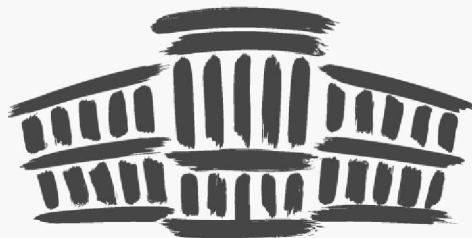


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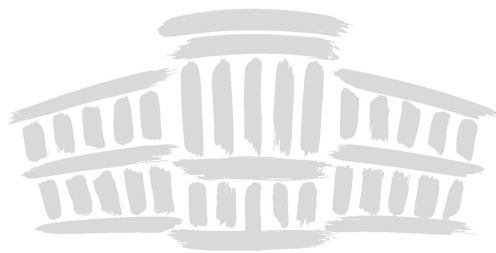
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CHANGING PARADIGMS
IN EDUCATION AND SCIENCE



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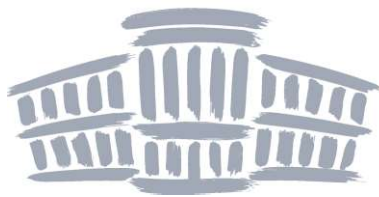
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COMPLEX DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS IN KINDERGARTEN EDUCATION THROUGH THE METHOD OF 'MANTLE OF THE EXPERT' (MOE)

Abstract

In my study, the complexity of kindergarten children's skill development is presented through the empirical and theoretical aspect of 'Mantle of the Expert (MoE)' method, a specific type of education approach based on drama pedagogy (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995). Participating in the expert play, the children acquire and improve their skills in variable areas and provides opportunities for a range of cognitive, emotional and social abilities. The adaptation of MoE in preschool education can be understood within the framework of dramatic play and it can be justified by the main features parallel of the Hungarian National Basic Programme for Early Childhood Education (2012). The empirical research regarding with the MoE method was conducted in the Central Kindergarten, Jászberény, where a "playing library" was established and the kindergarten children are involved as "professional" library visitors and librarians. The qualitative interview research presents the views of parents of kindergarten children according to the children's abilities and skills in the context of expert play..

Keywords: *kindergarten, Mantle of the Expert Method, complex development, skills*

1. Heathcote's expert play method (MoE)

Dorothy Heathcote developed her innovative teaching approach in the middle of the 20th century named the Mantle of the Expert(MoE) method (Farmer, n.d.). In the 1980's the MoE method was designed specifically for teachers as a dramatic-inquiry based approach to teaching in order to help them know how to generate imaginary contexts to raise motivation and evocative activities for successful learning (Heathcote, 2002).

As Taylor (2017) described Mantle of the Expert is similar to roleplay or imaginary play because the children imagine themselves in a character with abilities and powers they really own and they take on the role of a certain character. What is more in the Mantle of Expert method than in the typical roleplay is that in the expert game the children are conscious of being involved in an expert team, working collaboratively on the same commission. According to Van De Water, McAvoy and Hunt (2015) the children are responsible for working on important assignments, exploring together, caring about the things they do. During the playing situation the real world is still all around them, it never actually goes away, but the most important is that the children are fully aware of this and they operate within the fiction (Taylor, 2017). Being aware of moving from the real world to the fictional, the teacher calls the students attention to reflect on the process and to think about the aim and purpose of their work. Through the expert play they acquire skills and knowledge that they can apply in their everyday lives, moreover they develop commitment and increase their self-confidence.

The expert play can be adapted in kindergarten education while an imagined context can be designed in order to improve different skills and to get new impression and knowledge about the world. The kindergarten children can experience different situations, variable ways of acting and ideas and they learn to be conscious of their new skills and concepts acquired. "...the children dealt as naturally as possible with questions for which, according to the ingrained practice of ...education, their age does not predispose them." (Kaposi, 2011:11)

1.1. Mantle of the Expert (MoE) method as an opportunity of complex development in Central Kindergarten (Jászberény, Hungary)

In the Central Kindergarten of the Jászberény City Kindergarten Institution (Hungary), children and kindergarten teachers founded a kindergarten library as experts (librarians) in 2019 (see more in Bernhardt, Kunné and Magyar, 2022). Based on eight pre-school children's idea, the children and the kindergarten teachers established the contract, set up the place and location of the library, designed the method of running the library and decided about the roles and tasks (librarians and readers/visitors). Meanwhile all the challenges or problems to be solved were discussed.

Illustrating the description how MoE method works, an adaptation and development of Taylor's figure (2017) as a sequence of activities from library can be presented by Figure 1.

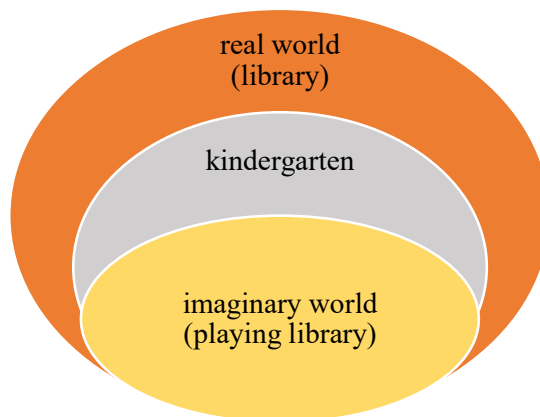


Figure 1: *A sequence of activities from Library (made by the author)*

- Inside the fiction the students imagine they are librarians, they are responsible for running the library, giving and borrowing books and taking care of the conditions of books.
- Outside the fiction they are kindergarten children who have books at home and they can find different books in the kindergarten too, they know a lot about the variable types of books and go to the library with their parents or their kindergarten teachers.
- Back inside the fiction they use this knowledge to run the library as librarians. They collaborate with the readers who go to the library to borrow books.
- Outside the fiction the students apply their developing knowledge for creating the library room and the process of running the library.
- Inside the fiction they meet the readers to give them books and arrange the fluent way of borrowing books from the library.
- Outside the fiction the students talk about the library with each other and the kindergarten teacher, reflect the process and the running of the library.

In this way the teacher helps the kindergarten children move in and out of the fiction, create a sequence of different episodes and the opportunities for learning. The kindergarten teacher - as a facilitator - provides them with the resources, support, and feedback they need to meet the challenges of the fictional context and the demands of the librarian.

2. Complex skill development concerning the MoE method

The uniqueness of children's playing activity and its positive impact on their personality has been conducted and demonstrated from many perspectives, in terms of psychology (Piaget, 1970; Mérei and V. Binét, 1978), pedagogy (Millar, 1973), sociology (Andersen and Taylor, 2009). In response to the age specificities of kindergarten education, Körmöci (2019:75) argues that "playing is the most important and most developmental activity of early childhood and thus the most effective tool of kindergarten education."

According to the typology of pedagogy of play, drama play can be understood as a category in its own right, based on action, which makes the individual active and influences cognitive, affective, dynamic and social aspects and develops the complex personality (Tombak, 2014). Within drama play,

the use of expert play in childhood is a synthesis of movement, language and communication, thoughts and feelings. It requires active participation of the actors (the children) and therefore priority is given to strengthening cooperative and collaborative skills at the level of age specificity. Concerning the above mentioned facts, it is worth comparing the characteristics of expert play with the potential and developmental effects of drama play, as summarised in Table 1 below (the elements of the expert play by Aitken (2013: 40-41) are adapted and further improved and combined).

Table 1: *Correlation between the characteristics of expert play and the development impact of drama play (table made by the author)*

Specificities of the expert play (comp. Aitken, 2013)	Development impact of drama play in specific areas
1. „ <i>Drama for learning</i> ”: the work is always done on paper (i.e. not with real raw materials);	decision-making and thinking skills; creativity and imagination;
2. „ <i>Tensions</i> ”: the notes are not not as a final result, but as a source; the teacher plans for certain obstacles during the completion to arise;	motivation to explore; cognitive skills (acquisition and application of knowledge);
3. „ <i>Reflection</i> ”: conscious observation is present;	self-awareness, positive self-image; memory;
4. „ <i>Company</i> ”: the work is task-oriented, but the company must start with the setting up of the company;	communication skills (expressiveness, use of conversational phrases, courage to speak); social sensitivity; interpersonal and social skills;
5. „ <i>Fixtional context</i> ”: the work is not real, but realistic all the time and there is dual awareness of both (metaxis);	concentration; work performance; sense of responsibility;
6. „ <i>Frame</i> ”: everything takes place in real time (all work phases must be executed);	spatial and temporal awareness; creativity; motor development;
7. „ <i>Powerful repositioning</i> ”, „ <i>Client</i> ”: children are positioned as experts; the teacher positions children as knowledgeable and competent colleagues;	empathy; task awareness; behavioural norms and habits (conflict management);

As it is presented in Table 1, the characteristic features of MoE method cover the main skills and capability areas. In the process of improving kindergarten children's attitude and skills, 'librarian play dressed up as an expert' (Mantle of the Librarian Expert) provides opportunities for a range of physical and psychological improvement through drama playing (especially in the role of the librarian). A few of the skills and capabilities are priority areas, such as emotional-volitional sphere, cognitive sphere (psychical functions, linguistic development, playing activity), physical development (healthy lifestyle) and social skills (attitude formation) and the previously mentioned ones can be effectively developed by the MoE as summarised in the table below (Table 2).

Table 2: *Development impacts of the playing library (table made by the author)*

Developmental aspects of the Mantel of Expert (MoE)
I. Emotional - volitional sphere
<i>Emotion</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Their role expressions become more structured; - Their dual consciousness is activated (now playing "civil" in the group or having a librarian meeting); - They assert their will and ideas when adapting to the community; - They agree, discuss, collaborate; - They promote and reinforce cultural patterns of behaviour (both as readers and librarians);

<i>Volition</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Their decision-making skills are developed; - Their decision-making is characterised by democracy (they vote on a new idea); - Their sense of responsibility becomes school-level (they keep track of what days they are scheduled); - Their conflict management is more colourful; - Their moral judgement becomes more colourful;
II. Cognitive sphere
<i>Psychical functions</i>
<p><i>Perception-perception</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Their spatial orientation is well-developed (shelf order, structure); - Their perception of time follows the order of the week well (work schedule); - Concrete perception of the passage of time is well monitored by supervising the return of books; - They are more advanced than their peers in their knowledge of time; - They have a good understanding of concepts of time and use temporal relations correctly; <p><i>Memory, attention, thinking</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Their visual memory develops through their knowledge of books and their ability to count; - Their number sense goes well beyond the 10s (they recognise numbers up to 250); - Their thinking is characterised by having more information about the world than is typical for their age group; - They have unique ideas and experiment with individual solutions (voice search on the internet); - Their attention is sustained and focused; - They create and interpret symbols (symbols for the order of borrowing, symbols for the order of shelves); - Their use of ICT tools is purposeful and conscious - They create rules and take responsibility for their observance (library rules)
<i>Linguistic (mother tongue) development</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They own high quality, nuanced expression; - They have the ability to argue and express themselves in and out of role; - Their skill of storytelling are more advanced than their peers; - They are no strangers to forms of address and affectation;
<i>Playing activity</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Their playing is more advanced than that of their peers; - They are more successful than their peers in organising play, planning long-lasting play themes; - They are more creative in designing playing spaces;
III. Social skills
<i>Attitude formation</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They have positive attitudes towards books and reading (see later for details) - They have a maximum respect for books; - They are more empathetic and tolerant towards their peers; - They are more polite, their social habits are more stratified; - They are more cooperative and capable; - The older ones can be able to mentor the younger ones;
IV. Physical development
<i>Healthy lifestyle</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They considered it important to introduce epidemiological rules (disinfecting hands, ventilation, disinfecting tablet, putting tissues out);

Proving the connection of the MoE method and kindergarten educational process focusing on skill development, the following teaching-learning situation can be presented when children are interested in the topic of 'birds'. In Hungary due to the daily practice of complex activities, the kindergarten teachers work on the same themes/topics in their groups (e.g. birds) due to the same yearly and monthly and weekly planning based on the Hungarian National Basic Programme for Early Childhood Education

(2012). This allows them to place books that are related to the actual topic (birds) on the offering shelves in the library. In cooperation with the Jászberény Municipal Library, the playing library acts as a branch library. Having more books or magazines on a certain topic, these published items can be available to the kindergarten children. Also on a thematic basis, the Municipal Library's Folktale Point (Jászberény) has been called upon, where children can play with felted birds (see more about literacy education by the application of MoE method in Magyar, 2002). Moreover the puppets were used as decoration in the library for the bird theme. Adapted to the topic (birds) and taking advantage of digital culture and digital tools, kindergarten children can also find recordings and pictures on tablets or laptops about the certain subject.

The previously mentioned example can characterize how complex and interdisciplinary kindergarten education can be and how deeply conscious a kindergarten teacher's planning should be.

3. Notions and views on the development of children's skills regarding to the playing library

In a preliminary qualitative research, structured interview method was used with 11 parents focusing on their experience and views about the playing library in Jászberény. The research took place in The Central Kindergarten (Jászberény, Hungary) in February 2022.

In this study only some of the results are presented (see more details and results in Bernhardt, Kunné and Magyar, 2022). Overall we inquired how the parents think about the development of skills and abilities concerning different spheres. In the interview we listed 15 different spheres, skills and attitudes and the interviewees were asked to think them over by using the options of 'Absolutely', 'More likely, yes', 'More likely, no' and 'Not at all'.

Not surprisingly all the spheres and areas were given very positive answers, the parents used only the options of 'Absolutely' and 'More likely, yes'. In relation to the parents' views the following areas are over-represented (N=11) that playing library can cause a positive impact: *memory; problem-solving skills; knowledge acquisition and the interest in books.*

The answers of N=10 'Absolutely' vs N=1 'More likely yes' stated that *expressiveness, conversational formulas; use of phrases; creativity; attention; task awareness; cooperation* can influence their child's development positively. The importance of *speaking skills, speech activity; roleplaying; sense of time; conflict resolution* was highlighted by views of N=9 'Absolutely' vs N=2 'More likely yes'. The least options mentioned that *vocabulary, language use* sphere can be well improved by participating in the playing library (N=8 'Absolutely' vs N=3 'More likely yes').

Moreover, in the interviews kindergarten children's parents gave us specific examples of their personal experiences related to different skills and attitudes experienced previously in their child's development on variable areas.

The child's memory could be tested: „*Every week the child happily reports what has happened or what they will be doing in the library*” (P3) and the problem-solving skill aroused: „*My little librarian's brother didn't bring the book home he borrowed, because he couldn't find it. He played out in his head how he would solve the problem in the afternoon and did it the next day.*” (P7). One of the interviewees told that interest in books increased: „*My little boy is positively affected by the librarian role, because he is more interested in books at home. He likes to choose a book and then looks at it for a long time. He also likes to find a story book and ask us to read it to him. He is lucky because we have bookshelves at home and he often sees us reading. However, there are families with few or no books, and in their case a playing library might have an even greater positive impact.*” (P10).

The expressiveness, conversational phrases could be realised by one of the parents (P9): „*I love it when she used new, adult words at the right time, in the right place.*” Furthermore kindergarten children's attention and responsibility was detected: „*She learned that it's time to take the books back.*” (P11); „*The punishment for not returning the books really helped my kids to learn to take responsibility*” (P1). Children learned to cooperate: „*We had to get to the kindergarten early every morning because the library had to be "opened", packed and prepared for the readers.*” (P4) and got to have courage to speak and had more speech activity: „*I experienced the courage to speak when the team members/staff introduced themselves at the launch and then signed a contract.*” (P6). They enjoyed being in the role of a librarian: „*Let's hurry, Mum, I'll be the librarian today!*” (P2)

4. Conclusion and further implementation

Participating in the playing library as a Mantle of the Expert approach, the children obtain and improve special skills in different areas and develop their cognitive, emotional, social and physical abilities. The adaptation of the expert play in kindergarten education, that is one of the most innovative and creative ways, is culminated by drama education, inquiry learning, and the situation involving children in the position of experts.

In Jászberény, teachers and students teacher (EKE Jászberény Campus) in cooperation with the children have already started another expert game, when children became experts of entomologists (experts dealing with insects). Although the playing library or the playing insect farm are taken into consideration, it can be stated that one of the most important advantages is that the aims and positive impacts of expert plays can be linked to the basics and conceptions of Hungarian National Basic Programme for Early Childhood Education (2012). Furthermore kindergarten teachers' role functions much more a facilitators than as educators. In addition educational process becomes much more intensive, interesting and challenging and the complex improvement of skills turns into be much more effective. So should kindergarten education adapt and use the Mantel of the Expert method? Definitely, yes!

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