for the body, the voice and the concentration, team building exercises and improvisations, the theme of which was given each time by the instructor. The participants were adults of different professions that took part in the workshop for personal reasons.

The participants were asked to fill in a diary three times a week for three weeks. Then, the technique that was used to analyze them was the Thematic Analysis. The research is qualitative because qualitative methods seem to be more appropriate for the questions that we want to pose. The advantages of the qualitative research are that: a) it is characterized by the deep and detailed enquiry; b) it has the potential to investigate effects, procedures and attitudes that were not projected; c) it investigates the experience of social beings; d) The researcher sees the world through the eyes and the perception of the social beings and e) there is an effort to avoid a priori judgment. (Iosifidis, p.23)

The first chapter refers to employability skills. It starts with the definition and continues with an attempt to categorize them. After that, there are comments on the importance of employability skills and more specific on their major advantage, which is transferability. A special subchapter is written about teamwork which among the employability skills is the most important and usually asked by employers.

In the second chapter there is a brief description of three important adult learning theories that are based on experiential learning. There is a reference on the Lewinian Experiential Learning Model, on Dewey’s Model of experiential learning and on the experiential learning theory of Kolb.

The third chapter is dedicated to educational drama. A description of improvisational drama and forum theatre is followed by the reasons why drama is proposed as an educational method. Then, there is an overview of the results of some example researches on how educational drama was used in in-service training. The chapter ends with a reference on what has not yet been examined.

The second part of the paper includes the research. First there is a detailed description of the experiment and the method that was used for the analysis of the selected data. There is a presentation of the findings of the thematic analysis and then we make a chronological approach of them while trying to give answers to the research questions. In the conclusion we can read the results and the suggestions and the limitation of the research.

FIRST PART - THEORETIC

1. Employability Skills

1.1 The need of New Employability Skills

The new economic system is characterized by globalization, technological development, increased competitiveness and a fast pace of changes (Fallows and Steven, 2000) and its success will depend on the employability skills of its workforce such as creativity and imagination (Greatbatch and Lewis, 2007). The employment market is no longer characterized as permanent, old jobs are disappearing (Fallows and Steven, 2000, p. 75) and the new jobs require workers to adopt new roles, change work behaviour, and develop new skills (Pulakos, Arad, Donovan, & Plamondon, 2000). Apart from technical skills, employers are seeking generic skills as a means to acquire highly employable workers who enable the organization to remain competitive through the new products and services they provide (Nauta, van Vianen, van der Heijden, van Dam, & Willemsen, 2009; Greatbatch and Lewis, 2007).

The European Union has realized the importance of the new work-related skills and has intergraded the acquisition of this type of qualification to the goals of life-long learning. In November 2007, the Education, Youth and Culture Council adopted a resolution on New Skills for New Jobs which “stressed the need to identify new types of jobs and skills need in Europe and develop regular anticipation exercises based on existing structures at European level” (European Commission, 2009, p. 13). The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) has begun developing medium to long-term skills forecasting at EU level, broken down by country and the Commission is developing a range of ad-hoc studies looking at skills needs. In addition to these, the Institute of Prospective Technological Studies (IPTS) analyses the impact of technological change on employment and skills structure.

1.2 The definition of employability skills

By employability we mean the “continuous fulfilling, acquiring, or creating of work through the optimal use of one’s competences” (Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden, 2006, p. 453). According to European Commission, “skills are the ability to use knowledge and know-how to complete a task or solve a problem, whether in a professional or learning context and in personal and social life” (European Commission, 2009, p. 7). Employability skills are also known as non-technical skills, key skills, core skills, essential skills, key competencies,

transferable skills and generic skills. Sherer and Eadie (1987, p. 16) define the non-technical skills as those skills which can be applicable to many different jobs or professions and “cut horizontally across all industries and vertically across all jobs from entry level to chief executive officer” (as cited in Cassidy, 2006, p. 508).

Although it is highly recognized that generic employability are of vital importance for the workforce, there is no specific list of such skills. Several lists have been developed in Europe, the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada. These lists include:

Fundamental cognitive skills: literacy, using numbers, technology skills, reading, writing, higher order skills such as learning skills and strategies

Conceptualizing / thinking skills : managing information (locate, gather and organize information using appropriate technology and information systems), problem solving, planning and organizing skills, learning skills, thinking innovatively and creatively, reflective skills, decision making.

Interpersonal skills – social competences: communication skills, influencing skills, negotiation skills, customer service skills, leadership skills, resolve differences and work in a multicultural organization.

Team work: You have to be good at working with people; this means both your workmates and other people that come into contact with your organization.

Management: self-management, self-discipline, ability to work without supervision, self-reflection, self-evaluation. Management skills include the activities of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling to meet organizational goals (Schermerhorn, 2008).

Work ethic dispositions and attitudes: being enthusiastic, adaptable, motivated, reliable, responsible, honest, resourceful, committed, loyal, flexible, well presented, sensible, perseverant, efficient, independent, patient, professional, take initiatives and have realistic expectations of job requirements and career advancements.

All major generic skills schemes include interpersonal skills and conceptualizing / thinking skills.

1.3 Why are employability skills important?

The main characteristic of generic employability skills is the transferability. In opposition to the technical, content – based skills, the generic ones can apply across a variety of jobs, organizations and sectors. According to Overtom (2000), “basic employability skills are

transferable core proficiencies that represent essential functional and enabling knowledge skills and abilities required to succeed at all levels of employment in the twenty-first century workplace” (Rosenberg, Heimler, & Morote, 2012, p. 8). They are valuable regardless of the occupational sectors and organizations, in which individuals work (Greatbatch and Lewis, 2007), but as pointed out by Lazear (2003), they are used in different combinations and with different weights attached to them.

Highly skilled and adaptable employees are beneficial for the organization they work in, because they help increase its’ competitiveness. Some of the generic employability skills that are highly valued are flexibility, initiative, communication skills and adaptability. A research held by Peterson (1997), on the way job interviews are held, shows that all employers, regardless of the sector their business is occupied in, identified communication skills in particular, as having major effect on hiring decisions. Employers are satisfied by the level of technical knowledge of the new graduates but they worry about the lack of generic employability skills (Cassidy, 2006). They invest in generic skills’ training programs as a means to enhance their employees’ motivation and productivity (European Commission, 2009).

Developing employability skills is critical not only for organizations but also for the employees who want to adapt new qualifications that enable them to develop their career no matter whether they work for the same organization or they change jobs (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004; Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden, 2006; Smits, 2007). Developing skills can lead to better job opportunities and salary increases while the individual keeps working for the same organization but in this case he/she will probably use only the skills that apply to that particular job. Therefore, some employability skills may be more valuable if the employee have to switch organization (Smits, 2007) because they will help him/her adjust easily and learn the new competencies required.

New graduates usually do not follow the profession they have been educated for and the attributes they have developed, that are applicable regardless the job they are going to perform, such as information retrieval, might prove to be more than useful (Fallows and Steven, 2000). The business, finance and retail sectors require more staff with interpersonal skills, manufacturing workers require more internal communication, craft workers require problem solving (Greatbatch and Lewis, 2007), managers need to be more creative and so on.

1.4 Team Work

Teams exist in many sectors: in business and industry, in schools, hospitals and almost everywhere people gather to do things. But what is it that makes a team work effectively? When it comes to the selection of the members the first thing that matters is their experience and technical knowledge of the field that the team is going to work in. But this will not bring the desirable results if they don't have teamwork skills (Ellis, 2005; LaFasto, 2001, p. 4) and if they do not demonstrate the interpersonal competencies required in order to work within a team (Trent, 2003, p. 52).

LaFasto (2001) in his book "When Teams Work Best" argue that the attitude of every single team member and the relationship between the teammates are two of the dynamics of teamwork and collaboration. As far as the attitude is concerned every teammate should be committed to the team's objective, be action oriented and all be open to each other so that everybody can express his/ her opinion openly, exchange ideas and thus solve the team's problems (LaFasto, 2001). In effective teams, members are communicative and use their listening skills in order to ask questions, recognize the different perspectives of the others and discuss the important issues with the team (Stevens, 1994, p.512).

The relationship of the team members should be based on trust and mutual understanding to foster a constructive feedback (LaFasto, 2001). A team reaches its most performing stage when the members are individually empowered and open to one another, work in a climate of trust, creativity, shared decision making and role flexibility and have a healthy feedback (Kur, 1996, p.26). Maxwell, (2002) in his book "The 17 rules of team spirit" describes the importance of understanding the value of team work and he emphasizes the need of goal setting, trust, positive behaviour and communication among the teammates.

While the technical knowledge is applicable in particular tasks, the general competences of appropriate behavior and attitude towards the team and the skills required to perform a team task are transportable (Salas, 2002) and they can be applied in a variety of contexts (Ellis, 2005, p.642). Thus, training programs directed to skill deficiencies are necessary for corporations that use work teams (Ellis, 2005) and can be rather beneficial for the team members (Trent, 2003) even if they stop cooperating with the specific team or cooperation.

2. Adult Learning Theories

It is now recognized that employability skills are quite as important as technical skills for both the employees and the organizations. The formal education deals with the acquisition of technical knowledge. But how can somebody learn and develop his/her generic employability skills? Knowles (as cited in Jarvis, 2004, p.126) describes what attributes differentiate the adult learners from young students:

A change in self-concern since adults need to be more self-directive.

Experience since mature individuals accumulate an expanding reservoir of experience which becomes an exceedingly rich resource in learning

Readiness to learn, since adults want to learn in the problem areas with which they are confronted and which they regard as relevant

Orientation towards learning, since adults have a problem entered orientation they are less likely to be subject centered.

The value of experience in the learning process has been recognized by many theorists and educational philosophers. Lewin and Dewey have presented learning models based on experiences and Kolb has developed the experiential learning theory. According to Kolb and Lewis (1986, p.100):

Experiential learning methods help to seal the bond between the learner and the learned in two ways: First, by encouraging reflection on the meaning of abstract concepts in the light of shared personal experiences, the techniques allow concepts to become “real”; that is, learners find examples and applications in their experience that illustrate concepts. Second, by encouraging personal action on concepts, the techniques allow learners to commit themselves to the idea; they accept responsibility for the choice of that idea and for learning the skills necessary to use it.

At this point we summarize the most important adult learning theories that base learning on the personal experiences of the learner.

2.1 Dewey

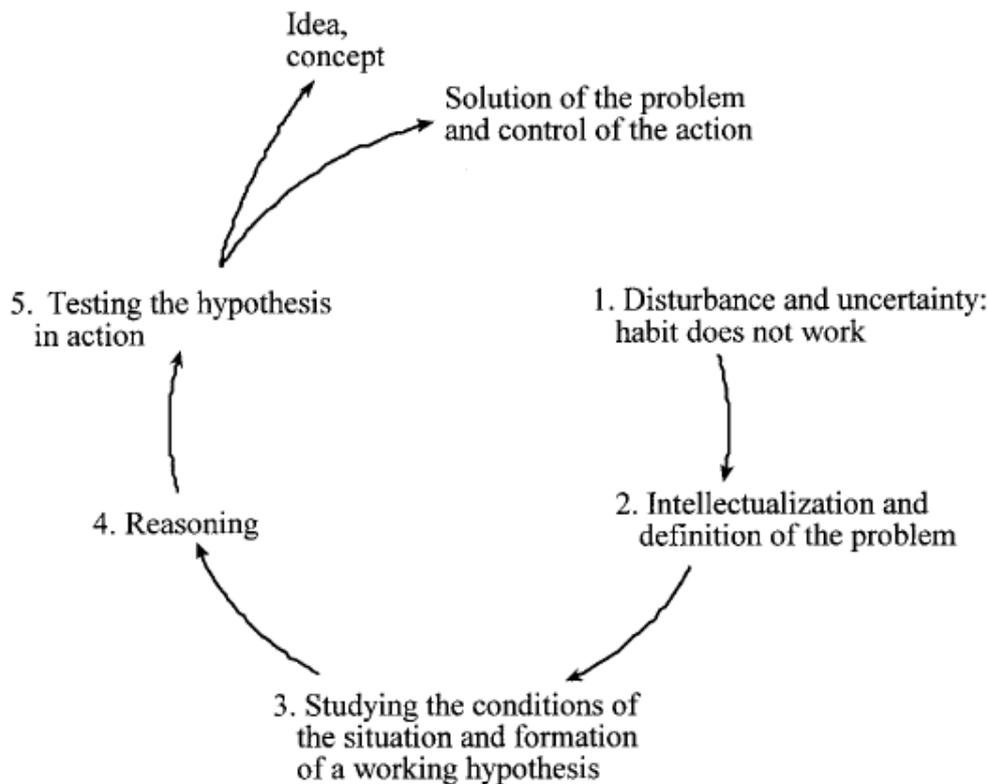


Figure 1 Dewey's Model of Experiential Learning according to Miettinen (2000, p.65)

For Dewey the learning experience begins when something happens and in order to handle it, a person needs to change his attitude. The habit does not help and first of all the problem needs to be defined. The next phase is to study the conditions of the problem that include both material and social conditions and the ways in which the problem is supposed to be solved. At this point the working hypothesis is set. The next step includes the evaluation of the working hypothesis using the available resources and by conducting experiments. If something does not go well then we can start all over. The hypothesis is actually tested when it is realized in practice. The situation is reconstructed according to the requirements of the hypothesis, to see whether the consequences deduced from the hypothesis become real in practice.

Dewey makes the following distinction between a primary and a secondary experience: "The primary experience is composed of material interaction with the physical and social environment and the secondary experience is a reflective experience that makes the environment and its things as objects of reflection and knowledge" (Miettinen, 2000, p. 65). Dewey (p. 39, 43) described it this way:

Experience does not simply go on inside the person. It does go on there, for it influences the formation of attitudes of desire and purpose. Every genuine experience has an active side

which changes in some degree the objective conditions under which experiences are had... The environment, in other words is whatever conditions interact with personal needs, desires, purposes, and capacities to create the experience which is had. Even when a person builds a castle in the air he is interacting with the objects which he constructs in fancy. (as cited in Hickcox, 1990, p.20)

2.2 Lewin

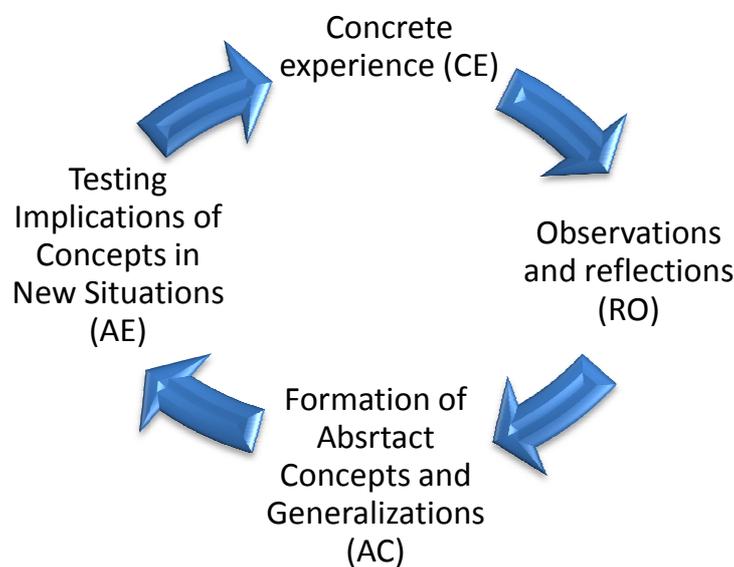


Figure 2 The Lewinian Experiential Learning Model according to Kolb (1984, p. 21)

Figure 2 presents Lewin's four steps Experiential Learning Model as it is presented in Kolb's work. The concrete experience is the stimulus of the learning process and it ends up with the modification of the learner's behaviour.

In the techniques of action research and the laboratory method, learning, change and growth are seen to be facilitated best by an integrated process that begins with here-and-now experience followed by collection of data and observations about that experience. The data are then analyzed and the conclusions of this analysis are fed back to the actors in the experience for their use in the modification of their behavior and choice of new experiences. (Kolb, 1984, p.21)

The laboratory method of Lewin that was introduced emphasizes the value of subjective personal experience in learning (Hickcox, 1990). Lewinian's model emphasizes on the here-and-now concrete experience and bases learning on the feedback provided by the analysis of the data collected. An imbalance between observation and action may result in learning ineffectiveness.

2.3 Kolb: The Experiential Learning Theory

Kolb combines the learning theories of Lewin, Dewey and Piaget, connects them with therapeutic psychologies, humanistic psychology and andradical educationists, utilizes the results of neurophysiology and forms his experiential learning theory which is the most famous one (Miettinen, 2000). The experiential learning model of Figure 2, which is presented by Kolb as the Lewinian model, is commonly known as Kolb's four-stage cycle. In this cycle, observation and reflection are based on immediate experience and cause new stimuli for action. These stimuli serve as guides in acting in order to create new experiences.

An effective learner needs four different capabilities: concrete experience (CE) skills, reflective observation (RO) skills, abstract conceptualization (AC) skills, and active experimentation (AE) skills. That is, he or she must be able to get involved fully, openly, and without bias in new experiences (CE), to reflect upon and interpret these experiences from different perspectives (RO), to create concepts that integrate these observations in logically sound theories (AC), and to use these theories to make decisions and solve problems (AE) leading to new experiences. (Kolb and Lewis, 1986, p.100)

Healey and Jenkins (2000, p. 186) summarize the strengths of Kolb's theory in that:

- *it provides ready pointers to application;*
- *directs us to ensure that a range of teaching methods is used in a course;*
- *provides a theoretical rationale for what many of us already do as teachers and then offers suggestions on how to improve on that practice (in particular ensuring effective links between theory and application);*
- *makes explicit the importance of encouraging students to reflect and providing them with feedback to reinforce their learning;*
- *supports us in developing a diverse, aware classroom;*
- *makes us aware of the way in which different learning styles have to be combined for effective learning;*
- *can be readily applied to all areas of the discipline, from a GIS laboratory exercise to a feminist analysis of a landscape;*
- *can be used by individuals and course teams; and*
- *can be applied widely from a single classroom session to an entire degree program.*

The theory uses the term experiential so as to differentiate it from both cognitive and behavioral learning theories and emphasize the central role that experience plays in the learning process (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 1999).

3. Theatre as a means of skills development

3.1 Educational Drama

Heathcote (1977, p. 43) gives the following definition about educational drama: “anything which involves persons in active role-taking situations in which attitudes, not characters, are the chief concerns” (as cited in Pearce and Jackson, 2006, p. 220). It is different than typical education techniques in that it is process-centered and engages the students in the activities of observing, creating and evaluating. It is an experiential learning technique through which they become more self-aware and potentially change their behaviours. The two mostly used educational drama techniques are Improvisational Drama and Forum Theatre. For the Improvisational Drama the students are both the actors who will create the scenario and the audience while in the Forum Theatre the students are the audience who can control the twists of the scenario that will be played by actors.

As far as improvisation is concerned, drama schools include it in their basic training program. In order to perform an improvisation, the trainer gives to his actors the theme they are going to work on, information about their surrounding and the circumstances of the event they are going to present. There is no script nor indications on what shall the personalities of the people involved be. The actors usually have a few minutes to discuss on the plot and then they are performing the improvisation. The story that comes out is a result of their initial ideas, the interaction between them and the reaction to each other’s acts. Role play games are inspired by the improvisation techniques and when they are used in in-service training programs the themes they work on are inspired by events that have occurred or have the possibility to occur during work. For example, salesmen, during their training program, are often called to improvise on how they would confront a dissatisfied client. In in-service training programs the trainees are taking the role of actors.

The definition of improvisation in Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (as cited in Daly, Grove, Dorsch & Fisk, 2009, p.461) is “to compose, recite, play or sing extemporaneously; to make, invent, or arrange offhand; to fabricate out of what is conveniently on hand”. Different actors with the same theme may result in a completely different dialogue and dramatic outcomes (Pearce and Jackson, 2006) depending on their spontaneity and creativity. Since there is no script to follow they have to observe and be fully aware of their surrounding, trust and cooperate effectively with their partners. Improvisation training concentrates on learning how to express oneself, become comfortable in front of an audience, overcome inhibition and ultimately be

confident and creative (Daly et al., 2009) and actually aims in changing how people think and feel, so that they will behave differently (Corsun, Young, McManus & Erdem, 2006).

Forum Theatre is another form of interactive drama that can be used in education programs. It is an interactive scenario played by actors during which the audience can intervene and change what follows. The actors create and present a scene of a problem and the audience, which is called spect-actors (Dwyer, 2004) uses the technique of “freeze framing” the scenario (Hall, 2004) to make suggestions on how it would react in order to turn towards a solution. The actors go back in the scene and play the suggestions so that the audience can see them. In the end the actors and the spect-actors debate around the outcomes of their suggestions. A different version of interactive drama is the “Hotseating” where the actors play the whole scene without interruptions and in the conclusion, while they still stay in role, the audience will challenge them, as much as possible, about their behaviour and advise them on how to improve it (Swales, 2010, p. 261).

Interactive drama is effective because it engages the participants on a rational and emotional level (Swales, 2010), allows them to see the consequences of their decisions and learn how to react in a real time situation to solve a problem (Walker, 2009). In addition, the discussion with the other participants allows them to examine their own behaviour (Hall, 2004), reconsider their choices and understand the connection between the individual and the community’s concerns (Placier, Burgoyne, Cockrell, Welch & Neville, 2005). The participants in both Improvisational Theatre and Forum Theatre have the opportunity to create theatrical scenes based on their perception on themselves and the others, articulate stories otherwise unspoken (Feagan and Rossiter, 2011) and within a safe environment share their opinion, perform actions and then evaluate their decisions.

3.2 The reason drama courses are proposed

Educational drama is a direct way to connect the theory with the practice. Reading a theory in a book or listening to a lecture is one thing but watching it unfold in front of you may be more efficient. Watching it and even better participating in it gives the students the opportunity for a deeper connection with the learning material (Walker, 2009). Interactive drama places actors and audiences in situations in which they are able to participate in “true to-life” interactions (Tromski and Doston, 2003, p.53). Managers who have attended improvisational theatre games have commented that it helped them build the gap between learning and working

environment and offered a means to clarify the growing complexity they are facing (Corsun et al., 2006; Nissley, 2010).

Participating in drama exercises is a multidimensional experience that involves body, mind and emotions. This holistic approach aims towards a deeper understanding of knowledge and makes the learning process more memorable (Brookfield, 1990, p.15; Hall, 2004). It is potentially more effective in explaining difficult or complex issues (Walker, 2009; Nissley, 2010). Another asset of drama courses is that it includes entertainment, it is relaxing and as Harris R., Harris K. and Baron (2003, p. 196) argue the employees that participate in such workshops “enjoy the freedom given to them to dramatize a realistic scenario, and are very creative in re-constructing the chain of events”. This full body experience engages the participants in development activities in an emotional and rational way (Swales, 2010; Corsun et al., 2006; Walker, 2009; Boggs et al., 2007) and triggers their reaction. Wagner (1998, p. 16–17) argues that:

Drama works powerfully because the bodies of the participants are stimulated as well as the minds. As students participate in educational drama, they are stimulated in imagined situations to respond with their whole beings. Because their previous stasis is disturbed, their whole organisms are aroused. Their bodies as well as their minds need to give shape to their experience and to this changing vision of the world. Learning comes as students give form to experience, as they construct meaning (as cited in Placier et al., 2005, p.257).

Finally, we should not forget that drama workshops offer a safe, protected environment where participants can try unafraid their ideas and share their opinions. The improvisations or the presentations in forum theatre are based on realistic occasions that derive from the working environment but the situations and the events that occur are imaginary. The emotions that emerge are real and thus, the participants are open to change, enhance interpersonal trust and improve work related skills (Corsun et al., 2006) and the organizations can communicate to their staff sensitive issues (Walker, 2009). The participants can use their spontaneity and creativity without risk in order to find various possible solutions to unexpected situations (Harris, R., Harris, K. & Baron, 2003) and reveal inner thoughts and feelings that may not be accessible through more conventional development methods (Nissley, 2010). Drama as a learning method not only enhances the creativity and the spontaneity of the participants but also makes them feel more confident in real situations.

3.3 Previous research

The educators, in adult training programs, use role play games, in which students act out a brief scene based on experience, history, or fiction (Placier et al., 2005, p.256). There is however limited research on the benefits of educational drama (Jackson, 1996) and on how it can be used in adult learning for work-related skills. We will review some research examples on how theatre has been used in adult training programs and what the benefits were according to the opinion of the participants.

Daly, Grove, Dorsch and Fisk (2009) used improvisation training, as used in acting schools, in preparing the cabin crew of a regional Arish airline. They were interested in examining the effectiveness of theatre training in developing the frontline service workers' adaptability and ability to improvise. Service employees usually need to face unique situations and unusual customer requests and the excellence of the service provided relies upon the worker's creativity, quick response and ability to adapt the service performance. As a part of their training, the airline's crew conducted improvisations with particular subjects inspired by past or possible events that happen on airlines. The results of the research showed that the participants got involved in the improvisation training with enthusiasm and excitement and that they marked it as "useful, relevant and helpful" for their careers.

The post-test findings clearly show that the trainees felt that when facing unique situations improvisation training improved their confidence, effectiveness, ability to adapt, spontaneity and comfort in successfully handling unique situations. (Daly et al., 2009, p. 468)

Manning, Verenikina and Brown (2010), made a research on how arts – based courses can develop someone's work – related skills. In this research, the participants that attended performing arts – courses held by the National Institute of Dramatic Arts (NIDA) were interested in developing their communication, personal and interpersonal skills for work purposes. They described the performing-arts learning experience as 'inspiring', 'liberating', 'challenging', 'powerful', 'releasing', 'confidence building' and 'revealing' and enjoyed the fact that they were completely engaged in the learning experience (Manning, Verenikina & Brown, 2010, p. 214). They also appreciated the fact that some of the techniques they learned were immediately applicable to their workplace and to their life. Finally, the skills they claimed to have developed are creativity, communication ability, self-management, confidence and will for life-long learning.

Pearce and Jackson (2006) after a review that revealed the importance of generic skills such as teamwork, communication and negotiation for marketers, used educational drama to teach the final – year undergraduate marketing students. The aim was to teach them the marketing principles in a more interesting and participial way and to help them acquire the generic skills that they will need for their careers. The results of this experiment are summarized by the authors in the following sentence:

The drama convention exposed students to alternative perspectives and enabled students to share in an educational experience that was engrossing, memorable and even personally enriching (Pearce and Jackson, 2006, p. 228).

Placier, Burgoyne, Cockrell, Welch and Neville (2005) examined with both quantitative and qualitative methods whether Theatre of the Oppressed intervention in a teacher education class can change pre-service teachers' attitudes toward cultural diversity. The quantitative data did not demonstrate that the TO was an effective intervention, but this – according to the authors - might be because of the controls and/or measures they have used. On the other hand, the qualitative component of the study showed some evidence of change and that “theatre of the oppressed was very useful to the education instructor as a way of making conceptions of teaching visible, as a kind of alternative assessment”(Placier et al., 2005, p.275).

Corsun, Young, McManus and Erdem (2006) on their research on managers' perceptual shortcuts, support that improvisational theatre games can be used in managers' training programs so as to help them

- (1) discover their perceptual shortcomings;*
- (2) develop basic observational and improvisational skills; and*
- (3) test those skills at a more advanced level* (Corsun et al., 2006, p. 305)

3.4 To be examined

As we already have seen the research on the use of educational drama in adult learning is limited. There should be more research on how drama can be used in in-service training so as to develop the generic skills of the participants that correspond to their profession, such as communication skills for the salesmen. In addition to this, educators could include drama techniques to make the teaching procedure more interesting for the participants since learning is accomplished through experience. It would be interesting measuring student learning outcomes after participating in drama based learning procedures and compare it to other teaching methods.

The in-training programs have a specific subject and they are focused on the company's needs regarding the employees' qualifications. But adults are responsible for their training and they should find ways to develop their skills regardless of their profession. Drama workshops are available to anyone and be trained in improvisation techniques and participate in full-body exercises that aim to the actors' self-awareness, self-control, spontaneity, creativity, observing and other skills that are important when playing theatre. An adult that wants to develop his skills for his professional life or just for his personal development can take part in a drama workshop. For the moment there is no literature on how drama workshop can help participants enhance their generic employability skills.

SECOND PART – RESEARCH
**HOW DID DRAMA COURSES HELPED THE PARTICIPANTS DEVELOP
EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS: A DIARY RESEARCH**

1. Research Design

1.1 Research questions

The purpose of this study is to explore whether drama courses can help individuals develop employability skills and enhance their ability to collaborate more effectively at their work place.

Research question one: Which skills are developed during drama courses?

Apart from communication skills, drama courses can potentially help participants to improve their other capabilities. Participants can attend these courses in order to develop their emotional and personal characteristics such as their expressive ability. Courses based on improvisational drama in particular are conducted in order to enhance the creativity, perceptiveness, teamwork, decision making and empathy of their participants. So the first research examines the different work – related skills that can be developed during the drama courses. There is a particular interest in communication and expressive abilities.

Research question two: In what way is collaboration among the participants enriched during drama courses.

It is getting more and more important for the researchers to evaluate a team' s competency in areas such as team building, group dynamics, conflict resolution and group communications skills (Cianni and Wnuck, 1997). An improvisational drama game is purely collaborative and allows every single member to be a part of it and affect the process. Therefore, collaboration is a main component of the success of a drama game and trust is what truly denotes collaborative dynamic of an organization (Holton, 2001). What we examine here is how the techniques used in drama courses can affect the communication in the team; enrich the collaboration among the participants and lead to effective team working.

Research Question Three: What impacts do drama courses have on the participants' personal and/or professional lives?

The third question is more general and aims in finding any other impacts that drama courses may have on the participants' lives and that are not yet listed in literature. The findings of this question might lead to other questions and be the trigger for new research.

1.2 Participants and procedures

The sample of the study consists of adult learners who attended a drama workshop for adults in Thessaloniki. The ages of the participants varied between 18 and 60 years old and they were employed in different occupations such as teaching, library science and medicine. The different characteristics of the participants turned out to be useful for the research because it will give us the opportunity to explore a broad range of experience.

The diary method is commonly used in clinical research, occupational research and health care in order to examine patients' experience. But it is also preferred by other researchers within the social sciences because of the possibility to collect rich data that can't be collected with other methods (e.g., survey methods). The advantage of this method is that participants are writing about important events, soon after they happen and that the researchers can study their interpretation of the situation and their personal perspective and attitudes toward them (Day and Thatcher, 2009, p. 250). For this research, the diary method was chosen because we were interested in studying the reflection of the drama courses on the thoughts and behaviours of the attendants with a perspective of their one feeling and thoughts.

A diary was designed for the research which was pocket size and portable. After being pilot tested it was given to the participants along with instructions on how to fill it out. Every participant was contacted personally in order to explain to him/her the purpose of the research and how he/she is going to participate. The contact with the participants was maintained throughout the process so as to explain any misconceptions. They were informed that it is an anonymous research and that they could quit any time they felt like it.

The diary consisted of four questions:

Question 1: In what way has your involvement with the drama courses affected your ability to express yourself? Please provide examples.

Question 2: Is there any moment in your day, since the last lesson, that you recalled the exercises you participated in at your drama courses? Can you give an example?

Question 3: Thinking back on your last lesson, what did you learn from the other members of your team?

Question 4: Has your participation in the drama class had a positive or negative impact on your work? Please give examples

The participants attended a drama workshop two times a week for three weeks. The courses start with vocal and kinesthetic exercises and continue with team building techniques and improvisations. All exercises are interactive and aim to enhance personal development via expression and strengthen collaboration among all participants. The participants are called to fill out the diary three times a week. They fill it out the day after the first lesson of the week, the day after the second lesson and the day before the lesson of the next week. We examined the reflection each course has had on the participants the day after and some days later, in order to detect if there are any differences amongst the two.

The participants were given the following additional questions:

Before filling out the diary:

Thinking back on the time you decided to participate in drama courses could you describe your expectations?

After the three weeks workshop:

Now that you finished the courses would you say that it has met your expectations? In what way?

What skills would you say that you developed during the drama courses?

In what ways has your involvement with drama courses impacted on your personal and / or your professional life?

By asking the participants to respond to some questions we are trying to reach the respondents' innermost thoughts by having them project those thoughts into a non – threatening situation (McDaniel and Gates, 1996). They were urged to reply according to their actual feelings and thoughts about the drama courses and to not hesitate to restate something or reply that there was no impact on them if they felt so.

All fifteen attendants of the drama workshop were asked to participate in the research and fill out the diaries but only ten of them returned it to the researcher and only seven of the diaries were considered to be properly completed.

1.3 Analysis Strategy

The first step of the analysis was to read thoroughly all the diaries and do a primary content analysis. Each response was analyzed according to references to a) the respondent him/herself, b) the group, c) people of his/her personal or professional life. These categories were chosen as an effort to approach the research questions.

The main method of the analysis is the Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and the steps that the researcher followed are: 1) Read the diaries several times as a whole and code text segments according to content of what people are saying, 2) Find out the codes that can be grouped together and form higher – order themes, 3) Look for relationships between themes and for patterns, 4) Identify the important themes according to their frequency and/or to the exceptional issue that they raise, 5) Once the broader themes are identified the researcher reads again the responses and finds the text segments that can be evidence for these themes, and 6) These themes are examined in order to see whether they can be grouped and whether a conclusion can be drawn. This is an overlapping and iterative process.

The main categories were the ones we used for the content analysis and here we will see the subcategories that emerged after the thematic analysis and the most representative comments.

2. Findings

2.1 Pre course comments

All the participants of this research stated that they had no previous experience with drama before this workshop, apart from one participant who remembers taking part in theatrical shows as a child. Nobody took part in this workshop in order to become an actor/actress. The primary reason was to be part of a team and “socialize” especially with people of different backgrounds. They wished for personal development through the “intense activity”, “the physical and verbal communication” and the “exposure” that drama courses offer.

The participants started this activity because they expected to become more “sociable”, “spontaneous”, “communicative” and “less shy” with the other people. Moreover they hoped to “understand and improve aspects of their personalities” that didn’t know until then. Another important reason for attending drama courses was the fact that it was not related to their jobs, so it was interesting and they considered it as an opportunity to “beautify” their lives, “live the excitements” and “express in a creative way”. Finally, it was appreciated that they would cooperate with people who have the same interests and maybe the same expectations as well.

2.2 Responses with reference to the respondent him/herself

Techniques

As expected the majority of the participants mentioned that during the drama courses they learnt techniques that helped them raise awareness to the various elements of speech such as breathing, volume, stress, rhythm, and individual sounds. They mentioned that they “speak clearly, slowly and directly”, “my voice is stronger and more beautiful”. As a result of the techniques taught, they have also improved their body posture:

“... I control my breathing, I sit properly with my back up straight and I have improved my posture; I am trying to find my centroid...” (Ntina, 25)

“... my walking is more stable...” (Zoi, 40)

Self-awareness and expression

Drama is a multiple intelligences art that improves bodily kinesthetic abilities. All the participants mentioned that they became more aware of their body and subconscious movements that until now they did not realize. A participant noted that she did not “feel comfortable with my

own mouth”. Another one referred to her “rigid shoulders” and added that at the end of the lesson her “shoulders are looser and my body follows my feelings”.

Improving the awareness of the body was important because it helped the participants understand the significance of body language and how they could use it to highlight their feelings and express the message they want to present. Here are two typical comments:

“I used to use my arms a lot because I thought that was making me more expressive... but after the drama workshop I try to use my voice and my body posture without moving my arms all the time” (Anta, 32)

“I am using more physical effects... I have learnt that the body speaks before the mouth” (Ann, 22)

Six out of seven participants explained in details how drama workshop enhanced their expressive ability by “finding new ways to express a feeling”, “using the voice” in a more effective way and “relating the look in the eyes with the emotions”. Using non linguistic elements to express their opinion and feelings turned out to be important for the participants:

“The color exercise, where we had to find the person who had the same color with us, made me try and find new ways to express myself... My vocal and physical expression have been improved and they are both important when I am working” (Antrew, 38)

“The drama courses have significantly improved my expressiveness, mainly the nonverbal. Through the exercises I have significantly improved expression through my eyes. Now, I can communicate my feelings to someone only by looking at him/her” (Anta, 32)

During the improvisations participants were called to face up situations they may have never been involved in before and this brought them closer to their feelings. As a consequence they referred to the opportunity they had experiencing new emotions and exploring their possible reactions in various situations:

“I came in contact with my anger. Somebody tried to take my socks off and I got mad. I felt it!” (Zoi, 40,)

“... Through the obedience exercise ... I discovered that I can become more abrupt, domineering, and despotic while these are not of my obvious characteristics” (Andrew, 38)

Psychological impact of the drama courses

A number of studies (e.g. Johnson, 1982; Hui and Lau, 2006; Hickling, 2010; Erbay and Dogru, 2010; Schnee, 1996) have searched the effect of drama courses on the psychological development and psychotherapy of the participants. References to the positive impact of the workshop on the psychology of the participants could not be missing from this research.

Everybody stated that after the lesson they felt more “relaxed” but two of them added that they had also entered into their lives relaxation exercises:

“In a moment of relaxation at home, I used an exercise I learnt at the lessons that helped me very much to relax... I relaxed every single part of myself” (Vaso, 29)

“I am using the relaxing exercises in my everyday life. Every morning I start my day by doing one of the relaxing exercises for ten minutes” (Anta, 32)

The participants attended this drama workshop not only because they liked theatre but also as a way to get away from real life’s problems by doing a hobby. 58% of them referred to the positive psychology they have after the course and explained how this helps them with their jobs and lives:

«During the lesson I rest and forget my everyday life, so at my job I feel I am calmer and organized and that has positive results. For example my job demands enormous patience and I feel it has increased» (Vaso, 29)

«Although my schedule is heavier, I can say that I go to work in a better mood» (Ntina, 25)

Apart from discarding the stress, participants claimed that they feel more “energetic”, “creative” and “productive” after they started attending drama courses.

«... I am more active when doing something. More effectively dynamic. When for example I have something to do instead of being stressed, I feel more creative» (Zoi, 40)

Especially one of the participants, whose job is sedentary, describes how drama courses helped her be more active and keep her energy during the day at work:

«For example, my job is sedentary and I feel my energy dropping. Drama lessons helped me keep my energy longer. I talk more, I move more as much as I can» (Vaso, 29)

Self-discipline

The next step, after self-awareness is being able to control yourself. Through the exercises the participants learnt how to control their facial expressions, their voice and their body and this helped them in feeling more “confident”:

“My voice. I could say that I control it” “... use my voice depending on the occasion” (George, 43)

“Through drama courses I learnt to speak slower and calmer. In the past I was speaking faster and nervously” (Anta, 32)

Drama courses also helped them to develop self-discipline because they learnt “how important it is to keep your temper”. Now they are confident enough to control their feelings and even “pass from one psychological situation to another” if necessary and because of this they feel more adaptable. Furthermore, they stated that when they have to make a decision they have

the patience to examine the situation and the possible solutions before deciding. Self – discipline has a positive impact someone’s everyday life:

«Through the exercises I improved my self-control and that helps me keep my temper and stay calm... They helped me pass from one emotional situation to another fast. For example I can be strict to one of my students and at the same time smile to the rest of the classroom... »
(Anta, 32)

«After the drama courses I have more self-control and I do not take hasty decisions especially when it comes to the relation with my colleagues»(Antrew, 38)

“I got to know myself better, realize my reactions and learn how to control and improve them” (Ann, 22)

2.3 Responses with reference to the group

The drama workshop provided participants with numerous structured group activities where they were able to cooperate with other people from different backgrounds. One of the main objectives in drama education is to create a culture of collaboration inside the team and help the participants learn how to cooperate effectively with the others. No matter what the differences are, they are all working under a common goal.

Efficient team work

Six participants commented on the diversity of the individuals that formed this work group. Three of them were surprised to realize how unique every person is. One of them stated:

“I realize every time that the personality and the character of each one of the members is so unique and that is impressive” (Vaso, 29)

They all agreed that their differences are not an obstacle, especially because everybody understands that the common goal is most important. They appreciate the fact that they had the possibility to learn how to work with people of different backgrounds and use this diversity in a “creative” way.

“We have different personalities and as a result our approaches to the situations widely vary ... This diversity can be highly creative in every aspect” (Antrew, 38)

“Everyone uses his /her one talent. Or at least, when they do it, it is better for them and for me” (Zoi, 40)

“I learnt that I have to work together with a lot of different personalities, find ways to overcome the differences and contradictions in order to have a good cooperation towards the best result” (Ntina, 25)

A key factor that leads to good cooperation is respect. Four of the participants stated that they learnt how to “listen to” and “respect a different opinion”, “watch carefully” and try “not to distract” their classmates. They noted:

“I respect when somebody wants and tries to do or show something and I watch him/her carefully. That is how teams work and that is how community should be working as well” (Vaso, 29)

“You have to show respect to your partner and don’t do something that might distract him/her and set him/her outside the exercise. If someone does not understand the exercise it is his/her problem but should not through off the rest of the team” (Ann, 22)

Another important factor inside the team is listening to the other members when they have something to say or when they want to show something:

“I have learnt to listen carefully to the person who is talking and is trying to express himself/herself. It is vital to learn how to listen carefully” (Vaso, 29)

As mentioned above the collaboration under a common goal which is above personal expectancies is highly appreciated by the participants. They refer to the importance of leaving behind personal interests and potential conflicts for the sake of the team:

“I realized that everyone is a unique personality but under a common goal, we all work as one body and (usually) selfish reactions extinct. Of course there are always persons who wish to distinguish themselves” (Ann, 22)

“Inside a team there may be ten different members but they all work together as one. There are no personal interests and aspiration, only a common goal ... this has to be understood by all the members. The common goal should not be obstructed by personal interests” (Anta, 32)

Team work is highly appreciated by all the participants. Collaboration between the members is said to be “of great importance”, “valuable” and “essential” if they want to achieve a better result. The team works “as a human body” and everyone is “equally important”. Two of the participants also stated that not only does it lead to a better result but it also offers great satisfaction:

“team effort, beyond socialization, offers enormous satisfaction... teamwork and the united effort lead to an outcome and brings pleasure because of it” (Vaso, 29)

“Inside the team I learnt the real importance of cooperation, because during the exercises there is co-dependency among the members” (Zoi, 40)

Six participants recognized and emphasized the “responsibility” that everyone has towards the team. Everybody has something “unique to offer” to the rest of the team and must try to “do his/her best” for the better result because they are “interdependent”:

“I have learnt the real responsibility towards the team because each one has a role to play”
(Ntina, 25)

All participants referred to and repeated the importance of trust that has been developed between the members and played an important role in the development of a healthy cooperation. Trusting the rest of the members was not easy for everybody, considering that they did not know each other when the courses started. After a while they started “letting themselves to the hands of their partners” and that resulted in a “deeper relationship” between them. They noted:

“I learnt to trust the other members and that way I feel closer to them” (George, 43)

“You have to trust the other members of the group if you want the exercise to work. When you let yourself on the hands of your partner, at the same time you develop a deeper relationship with him/her, always in relation to the course. You can cooperate more effectively and get to a better result” (Ann, 22)

Participants also mentioned that it is vital to trust your team and share your thoughts with them, especially when there is a problem that has to be solved, otherwise it will cause greater damage to the whole.

“I realized that inside a team we should say our problems, otherwise sometimes it will appear and will disrupt the cohesion of the group” (Anta, 32)

“If something can be helpful but it is not expressed openly this is not in favor of the team and does not benefit the group’s cohesion” (George, 43)

The existence of problems in a group is inevitable. “Selfish attitudes do not disappear” and somebody may try to “stand out over the others”. In some particular cases, as stated:

“... that member should be rejected, so as not to intercept the progress of the group. Maybe sometimes a team has to reject a member when it is proven that he/she does not work with a team spirit, no matter how bothering that may be” (Anta, 32)

2.4 Responses with reference to other people of his / her personal and professional life

Interpersonal relationships

Being part of a groups function as a form of socialization. From this aspect, interpersonal relationships are developed, regardless the theme of the group and the members become familiar

to each other. As they stated, they remember “laughing together”, “feeling comfortable”, “relaxing with the others”. They “observe each other”, “learn from their reactions” and develop “intimacy” and “understanding”.

One of the participants said that she remembers:

“... relaxing with them, laughing, being myself. We are familiar to each other and that helps me in general.” (Vaso, 29)

Another participant claimed that the reaction of the others was equivalent to the way he approached them:

“... when you are positive towards the other members of the group and let them know that you are open to a collaboration with them (usually) you get back the same reaction by them” (Antrew, 38)

It is important though, as two of the participants said, that they try to keep these informal relationships outside the class so as not to affect the goals of the group:

“Whatever happens inside the lessons does not affect our relationships outside the theatre.”(Ann, 22)

“Likes and dislikes stay outside the classroom” (George, 43)

Communication

Drama courses offered a variety of exercises that enabled participants to develop listening and understanding skills. Four of the participants mentioned that these exercises helped them become more “observing” with the people they interact and “understand them better” since they “pay more attention to their body language” as well. Now they “look in the eyes” of other people, observe their reactions, “associate their posture with their feelings” and even “understand their placing towards” them. Two typical responses were as follows:

“I pay more attention to my partners in order to see the changes of their expression or their body language while they argue about something. For example I saw the agony in the expression and the body of a friend when he was worried about something” (Antrew, 38)

“I recall the exercises during which we have to keep as many elements as we can from our surrounding. This way I have become more observant in my everyday life.” (Ntina, 25)

As discussed in the previous session, participants mentioned that they have learnt to pay attention and listen carefully to the other members of their team. It appears that they have integrated this skill in their everyday lives. One participant reported that:

“...I have learnt that for some people it is difficult to express themselves and now I give them more time ... I have improved as to let the others conclude their thoughts and not interrupt

them by saying “yes, I know what you want to say” and this has improved my personal and professional relationships.” (Anta, 32)

All the participants in the drama courses acknowledged a positive impact on their social interactions. They referred that they feel more “comfortable” and “less embarrassed” with people they first meet; they have become more “communicative”, “expressive” and “open” with their friends and colleagues. This positive impact was appreciated the most by the ones whose jobs demand from them to be communicative because they interact with customers or students. They commented:

“The embarrassment I have as a person is alleviated. For example, before the drama workshop, when I had to interact with people whom I didn’t know well enough, I felt embarrassed. Now it is not that intense.”(Vaso, 29)

«Every day I am more and more relaxed, cool and I smile more ... In my job as a pharmacist, I am in constant interaction with the patients and I make them feel comfortable, which is important»(Ntina, 25)

They also mentioned that they tend to trust more other people in their lives and be more relaxed, even with the ones they do not know well. All the participants referred to the trust exercises as the most memorable. The following two replies show us the way trust has helped participants:

“I am used to doing everything alone. I realized that this might be a sort of lack of trust. I went hiking and at a certain point, where I was afraid to cross, I accepted someone’s help because I remembered an exercise we had done” (Anta, 32)

“We had done an exercise for which we were separated in couples and we had our hands tied, and then every member of the team jumped on the hands of the rest of us. It was an exercise of trust. I remember this exercise every time I am in a crowded place, like a club and for example I am shy and I don’t want to dance. In the end I always dance.” (Ann, 22)

Exposure

All the participants reported that they actively used and further refined techniques of public speaking and work-related communication. They feel more “comfortable” in front of the public and have “no fear” of being exposed. Among the participants we have teachers who mentioned that this helped them a lot with their jobs. All of them reported gaining self – confidence and obtaining new skills and advanced techniques in communication forums such as formal presentations and team meetings:

“After some drama courses I got more familiarized to being exposed to the public. As a consequence, this year I was more comfortable and relaxed with the presentations I had to do.”(Ann, 22)

“It has improved my professional life a lot because, as a teacher, I constantly have to talk to an audience. By becoming more expressive, I believe that the way I teach is much better in comparison to the period before the drama workshop.”(Anta, 32)

As a result of the exposure in front of others, all the participants mentioned that after the workshop they feel more confident about their opinions and about expressing their feelings. They “tell the truth without fear” and try to express even their “negative emotions” that before the drama courses they used to suppress:

“I have learnt now that we have to express all our emotions, even the bad ones that I used to suppress ... Now I express all my feelings.” (Anta, 32)

“... now I say my opinion without fear and I am not ashamed of it. Before the drama workshop it was difficult for me to present myself in front of a lot of people” (George, 43)

Claiming

Several participants shared how they had become more assertive and confident back in their workplace and with their personal relationships. They reported that they recall the exercises they have done during the courses and had to claim and win something from the other members. When reflecting on these exercises, the participants felt “more confident”, “strong” and “courageous”. A typical response was as follows:

“The improvisation with the advertiser had certainly a positive impact on my professional life because it made me feel more confident and that I have the strength to carry out whatever has been assigned to me” (Antrew, 38)

Back in their lives and their workplace, they claimed to feel the same strong and confident and that they have started to undertake tasks on their own initiative. Moreover they are more assertive when they feel they are right about a specific issue.

“For example I am more active and I am not ashamed to talk to my superiors... I negotiate more on whatever concerns me ... I undertake responsibilities and tasks on my own initiative and with courage I carry it out.” (Ann, 22)

“I saw that I have to claim more consistently and intensely what I want ... disappointment is of no help at all.” (Ntina, 25)

Problem solving – Creativity

As discussed in a previous session, drama courses gave the opportunity to the participants to face up to situations they may have never faced in their everyday life. During the

improvisations they were called to find solutions and that helped them “develop their imagination”. The participants appreciated highly the opportunity they had of becoming more “creative” in their everyday life because they have started to come up with more than one solution to their problems.

Self-discipline and creativity help them when they have to encounter a problem because instead of losing their temper they reported that they can “stay calm”, “relax”, think better and deal with the situation by making the appropriate decisions. Two of the participants described how this helps them in their jobs:

“My job is about informing people with special needs. Many times, when the situation is difficult, drama courses taught me how to keep my temper and relax the others... ” (Vaso, 29)

“Today a new student came to my classroom and he had an aggressive behavior. I blanked and didn’t know what to do until I remembered an exercise we had done at the drama workshop ... in the same way, firmly and slowly I approached him and talked with him until he calmed down”(Anta, 32)

2.5 Post course comments

All the participants reported that they met their expectations to a large extent during this drama workshop. Some of them feel they have to continue the courses in order to better develop their skills and some others said that their expectations were low considering what they actually learnt. They all agree that it was a fruitful experience.

When reflecting on their experiences of learning, the participants felt that they became more “sociable”, “relaxed”, “expressive” and “confident”. They reported that they improved their ability to listen carefully, observe, communicate and cooperate effectively. In addition they developed skills such as self-control, confidence, discipline and problem solving and of course vocal and kinesthetic abilities.

The improvement of the skills mentioned above was highly appreciated and was considered as an asset for a professional development. Apart from that, drama courses offered the opportunity to the participants to “relax”, “get away from their everyday problems” and “get to know themselves better”. Thus, they mentioned drama’s positive impact on their psychology and were reached to the conclusion that it has improved their personal and professional life overall.

3. Answers to the research questions

To understand how drama courses benefit the life of the participants, the findings were further analyzed and categorized with relevance to the research questions. At this point we also try a chronological approach of the findings using line charts.

3.1 Research question one: Which employability skills are developed during drama courses?

To answer the first research question the data were analyzed through the list of employability skills that literature gives us.

Conceptualizing / thinking skills:

During the improvisations the participants were called to react to the various situations they were involved in and they also had the opportunity to watch and learn from the reactions of their classmates at the same situations. This helped them seek different points of view in each situation and be “creative” and “imaginative” while they also try to improvise in their lives.

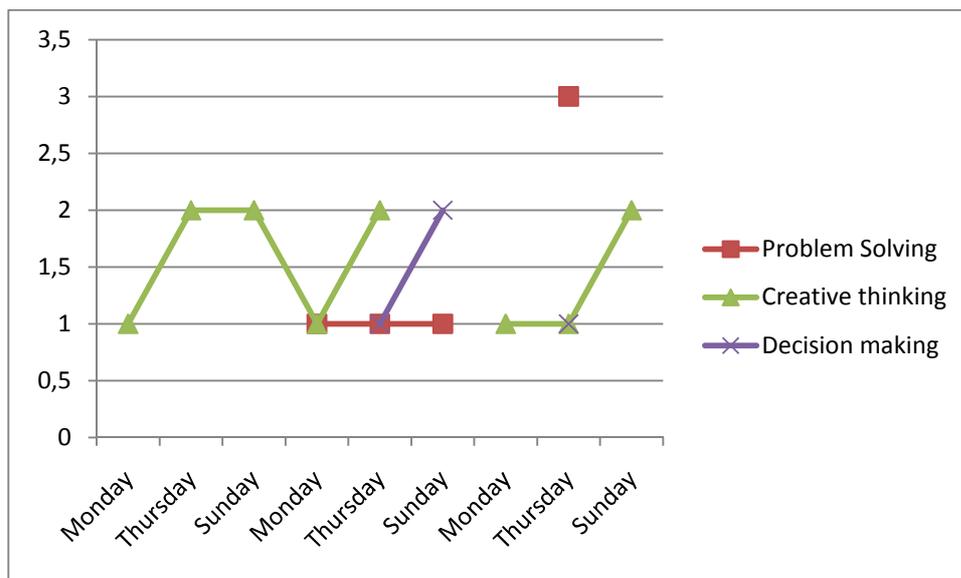


Figure 3. Total number of references on Conceptualizing Skills over a three week period.

Figure 3 presents the total number of references on conceptualizing skills made on the days the participants filled in the diary. As we can see in Figure 3, we have comments on creative thinking from the very first day of the workshop and from almost every day of the rest of it. This is normal if we consider that from the first lesson they are called to do improvisations. Developing creative thinking, in particular, has been mostly appreciated by the teachers who also use the exercises they have participated in during the drama workshop with their students and therefore, their lessons become more interesting and pleasant.

During and after an improvisation, the participants mentioned often tended to think how they would react if that was a real situation. For example one participant wrote:

“... I was thinking whether I would have the same reaction if I had the same problem with my girlfriend and I figured out that I would possibly do the same thing” (Andrew, 38)

By reconsidering their behaviour during the improvisation they evaluate the decisions they made and the possible outcomes these decision may bring up. In addition they learnt how to “stay calm” during crisis and as a result they feel more capable of solving the problems that occur. Figure 1 shows us that problem solving and decision making are abilities that are mentioned after the first week of courses. That might mean that it takes more time to develop them or that it takes more time for the participants to understand the impact that drama courses have on these abilities.

Interpersonal skills – social competences:

The participants of the current research not only realized the importance of non-verbal communication but also claimed to have developed their body language up to a certain point. According to their statements after the drama courses they feel more “familiar with their body and their movements” and they use them effectively to “highlight their feelings”. They have also learnt how to control their voice and their facial expressions and use them as tools in the communication game.

Another important skill that our participants have developed is listening carefully. For the exercises, they needed to listen and ask questions to understand the others’ points of view and they stated that they have transferred this attitude to their working and personal life. Practicing in paying attention to their partners was highly appreciated by the participants because it helps in understanding and communicating better with them, in learning from their reactions and opinions and in becoming more observing in general.

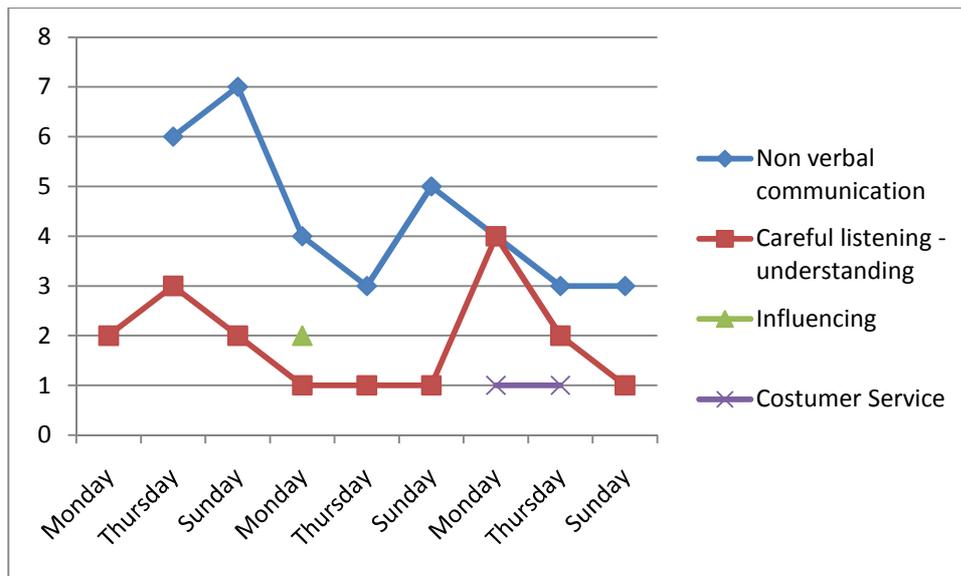


Figure 4. Total number of references on Interpersonal Skills over a three week period.

Figure 4 presents the total number of references on interpersonal skills made on the days the participants filled in the diary. In Figure 4 we can see that the participants referred to non-verbal communication almost every day, even Sundays, which can be explained by the fact that exercises in which they had to express themselves in various ways, besides talking, are part of every lesson. Furthermore, they have repeatedly mentioned that they take notice of their own and of the others non-linguistic expressions in their everyday life. Careful listening is also commented every day because it is the skill that the participants appreciated the most since they have entered it to their attitude.

Influencing / convincing has been mentioned only in one day during which the participants performed a particular improvisation for which they were supposed to be advertisers who had to promote their product. One of the participants described the benefits of that improvisation as follows:

“The improvisations with the advertiser helped me a lot in developing my persuasion and imagination so as to impress the others by making my product as attractive as I possibly could.” (Andrew, 38)

As far as customer service is concerned, it was only mentioned during the last week of the lessons because it is actually referred as a consequence of developing “patience” and “facility” during the precedent lessons.

Work ethic dispositions and attitudes:

The attitude of an employee may come last to the list of the desirable qualification but it is an asset for both the employer and the employee because it can transform working to a pleasant occupation. The drama course has helped the participants in being more “energetic” and

“active” while working and in this way they feel more “productive” and “cheerful”, in other words they have become more enthusiastic when working.

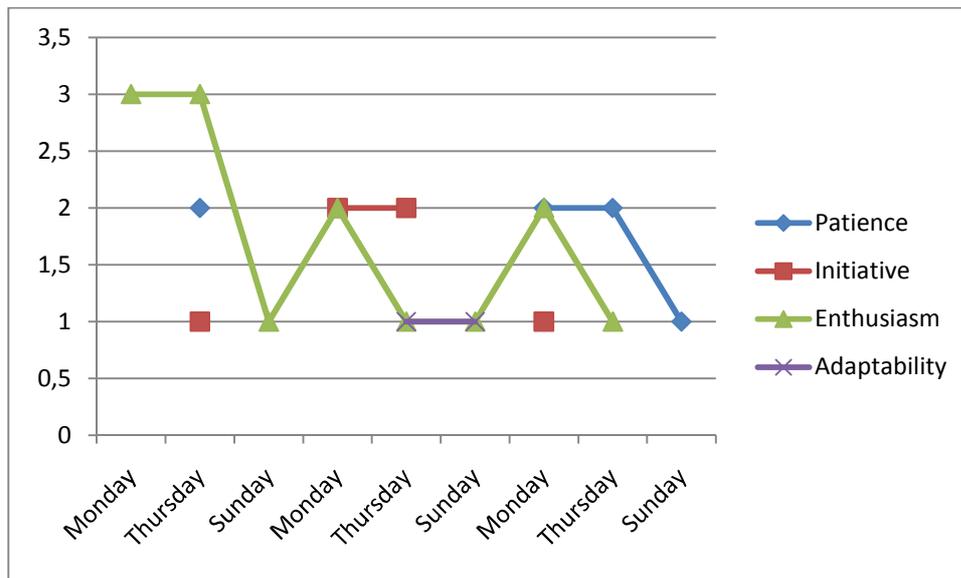


Figure 5. Total number of references on Work Ethic Dispositions over a three week period.

Figure 5 presents the total number of references on work ethic dispositions made on the days the participants filled in the diary. As presented in Figure 5, the first two days of the course the enthusiasm was in its highest level which is reasonable since the participants saw the drama workshop as a hobby and as a result they had all the excitement of starting their new activity. In addition, we notice that they referred to the positive impact of the drama courses on their psychology mostly on Mondays and less on Sundays. This is also an expected result since on Monday they filled in the diary right after the lesson so they were still influenced by it. Sunday on the other hand is four days after the previous lesson so its impact on their psychology is less intense. Nonetheless, comments on the enthusiasm caused by the lessons are present during the whole project.

Another important impact of drama courses is that the participants became more patient with the people they collaborate and with the ones they serve while working, e.g. costumers. As we can see in Figure 5, patience is mentioned mostly during the last week and that could imply that it takes time to develop it but it has also been mentioned on the second lesson. So, we conclude that time plays a minor role in developing the characteristic of patience.

Back in their lives the participants claimed to feel more “confident” about their opinion, “strong” and “courageous”. Not only they are trying to be creative but they also take initiative to start new tasks and be responsible for new projects. As far as initiative is concerned, Figure 3 is interesting in that there are no references on initiative during Sundays which could be explained by the fact that it is not a working day so there is possibly no chance of starting a new task.

The last skill mentioned from this category is adaptability. Anta, a teacher of 32 years old, on a working day mentioned that she changes the way she confronts her students from being “strict” to being “pleasant” according to their attitude. On Sunday she claimed that adaptability helped her participate easily in new groups. We could not include adaptability in the list of the skills adopted during the drama courses, since it is commented only by one of the participants but if one person claims to have developed it, then others might do as well.

3.2 Research question two: In what way is collaboration among the participants enriched during drama courses.

Working effectively within a group is one of the desirable employability skills. At this point we will summarize the findings of the research that refer to teamwork, with relevance to the attitude of the individuals and the relationships between them.

With regard to the individuals’ attitude the responses of the participants show that they realized the importance of collaboration, became goal oriented and they acknowledged the pleasure of achieving an objective with your teammates. They tried to overcome their personal objectives and use creatively their differences for the sake of the team’s goal. They also recognized the responsibility each one has towards the team.

As to the relationship between the members of the team the most important outcome was that they created a climate of trust and understanding. First of all trusting the team helped them feel more comfortable with sharing their thoughts and ideas and that was mostly appreciated when they had to provide feedback in the end of the lesson or resolve a conflict. In this climate of mutual understanding they learnt how to listen carefully to each other and be supportive when somebody is trying to do something. As a consequence, they recognized and respected the other people’s diversity and perspectives, the other’s opinion, efforts and contribution to the team.

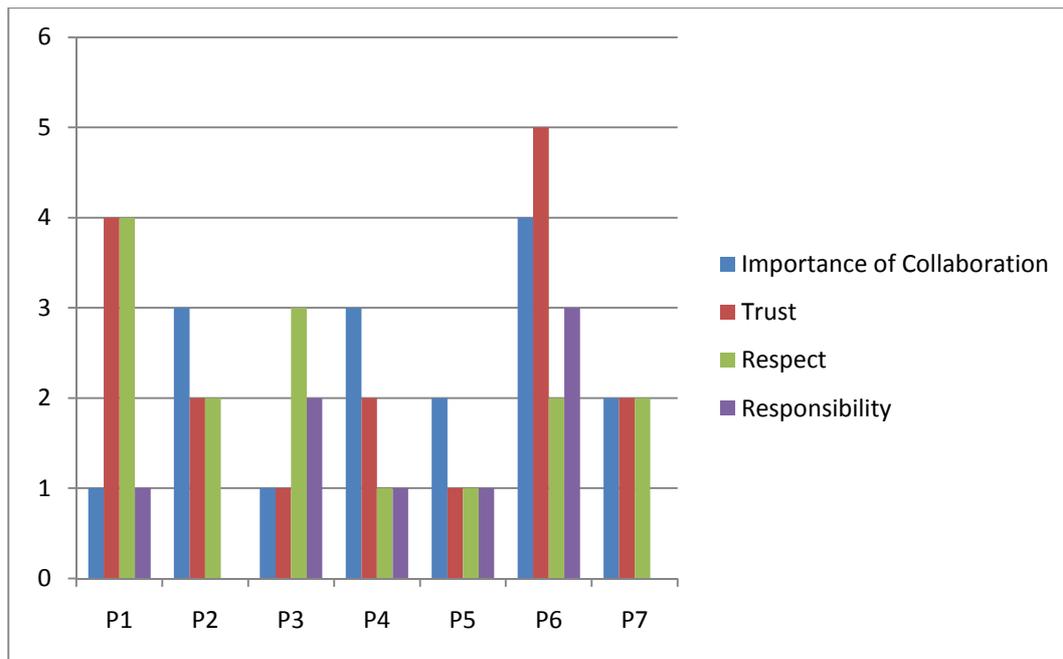


Figure 6. Total number of references to the Importance of Collaboration, Trust, Respect and Responsibility from each participant.

Figure 6 presents the total number of references on Self-awareness and Self-Control made on the days the participants filled in the diary. This diagram indicates that all the participants claimed to recognize the importance of team work, respect and trust and almost everybody realized the responsibility each member has towards the rest of the team. All of the elements of good collaboration that we described were almost equally commented by the participants. There were no important differences regarding the timeline of the comments.

3.3 Research Question Three: What impacts do drama courses have on the participants' personal and/or professional lives?

As we have already discussed, drama courses had a positive impact on the professional lives of the participants because of the employability skills they have developed. These skills have also helped the participants with their lives beyond work. In addition, drama courses helped the participants with their working life in various ways, apart from the skills they have gained. We are examining these two aspects in order to answer our last research question.

As far as the first aspect is concerned, the positive impacts of drama workshop on the participants' working life that also influenced their personal lives are communication skills, understanding, patience, enthusiasm, problem solving and decision making. Developing communication skills had a positive impact on participants' lives because it made them feel more "comfortable with their own self" and "relaxed" with people they first meet. Understanding and

patience improved their relationships with the people in their lives. The good mood they have after the lessons also make their lives in and outside work more cheerful.

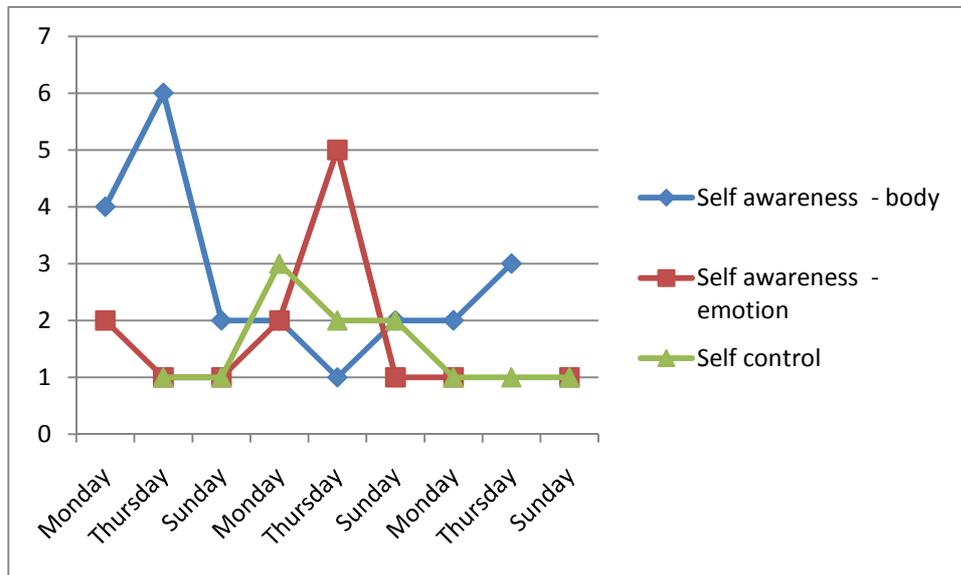


Figure 7. Total number of references on Self-awareness and Self-control over a three week period.

Figure 7 presents the total number of references on Self-awareness and Self-Control made on the days the participants filled in the diary. Figure 7 indicates that they first got in touch with their body and movements and kept working on that until the end of the third week but with a decreasing pace. From the very first day they also came closer to their emotions. On the second Monday we reach a peak on self-awareness, considering emotions and this is explained by the fact that that day all the exercises and improvisations were on the theme of violence which is one of the most intense topics. The comments reveal that self-control is a consequence of self-awareness. For this reason it is not a surprise that although the first reference to self-control is on the second lesson it actually appears mostly after the first week.

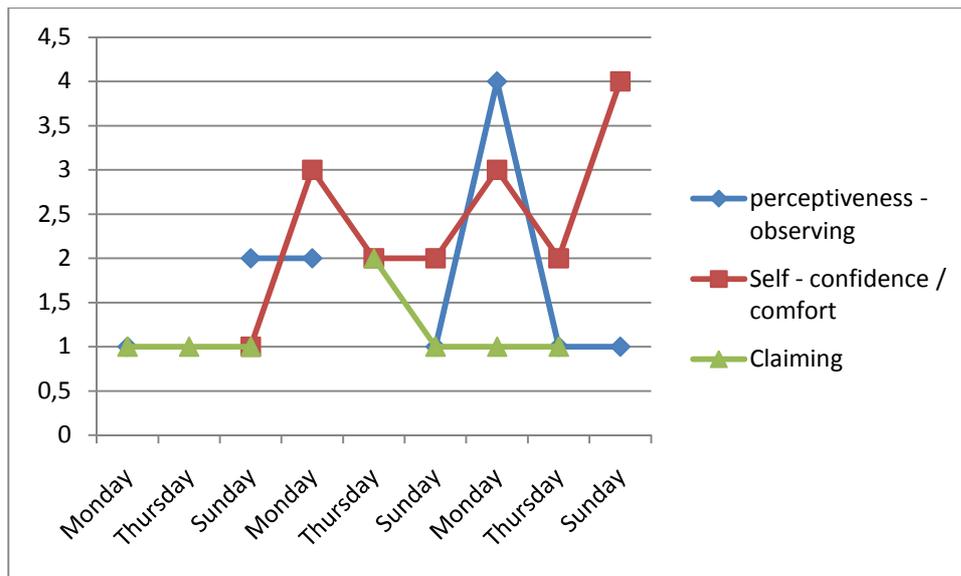


Figure 8. Total number of references on Perceptiveness, Self-confidence and Claiming over a three week period.

Figure 8 presents the total number of references on Perceptiveness, Self-confidence and Claiming made on the days the participants filled in the diary. Regarding self-confidence and comfort the participants claimed that after drama courses they feel less embarrassed and more comfortable talking in front of an audience and particularly with people they first meet. As it appears in Figure 8 self-confidence takes time to be developed and it has been mostly mentioned on the last Sunday which makes us suppose that it had the most intense impact on participants' lives.

The participants have developed their perceptiveness because during the drama exercises they had to be observing and keep as much information as they could from their environment and their partners. Figure 8 indicates that the participants felt to be more observing during the last week and mostly on the last Monday which can be explained by the difficulty of the exercise they participated in, for which they had to keep as many elements as they could from their surroundings. Claiming seems to be unaffected by the time factor.

4. Researcher's reflection

The researcher took part in the workshop as a student and as a result she had the opportunity to observe the reaction of the other participants and at the same time live the experience of attending a drama lesson. At the beginning, everybody was a little bit shy and needed encouragement to start an improvisation but in time they started taking initiatives. The most embarrassing exercises seemed to be the ones that involved eye contact or weird body movements. As the time passed everybody seemed to becoming more open, they started sharing their opinion in the end of the lesson and their comments were more substantive. Of course it was not easy for everybody and not everybody opened up at the same time. Some participants even after the completion of the workshop were hesitant. What was unexpected is that this group started collaborating and achieving easily the goals of the exercises quite early.

Taking part in the exercises helped in understanding the power of drama in skills development. The exercises affect the participants in an indirect way because the ultimate aim of the exercises is not told to the participants who only know the first hand goal that has to be achieved. For example, there was a game with chairs in which one person is on foot and is moving towards the unique free chair and all the rest are trying to prevent him/her from sitting. The purpose that the players should have in mind and work for, is not to let him/her sit down but the exercise aims in making the participants work together, understand how every single member is important for the team, observe and communicate with each other with anything but words. In order to get the most out of an exercise you need to be concentrated in the purpose that is set and after it is over, a reflection can be given through a discussion between the members.

5. Conclusion

According to the overall reflection of the participants the drama workshop had an impact on their skills that were transferred from the classroom to their personal and professional lives. As a training program the drama workshop aimed and succeeded in creating knowledge, developing skills and changing the attitude of the participants. First of all, they became self-aware of their body, expressions and movements and learnt how to use them as communicative tools. The knowledge they have gained during the workshop concerned voice and facial expressions techniques and body relaxation techniques that they use in their everyday lives. Moreover, they understood the importance of body language in expressing feelings and ideas.

Considering the skills that the participants claimed to have developed there is a broad list that depends on the personality and the perceptiveness of each one and the subject of the improvisation of each day. The skills that were referred by almost all of them were self-awareness and self-control, communication, expressive ability, observation, initiative, creativity and self-confidence.

Self-awareness includes the knowledge of both the body and the feelings and results from the full-body exercises and the improvisations that engaged the participants in newly-faced situations. Self-control appears after self-awareness and also refers to both body and feelings. The expressive ability of the participants was developed because they appreciated the importance of body languages and they also learnt how to control it. The communication skills include the ability to listen carefully and express using also non-verbal communication.

During the exercises and mostly during the performance of an improvisation a participant has to be aware of as much detail regarding his/her surrounding as possible and that can make him/her more observant. Furthermore, creativity and initiative are developed because the teammates of an improvisation game have to react to each other's actions instantly and in a way that make the outcome interesting for the audience. In the safe environment of the classroom and with the certainty that they can try their ideas without any consequences the participants gradually felt more and more confident and learnt to express themselves more openly and make suggestions.

Teaching the actors how to collaborate effectively is one of the most important goals of a drama workshop because on the stage they all are co-dependent. The comments of the participants regarding the importance of collaboration were, therefore, more than expected. Specifically, they appreciated the importance of working together under a common goal leaving outside any personal expectancy. In addition, trust, mutual respect and understanding between the partners were commented by everybody as key factors for a productive cooperation that will

lead to the desirable results. Finally, through this procedure they realized how everybody is responsible towards the team and affects the result of the common effort.

Besides the skills they have developed, back in their workplace and their personal lives the participants also changed their attitude. After the drama workshop they feel more comfortable with other people, open and confident enough to express their feelings and ideas and that helped their personal lives since they are more communicative. They are trying to listen carefully to their interlocutor, be patient and understanding and this was considered to have benefited their professional life. Self-discipline, initiative and assertion also affected their work lives. The teachers, in particular, that took part in the research appreciated the most the creativity they have developed, which they are trying to apply in their job making their teaching methods more appealing to their students. Finally, since the participants face theatre as a hobby, they expect to have a good time during courses and as they reported, when they leave the classroom they are relaxed, with better psychology and that follows them to their personal life and work.

The benefits of the drama workshop that were commented above were according to the opinion of the participants of this research and they depend not only on their personality but on the improvisations they took part in and the level of self-awareness of the skills they improved. Some of the skills, such as the use of non-verbal communication, are taught directly and some others, such as self-confidence, are consequences of others. The variety of the benefits that we discussed shows that there is also a variety in the ways that drama workshops could be used for adult training.

First of all there are some benefits, for example good mood, self-awareness and assertion that were referred by everyone. No matter what made them feel that the courses helped them, they all considered that their involvement with the theatre was beneficial for their lives. So we come to the conclusion that it is a way to achieve personal development for anyone who seeks to improve his/her capabilities and obtain new ones. The skills that were referred to this research are applicable to somebody's work regardless of his/her professions because they are transferable employability skills and also impact on his/her personal life.

Adult educators can use drama-based courses in order to make the learning experience more fun and engaging. Since the instructor can choose the topic of the improvisation that the students will conduct, they can use it to give life to theories. The teaching material becomes a real situation that the students are not only involved in but also affect the result. For example, in a training program for psychologists we could conduct improvisations having as a theme: 'how to face a patient who is in panic' and this way engage them in using the theory they have studied. Also, improvisation is an experiential teaching technique so it has more potential in

developing generic skills. Again, the subject of the improvisation triggers different reactions and needs different abilities of the participants to be used. For example, an improvisation on “TV commercials” needs the participant to become convincing but polite and pleasant while an improvisation on “claiming what you think that belongs to you” needs from the participant to become assertive and demanding. As a result, the enterprises can add drama-based techniques and improvisations in particular, in order to enhance the abilities of their workers or train them in new situations in a faster, more pleasant, more engaging and effective way.

The current research gives some indications for the use of improvisational drama in adult training that aims not only in in-service training but also for personal development. It is however important to keep in mind that it is a qualitative study that was conducted with a small group of people and thus the results can't be generalized. There is a need for more research and maybe more focused examination of each outcome of this one in order to form generalized conclusions. Another limitation of this research is that it is based on the self-reflection of the participants that can't be verified since there are no measurements. But the purpose was exactly to examine the impact of drama courses from their perspective. Even if they did not all profit by the drama courses as much as they said, still the indications for the benefits of this workshop are valid and trigger for more investigation on how to make adult training more interesting and effective through drama.

Technical knowledge can be taught but generic skills have to be developed. Drama-based learning offers a chance for direct connection between theory and practice in a safe and non-threatening environment and can be adjusted to the needs of the training program. From another aspect, when it comes to skills development, through drama-based training, learning happens handily and in an indirect way. The students focus on the purpose of the exercise but at the same time and without always realizing it they practice their skills. For example when a team works together to create an image with their bodies they learn directly that they have to cooperate in order to do that, as the theory says, but during the exercise a climate of trust is built between them. Trusting is a side-effect of the exercise so we have “side-learning”. The discussion in the end of a lesson and the personal reflection can help the participants realize the impact that the exercises had on each one. Finally, we should keep in mind that a workshop is insufficient in changing us. Continuous and recurrent training helps in maintaining the skills we have obtained.

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