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**Applied drama and forum theatre in the  
classroom: An arts-based research in  
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**Geza Mate Novak<sup>1</sup>**

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**Proposal Information**

Applied theatre and drama in the school are able to reveal aspects of social life on dramatic, narrative, reflective, symbolic, and aesthetic levels (revealing the necessity of human conditions), thus eliciting a reaction from the audience: committed creative work and self-reflective feedback, during the increasingly deeper learning process transform the “spectator” into a thinking-playing individual (Boal, 1979/2000).

The applied theatre of the 20th century derives from the critical theatre forms developed by Brecht. It is also informed by the critical pedagogy issues of Paulo Freire, the Oppressed Theatre works of Augusto Boal, and British theatre in education programs, while based upon other important antecedents and practices (Boal, 1979/2000; Conrad, 2009; Prentki & Preston, 2009, p. 12). By the beginning of the 21st century, applied theatre practice as a social and pedagogical intervention, associated with the international trends, has been manifested as participatory action research and arts-based research (ABR), making an impact upon traditional theatre art and the social sciences as well (Leavy, 2015, p. 11).

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<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Special Needs Education, ELTE Barczi Gusztav, Ecsery ut 3, Budapest 1097, Hungary, Email address: [geza.novak@barczi.elte.hu](mailto:geza.novak@barczi.elte.hu), ORCID: 0000-0002-2183-1706

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At the center of these projects are often parts played by social groups, which do not enjoy a sense of empowerment without theatre. The applied theatre tools give them the opportunity to use their own voices and to represent themselves. Moreover, as expressed by Prentki and Preston (2009, p. 10), the theatre has to appear “for” community, “with” community, or “by” community. theatre communities apply different forms according to their different aims – understanding social problems better or building the empowerment of marginalized or oppressed groups, which play a limited or insufficient role in the activities of their communities.

At the beginning of this century, the research-based practice of Applied Theatre has manifested as an innovation, action, experience and arts-based intervention, as well as a platform or forum with social-critical intensions (Denzin, 2003; Hartley, 2012; Leavy, 2015; Norris, 2009; Saldaña, 2011).

Forum theatre is a community theatre form, associated with other theatre-based forms, which has arisen from Augusto Boal’s work, like “Theatre of the Oppressed” or “Verbatim Theatre.” The aim of these forms is to develop skills of the participants through workshops and community building activities (Gallagher, 2015).

The subject of the project is “*Preparing youth at risk and clients recovered from substance use for family life with applied drama and theatre therapy methods.*” Using several methods of research allows us to examine both the results and the process of investigation. It permits us to ask not only what happened but how it happened (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Forum theatre is applied to the educational process to help students to explore their possible role in taking part in social and personal level of social participation. How does this forum theatre project influence on the attitudes of participants on social integration issues?

We observe how works the forum theatre-based project during the examined period and use the performance and different dramatic-based practices as research tools. The main goal of our research is to explore social involvement of participative and school groups. We focus on social activity and equality issues such as social inclusion, disability issues, lifestyle problems, and conflicts between generations (e.g., How the students can respect the other’s own reality?). During the project, our purpose is to analyze the narratives of the participants on their experiences generated by forum theatre method.

## Methods

In ABR, the researcher examines the way the student absorbs the experience and the way she/he interprets gestures and movements in the accentuated space. In ABR, the performance becomes the subject of qualitative research (Leavy, 2015).

This ABR project is divided into 6 half-year sessions between June 14, 2017 and March 31, 2020. Each session consists of two 16-hr workshops with the participative group (experts of drama/theatre in education and animators on the fields of substance care and theatre therapy). The participative group creates forum theatre programs for the groups of young people in risk and for the disadvantaged students in the targeted institutes/schools of countryside in Hungary. Altogether 24 classes will be involved in the project. In the examined groups, introductory drama workshops and project evaluations will be performed by the end of each session.

The qualitative methodology of research is based on document analysis ([LeCompte & Preissle, 2003](#)). The data are drawn from forum theatre performance and dramatic-based practices and the semi-structured interviews are used with qualitative narrative analysis (covered by ABR method). The research team examines the efficacy of workshops' process, the participants' involvement, and the role of key professionals of the 3-year applied theatre project. The results of the interview analysis and the suggestions will be shared with the practitioners of the Hungarian and international professional educational theatre community.

The patterns appear in the forum theatre program in the format of personal experience (creating the scenes), recalled experience (reflections during drama work), story (creating background stories), and other narrative elements in drama work. In this triple-method model (theatre + drama + interview process), both an individual and a collective dimension will be incorporated when constructing the events of the social world the participants live in.

Data will be obtained from interviews and project documents ([Leavy, 2015](#), p. 199). Reflections and analysis also occurred during the interview process. The interview process can be linked to previous experience (from the applied forum theatre and from their own lives). From that, the actual (individual or social) basis of the students' behavior patterns can be interpreted.

## **Conclusions**

Drama- and theatre-based techniques considering other emerging factors have an indirect effect on students' aspects of diversity issues. Therefore, with its complex art-pedagogical methods, applied forum theatre helps the students to get familiar with the topics mentioned above.

We can expect that the applied drama and theatre method will have positive impacts on improving the competencies of the participants as social communication, democratic attitudes and tolerance, cooperative, collective, and creative work. It can also significantly help improve students' self-awareness and the level of acceptance of others. It enables the

students to change their stereotypes when they moved the experiences from the drama/theatre world. It enables the students to interpret their individual and collective experiences through narratives. The forum theatre project in the classroom develops a greater understanding of the problems of inclusion and exclusion. In the frame of forum theatre, we use problem-solving and conflict management drama techniques, so we are able to give more empowerment for oppressed or marginalized groups.

Finally, the methods of forum theatre will enrich students' experiences on social participation during the developmental process. The drama/theatre-based research practice is a real challenge for cooperation and gives a chance for bridging the social and learning differences and diversification (Leavy, 2015).

Using theatre/drama-based practices, we create a place and an opportunity for the participants to discuss questions on the topics of diversity or being different. The project also helps them to be able to share their everyday experience and feelings in the group.

Theatre applications provide a vital chance for value acquisition and the creation of a truly equitable community.

**Keywords:** applied drama, forum theatre, social integration, arts-based research, drama in education

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