

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# Pedagogical Opportunities of Using Theater Pedagogy in The Process of Training Future Educators in Higher Education

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## Abstract

The modernization of higher pedagogical education requires the search for innovative approaches capable of ensuring the professional, communicative, emotional, and creative development of future educators. In this context, theater pedagogy is gaining increasing relevance as a pedagogical resource that unites artistic expression, interpersonal interaction, reflection, and experiential learning. This article examines the pedagogical opportunities of using theater pedagogy in the process of training future educators in higher education. The study analyzes the conceptual foundations of theater pedagogy, its role in the development of professional competence, and its educational value in forming communicative culture, empathy, creativity, reflective thinking, and pedagogical improvisation. The article is based on theoretical analysis of pedagogical, psychological, and methodological literature devoted to teacher education, art-based pedagogy, professional competence, and interactive learning. The results show that theater pedagogy creates favorable didactic conditions for integrating theory and practice, activating the learner's subject position, and preparing future educators for emotionally rich and socially complex professional interaction. It is argued that theater-based methods such as dramatization, role-play, pedagogical staging, situational modeling, and expressive movement foster a deeper understanding of educational processes and support the development of professionally significant qualities. The article concludes that theater pedagogy should be regarded as an important component of higher pedagogical education, especially in the training of future educators whose work requires sensitivity, expressiveness, communicative flexibility, and the ability to build developmental interaction.

## KEY WORDS

Theater pedagogy, future educators, higher education, professional competence, pedagogical training, dramatization, role-play, communicative competence, empathy, reflective practice.

## INTRODUCTION

The current stage of higher education development is characterized by a growing demand for pedagogical models that do not merely transmit theoretical knowledge but also ensure the integrated development of the future specialist's personality. In the field of educator training, this demand is especially strong because the professional activity of an

educator is not limited to formal instruction or routine organization. It involves constant communication, emotional responsiveness, interpretive sensitivity, pedagogical creativity, and the ability to construct meaningful interaction with children. Therefore, the preparation of future educators in higher education institutions must include methodologies that

address both the cognitive and the expressive, ethical, and interpersonal dimensions of professional formation.

In this context, theater pedagogy presents considerable promise. Theater pedagogy may be understood as an educational approach that employs the means, methods, and principles of theatrical art for pedagogical purposes. It does not reduce education to performance in the narrow artistic sense. Rather, it uses dramatic action, role behavior, embodiment, dialogue, scenario construction, and interpretive participation as tools for learning, reflection, and personal development. In educator training, this approach is particularly relevant because pedagogical work itself has a pronounced performative and communicative nature. The educator enters interactional situations, interprets human behavior, modulates emotional climate, communicates meaning through word and gesture, and often acts under conditions of uncertainty. Theater pedagogy therefore offers not an external addition to professional preparation, but a methodologically meaningful way of enhancing it.

The interest in theater pedagogy is also linked to broader transformations in educational philosophy. Student-centered learning, competence-based education, reflective practice, and experiential pedagogy all emphasize active participation, dialogue, creativity, and the construction of professional identity. Theater-based methods correspond closely to these priorities because they require learners to engage bodily, emotionally, intellectually, and socially in the educational process. They create conditions in which future educators can not only discuss pedagogical situations but experience them in simulated or dramatized form, analyze them from within, and build their own professional responses.

The relevance of the topic is further strengthened by the specific nature of educator training. Future educators must learn to understand children's emotional states, to communicate clearly and expressively, to organize group interaction, to manage conflict constructively, and to create a psychologically safe environment. These abilities are difficult to form through lecture-based instruction alone. They require practice in interaction, sensitivity to nonverbal communication, and experience in role-taking and perspective-taking. Theater pedagogy provides precisely such opportunities.

The purpose of this article is to identify and analyze the pedagogical opportunities of using theater pedagogy in the process of training future educators in higher education. The study seeks to reveal the educational functions of theater-

based methods, to explain their contribution to professional competence formation, and to determine their significance for contemporary higher pedagogical education.

This article is based on theoretical and comparative analysis of scientific literature in the fields of pedagogy, psychology, teacher education, art-based learning, and theater pedagogy. The methodological framework combines the systemic, competence-based, personality-oriented, activity-based, and reflective approaches. The systemic approach allows educator training to be viewed as an integrated pedagogical process in which cognitive, emotional, communicative, and ethical dimensions are interconnected. The competence-based approach makes it possible to interpret the professional preparation of future educators in terms of integrated knowledge, skills, dispositions, and value orientations. The personality-oriented approach emphasizes the development of individuality, self-expression, and personal meaning. The activity-based approach highlights learning through doing, modeling, and participation. The reflective approach is used to analyze how theater pedagogy supports self-analysis, self-positioning, and professional awareness.

The methods used include conceptual clarification of the key categories of theater pedagogy, pedagogical opportunity, and professional training; comparative interpretation of different theater-based educational practices; and synthesis of methodological conclusions regarding their pedagogical significance in higher education. The study focuses primarily on the training of future educators understood as specialists whose professional activity requires close interpersonal interaction with children in educational and developmental settings.

The analysis shows that theater pedagogy offers broad pedagogical opportunities for the training of future educators in higher education. One of its primary strengths lies in the fact that it transforms the student from a passive recipient of methodological knowledge into an active participant in pedagogical meaning-making. Traditional teacher education often emphasizes explanation, observation, and reproduction of prescribed models. Although these elements remain important, they do not always provide sufficient space for expressive practice, situational interpretation, and internalization of professional roles. Theater pedagogy changes this situation by placing the future educator inside modeled action. Through dramatization, role-play, scene construction, and performative dialogue, the student does not

merely discuss a pedagogical situation but experiences it as a participant who must interpret, react, and communicate.

One important pedagogical opportunity of theater pedagogy lies in the development of communicative competence. The professional activity of an educator is impossible without the ability to speak expressively, listen attentively, use tone and tempo appropriately, interpret nonverbal cues, and adapt communication to the age and emotional state of learners. Theater pedagogy directly supports the development of these skills. Exercises based on role behavior, dialogue improvisation, expressive reading, and scene enactment train students to become more conscious of voice, gesture, posture, eye contact, and emotional coloration. As a result, future educators become better prepared for live interaction in educational settings, where communication is never purely verbal and always includes affective and situational dimensions.

Another significant opportunity concerns the development of empathy and perspective-taking. In educator training, empathy is not simply a desirable personal quality; it is a professionally necessary ability. Future educators must understand the emotional experiences of children, recognize hidden meanings in behavior, and respond with sensitivity and care. Theater pedagogy fosters empathy because it requires students to assume roles, imagine inner states, and view situations from positions other than their own. When a student embodies a child, a parent, or an educator in a dramatized pedagogical scenario, this process creates conditions for emotional and cognitive decentering. The participant learns to see educational interaction not as a fixed external procedure, but as a living exchange of meanings and feelings.

The study also demonstrates that theater pedagogy contributes substantially to the development of creative thinking. Future educators often face professional situations that cannot be solved by following rigid templates. They must improvise, adapt, reinterpret, and find pedagogically meaningful responses to unexpected behaviors and emotional dynamics. Theater-based methods stimulate precisely this type of creativity. Improvisational tasks, situational role-plays, symbolic representation, and pedagogical staging all require the student to generate responses rather than reproduce ready-made formulas. This creative dimension is pedagogically important because it supports the formation of professional flexibility and reduces fear of uncertainty.

A further result of the analysis is the recognition that theater

pedagogy supports reflective competence. Reflection is one of the key conditions of professional development in education. Future educators must not only act, but also analyze their action, understand its effects, and evaluate its ethical and pedagogical adequacy. Theater pedagogy enhances reflection because dramatized educational situations can be paused, replayed, discussed, and interpreted collectively. Students can examine why a certain interaction failed or succeeded, how communicative choices shaped the outcome, and what alternative strategies were possible. In this way, theatrical methods do not end with performance; they continue into reflective dialogue, which is often where their deepest educational value appears.

The analysis further shows that theater pedagogy strengthens the practical orientation of higher pedagogical education. One of the persistent challenges in teacher education is the gap between theoretical study and real pedagogical practice. Students may learn about child development, communication, motivation, and educational methods, yet still feel unprepared when entering the actual professional environment. Theater-based forms of learning help reduce this gap by creating intermediate spaces between theory and practice. In such spaces, students can model classroom or preschool situations, test pedagogical behavior, practice conflict management, and experience responsibility in interaction without the irreversible consequences of real-life mistakes. This kind of simulation does not replace practice but prepares for it in a more embodied and meaningful way than abstract discussion alone.

Theater pedagogy also has strong value for group cohesion and collaborative learning. The preparation of future educators is not only individual but social. Educational work in contemporary settings often involves cooperation with colleagues, parents, and institutions. Theater-based methods cultivate trust, coordination, mutual attention, and collective creativity. When students work together on dramatized pedagogical tasks, they negotiate meaning, distribute roles, listen to one another, and co-construct educational action. This strengthens their ability to function as members of a pedagogical community and fosters a more dialogic culture of professional preparation.

An additional pedagogical opportunity lies in the formation of professional expressiveness. The educator's presence in the educational process matters greatly. Children respond not only to the content of speech but to the emotional energy, sincerity, facial expression, movement, and expressive

coherence of the adult. Theater pedagogy helps future educators become aware of their own expressive resources. Through performative tasks, they learn how bodily and vocal expression can support pedagogical intention. This does not mean turning educators into actors in an artificial sense. Rather, it means helping them communicate more vividly, authentically, and pedagogically effectively.

The results also indicate that theater pedagogy has particular relevance for educator training because it models the kind of educational interaction that future professionals themselves may use in work with children. Dramatic play, storytelling, role enactment, expressive movement, and scene creation are all methods that can later be adapted to preschool and early school pedagogy. Thus, when future educators learn through theater pedagogy, they simultaneously acquire experience of methods that they may later implement professionally. This gives theater pedagogy a dual value: it is both a means of training and a prototype of future pedagogical practice.

At the same time, the analysis shows that the effectiveness of theater pedagogy depends on certain didactic conditions. It should not be applied randomly or superficially. Theater-based work must be pedagogically purposeful, connected with the aims of professional training, and followed by interpretation and analysis. Without reflective framing, theatrical activity may remain entertaining but educationally shallow. The teacher educator must therefore act as a facilitator who structures situations, guides debriefing, and ensures that experiential participation leads to pedagogical insight.

The discussion of the obtained results confirms that theater pedagogy should be viewed as a serious and methodologically grounded educational approach in higher pedagogical education. Its value lies not only in diversification of instruction but in the qualitative transformation of professional preparation. In many traditional training models, future educators are positioned mainly as recipients of pedagogical knowledge, which they are expected to apply later. Theater pedagogy shifts this logic by emphasizing situated participation, role-based experience, and embodied understanding. In doing so, it corresponds to contemporary visions of higher education as a space of active competence formation rather than passive accumulation of information.

A major point that emerges from the analysis is that the pedagogical profession itself contains performative and dramaturgical dimensions. The educator must enter interaction intentionally, respond to the emotional atmosphere

of a group, interpret signals, guide attention, manage transitions, and maintain a developmental communicative environment. Theater pedagogy does not impose something foreign on educator training; it makes explicit and trainable aspects of pedagogical action that are often left implicit. This is why its opportunities are particularly significant for future educators, whose professional work requires delicacy, expressiveness, emotional balance, and communicative artistry.

Another important issue concerns the relationship between artistic means and pedagogical goals. Theater pedagogy is sometimes misunderstood as aesthetic activity detached from professional content. However, the analysis shows that its educational force lies precisely in its ability to connect artistic means with pedagogical reflection. Theatricality is not used for entertainment alone, but for the modeling of meanings, relationships, and professional situations. Through this connection, future educators gain deeper insight into the human side of pedagogy, including vulnerability, misunderstanding, emotional tension, and cooperation.

The discussion also reveals that theater pedagogy aligns strongly with competence-based education. Professional competence in educator training includes knowledge of pedagogy and psychology, but also communicative competence, reflective ability, ethical sensitivity, creative action, and emotional intelligence. Theater-based methods affect these dimensions in an integrated way. They activate cognition through interpretation, emotion through role-taking, communication through dialogue, and reflection through discussion. In this integrated quality lies one of the greatest pedagogical opportunities of theater pedagogy.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the implementation of theater pedagogy in higher education requires prepared instructors and supportive institutional conditions. Not all teacher educators feel confident using dramatic methods, and not all students enter such activities without hesitation. Some may initially experience insecurity, fear of exposure, or misunderstanding of purpose. Therefore, theater pedagogy should be introduced gradually, ethically, and professionally. Its methods must be adapted to the psychological readiness of learners and linked clearly to educational aims. Where this is done successfully, theater pedagogy can become a powerful formative resource.

The discussion finally suggests that theater pedagogy has a strategic role in the modernization of educator training. Higher

education increasingly recognizes that future professionals need more than information. They need readiness for uncertainty, relational competence, interpretive sensitivity, and the capacity to act meaningfully in complex human situations. Theater pedagogy responds to these needs in a distinctive and powerful way.

In conclusion, the pedagogical opportunities of using theater pedagogy in the process of training future educators in higher education are broad, multidimensional, and professionally significant. Theater pedagogy contributes to the development of communicative competence, empathy, creativity, reflection, collaborative ability, and expressive presence. It creates conditions for bridging theory and practice, for deepening professional self-awareness, and for preparing students to work in emotionally and socially complex educational environments.

The analysis conducted in this article makes it possible to state that theater pedagogy should not be seen as an auxiliary or decorative element of pedagogical training. It should be regarded as a substantial educational approach capable of enriching the professional formation of future educators. Its special value lies in the fact that it addresses the human, dialogic, and experiential dimensions of pedagogy, which are often underdeveloped in purely lecture-based preparation.

The successful integration of theater pedagogy into higher educator training requires methodological clarity, pedagogical purpose, and reflective organization. When these conditions are met, theater-based methods become an effective means of preparing future educators who are not only knowledgeable, but also sensitive, expressive, reflective, and ready for meaningful interaction with children. In this sense, theater pedagogy represents an important direction for the further development of higher pedagogical education.

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