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Susan Colverd*
Adam Jagiello-Rusilowski**

TEACHERS' CONCEPTS OF A 'NO PENALTY ZONE'. DRAMA-BASED LEARNING FOR INCLUSIVE AND CO-DESIGNED CLASSROOMS

ABSTRACT: The pandemic related restrictions for schooling became a momentum for redefining teachers' competences to engage students in designing learning situations as equals. In the COVID-19 context the educators trained in drama identified it as a key professional resource for sharing power and inclusion of students' diversity. The aim of the study is to explore how teachers understand 'no penalty zone' in their critical incident protocols and what training support they need for professional development. The construct of 'no penalty zone' is taken from the theory and practice of drama by Dorothy Heathcote. The rationale for combining reflective teachers' practices with drama comes from the theory of liberating pedagogy of Paulo Freire. Previous research on drama as a democratising tool for co-designed learning is presented. The study analyses the teacher's concepts in juxtaposition to the incidents they chose as vicarious experiences. The results reveal personal meanings of mutual empowerment that teachers see in learning through 'no penalty zone', unique paths they have taken from totally transmissive and often high-pressured classrooms to power sharing leading to inclusivity and creativity in their classrooms. They also show the further need for drama framing skill-oriented teacher training.
KEYWORDS: drama, inclusion, co-designed learning, critical incidents.

The pandemic context of the study

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 became a strong momentum for all stakeholders of education to better appreciate relations that serve inclusive learning. Imposed on-line activities made teachers realiwe that their professionalism had to be based less on the delivery of content and more on their agility to share power and responsibility with students (Oyler 1997) who appeared to be natives of digital world and could offer valuable assistance in co-designing classes. A virtual community of learners was built more effectively when hierarchical structures disappeared and teachers recognised their students' digital expertise as part of their daily life, ability to find and share on-line resources, analyse and solve problems creatively and use knowledge for meaningful purposes. Even young pupils willingly and spontaneously took on the roles of instructors of their less privileged peers to include them in teamwork. Often, they also helped teachers to cope with specific aspects of learning platforms, prompted some actions,

* **Susan Colverd** – University of Gloucestershire, School of Arts, England; e-mail: scolverd@glos.ac.uk; ORCID https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1949-1439.
** **Adam Jagiello-Rusilowski** – University of Gdansk, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Education, Poland; e-mail: arusil@ug.edu.pl; ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3485-634.

initiated activities, designed some tools to address any special needs of peers, etc. During the lockdown, students demonstrated a strong commitment to both self-directed study and ownership of learning goals and the choice of collaborative methods of learning and assessment. On-line interaction became an opportunity for including students' valuable perspectives, initiative and joyful expression of collective success.

However, when teachers insisted on traditional transmission of ready content through lectures and self-study of textbooks, assessing the work by testing, students used every mistake of their instructors on-line to disrupt or even sabotage the class. Cases of ridiculing the teacher's helplessness, inside jokes, hacking, sharing explicit images, muting or even blocking the adult from entering the platform were all means of showing that power games do not serve the purpose of learning[1]. The lack of teachers' awareness of the need for relational learning, students' desire for the ownership of their class design and discourse lead inevitably to professional burnout. Both students and teachers who took part in this study responded in the context of this raised awareness of lockdown as a 'no penalty zone' where classes are authentically co-designed and learning is collaborative or learners fight for at least a margin of autonomy.

Theoretical underpinnings

Paulo Freire (Freire 1970, 1998a) advocated pedagogy 'for liberation', in which classroom relations are equalised. He defined daily life experiences as a valuable resource which learners use to relate to while they interact with the educational content. Freire recognized that education must be related to experiences that lead to the deepening of perceived freedom, social justice, inclusion and critical thinking. Freire's theory promoted an 'understanding of history as opportunity and not determinism' and modelling hope by educators as 'an act of moral imagination'. Within this framework, equity of teachers and students alike was built through mutual problem posing and dialogical engagement rather than a one-way transmission of values or 'depositing' ready-made knowledge.

According to Freire and Shor (Freire & Shor 1987) 'the liberating educator has to be very aware that transformation is not just a question of methods and techniques but a different relationship to knowledge and to society'. In drama, participants are asked to imagine themselves differently and to behave differently, to take on roles and characters which allow them to go beyond the current status-quo. When examined against the realities of the classroom, the issues emerging from the narrative or symbolic action release the challenges and difficulties associated with trying to implement

[1] https://feverstruggle.net/2020/06/06/new-types-of-school-sabotage-in-distance-education/, 11.02.2011.

power-sharing ideals within a hierarchical structure. This kind of engagement of the pedagogical subjects is necessary as they are never of the educational homogeneous but of culturally diverse individuals. Freire advocated to cross borders of cultural identities and status. He understood inclusive education as persevering in seeking social justice, acting for empowerment and opposing any forms of oppression.

Augusto Boal translated these ideals into theory of drama which 'should help us learn about ourselves and our times. We should know the world we live in the better to change it… it is a form of knowledge; it should and could also be a means of transforming society' (Boal 1993, p. xxxi). The forum theatre method in which audiences are empowered to improvise alternative solutions and make social learning participatory added value to already acknowledged forms of adult education through popular theatre (Bates 1996).

Freirian pedagogy makes a clear distinction between formal knowledge which someone else presents to us and action knowledge that one may use for their own purposes and incorporate it into their view of the world, on which choices and actions can be based. Using 'knowledge for our own purposes' is the key theoretical assumption for this study as such a perspective corresponds with propositions made by Dorothy Heathcote. '[T]o teach right thinking' according to Paulo Freire,

> …is not something that is simply spoken of or an experience that is merely described. But something that is done and lived while it is being spoken of, as if the doing and living of it constituted a kind of irrefutable witness of its truth. To think correctly implies the existence of subjects whose thinking is mediated by objects that provoke and modify the thinking subject… [as] an act of communication. For this reason, there is no right thinking without understanding, and this understanding, from a correct thinking point of view, is not something transferred but something that belongs essentially to the process of co-participation (Freire 1998a, p. 42).

The above Freirian concepts work as a comprehensive rationale to establish a concrete basis for explaining and validating Dorothy Heathcote's revolutionary use of drama to reorder the context for inclusive learning. She emphasised that: 'students' view point has to be put to use so [that] the drama starts from where they are; simply because you cannot start from where you aren't!' (Heathcote 1975, p. 8). This position intimates one of the key reasons why Heathcote's approach to drama in education represented a distinct counterpoint to 'transmission' or 'banking' pedagogy which emphasises 'judging' and assessing what students present as a final draft (Barnes 1976). Her work belongs to 'interpretation' orientation in pedagogy as she emphasises 'response' and 'feedback' for 'understanding' as the predominant role of the teacher. In Heathcote's 'no penalty zone' instead of transferring ready knowledge, adults respond, in or out of role, to the 'exploratory' statements made by pupils as they share their hypotheses in an attempt to understand and collaboratively offer a potential solution to an investigated problem.

The 'no penalty zone' is one of the key concepts within theory and practice of drama in education developed by Dorothy Heathcote (1990). She elaborated on the work of Erving Goffman's Dramaturgical Social Interactionism (Goffman 1974) by analysing social interactions of pupils and teachers in fictional roles and distancing from roles through dramatic frames. The framing devices used for 'purity of social occasions' offer drama participants '[t]he freedom to experiment without the burden of future repercussions' (Heathcote 1980, p. 8; 1984, pp. 104-162). The improvised action is equally liberating both for students and teachers who may enter social occasions in a role (e.g., curious stranger, lost animal etc.), which allows adults to suspend their authority and control of academic knowledge to empower students to initiate some enquiry-based learning.

This 'role-shifted discourse' provides a measure of 'protection' which enables distancing. The participants get the opportunity to assume an attitudinal stance that reflects a worldview which is different from any opinion or an attitude that both children and adults could possibly evince as expressions in their day-to-day life. When participants of dramatic framing begin to speak from the point of view of their assumed roles, a new context for learning and teaching emerges that calls for new types of discourse initiatives to sustain belief in the fictional narrative that the participants have cooperated to create (Carroll & Cameron 2005).

Heathcote's practice with educators stressed the imperative for them to carefully select the appropriate language that would actively enable teachers to share 'the power to tell' with the students.

> By sometimes working in the action of the play, and sometimes from the spectator position I can give this power to the class. Role helps them do, and the teacher helps them see. In the early stages, contracts and decisions are often best taken from the spectator position so that everyone can see there is not a con-game going on. This is one of the secrets of sincere work. In a paradoxical way, then, I build trust in the drama by working as a teacher, negotiating within the actual state, while in role build trust in the virtual state. This is a very comfortable way to work for both teacher and class, for it enables all the rules to be seen as they come into action, and especially it gets rid of the teacher power to tell [the students what to do] directly (Heathcote 1984, p. 164).

The comfort she stresses, however, is not about 'free falling', joyful, creative playing or seemingly effortless gamified learning. Heathcote insisted, both in her theoretical essays and teacher training material, that what she means is a dynamic zone, with problem solving processes demanding more than just imitating or memorising certain skills and concepts, then applying them to satisfy the instructor. Analogically to Lev Vygotsky's 'zone of proximal development' – ZPD (Vygotsky 1930/2004) learners are stimulated and challenged within dramatic framing to extend their conceptual understandings and reflect upon their learning and sense of self. The role of the adult here

is not, therefore, one of a neutral facilitator who only supports children's free exploration, but the one who interacts as a knowledgeable significant other. Teachers must be prepared to be involved and intervene to help expand children's horizons as they co-construct solutions within challenges offered by adults or evolving spontaneously from fictitious interactions. Drama specialists, in particular, must have expertise in selecting and drawing attention to narrative material. Heathcote also elaborated on the importance of choosing dramatic conventions, allowing students the opportunity to become committed to the drama experience, to slow down time for thinking and exploring the implications of the choices made in or out of roles (Johnson & O'Neill 1984, pp. 165-166).

In Heathcote's book *Drama for Learning*, co-written with Gavin Bolton, the drama theorists refer clearly to Vygotsky and describe the operations of a ZPD. Bolton also discusses the empowering role a teacher plays in guiding learning activity especially through working as teacher-in-role, which became a major drama technique:

> …in the presence of an empowering adult a child can reach beyond his own capacity in carrying out a task. Teacher-in-role enhances this particular adult function. The teacher, through her role, provides a model of high expectations for the enterprise that at first seems out of reach. In time he has no choice but to aim beyond his normal ability – and to break the confines of rigidly held concepts (Heathcote & Bolton 1995, p. 35).

Heathcote's concept of 'no penalty zone' explains how role conventions function as a framing device for bringing clarity to the students' understanding of the roles they might assume as they enter into the action of the drama in 'now and imminent time' (Heathcote 1984, p. 161). Her elaborations of Goffman's concepts of the 'purity' of different types of role-based performance led to John Carroll's creation of the diagram 'Role Distance' (Carroll 1986, p. 6).

Drama in inclusive and student co-designed classroom

We understand drama in this study as an exploration of any action in a fictional context in which participants can distance themselves to feel safe and engage in learning. Drama in Education (DIE) is primarily concerned with providing the child with lived-through experience, with the enactive moment, rather than with performing the rehearsed script. It offers shared experience among those involved where they suspend disbelief and imagine and behave as if they were someone other than themselves in some other place at another time (DICE Consortium 2010). Drama experiences offer a special kind of 'living through' and 'experience' because they use lifelike situations and issues which participants may have an actual experience of (Davis & Dolan 2016), without having to live with the consequences of actions taken outside of the safe zone.

Role-taking allows the participants to respond as if they were involved in an alternative set of interpersonal and socio-cultural relationships. Any ambiguity, provocative actions, diversity of behaviours and attitudes explored in imagined action can be the source of dramatic tension but also of humour, both of which lead to discovery, new insights and an increased sense of efficacy and resilience (Jagiello-Rusilowski 2016). The drama facilitators' mission is to organise an environment of safe uncertainty which builds resilience. They use framing to enable children to get lived-through experiences 'in advance of themselves', choose content and structure pupils' focus so that they get a chance to face challenges and crises in imagination before they find themselves overwhelmed in real life. They gain the feeling of mastery over events, the sense that they are equal to life (Wagner 1976, p. 228).

Drama in Education, as an artistic and educational experience, is sufficiently evidenced in the literature as a dialogical, liberating practice of education (Tilema 2000). Activities are sequenced in drama sessions so that they build trust, concentration, collaboration and a free flow of unrestricted creative ideas and initiatives. Participants may also adopt diverse perspectives and attitudes liberating them from any imposed identities or stereotypes. They may 'feel' differently about occurring situations through the experience without feeling guilty or ashamed. While the context and roles are openly fictional, the emotions that participants feel may be 'real' while also being distanced from the real (Vygotsky 1998). Drama enables the exploration of a wider range of meaningful characteristics, with participants' experiences being curated and enacted within teacher-structured and/or student co-designed learning contexts. Teachers with experience of using drama in the classroom are equipped with tools for engaging students' creativity, therefore, they are better prepared for tolerating mistakes, changing the direction of a class in response to unfolding inquiry, improvising, appreciating spontaneity. Other liberating aspects in a drama class include mutual trust, sensitivity to diversity and special needs, giving up control, tolerating uncertainty (Lehtonen, Kaasinen, Karjalainen-Väkevä & Toivanen 2016, p. 564).

Drama is based on special heuristics, called, from Greek, 'metaxis' – the mental ways of holding two worlds in mind simultaneously: a real and fictional one. Drama allows a safe collision of the two states of being in a role and oneself at the same time. The metaxis is an educational space in which core concepts, values, assumptions or worldviews can be challenged and ideally re-worked (Bolton 1999; Bond 1993). The added value of drama according to Augusto Boal lies in the tensions that participants 'live through as spectactors' in a dialogue between these two worlds and the individuals behind their representations: the real and the enacted; the spectator and the participant; the actor and the audience (Boal 1979). Heathcote depicted the ways that teachers may

use this duality to empower their students to explore their dreamed of potential for agency and to communicate it within a trusted community of learning.

I am concerned in my teaching with the difference in reality between the 'real world' where we seem to 'really exist' and the 'as if' world where we can exist at will.

I do live but I may also say, 'If it were like this, this is how I would live'. It is the nature of my teaching to create reflective elements within the existence of reality. Brecht calls this 'visiting another room' (Heathcote 1984, p. 129).

Dramatic structures alternating between emotional engagement in role and rational distancing facilitate s re-examining of what is viewed as failures or misfortunes and any other stereotypical assumptions. Many theorists refer to the 'colleague-ness' between a learner and teacher, generated by the co-creativity of drama and the process of an ongoing negotiation and renegotiation of learning purposes and outcomes between teachers and learners (O'Toole 1992). Bowell and Heap (2005) stress that engagement in drama, results from opportunities to co-design learning processes by students which may involve expressing needs and motivations for certain content, offering specific methods of inquiry, sharing personal insights for reflection and assessment, etc. Even if learning is structured by framing and other devices offered by the facilitator, it is the participants as the community that feel ownership of the educational set up. Drama requires participants to forsake the traditional roles of students and teachers. It encourages and gives the chance to become more autonomous, self-directed, that is having a 'character to want to learn and skills to be able to access learning when, how and where it is needed'. It involves a readiness to share with the teacher and the rest of the class the initiative and 'responsibility for planning, seeking out learning resources, implementing and evaluating their own learning' (Warner 2002).

Drama facilitators are working at a deep intrapersonal and interpersonal level with the [participants] analysing behaviour, building resilience, building their imaginative capacity and problem solving but this experience and learning is cloaked in the fun of working together. (Colverd & Hodgkin 2011, pp. 114-115). This 'fun' is the freedom of working in the frame of the 'no-penalty zone' where participants are given the freedom to experiment with situations and ideas without the blocking element of 'failing' or a preconceived 'correct way' of operating. Frames and boundaries are created and explored by the group. If one looks at Boal's Forum Theatre framework, participants are facilitated by 'the Joker' (a trained practitioner) to experiment and problem solve in a 'no penalty zone' to resolve the problems or issue of a specific scenario they have been presented with. The Forum process is designed to be dialectic, coming to a conclusion through consideration of opposing arguments… It is not didactic: one-sided from the [participants] with no opportunity of reply or counter-argument – it is a co-learning drama experience in a 'no-penalty zone'.

From a collaborative constructivist perspective, self-direction and co-designing can be learnt experientially as a part of social competence. Students' engagement as equals is a context-based individual or collective response resulting from self-motivation in the specific learning situation. It depends on the level of choice that students have within an instructional setting. Readiness to become co-designers of one's own educational success also requires a balanced integration of cognitive and collaborative learning processes for the learning outcomes to become both personally meaningful and socially worthwhile (Garrison 1997).

Teachers capable of using drama are in a position to facilitate certain intrinsic capacities of children which contribute to their becoming self-directed co-designers of learning environments, especially when learners face some disadvantage, e.g., previous negative educational experiences, special educational needs that are not satisfactorily addressed or a low cultural capital of their parents. Most of the capacities needed for co-designing one's own learning overlap with educational resilience protective factors. They include a sense of emotional security, self-esteem, self-efficacy (understanding of one's strengths and limits), social competences (mobilising the resources of diverse partners), autonomy (internal locus of control) and capacity for creative problem solving, playfulness and imagination. Sensitive, supportive, and shared power relationships by educators are critically important for the development of most of these qualities, especially those to do with a sense of safety, confidence and trust in others (Werner & Smith 2001).

Inclusion in this study is understood as a state of successfully addressing the needs and voices of any disadvantaged students so that they have equal learning opportunities, and an effective provision of meaningful challenges along with constructive feedback. Inclusive classrooms build real competencies for the future rather than just fulfilling the minimum requirements of local standards to produce citizens at risk of structural unemployment. The research in the framework of the JIMAC project (Jagiello-Rusilowski 2020) shows that educators and stakeholders believe that successful inclusive education happens primarily through accepting, understanding, and attending to student differences and diversity, which may manifest in their physical, cognitive, academic, social, intercultural and the emotional functioning. The JIMAC consortium values are an appreciation of learners' diversity, unconditional support for their growth, collaboration and their own professional development. The added value of the JIMAC project is that the international consortium makes sure that teachers are supported with drama tools and rationale which develop resilience necessary for children to deal with learning barriers and unfavorable assessment.

Teachers' concepts of the 'no penalty zone' as well as their ideas on inclusive and self-directed classrooms are rooted in their previous educational experiences or based

on intuition about sharing power over planning, managing and the assessment of learning. Educators' understanding of power relations in a classroom determines their current teaching practice and professional development towards making their students self-directed, resilient learners. Teachers' belief systems adapt as a result of the diverse experiences they undergo with their students and with other stakeholders like parents or school principals. Teachers adjust their concepts in response to the demands of their school culture, and their interventions are aligned with daily activities. The teachers' concepts keep changing and are reorganised usually by the teachers themselves as a result of effective training but also after particularly 'dramatic' moments of adversity or novel challenges. It is important that the teachers are assisted in making sense of their experiences e.g., through collective reflective practice or appreciative inquiry sessions.

Relevant previous research and development projects

Best practice in applying Drama in Education researched in three EU funded projects: DICE, ARTPAD[2] and JIMAC[3] shows that drama facilitators help learners become more resilient, inclusive and self-directed when they are supported in aligning the needs, aims and success criteria by negotiating most of the parameters or narrative contexts for a community to work within. The teachers who had been trained in the educational uses of drama appear in the studies as fully aware of how selecting mediating materials helps to situate the framing, such as a story, a historical incident, documentary reports, pictures, personal or symbolic objects, compound stimulus and so on. They reveal self-efficacy in using roleplay and divergent problem-solving tasks as well as developing and sharing dramatic action, the outcome of which is uncertain. However, they are ready to guide and challenge moments in the process where participants self-reflect and learn. For Heathcote this is like a two-way street, where learning takes place – 'Role helps them to do and the teacher helps them to see' – Heathcote (1990). The studies from the above EU projects show that the more expertise the teachers have in framing and reflection tools the more resilient, socially competent and inclusive of the other their pupils become. Teachers' attitudes and subscription to progressive, inclusive pedagogies is only one aspect of their ability to empower their pupils. Their good intentions must be supported by specific skills in structuring the drama experience, addressing any special needs for engagement in learning, giving feedback and making sure that pupils' insights get translated into valuable competences.

Most of the challenges which impact teachers' beliefs on their self-efficacy in sharing power and responsibility with students are related to inclusive classrooms. Teachers

[2] https://artpadproject.eu/artad-aims-and-outcomes, 12.02.2021.
[3] https://www.joininandmakeachange.com/home, 12.02.2021.

usually subscribe to the mission of eradicating discrimination and declare to provide every student with an equal opportunity for learning and becoming a competent contributor to society. Teachers also believe in the positive influences of inclusive education on both students with and without special needs where children more often learn to take responsibility for their own and peers' learning (Porter & Towell 2017).

The JIMAC project teachers and students' needs analyses were based on the results of nearly 300 questionnaires and 8 focus group discussions. The teachers' self-assessment about their contributions to inclusivity and the co-designing of learning by students juxtaposed with the perspectives of the latter appeared over-optimistic. While most of the researched teachers were convinced of their professionalism to build and sustain relationships which serve inclusive learning, their corresponding students (aged 9-11) felt ignored in class as nobody was motivated to listen to them or capitalise on their initiative for meaningful inquiry or creative problem solving. A majority of teachers strongly believed that the way they teach is inspiring for children and is perceived as role modeling of mutual respect and collaboration within a community of learners. The students, however, declared in questionnaires and interviews that they would have been more engaged if they had been able to spend time productively with peers, to share their experience gained in diverse non-formal educational spaces, to explore different roles in a more playful and imaginative way that they know from outside of school. Except for specific programmes including divergent tasks, like in drama-based activities, pupils prefer remaining invisible to being entrepreneurial. Being helpful to their teacher means following the lesson plan, not making any mistakes, not questioning any meanings or facts, moving on to the next unit, making sure that peers with special needs are not left behind. Very few respondent pupils felt any ownership in co-designing their learning environment.

On the other hand, they expressed their resistance when the teacher delegated greater responsibility than they were equipped to handle. The cases concerned the use of what the pupils perceived as 'non-traditional' teaching. The use of divergent problems or drama (e.g., Mantle of the Expert) resulted in chaos, nobody listening to each other, pushing individual ideas without analysing the problem they worked on, getting no feedback from the teacher, having no clear objectives or success indicators. The previous EU research project – DICE[4] had clearly proved, however, that Mantle of the Expert, when facilitated professionally, successfully built competences such as learning to learn, engaging diversity, initiative and entrepreneurship. This confirms that teachers can be effective in co-designing the learning environment valued by their pupils when they develop expertise in selecting the appropriate content, specific dramatic framing and

[4] http://www.dramanetwork.eu/education_resource.html, 12.02.2021.

reflective approaches. A general awareness of progressive pedagogy ideals may not suffice in securing inclusive and child-centered learning. It is a misunderstanding for teachers to think of drama as giving up the power and control over learning processes entirely to class dynamics. This often results in disappointment about drama and an overgeneralisation that co-designing in education is utopic.

In this study 30 teachers and students of early education from 17 countries in Europe, Asia and both Americas, with at least some previous experience of drama were invited to identify situations that could be used for deeper reflection to help them make their general classroom practice more inclusive, playful and co-designed by pupils. The research participants were trained in the use of drama for building resilience analogically to free play. Their 12-hour training as part of the Erasmus Plus Joint Diploma programme at the The Polytechnical Institute of Lisbon included the experience of building trust, concentration and collaborative skills through drama games, improvisation, narrative, framing and reflective techniques. It also offered instruction in designing divergent tasks, structuring drama sessions to engage student's creativity and make them co-designers of interdisciplinary classes (history, science, language, civic education) using the Mantle of the Expert approach as well as teaching in a role convention. The training programme was adapted from the ARTPAD project module. The participants were also trained and asked to use the critical incident protocol as both a research and professional development tool. The content of their protocols were analysed phenomenologically – with the concepts of 'no penalty zone' emerging from the teachers' narratives.

David Tripp's (1993) approach to reflective practice was based on 'critical incidents' that come out of observations of classroom activities. 'Critical' was to be interpreted as relevant or important rather than just negative or dangerous. Once, the situation was analysed the teachers were asked to plan for a response or a strategy and finally to reveal a new understanding of the 'no penalty zone'. With this model, teachers reflected strategically and systematically on the critical incident in order to be able to plan for an appropriate new strategy and ultimately improve their practice. Ideally, they develop a personal or organisational action plan.

The research method is seated in an action research framework where the drama situations inform and progress, these create a 'developmental perspective' (Altricher, Posch & Somekh 1993, p. 40). This is practitioner-led or practitioner-based research (McNiff 2006) where the practitioner is able to develop the content of the drama process with the participants (O'Sullivan 2011). In this iteration drama process the practitioner is skilled in the specific area of drama practice and praxis in the field or the 'real world' (Robson 2011, p. 294). It is a complex action-knowledge generated process that simultaneously involves the cogeneration of 'new information and analysis together with

actions aimed at transforming situations' (Greenwood & Levin 2007, p. 50). A process led drama intervention can facilitate the study and growth of social exchange and understanding between the participants themselves as well as between the participants and practitioner in the action of responding to a given drama-based situation. 'The researcher will become the main instrument of social investigation… on situations as they occur' (Burgess 1990, p. 79), and will work within a frame that gives options to extend the process in a cycle of planning, acting, monitoring, reflecting and evaluating in a 'generative transformational enquiry' (McNiff 2006, p. 57).

Results

Stories of critical incidents were grouped into three emerging categories: one referring to situations in which children surprised teachers by using drama opportunities to take control of class dynamics or pupils with difficulties in a classroom whose fighting for attention challenged the spirit of the learning community. The second category showed rather negative consequences of other teachers or parents shaming children for cultural inadequacies. The last one focused on cases in which special needs or underprivileged pupils became empowered through teachers' specific interventions.

Table 1. (own design) Emerging categories for 'no penalty' concept

Critical incident type	Implication for inclusion/co-designing	Concept of 'no penalty zone'
Class accepting responsibility for engagement in learning (co-designing)	Appreciating non-standard initiative, delegating roles in teams. Shifting energy from getting teacher's attention to educational tasks	Alternative to competitive ideals in mainstream education
Abuse of power/shaming by adults (penalising)	Engaging diversity for innovative solutions Child's ownership of indicators of success	Liberating from imposed cultural expectations
Empowerment of special need pupils (inclusion)	Increased motivation and self-regulation	Co-designing of learning environment to re-gain control/heal

Source: authors' own design.

The first group of conceptualisations of 'no penalty zone' centered around creating an alternative space for collaboration that is free of competition and the ranking of students. Teachers stressed the potential of the 'no penalty zone' as an alternative to educational systems which function on competitive ideals. Casting individuals as competitors impedes imaginative expression, teamwork and innovation. Framing, on the contrary, ensures the comfort of no pressure to show off an advantage over others, prove worthiness, as freedom to learn through exploration, failure and mistakes.

Teachers learn how to offer this freedom through drama itself and by observing the growth of initiative, creativity and playfulness. Divergent tasks in drama help both children and educators experience caring relationships with learning as a shared goal. The 'no penalty zone' was conceptualised by this group as the learning environment in which initiative and contribution is unconditionally accepted and appreciated rather than judged against specific standards. Children are free to explore as many roles as needed and feel comfortable that they are not going to be pressurised in any way. This freedom encourages creative problem solving, assuming divergent roles in teams and it helps children discover the value of experimentation and withholding judgement on unusual responses.

Imaginative uses of time, place and interpersonal situations give children options to take on the role of different characters. In this social interaction, children are given the freedom to experiment different episodes or scenarios to experience agency and gain insights about the consequences of those interactions without any reservations on the account of assessment. As a result, this playful learning from one another happens without being pressured to be the best or avoiding being the worst in terms of accomplishment. It also frees the teacher from being targeted for attention and the object of false pleasing, impressing. It allows the teacher to use her talent and creativity to truly engage pupils through careful selection of content and focus, structuring their inquiry through dramatic lens and diverse conventions.

The 'no penalty zone' for an early education student means that children are free to try out scenarios which they would find difficult to deal with in real life. Engagement in such scenarios allows children to feel a sense of freedom and agency while knowing that they will not be met with disapproval and reproach from the adults or peers around them. In their perception, the 'no penalty zone' works like a transitional space between the reality designed by participants and the reality they need to go back to; much like Alice, going down the rabbit hole.

For some teachers, the 'no penalty zone' helps pupils focus more on the lived experience rather than on the rehearsed part or the result which must be presented for evaluation. As children work on open-ended challenges, selected by teacher content or their own material, using different distancing tools, they become aware of no pressure. Their dramatically revealed needs and questions are dealt with by the community of inquiry, which provides a sense of security and protection. Drama offers an alternative reality, an 'in-between' space for the dialogue developed both from the real and the fictional world perspectives. They also seem to understand clearly the mechanics of framing. 'What if scenarios' make it easier to bring a dialogue related to a situation that might be very personal, painful, or shameful, which is the main contributor to children's resilience.

The second group of teachers' materials from the critical incidents protocol focused on perceiving the benefits of a 'no penalty zone' in terms of freedom from limiting cultural expectations, stereotypes, taboos etc. In this group of researched teachers, drama allowed 'telling the untold', exploring and expressing multiple voices, a range of emotions, dreams, aspirations, values etc. It was about preparing (for) social change, more participatory forms of belonging to a society. The potential contribution starts with the freedom of imagination and interacting through art forms (frames). Some teachers analyse in their protocols the benefits (mainly resilience) of the Mantle of the Expert as a specific drama approach in which learning is framed by the teacher but driven by pupils' inquiry with an opportunity to experience a 'what if' professional role with responsibility to the imagined client. This responsibility grows from prompts and frames carefully prepared by a caring facilitator. The essence of 'no penalty' in drama here is the specific power relation with adults who may support children indirectly, armed in a wide range of roles offering Vygotskian scaffolding. Children, according to this group of teachers, are given the full freedom to express and challenge themselves in a way that seems relevant to them. In drama-based interventions there should not be any repercussions for initiative and imagination, especially when pupils perceive them as an open invitation to contribute to the learning process as equals. Children may assume a high level of artistic liberty. The artistic expressions might differ indefinitely, so there is not only one correct or prescribed way of creating a character, living through but also reflecting on the experience. This experience of freedom, the sense of self-responsibility for one's choices and the discovery of multiple ways of responding to a situation contributes to children's resilience. According to one teacher the 'no penalty zone' is an opportunity 'of expressing things that might be troubling someone'. He uses a concept of a joke to show the advantages of drama where children do not have to be even stressed to be funny and successful in terms of making the right comment on reality as a punch line. There are missed jokes which make the situation awkward but drama offers freedom that allows the security of externalising things without the fear of failing. Perspective taking empowers children to make more critical choices, feel more control and as a result have stronger resilience. Another teacher offered a concept of multiple dimensions that encourages children to cut ties with the original reality they are bound with. Interacting through fiction helps children to lose the burden or stress that they carry in reality, alter egos can be created in whichever way the protagonists see themselves. Children are free to design their own scenarios and play multiple roles within the frames of their own choice, as authors and actors. They are authorised to exit or even demolish the conceptualisations they are not happy with, gain power and authority in making their narratives which may offer an idealised model of reality or at least allow them a greater sense of control during e.g., designing work.

The last group of conceptualisations of the 'no penalty zone' by teachers focuses on therapeutic aspects of sharing power and giving control over learning environment to children. Teachers look at the 'no penalty zone' as a space for healing which is free from any unpleasant 're-living' of traumatic experiences because children have enough power to make decisions on what they initiate and explore as a trustful community. No one 'loses face' thanks to the distancing tools offering a whole range of roles, perspectives, licenses for otherwise socially controversial behaviors. The zone helps adults to give a chance to all children to reveal their strengths before they get blocked by reminders of weaknesses, deficiencies and lack of control. For others in this category the freedom for children to defy even the natural laws of physics allows them to explore whatever they need to regain balance and strengthen their resilience. From some experiences of teachers, allowing the children to make choices from power positions of adults is radically liberating, especially when they are able to offer constructive criticism on adults' choices rather than just being passively modelled into obedient subjects. Taking on the roles of teachers or doctors facilitates children's' initiative and self-direction in learning. Experiencing a position of responsibility, e.g., through Mantle of the Expert, reduces the fear of engaging in a task and of being assessed. One teacher supports her arguments for more space in which children can be playful and creative with some recent Asian studies on the use of drama and robots. Reversing the power positions and taking care of robots' needs empowered autistic children to develop narration as a way of showing their understanding of partner-type relationships. They became the expert care takers in this scenario.

The 'no penalty zone' for another teacher is the interaction of equal subjects which is not resolved in terms of who and what is right or wrong, but instead is focused on solving problems collaboratively and creatively. Dramatic challenges allow participants to change their perspective, gain new knowledge, change their attitude or even behavior without taking actions/words or feedback personally. It is also a space to experience engagement and safe uncertainty about outcomes of open-ended situations. Only the lack of fear of punishment produces real flow as a creative process in which children forget their limitations and become co-designers of a learning environment that is true to their character.

Some conceptualisations focus on the 'no penalty zone's' potential for learning the competences of children. Adults who are responsible for designing the educational space for pupils must take into consideration their diversity of learning styles, different thresholds for making sense of the educational content based on cultural background. Mistakes and challenges children face should be treated by adults both as a needs diagnosis as well as an opportunity for building their resilience, for underprivileged groups in particular, as their agency may be built with positive expectations and modelling

of strategising (offering real or fictitious roles). Freedom for children to explore and manifest autonomous decisions/choices is not confused in drama with infringing other's space or individuality. Having a voice through playing a role and reflecting on the experience is extended to all and must happen in the form of polyphonic dialogue, designing both in roles and out of roles together.

Finally, the 'no penalty zone' is perceived as an invitation for children to co-design learning situations so that all social interactions serve as positive experiences. Drama encourages managing safe uncertainty, exploring diverse behaviors, attitudes, testing risky ideas, linking them to consequences but feeling safe with distancing, getting in touch with strong emotions which feel real but everybody understands that they come from imaginative, playful actions.

Conclusions

The content of reflective practice in the form of a critical incidents protocol was an opportunity to study the multiple conceptualisations of the 'no penalty zone' offered by teachers who either had a good experience of using drama or who were familiar with it due to it being included in their teacher training. Most teachers clearly subscribed to the Freirian ideals of cresting relations amongst the community of learners that are equalised. They all find drama as a specific vehicle to empower students while they interact with the educational content related to lived-through experiences that lead to the deepening of perceived freedom, social justice and their potential to grow beyond any imposed limitations.

The concepts revealed in the study heavily focus on ways of realising the pupils' freedom to have their own voice, choose what and how they want to learn, take risks and learn by trial and error, to experiment, fail and explore the causes of both success and failure. The element of 'challenge' in this work is inherent and invisible and therefore non-threatening to the participants. They see drama framing as a way of protecting children as enquirers, reducing their vulnerabilities while increasing their resilience and creativity. The teachers prove both their sensitivity and talent in re-imagining the learning environment. Some of the most personal insights come from some very specific cultural contexts where education is still part of oppression, the transmission of behavioral standards or (religious/atheist) values and instilling the fear of authority and possibly the threat of punishment for disobedience or exclusion for just being different than the mainstream majority.

Some teachers make a connection between the learners autonomy offered within drama and the disciplined structuring of their lived-through experience. They do their best to achieve meaningful learning outcomes while avoiding curriculum focused

activities. The others, though, seem to romanticise the notion of the 'no penalty zone' as 'free falling', a playful expression of early learners who otherwise may feel too pressurised by formal teaching and assessment. The depth of reflection on how the zone operates and arguments for its application in a school setting is impressive. It is supported by extensive reading from diverse sources, theoretical perspectives (Maslow, Roger, Vygotsky, Freire etc.) which allows teachers to use it for in-depth analyses of critical incidents. However, the overgeneralised and rather abstract level of possible strategies for preventing some of the negative incidents and stronger support of inclusion and resilience may suggest the need for a more tool-oriented practice. Teachers in countries from 4 continents have good access to texts on Heathcote's theory and practice, some of them could also watch a few video recordings of her lectures and actual work but they complained that the opportunities of some lived-through, vicarious training experiences are scarce. They know intuitively that facilitating a 'no penalty zone' requires an understanding of dramatic framing, selecting inspirational content and structuring learning experiences that become meaningful to children after deep reflection. Reading and discussing it may be not enough if the actual educational system is in fact exactly in opposition to these ideals… This imbalance is evident in cases of teachers referring to the technique called Mantle of the Expert[5]. This is a highly inclusive method but it requiresa careful structure and skillful, creative intervention from the facilitator. The only way to master it by the educator is to actually do it many times in class, preferably with a more experienced supervisor.

Education, as the facilitation of learning and the conduct of empowering teaching, can be perceived as a site of cultural struggle that challenges educators to identify and articulate the values that guide their teaching praxis. Once identified, teachers need more support from stakeholders and drama specialists to apply those principles in action on a day-to-day basis – with students. This terrain of cultural struggle presents teacher trainer's initiatives a special challenge. Teachers seem to need vicarious experiences themselves, direct exposure to safe uncertainty and observation of power dynamics.

The JIMAC project seems to address the needs of all stakeholders to include drama as a powerful tool for inclusiveness. The methodological problems that this study faced related to the inability to assess the early educators' actual competence in using drama for inclusion and power-sharing as they were the beneficiaries of diverse educational systems from all over the world. The JIMAC project will address this challenge and test training based on in-situ support for the practical application of the 'no penalty' zone and measure the impact of drama facilitation on inclusive classrooms.

[5] https://www.mantleoftheexpert.com/what-is-moe/how-does-moe-work/, 12.02.2021.

The new understandings of the 'no penalty zone' produce teachers that are sensitised to the ways in which 'in-role discourse' can be used to communicate meaning and arouse a quality of 'critical epistemological curiosity' (Freire 1998b, p. 67). This curiosity is likely to affect a transformative impact upon 'social occasions' between teachers and learners. The 'no penalty zone' seems to enable the community of learners to create new 'pedagogical space[s]' (Freire 1998b, p. 64) in which both cooperate to actively enlarge their 'capacity for learning not only in order to adapt to the world but especially to intervene, to re-create, and to transform it' (Freire 1998b, p. 66). As a result of this co-operation, they 'become actors in their own learning' (Freire 1998b, p. 68), included in the community regardless of any non-standard point of entry, special need, encouraged to be self-directed. This orientation to learning and teaching is an important outcome of using the 'no penalty zone' as understood by the teachers in this study.

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