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DRAMA EDUCATION IN CROATIA TODAY - AN EXPERIENCE BASED STORY

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Abstract

The author gives a personal overview of the development of drama education in Croatia in the last twenty years and presents the ideas, conclusions, strategies and achievements in the field of practice and theory of drama pedagogy of which he was not only a witness but an active protagonist. Strongly moved by the warfare situation in the first half of the 1990s and its devastating consequences for life of individuals and societies the contemporary drama education in Croatia developed not only as a kind of arts education, but as a didactic approach with important psycho-social, developmental and educational outcomes and effects. Ever since these post-war years the enthusiasm of Croatian teachers and educationalists for drama education was nourished by the international movement of drama and theatre education worldwide. In the course of the years Croatian drama pedagogues, organized in the Croatian Centre for Drama Education, were catching the pace with drama education in other countries but also met numerous questions and dilemmas, in theory and in practice, about purposes and objectives, methods and strategies, as well as about the effects and outcomes of their work and profession. In his review the author is mainly concerned with the implantation of drama education and pedagogy in the Croatian educational system.

Keywords: Drama/theatre education, drama pedagogy, creative drama/theatre work with children and youth, National Curriculum Framework

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1. Starting point

Social, educational and therapeutic potentials and benefits of drama and theatre activities especially in working with children and young people become widely recognized in Croatia during and immediately after the last wars in the region. The warfares of the 1990s, which invariably hit and left their scars upon all societies in the region, in a way challenged numerous educationalists and socially aware artists to give their immediate professional and creative response to the social crisis. Many of them reacted on ethical impulse, without any previously learned lesson of how to act in such extreme situations, and spontaneously used and applied creative techniques and medium of drama and theatre in work with war-affected groups and communities. However, at that time a number of experts and professional associations working in the field of psycho-social assistance and therapy, often supported by international humanitarian organizations and institutions, has launched various emergency programmes to support war-affected groups in the war zones, refugee camps and settlements, in schools and other settings, as well as in communities affected by war and its consequences, and these projects extensively and very often primarily used drama and theatre techniques in their activities as their main methods.

2. Purpose of the review article

Starting from this initial background of a general social fracture and crisis in which creative theatre and drama proceedings have proved as valuable and effective educational and therapeutic methods, this article will describe the development of contemporary drama education in Croatia with a focus on the main activities, goals and problems which emerged as important issues in the course of the last twenty years. Although this historical analysis is rather personal and mainly experience based, still it is my belief that my article can be considered a document that bear witness of constructive engagement of Croatian educationalists in building and establishing the contemporary drama pedagogy in Croatia as an organised system, as a verified methodology and, finally, as a recognized and appreciated educational profession.

3. The pre-war roots of contemporary drama education in Croatia

Although the painful reality caused by the wars of the 1990s incited numerous educationalists, therapists and artists to react humanely and professionally to generally devastated social and family life and especially to disrupted childhood and education of

practically all children in Croatia,¹ the awareness of the psycho-social, educational and therapeutic values of drama and theatre work with vulnerable groups could have been created not only by immediate evidences and positive effects recognized through these activities, but also thanks to the widespread creative drama practice with children and youth which existed in the pre-war period in Croatia, as well as in other parts of the former state, the practice which has been since the 1960s systematically fostered and gradually developed through the theatre education of teachers and leaders of the school theatre groups, through the school theatre festivals and through the work of several children's and youth drama/theatre studios of that period which were the hotbeds of *children's scenic creativity*, as it was then called. Based, on the one hand, upon this pre-war tradition of creative work with children and strongly instigated, on the other hand, by the immediate moral and professional demands of the aggravated war and post-war situation in which the majority of children lived, hence arose a great enthusiasm and willingness of numerous teachers, pedagogues, social workers, psychologists and art educators to participate and further educate themselves in drama and other creative activities which could be applied for educational and/or socio-therapeutic purposes. Since that time, i.e. immediately after the wars of 1990s, also the term drama education has gained the wider acceptance as a general concept which, although it often includes very different types and forms of drama and theatre work, has gradually acquired an increasing appreciation as socially and educationally valuable practice.

4. The foundation of the Croatian Centre for Drama Education – a milestone in development

Drama Education in Croatia received an especially strong momentum in 1996, when, prompted by the echoes of the 2nd Congress of the International Association of Drama / Theatre and Education (IDEA) held in Brisbane in Australia a year earlier, the Croatian Centre for Drama Education (HCDO) has been founded with the initial funding from the Soros's Open Society Institute Croatia. In its first years the HCDO initiated educational workshops led by Croatian and foreign trainers and teachers² and organized two important

¹ "The first Croatian nation-wide screening for post-traumatic stress among elementary school children realised after the war proved strikingly that virtually all children in Croatia, no matter where they lived during active military operations, were exposed to lasting series of traumatic war experiences – 92.1% of all children experienced terror due to air or general raids; 90.2% of them spent more than 36 hours in shelters; 74% of them witnessed shooting in their immediate environment including shooting in the home; 46% were forced to leave home; 37% changed school; 31% faced grief and mourning after losing something very important in their personal life, whether a person, one of their dearest toys, a pet, a plant or something similar." (Krušić, V. *Escapism? Why not!* (1996). In O'Toole, J. & Donelan, K. (Ed.) *Drama, Culture and Empowerment*, Brisbane, IDEA Publications.

² The first foreign trainer was Tintti Karppinen, a well known Finnish drama pedagogue.

conferences, "Potentials of drama education work in the prevention of psycho-social consequences of war for children and young people" and "Potentials of drama education work with children and young people with special needs", which both had a strong public advocacy effect, because they testified to what extent and with what enthusiasm the different professions in the field of education and psychological and social support (teachers, school psychologists, rehabilitators, social workers and other educators) embraced drama work and related educational approaches as an effective methodology of psycho-social assistance and social integration, of personal growth and as an experiential and participatory way of teaching and learning. Among the workshops organized by the Centre at that period the particularly innovative and stimulating one was the eight-day *theatre-in-education* workshop³, held in summer 1997, which laid the foundations for the first TiE productions in Croatia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the next decade.

However, the basic education and training in drama pedagogy of motivated teachers and other educational workers took place through the workshops organized most often in collaboration with the educational system and school authorities. The Centre for Drama Education was closely connected to these through the annual school festivals of literary, theatre and journalistic creativity of students, which in fact continued the tradition of similar festivals of the pre-war period. The workshops, designed as a one- to three-day practical courses, were generally focused upon the acquisition of the basic methods of *creative drama work* with children (games, exercises, improvisational expressive techniques), but gradually they were supplemented with numerous "new" methods and techniques transmitted mainly from Anglo-Saxon drama teaching practice. Through workshops at home and abroad, but also studying and learning from the available professional literature,⁴ the Croatian drama education partisans became acquainted, along with the basics of *educational theatre* (TiE), with techniques like *teacher-in-role* and *the mantle-of-expert*, with *forum theatre* and other Theatre of the Oppressed techniques (*image theatre*) and with *process drama* (Krušić, 2002, Boal, 2002). This first period, permeated with general pedagogical enthusiasm and activism,

³ The workshop was held in August 1997 in Prvić Luka at the Adriatic coast and it was led by British drama educators Roger Chamberlain and Tag McEntegart. The workshop was financially supported by the Care International Organization.

⁴ The chief source of knowledge and information at that time was, rather expectedly, the professional literature in English, since it is true that in the second half of the 20th century predominantly the Anglo-Saxon teachers and theoreticians cleared up the ground for drama education and its concepts throughout the world and created the dominant matrix for understanding it as a specific educational field. So we have read and studied the books and articles by such authorities as Peter Slade and Brian Way, Dorothy Heatcote and Gavin Bolton, Cecily O'Neill and John O'Toole, Norah Morgan and Juliana Saxton, as well as the publications in English of such influential author as Augusto Boal.

came to its end when, in 2002, a previously intensive and close cooperation with the Ministry of Education was “broken”, after which the systematic drama-pedagogical training of teachers through jointly organized workshops was interrupted for a decade.⁵ The highlight and, in a sense, the conclusion of this period was marked by the publication, in the same year, of the book by Iva Gruić "The Passage in the Imaginary World - Process Drama or Drama in the Making: Manual for educators, teachers and all those involved in drama work with children and young people",⁶ in which the author,⁷ one of the co-founders of the HCDO, gathered basic features of one of the main flows of the contemporary drama pedagogy, namely of *drama-in-education*, focusing upon and describing its main genre – the *process drama*.

5. Developing local resources and reflective discussion of the field of practice of drama/theatre education in Croatia and its goals

Although in that period of general flourishing of contemporary drama pedagogy all around the world it seemed most important to learn its methods and be able to apply them within our own socio-cultural and educational contexts, even at that early stage, along with constant and unequivocal advocacy of *drama education* as inherently humanistic and progressive pedagogic approach, there appeared a need to check, review and assess all that abundant material ranging from simple exercises and child games to complex didactic and psycho-developmental concepts and techniques. There is no doubt that the world drama pedagogy has richly and generously awarded us, but it has also burdened us with some specific understandings and concepts that could be attributed to the specific socio-cultural and pedagogical contexts as well as to the educational and theatre traditions in which these dominant trends developed. In the period that followed – less pressed with then urgent tasks of deeply ethical and pedagogical engagement during and immediately after the war, but loaded with new issues and questions of function and status of education in a politically parted and economically stratified transitional Croatian society still in search of its identity –

⁵ After that, drama training of teachers, educators and students takes place in workshops organized by different institutions: the HCDO held them at their annual conferences, the Ministry and the Institute of Education (since 2006 the Agency for Education) within the frame of their own activities. In 2002 the private Studio Kubus in Zagreb starts on the regular basis a varied drama- pedagogical workshops, and since 2004 the Drama Studio Tirena, run by the members of the HCDO, launches a more systematic training program at the Summer Theatre Camp in Pazin in the Istrian county.

⁶ Gruić, I. (2002). *Prolaz u zamišljeni svijet - procesna drama ili drama u nastajanju: priručnik za odgajatelje, učitelje, nastavnike i sve one koji se bave dramskim radom s djecom i mladima*. Zagreb. Golden marketing.

⁷ In 2005, Iva Gruić defended her doctoral thesis at the University of Central England in Birmingham and became the first Croatian PhD in the field of drama/theatre education.

the questions about the goals and tasks of the vividly sprouting drama education had to be asked and answered differently, i.e. to a much greater extent with regard to the real institutional conditions and personal resources needed for its current development and the possibilities of its systematic implantation in formal and informal education.

The first problem that we have already met in the beginning of this development was concerned, apparently, with the terminology and its transfer in a different cultural or linguistic context. But this actually pointed to the need for a broader and more comprehensive consideration of the two contexts: the context in which a particular term has been generated and used with a specific meaning, and the context into which a particular term is being transferred or translated. Developing in a highly multidisciplinary space of necessarily fluctuating and converging boundaries the contemporary theory and methodology of drama pedagogy have in a way shaped their concepts and their specific terminology as a kind of meta-speech characteristic for specific, linguistically and culturally determined, cultures and environments. The most powerful and linguistically most influential was of course the culture of the English language; its supremacy, however, was and is a source of frustration for some other linguistic environments that shaped their theoretical and practical discourse and professional terminology in the field of drama/theatre education by relying primarily on their own theatre and pedagogical traditions and cultures.⁸

The noticed differences of contexts and the varying meanings that some basic and generally widespread notions have in different cultures and languages induced me to investigate more closely the phenomena, the concepts and the related terminology found in the common field of actual drama and/or theatre education, to perceive their differences as well as their congruences and overlaps in different cultural contexts and, consequently, to make an effort to designate the specific ground for drama pedagogy in the context of our own cultural and pedagogical actuality and tradition, to produce adequate theoretical and methodical frameworks and finally agree upon the definitions and terminology. In this endeavour, which is still in progress, I opted for some terms as pivotal – such as: *drama education* (as distinct from *theatre education*), *drama pedagogy*, *educational drama*, *educational theatre* and the like – aware that, although some mutual semantic overlapping

⁸ In French the term drama is related only to the literary or theatrical genre; to describe the field of contemporary drama education the actual French terminology uses the complex words théâtre-education or arts de la scène-éducation, and only recently the term pédagogie dramatique can be occasionally found. It is similar in German in which the term Theaterpädagogik has always been used for drama education and the whole field it covers, which clearly shows that the notions of drama as well as of theatre are understood differently than in domain of the English language. On the other hand, in The Netherlands a rather clear distinction is being made between drama pedagogy as educational approach in the classroom teaching and theatre pedagogy as a form of teaching theatre skills.

simply cannot and should not be avoided, the main terms and concepts should be defined and understood with regard to the both – to their meaning and function in the general international field and practice of drama and theatre education, as well as to their meaning in our specific pedagogical and cultural tradition and terminology. Doing so, we – me and my colleagues from the HCDO – are preparing the ground for a better and more appropriate comprehension, in our cultural and pedagogical context, of all forms and concepts existing today in the domain of drama and theatre education and, based on these insights, we hope to be able to better define the accessible objectives and directions of actions for drama pedagogy in Croatia and for our Centre.

Bearing in mind the mentioned diversity of concepts, practices and understandings in the common field of drama/theatre education, we did not define our goals as some unique mission and purpose, but rather as possible and reachable effects and outcomes in various strands and levels of manifold activities that we carry out. Therefore, we determined our tasks in accordance with the most frequent forms of actually present educational drama and theatre work in Croatia and considering the needs that such work requires for its development and positive educational outcomes.

In Croatia there are actually two principal forms of drama/theatre work which can be considered as serving educational purposes. In both cases it is principally the work with children and young people that legitimizes its educational character.

The most widespread and traditionally inherited type of practice is *the creative theatre work with children and youth* which is present, on the one hand, inside the formal educational system in the activities of *school drama groups*.⁹ On the other hand, this type of work is also present, as a kind of the informal education outside the school system, in the practice of many *drama and/or theatre studios*,¹⁰ often operating as parts of professional theatres or cultural institutions. (It is worth mentioning that the number of drama/theatre studios in Croatia has considerably increased in the first decade of the 2000s.) Both practices, inside and outside the school system, are in fact based upon and are continuing and developing the strongly rooted tradition of the *children's scenic creativity* of the pre-war period.

The second type of undoubtedly educational drama or/and theatre work is less evident, and consequently less researched and elaborated, but it is slowly and gradually

⁹ In Croatian, the official school terminology keeps the word *dramski* in the title, although it is basically the theatre oriented kind of work whose objective is always a theatre production.

¹⁰ The Croatian title *dramski studio* also generally implies the work aimed at preparing and building a theatre production. Such use of the basic term *drama* convincingly indicates what was its traditionally accepted meaning in Croatian culture and education.

growing and spreading in the school practices: *the use and application of drama proceedings as teaching and learning methods in schools and other educational contexts*. It is drama pedagogy in its specific and most accurate meaning and function as *classroom drama or drama for learning, for personal and social growth* or, in particular contexts, *for therapy*.

Our Centre, as well as its members in their respective professional settings and organizations, continually supported and promoted the development of both types of work, either through the workshops and projects organized by the Centre or through the activities and programmes organized by other institutions, but with our members as teachers, trainers or facilitators.

6. Drama/theatre education in Croatian teacher training colleges and at the universities

Drama/theatre education programmes, or their elements, in the actual higher education and university curricula in Croatia are present at several institutions.

At the Croatian teacher training colleges, as well as at the teacher training schools across the former state of Yugoslavia, there was traditionally a subject entitled "Puppetry and scenic culture" intended mainly for students of the preschool education. The purpose of such a course was to empower the future preschool teachers with the basic practical knowledge of (puppet) theatre production and presentation and of *creative theatre/puppetry work* mainly *for* and less *with* children. With the arrival of Iva Gruić, in 1993, on what was then the Zagreb College of Education this kind of work gradually grew into a subject much more related to the contents, methods and goals of the contemporary drama/theatre education and intended not only for the future preschool educators but also for the primary school classroom and subject teachers. Moreover, in 2007, with the merger of teacher studies from three different towns, Zagreb, Petrinja and Čakovec, in a unique University of Zagreb Faculty of Education, the conditions were created for a more systematic training in drama pedagogy of the future teachers, as well as for a more clear positioning and determination of drama pedagogy not only as a didactic approach and methodology, but also as a specific educational field that can and should be investigated, analyzed and developed. Thenceforth, also, the former unique subject has been divided into three separate courses, "Scenic culture", "Puppetry" and "Drama education", which make part of the teacher training syllabus.

Another stronghold of drama education at the University of Zagreb is the Department of Social Work of the Faculty of Law, where, after some workshops in "dramatic expression"¹¹, there exists, since 1999, an optional course of the basic training

¹¹ We find the same term often used in French as expression dramatique.

in educational drama intended for the future social workers. This course has been started and consequently maintained by the members of our Centre.

The third spot where drama education has been present at the university level was the Department of Croatian Language and Literature at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Zagreb. Between 2003 and 2010 I taught on several occasions the basics of educational and creative drama/theatre work with children and youth to the future primary and secondary school teachers of Croatian language and literature.

With the precious exception of the future social workers, these programmes were primarily intended for the future preschool and classroom teachers and the teachers of the Croatian language and literature and this principal focus, determined by the institutions in which the courses took place, has been quite in line with the long ago established dominant practice in which drama/theatre creative work with school children has been mostly the professional domain and expected task of these teaching professions. Besides, such determination also reflects the generally dominant understanding widespread among the school professionals that any kind of drama/theatre work with students is in fact a part of their literary education.

Along with the courses realized or developed at the institutions of professional education the HCDO accomplished most of its training programmes in drama pedagogy directly in the schools, through specific projects supported by the Ministry of Education and targeted at particular problems and/or social groups. For instance, in the school year 2004-2005, within the project "Forum Theatre for the School without Violence", the HCDO launched 12 workshops for teachers and students with over 200 participants. The project has been realized in cooperation with the UNICEF Office for Croatia and took place all over the country. In the period from 2011 to 2013, the Centre conceived and realized the Croatian part of the international project initiated and funded by the Open Society Foundation Budapest entitled "Educational theatre and drama as a tool to facilitate Roma inclusion". Within the framework of the project we realized 10 workshops for teachers who work in schools with a larger number of Roma students; the workshops were attended by over 180 participants. We also devised, in cooperation with the 12-14 year old students as performers, a Forum programme about discrimination and bullying in the school, which has been performed 8 times for their classmates and peers in various schools in the regions with larger number of Roma students. Over 200 youngsters, most of them Roma, participated in these performances. Finally, in 2014, with support of the Ministry of Education we implemented the project "Participatory and drama methods for civic education", which consisted of 6 workshops held in different

parts of Croatia and attended by 137 participants (classroom and subject teachers, school pedagogues and psychologists etc.). In this project, the instructive part of each workshop has been supplemented by the feed-back session held a month or two later, in which all the participants presented and shared their experiences in applying drama methods for teaching civic education themes.

7. Publishing programme at the Centre for Drama Education

Such activities and projects of the HCDO and its members, aimed at spreading positive experiences and shaping – new – objectives and methodologies of contemporary drama pedagogy in Croatia, received an important supplement when the Centre launched its publishing programme and edited a series of manuals with the principal aim to supply practical help in their everyday work not only to our members but to a wider scope of interested users – school teachers, social groups and civic organizations leaders and activists, drama/theatre pedagogues in drama/theatre studios etc. With somewhere more and elsewhere less detailed theoretical explanations and, when necessary, added definitions, all the books are rich in descriptions of games, exercises, methods and techniques suitable for different purposes. Some books contain a number of examples of drama/theatre work in appropriate contexts, e.g. for school lessons, for preparation of the school plays, for forum theatre at school and in the activities of the civil society organisations, for work with socialization and therapeutic groups, etc. We launched our publishing programme modestly in 2005 with the Croatian translation of the very useful manual for creative work with children in drama/theatre groups and studios written by the British theatre teachers Anna Scher and Charles Verrall, *100+ Ideas for Drama*, and it was shortly after followed, in 2006, by its sequel *Another 100+ ideas for drama* (2006). In the next years we realized our more ambitious projects: in 2007 we published the book *I Play and I learn! - Drama Methods in Classroom Teaching*, completely written and edited by our members, inventive and motivated classroom teachers (Lugomer, 2008). The same year, as the outcome of an international project we conceived and published the manual of the Forum Theatre entitled *Don't Discuss, Act!*, in which the instructive part was supplemented, firstly, by a theoretical elaborations and definitions of the Forum Theatre as theatre genre and educational technique, and secondly, by a dozen examples, all realized and described by the participants in the project, of how they used the Forum Theatre technique in different contexts (Krušić, 2007). In the following years we edited two more books: in 2008 we published another valuable and very practical manual – *Imagine, Experience, Express! - Drama Methods in Teaching the Croatian*, which was again completely produced and edited by our creative and diligent

members. The last book that we managed to launch in 2009, before the financial crisis has put an end to our publishing programme, was Augusto Boal's classic *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*.

8. Dilemmas and challenges for contemporary drama pedagogy in Croatia

This practically oriented activism was not, however, been deprived of some general issues and dilemmas that, depending on the country, in different ways burden the entire area of contemporary drama pedagogy. One of them is the question: *how should drama education be implanted in the educational system* – as a subject, as an extracurricular or even out-of-the-school activity or as a didactic method and approach applicable in different educational fields and subjects? Faced with these dilemmas the HCDO did not openly opt for either of the concepts of drama education, taking into account the evident plurality of its forms, types and levels of manifestation not only in the school or in the educational system, but also in a much wider range of social and cultural areas and phenomena. Nevertheless, *drama education*, more precisely *drama pedagogy as its methodical aspect*, received in Croatia its partial formal elaboration within the school system. In 2010 the "National Curriculum Framework for the Pre-School Education and the General Compulsory and Secondary Education" (NCF) has been adopted as an umbrella document and the basis for curricula of all lower levels (schools, subjects). The NCF has been conceived as a "framework for the acquisition of basic and professional competences" and for "the definition of expected student achievements" in various educational areas, including in the "art area". Within this area, with our contribution, the "dramatic culture and art" has been for the first time elaborated and described in such a document as a specific educational and art field. The purpose and goals of *dramatic culture and art* have been indicated within the general description of the whole art area.¹² In the same way the specific educational contribution of each sub-area has been framed by a joint platform,¹³ which in all of its components builds upon UNESCO's "Guidelines for Arts Education" created as the final document of the First world conference on arts education held in Lisbon in 2006. Moreover, the elaboration of the

¹² "Education in and through the arts contributes significantly to the formation of personal and social and cultural beliefs and worldviews, creating the personal and public, national and European cultural identity and the acquisition of universal humanist values, respect for differences between people and cultures, developing empathy, cooperation, solidarity, and personal, social and cultural responsibility." (NCF, p.152)

¹³ "Arts in education contribute to mental, sensory, emotional, social, physical, spiritual and creative development of students, allow the connection of students' individual skills, knowledge and experiences with other educational areas and their integration into the wider social and cultural value systems and worldviews." (ibid, p.152)

sub-area *dramatic culture and art* has been supplemented with the description of the expected students' achievements at all educational levels implying not only artistic or aesthetic attainments of the students, but much more the educational outcomes resulting from the process of individual and social growth and maturation, from developing social skills and communication, from cultivating critical thinking and fostering social and humanistic values, i.e. from methods and ways of work specific for contemporary drama pedagogy. Much more than the general list of purposes and goals of the whole arts area, the description of teaching/learning outcomes in this sub- area reflects the striving to *present and recognize dramatic culture and art within the school and subject curricula not only as the content to be learned* (e.g. in learning about drama as literary or theatre genre), but as a *didactic method, as a form of experiential teaching and learning applicable in different educational areas and for various educational topics*.

9. Conclusion: The future perspective for dramatic culture and art in educational context in Croatia

The inclusion of dramatic culture and art in the NCF has not, of course, immediately brought in concrete changes in the prevailing reception and forms of dramatic work within the school system, but we can say that it significantly opens the door and legitimizes all attempts aiming either at more intensive development and implementation of drama pedagogy in the school system, or at launching teaching/learning programmes and projects with educational drama as their component or even at creating specific syllabi with drama/theatre education as its main topic.

The hoped for realization of the outcomes specified in sub-area dramatic culture and art, as conceived in the NCF, requires further patient work on raising awareness of various possible uses of dramatic medium for educational purposes, primarily through education and dissemination of drama pedagogy both, as a way of stimulating and developing the dramatic/theatrical creativity of children and young people and as a form of experiential teaching and learning. The latest step in this direction, along with some other educational projects, is the preparation of a specialized postgraduate study in drama pedagogy at the Zagreb Faculty of Teacher Education, which is currently in progress and which will, on the one hand, enable interested students and experts of related fields to acquire in a more systematic way the professional drama-pedagogical competences and, on the other hand, produce qualified experts capable of further research, design and development of drama pedagogy in Croatia.

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