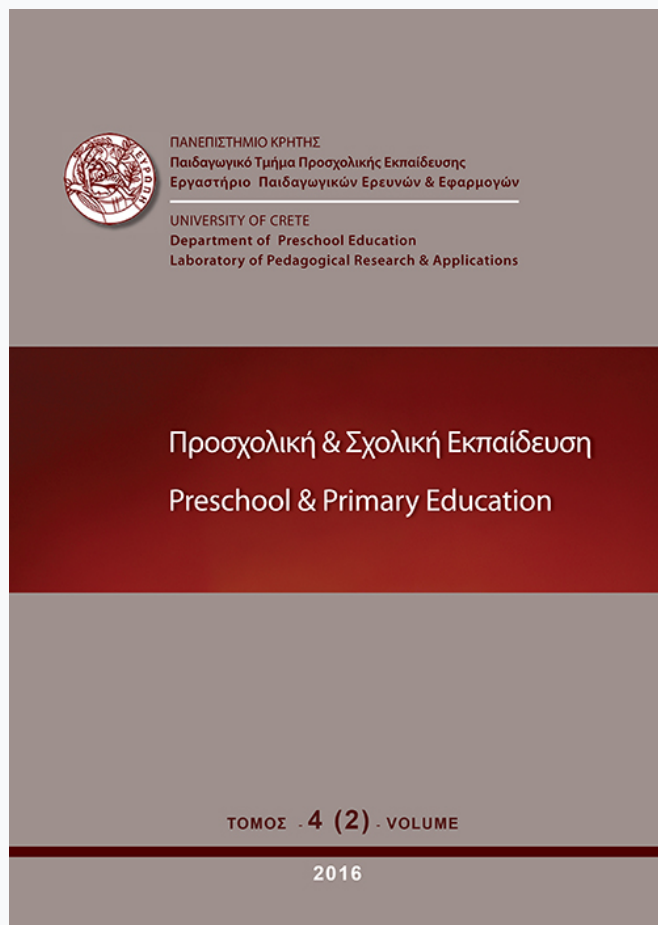


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Marianna Giotaki, Antonis Lenakakis

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Theatre pedagogy as an area of negotiating and understanding complex concepts by kindergartners in times of crisis: an intervention-based research study

Marianna Giotaki

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Antonis Lenakakis

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Summary. In this research theatre pedagogy was used to explore kindergartners' perceptions of the economic crisis and its effects on their everyday lives, as well as to provide them with opportunities to invest crisis situations with a positive, dynamic meaning, and to shift towards the humanitarian values of justice, active citizenship and understanding the other. Through our theatre-pedagogic programme, a social topic was put forward to the class, and performing arts tools were used to generate a framework for seeking solutions and finding meaning. Research results corroborate the value of theatre pedagogy to kindergartners negotiating, expressing and understanding complex concepts like those of the economic crisis and its effects. Theatre pedagogy can also generate empathy in kindergartners for what is unusual, different, or seemingly distant and irrelevant.

Keywords: Theatre pedagogy, drama and theatre in education, theatre of the oppressed (TO), play, economic crisis, empathy, early childhood

Introduction

According to a recent study by Germany's Bertelsmann Stiftung on the social justice index¹ (Schraad-Tischler, 2015), 26 million young people in Europe were threatened by poverty in 2015. Children and young people were the greatest victims of the economic crisis, given that their families' income ranged from 60% of the median income to zero. Remarkably, Greece ranked last among the 28 EU member states. High unemployment because of the crisis is one of the major reasons for Greece's low score on the social justice index. In addition to unemployment, it is also poverty, social exclusion (especially for vulnerable population groups), precarious work placements and an uncertain future that create a dead end for these people's quality of life.

The impact of the economic crisis is reflected in the bleakest of ways on children's early experiences, which can modify the structural and functional development of their brain and lead to future mental health problems (Giotakos, 2010). Low income can generate multiple affective and psychological problems in parents (McLoyd & Wilson, 1991). Mothers showing signs of depression often distance themselves from their children, thus hindering their development (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994). Moreover, a negative socioeconomic status in parents is related to low focusing skills in children (Duncan et al., 1994). Socially and personally unstable and precarious environments are stressful for adults and, subconsciously,

Correspondent Author: *Antonis, Lenakakis*, School of Early Childhood Education, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Tower Building, Campus, 54124 Thessaloniki, e-mail: alen@nured.auth.gr

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for young children (Sideris, 2013). An insecure and unstable family atmosphere can cause several problems to children including stress, violent behaviours, sleep disorders and low self-esteem (Kogidou, 2012; Kolaitis, 2011; Lundberg & Wuermli, 2012).

Given these findings and the impasse people are faced with in times of crisis, it is now imperative to provide psycho-affective support to children. Playing and theatre in education are of educational value (Lenakakis, 2012, 2013). The artistic science of theatre pedagogy (Lenakakis, 2008) provides a repertoire of strategies and principles for multifaceted personality development in schoolchildren, emphasizing active, experiential, multisensory and multi-arts learning to generate creativity, flourishing imagination and freedom of expression. These are attained through a safe expressive *gap*, which is crucial in kindergarten and in the first years of primary school, for the purpose of *lexicalizing* their surplus of energy and their unspent affective load, as well as for understanding and cultivating the self and the other.

Let us now proceed to discuss our theatre-pedagogic workshop which substantiates the theoretical strand of our research on the potential of theatre pedagogy for kindergartners negotiating and understanding complex concepts (see also Lenakakis, 2012).

Through exercises and games, the animateur provides the group with the appropriate stimuli to awaken their senses, to set their mental reserve free, and to address their individual enigmas seeking a solution and a way out. The concept of roles and safety in playing are the vector and the mining tool for this mental reserve. The normality of real life is turned into another normality, that of playing, with the latter entering in a dynamic (critical or undercutting) relationship with the former. In this reductive approach players are subjects, objects and media of the artistic process mixing holistically (body, mind, feeling), playing, crafting forms, representing, being exposed with all of their constituent materials. This is so because each player's expressive and performing potential stems from their experience, knowledge, prejudice, taboos and cultural make-up. Playing, therefore, means freely experimenting in order to construct one's own world subject to one's own terms and conditions, even if it is only for as long as the playing goes on. Actually, it is the self uncovering, becoming aware of, and assigning meaning to, the normality of the world whose subjects include it. Playing is the illusion and the hypothetical if happening at a place and time beyond reality, but each player's dreams and illusions are made from the updated materials of their own lives. The players' free, safe, and creative action and expression is a most telling way of uncovering perception mechanisms and reflecting appropriated attitudes and values, potential contradictions and individual enigmas on the subject of action, and on the group as well (Lenakakis, 2012).

To sum up, the power of theatre pedagogy lies in the potential it generates for activating sensory impulses through scenery, symbolism, metaphor, hypothetical if, and intonation (Lenakakis, 2004). Activating sensory impulses, however, makes players aware of their expressive means, which are subsequently developed to potentially generate multisensory expressions and representations. Becoming aware of, visualizing and symbolically presenting contradictions within a safe setting enables players to freely put forward and try out their own solution proposals.

Providing similar play areas in times of crisis gives children the opportunity to explore and consider what are to them complex and obscure concepts, to externalize their feelings and opinions, to interpret the facts, to confront moral dilemmas and take important decisions, to get to know themselves, as well as others, better and to develop their empathy. Theatre entails safety; it is not reality itself but a mere representation of it. Children can, therefore, face up to their problems through play and theatre painlessly and unhurriedly (Kondoyanni, Lenakakis, & Tsiotsos, 2013). They can act as they choose, they can acquire direct experience from their surroundings to be explored, look into social issues and develop skills which are important for shaping an integrated personality. According to Guichard (2001 as cited in Alkistis, 2008),

art is a rare and valuable area of freedom but, at the same time, it is also a special area of real and effective learning as children are taught to listen, watch and observe themselves, others and life itself. Theatre in the form of play provides areas of negotiation, exploration, partnership, communication and interaction through enjoying what is a shared outcome (op. cit.).

Research methodology

Several researchers have discussed the negative impact of the crisis on children's psychology and attitudes (Levin, 2013; Sideris, 2013); very few, however, have looked into the way children perceive the crisis phenomenon. Kalerante, Koltsaki, and Kontopoulou (2012) used the visual arts to enable children to express themselves on the consequences of the economic crisis. Their findings included mainly self-centred interpretations of the crisis by kindergartners, their psychological void and their inability to manage their negative feelings. In a similar research, Doliopoulou (2013) used interviews and found that kindergartners had difficulty grasping the overall abstract aspects and concepts of the economic crisis; hence they focused on individual elements, tending to magnify and dramatize facts. Moreover, kindergartners usually think in a rigid, absolute way, judging people and things as either good or bad. Both researchers stress the major role adults can play in providing a safe context for kindergartners to negotiate, express, understand and cultivate their feelings because of the crisis.

In our research we chose to broaden the repertoire of data collection tools through theatre-pedagogic techniques, and to examine their input on the matter in question. We placed great emphasis on interactive and participatory forms of theatre, like Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (TO)².

We believe that there is value in theatre as play and as an area of free and creative thinking, which is why experiential and multisensory tools were used to shed light on the kindergartners' views of the crisis, their subconscious thoughts and prejudices, their feelings and fears.

Research topics

Our research topics were as follows:

- a) How do preschool children perceive the aspects of the economic crisis through theatre-pedagogic techniques?
- b) Do theatre-pedagogic techniques provide i) appropriate ways and areas of negotiating, expressing and understanding the aspects of the economic crisis, and ii) ways of developing empathy for those hit by the crisis? If yes, in which way?

Method, sample and data collection tools

This research was based on the methodological paradigm of Grounded Theory by Glaser, Straus and Corbin (Strauss & Corbin, 1996), and it was also an action research (Altrichter, Posch, & Somekh, 2001; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2008).

Participants included 14 kindergartners aged 5-6 years, 5 boys and 9 girls, in the city of Thessaloniki. Twelve two-hour meetings took place between February and April 2015. Group interviews were conducted with kindergartners and educators before and after the programme. Interviews, as well as the programme in its entirety, were recorded. There was participatory observation; researchers kept a logbook, too³. Respondents were asked about what they had heard and knew regarding the concept of economic crisis and its individual aspects, the causes and consequences of unemployment and lack of money, and their thoughts

and feelings for the poor. The interviews were semi-structured and included open-ended questions which were adapted depending on the children's answers.

Research boundaries and constraints

Our research took place in the natural setting of a classroom; ipso facto researchers cannot have a classroom under their complete control. It is highly likely that markedly dissimilar conclusions would arise from the same research being conducted in another setting, with another sample and at a different point in time. Therefore, the conclusions of the present research cannot be subject to generalization. Moreover, researchers share the interpretive/explanatory standpoint according to which interpretation does not take place independently from the researcher. Reality does not exist separately from human entities; reality is created by each one of us, and each one of us understands it in a different way. Our beliefs, prejudices and ideas do impact on the way we perceive and interpret facts (Hassandra & Goudas, 2003). Consequently, it is highly likely that another researcher would reach very different conclusions from of the same research based on the very same data, because of that other researcher's different standpoint. Even the same researcher can interpret data in a different way at different points in time (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Programme timeline

This was an action research, i.e. circles of design, action, data collection and reflection. Our venue was the kindergartners' classroom to make sure they felt comfortable and safe with lots of pre-programme exercises and warm-up, trust and bodily expression games. We constantly reflected on and redesigned our theatre exercises and games to make sure they were applied successfully. Our plan was constantly updated and adjusted, depending on the new knowledge gained after each meeting. During games and exercises, as well as during the stage of reflection at the end of the day, the children were giving us ideas and showing us the way for our next meeting.

1st meeting

Research duration and objectives were briefly discussed with the teacher of the class and the principal of the kindergarten; permissions were granted, meetings were scheduled and we introduced ourselves to the children.

2nd meeting

Focus groups were interviewed to find out about the children's prior knowledge of the economic crisis.

3rd meeting and 4th meeting

We proceeded with exercises and games⁴ of getting to know each other, synchronizing, multisensory awareness raising and building trust among group members.

5th meeting

The topic was introduced by means of a scenario. Following some games and improvisation exercises, the class received a letter (scenario) from a father who had just lost his job because of the economic crisis. In his letter, the father explained the situation and asked the children to listen to his problem and to help him by proposing solutions. By reading out the letter, we took on the father's role ('teacher in a role') in order to elicit children's views and feelings. The letter arrived together with an 'exploration pack' containing the father's personal belongings, such as a zero-balance passbook, an empty piggy bank, a piece of jewellery he was going to sell, which meant a lot to him, a pair of his son's prescription glasses, and a ribbon from his daughter. After exploring the objects, the children devised possible life

scenarios for the father, and we continued with role play and improvisation based on the story of the unemployed father.

6th meeting and 7th meeting

Following the letter from the unemployed father and the subsequent improvisations, we held a short discussion about the story, followed by a short improvisation about the economic crisis in the leading role. In the end, we noted the children's impressions of the improvisation and their reaction to its hero, prior to a discussion about the main aspects of the economic crisis, which was personified and played the leading role in the improvisation.

8th meeting

The children were introduced to *Image Theatre*⁵ by means of body part and sense organ exercises and games to familiarize them with frozen body postures and non-verbal communication. These exercises were linked to the story of the unemployed father, followed by reflection and discussion about the exercises and the crisis in general. In the end, the children split up in teams of four to paint the portrait of the economic crisis.

9th meeting

*Forum Theatre*⁶ and the topic of oppression were introduced in a way that was familiar to children, i.e. through a scenario (letter) and an exploration pack. The letter was from a girl in primary school saying how sad she was because a new pupil was being bullied, but she was afraid to do something about it. The 'exploration pack' technique was used again with a torn T-shirt and a pair of broken prescription glasses which, in fact, were the glasses of the unemployed father's son experiencing bullying because of the way he looked, as a result of the state of his family's finances. This is how we followed up on the story of our initial meetings. Discussion on the two objects and their relation to the crisis preceded the reading of the letter, and then the hot-seating technique was used with a child in the role of the oppressed girl (who had sent the letter). The story took a new turn based on the girl's thoughts and feelings to be explored. The meeting ended with some short improvisations and discussion.

10th meeting

We focused on *Image Theatre* in order to find out about deeper expressions and views on the issue of oppression through body language and focusing. Children split up in actors and spect-actors. Actors prepared the image of oppression with their bodies and presented it to the spect-actors who had to remain speechless, sculpt actors' bodies and turn the image of oppression (*real image*) into an *ideal image* where problems have been solved.

11th meeting

We focused on *Forum Theatre*. A scene about classroom bullying was shown by a group of co-workers, which was then replayed. The oppressed protagonist was called upon to do something about his classmate being bullied by another classmate (antagonist⁷). During the replay, kindergartners could shout 'stop!' and take over as protagonists to act against the oppression of bullying. A short discussion followed in search of solutions and ways of addressing this critical issue.

12th meeting

Group interviews were conducted to establish any changes in children's perceptions of the economic crisis and its effects, as well as their sense of empathy towards those experiencing the consequences of the crisis.

Data analysis method

Data analysis followed the *Grounded Theory* (Strauss & Corbin, 1996) through open, axial and selective coding in addition to *in vivo* coding for creating codes based on the participants' language to identify "prominent themes and patterns rooted in the participants' own language" (Saldaña, 2005, p. 119). Conclusions were reached after comparing pre- and post-programme interview categories, taking into account children's *snapshots* during the programme. We looked into whether children started perceiving concepts differently, i.e. the extent to which there had been any change regarding their knowledge and views about the focal concept of economic crisis and its aspects, poverty, employment and money. Finally, we examined whether children had developed empathic understanding for someone who was different and, in our case, poor.

For empathy we followed the methodological approach of Saldaña (2005), who based himself on a proposal by Banks and Nieto (1999 as cited in Saldaña, 2005, p. 129), because of its clearly discrete and identifiable categories to be evaluated.

Analysis stages included the following units, which were matched against our own research questions:

- a) 1st stage "Knowing and Questioning", during which we sought to raise the children's individual and collective awareness about the economic crisis and its consequences;
- b) 2nd stage "Critiquing and Caring", aiming to develop empathy for those experiencing oppression because of the crisis and for anyone who is different in general;
- c) 3rd stage "Action-Walking the Talk", relating to the behavioural proof of change, the "reverse of oppression", through specific children's actions against oppression and through potential attitude changes towards what is different.

Presentation of research results

Pre-programme group interviews provided information about the children's knowledge of the crisis and their feelings for those hit by it. According to *Grounded Theory*, the categories resulting from our research data relating to the economic crisis were money, poverty and employment⁸.

The economic crisis as a "bad and greedy witch"

Prior to our theatre-pedagogic programme and under the semi-structured interview, kindergartners were asked about what they understood by "economic crisis". Response analysis showed that there was a certain confusion as to the concept, which they defined as "fire", "volcanic eruption" and "lava" or something that is part of a "game". Some kindergartners thought of the word "crisis" as something bad, others as something good, while several of them did not know the word and could not express an opinion. The only definition given was that of "when we break eggs?".

Kindergartners' fuzzy, uncertain or non-existent answers about the economic crisis were also evidenced by their length and content; none made mention of the current situation in our country. When asked about the fact that many people can't pay their electricity and water bills, they said that having electricity and water cut off was not a problem because "you can use candles" or "take water from the river (...) when it's not cold". About the lack of money, they answered that one could sell something and "get all the money from there. The prevailing view was that money can be bought. Money value was not an issue for kindergartners because, if you need heating but you don't have any, "you can dig up a hole, put some bricks in and that's it". Very few kindergartners were able to relate unemployment to lack of money, all the more so to lack of means for subsistence.

We believe that our theatre-pedagogic programme contributed to the understanding of the basic aspects of the economic crisis.

From that point on, children were able to define economic crisis as a “*money problem*”, work problem, shortage of basic goods, lack of money and a “*chaos problem*”. They termed it “*evil and greedy, wanting to destroy everything*”, they likened it to a witch [“*it is like a witch*”], looking extravagant and wasteful, and they discussed its consequences in detail: “*It is an evil for the economy, that is to say, we don’t have much money*”, and “*if our boss doesn’t have much money to pay us or if customers in the store don’t, then we won’t have money*”. The prevalent feeling as to the consequences of the crisis was sorrow. Also, they chose to discuss certain aspects of the phenomenon, e.g. someone losing their job or having very low income [“*this mum was not working and his dad had economic crisis*”], tax evasion [“*some people don’t say how much money they have*”] and stealing [“*that they can steal money (...) from others ... so they can take all of the others’ wallet and now the others are poor*”].

Our kindergartners considered unemployment to be the reason for lack of money leading to lack of food, water, as well as life [“*there is no life without food*”].

During improvisation, children came up with several different solutions for saving money and dealing with the crisis: “*he should cry*”, “*he should scream*”, and “*ask desperately for money*”. Certain solutions were more extreme [“*let’s grab a gun and kill the crisis*”] but, also, there were some specific and sustainable solutions relating to profit, finding a job and paying the bills. Our kindergartners suggested selling objects to buy food, financial help and food assistance to the most deprived, and offering all of the money deposited in banks to those in need. In any case, however, what one must have to confront the economic crisis was described by one kindergartner: “*He will beat it ... by being strong*”!

Our kindergartners had difficulty grasping the subtle, individual aspects of the crisis, as well as the causes and the consequences of the central concept. Following our programme, however, four major aspects had become clear, given the lengthy answers: loss of work, lack of money, lack of means of subsistence and poverty.

Empathy or “Say the words, speak out”

As mentioned above, our kindergartners were not aware of the significance of the crisis and its consequences prior to this programme and up to our first few meetings. Their egocentricity allowed them to interpret the world from their own standpoint (Doliopoulou, 2013), without taking into account the position other people are in. Although in our pre-programme interviews they seemed to recognize the poor father’s feelings (that he might be sad because he had no money and no place to stay), the points they made during our first improvisations were the exact opposite. They were completely unaware of the real difficulties lack of money entails, and they had trouble getting into the shoes of those experiencing the crisis. It is worth noting that, although they asked why it was that the unemployed father was sad, when they learned that it was because he had lost his job, they just asked “*well, why can’t he find another one?*”. In the course of our meetings, children started wondering about and recognizing the deeper social aspects of the crisis. In accordance with the first stage of Banks’ and Nieto’s model (1999 as cited in Saldaña, 2005), we tried to raise the children’s individual and collective social awareness about the topic in question, and we proceeded as follows:

a) “*Knowing and Questioning*”. Children started wondering and thinking about the social dimensions of the crisis through the improvisations and discussions ensuing from each activity. Gradually, they started detecting some basic consequences of the crisis, and having an understanding attitude towards those experiencing it. In our first meetings they started taking interest in learning about the crisis [“*Miss, can you tell us what the crisis is?*”], expressing views about potential consequences and feelings that it generates [“*death*”, “*sorrow*”] or showing they had realized that, after all, it might affect them, too [“*oh no, oh no, my dad too has*”].

a very beautiful shop"]. During the same stage, crisis management ideas emerged [*"he will beat it by being strong", "he must not be afraid"*], which corroborates this gradual awareness raising about the main topic, always in line with specific snapshots from everyday life.

b) *Critiquing and Caring*. During this stage kindergartners were called upon to take on the role of the child suffering from the economic crisis and experiencing oppression because of the different way he looked. Through improvisation they put themselves into the shoes of the unemployed father's boy and saw things from his standpoint. With Image Theatre and Forum Theatre, they were called upon to provide support by means of specific actions, attitudes and phrases: *"I was very very sad ... I sort of froze ... like that ... because this story is a bit horrible"*. The prevalent feelings were sorrow and compassion for the one who is unemployed, poor, and subject to the painful consequences of the crisis. Children showed that they cared for their fellow human being, and that they shared his feelings: *"He is just poor, and you wouldn't like it to see him so sad like that"*. In fact, they were not just able to understand his feelings but, also, to predict his potential reaction: *"crying on the streets, asking for money?"*.

c) *Action-Walking the Talk*. The third and last stage related to the behavioural proof of change, the *"reverse of oppression"*. Regarding the instances of oppression through Image Theatre and Forum Theatre (see above), children were called upon to stand up for a child being bullied. The following are some indicative comments quoted verbatim, showing change setting in as to how the causes and the consequences of the economic crisis were perceived:

"Yes, but his mom doesn't work and, first, his dad doesn't work and dad had economic crisis at work, and now they don't have any money at all. Do you get it?".

"If ..if you didn't have any money, how would that make you feel?".

"So you are saying that the problem is solved by telling it to the teacher or by stopping him (the oppressor)?".

Children turned against oppression by standing by the victim of bullying in various ways. They discussed the crisis problem, trying to put the victimizer in the position of the victim. They wondered about how the problem of oppression can be solved, and encouraged the victim to confront oppression and speak out: *"Say the words, speak out!"*. In this activity, as well as in the other snapshots, we had the first signs of a change of attitude towards what is happening around us, laying the groundwork for active and responsible citizens.

Despite a plethora of similar proposals and activities by the children for doing away with oppression, we cannot be sure that Forum Theatre did change their attitude or that this change is definitely going to bring about a change of attitude in their everyday lives. After all, it is not possible to measure with precision the influence of any classroom programme aimed to generate empathy (Saldaña, 2005). Having said that, the objective of our research was to provide a setting for negotiating safely through our theatre-pedagogic workshop, and this objective was attained.

Conclusion and discussion

Our research focused not so much on kindergartners' views about the crisis but on providing opportunities for discussing it and becoming aware of it. Our objective was for young children to invest crisis situations with a positive, dynamic meaning, and to shift towards the human values of understanding the other, justice, flexibility and active citizenship. Our theatre-pedagogic classroom programme sought to put forward a social topic, and use performing arts tools to create marginal conditions for seeking solutions and finding meaning. A theatre-pedagogic workshop is a space where attitudes and actions are processed, and we wanted ours to work as a *rehearsal for life*, preparing children and raising their awareness so that they can lead a more dynamic and optimistic life. Garbarino (2008) correctly points out that justice, empathy, and humanistic values are not innate in children;

therefore, animation and guidance programmes are needed if they are to manage a destabilizing situation such as the current crisis. We are in need of settings where awareness raising can take place, where crises can be defused, where fears and feelings can be voiced. The so called mental resilience (Kogidou, 2012; Prekate, 2014) is what we must strive for nowadays and, in our opinion, playing and interactive theatre provide the tools for creating such settings.

Research findings show how valuable theatre pedagogy is for children negotiating, expressing and understanding complex concepts such as the economic crisis and its effects but, also, in order for them to develop empathy for what is unusual, different or seemingly distant and irrelevant to them.

By comparing pre-and post-programme answers, we confirmed that our theatre-pedagogic programme enriched kindergartners' perceptive paths regarding the economic crisis; it also changed their empathic understanding of those hit by it. Theatre enabled kindergartners to express themselves in a spontaneous, creative way and to understand the basic aspects of the phenomenon in question. The theatre-pedagogic programme and the TO approach provided free participation and expression; all participants could express themselves any way they chose to, and whenever they chose to, as long as they observed group and play rules. On the other hand, the fact that all inputs were respected and materialized encouraged kindergartners to be present and active at all times. There was a real reason for active participation: they had to find a solution to the dead end happening on stage right there, right before their eyes. We found the answer we were looking for by that kindergartner spontaneously urging the victim-actor to "*say the words, speak out!*" in the context of safety and freedom of expression provided by Forum Theatre techniques; the victim was advised not to be afraid, to dare speak out and take action, not just stand there doing nothing in the face of oppression.

Active participation programme games and exercises brought forward kindergartners' prior knowledge of the central concept. Symbolism, together with performing arts flavourings, were there in every activity and, in this way, children could grasp the scope of the economic crisis and give their opinion about lack of money, loss of work, poverty and oppression. There is a clear qualitative and quantitative difference between pre- and post-programme comments⁹. Representation through personification generated an authentic communication setting enabling children to learn about the concept of the crisis in a plain, intelligible way that they could manage themselves. By visualizing and symbolically representing the phenomenon and its ramifications for everyday family life, kindergartners (*were*) actually moved, invested crisis outcomes with a positive, dynamic meaning, and started looking for different and, many times, ground-breaking ways of managing them with solidarity.

In closing, we wish to point out the following particularity of theatre pedagogy and its repertoire. Theatre pedagogy can acquire a communicative and differentiating potential, provided it is not approached as a management tool or as a method for solving any deficit, social or other. Such a tool-like approach to theatre pedagogy aiming to unilaterally attain a pedagogic, social or other target runs against its very nature. Theatre pedagogy can survive and influence its addressees when it keeps its playful, experiential and procedural character, when playing with its performing arts forms, focusing, exaggeration, the unexpected, and the random factor find their right place and time to bear their fruit (Lenakakis, 2013). By observing this principle we maintained the identity of the methodological tools of our research, and we think that this is the reason why its benefits are evident.

Endnotes

¹ The EU's Social Justice Index comprises 35 indicators, each associated with one of the six dimensions of social justice: poverty prevention, equitable education, labour market access, social cohesion and non-discrimination, health, and intergenerational justice (<http://www.social-inclusion-monitor.eu/social-justice-index/>).

² In the late '60s Boal developed the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), a flexible system of interactive games, exercises, and more structured theatrical techniques (Burlson, 2003). TO was Boal's way of hitting back at the oppressive and dictatorial regime, and giving a voice to those people that were stripped of their right to express themselves due to the economic and cultural situation at the time. Boal considered theatre to be a representation of reality, a tool generating an area for a 'rehearsal for life', the rehearsal for the revolution. TO makes the audience aware of the oppression they are under; they become actively involved in action, they try out ways and means to combat oppression in an effort to apply them in real life (Alkistis, 2008).

³ Early research data originated in our work under a University of Thessaly postgraduate programme entitled "Educational Sciences: Educational Material and Pedagogical Toys", which was headed by assistant professor K. Magos.

⁴ Ideas about theatre-pedagogic programmes with exercises and games in Greek can also be found in Alkistis (2008), Boal (2013) and Govas (2003).

⁵ Image Theatre is a fundamental technique of Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), which is based on the unique potential of the human body. For Boal, the human body has the potential to convey ideas and information, i.e. to start a dialogue (Schaedler, 2010). Image Theatre enables the members of the audience to start a dialogue among themselves, as well as with the actors, but without talking; they can step forward and express their opinion by 'sculpting' the body of others, just like a sculptor would do. The ensuing discussion by the audience is non-verbal; it takes place exclusively by means of modifying actors' bodies. Other major TO techniques include Invisible Theatre, Legislative Theatre and Rainbow of Desire (see Boal, 1979; Burlson, 2003).

⁶ Forum Theatre, another TO technique, actively involves audience members by asking them to tell a story about injustice and oppression, followed by improvisation or rehearsal in order to put up a short performance. Any member of the audience is allowed to shout 'stop!', take the place of the protagonist and try out their proposed solution. The protagonist is the hero facing oppression because of someone else (or several other people) acting against him, the antagonist (MacDonald & Rachel, 2001). Following the spect-actor's part, the replaced actor comes back on stage to continue the play in accordance with the spect-actor's version, followed by discussion and dialogue about oppression and the proposed solutions.

⁷ On the concept of 'antagonist' see previous footnote.

⁸ During meetings, children raised the issue of oppression someone may be subject to because of the way they look: "Miss, do you want to play poor and rich? Some classmates will be poor, and some will be rich. The rich will wear nice clothes". Therefore, the category of "bullying" came up as well, and it related mostly to children's actions regarding diversity and oppression. In the present paper we will focus only on categories which are directly relevant to our topic.

⁹ For example, the answer to the question about what one can do when they are short of money was "We'll give them money", before the programme; after the programme it was "Why don't you sell something?", "Well, I say he should go to my dad's work. My dad makes robots, he's an inventor"

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