



BUKS – Tidsskrift for Børne- og Ungdomskultur

Nr. 74 2026 • Årgang 42 • ISSN online 2446-0648 • www.buks.dk

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A Fight for Honesty: The Drama Pedagogue Gill Dowsett and Her Quest to Let Children Be Free to Be Who They Are

Resume

This article explores how efforts to promote honesty can be applied within a drama pedagogical setting to create a free space in which children and young people can express themselves and be recognised as independent individuals. The article draws on experiences from encounters with Gill Dowsett, an esteemed drama pedagogue with a lifelong commitment to forum theatre and strong values of equality and truthfulness. Her unwavering dedication to embodying these ideals—even in the face of challenges and conflicts with young participants—made a profound impression during our meeting. The drama pedagogical space presents a complex dilemma, balancing participants' active involvement with the educator's role and responsibility. On the one hand, it encourages unique stories, perspectives, and voices to emerge; on the other, it may demand unconditional participation, potentially giving rise to feelings of pressure and vulnerability. In this article, these dilemmas are discussed in relation to Gill Dowsett's methods and intentions to create an honest and free space for both herself and her students.



Keywords: freedom; honesty; drama; education

Introduction – Setting the Stage

In this article, the aim is to explore how efforts to promote honesty can be applied within a drama pedagogical setting to create a free space for being and acting among participating students. The article is based on the work and practice of the drama pedagogue Gill Dowsett, who has developed a specific teaching approach in which she insists on making room for honesty, inspired by drama pedagogical methods and ethics. The story of Gill Dowsett is presented through a narrative approach. However, before turning to the intriguing account of Gill Dowsett and her encounters and work with her students, the methodological framework of this article must first be briefly outlined.

This article is based on empirical data obtained during the research project *Art as a Tool*. The project brings together schoolchildren from different countries in week-long camps, where they participate in creative activities facilitated by artists from various nations. The primary objective of the project is to foster self-confidence, personal development, and democratic competence among children and young people. I, together with the research team of which I am a part, have studied these processes for several years and on multiple occasions, focusing on visual arts, music, magic, circus, drama, and dance (Austring & Boysen, 2020a, 2020b). The project has been developed and organized by the pedagogical entrepreneur Bo Otterstrøm and his organization *Arttrain*.

The research approach underpinning this article can be summarized in two key principles. First, it adopts a pragmatic standpoint, emphasizing the creation of practical and applicable knowledge (Dewey, 1938). In other words, the study investigates how the pedagogy works and how it can be further developed. Second, it draws inspiration from the educational research tradition of self-study research, which acknowledges knowledge as interconnected with local and contextual practices and shaped by practitioners' accumulated experiences (LaBoskey, 2004). Accordingly, the central objective of this study is to investigate and describe pedagogical approaches that have been developed over time by experienced practitioners and enacted within a practice-oriented context.

The study is based on (1) three days of participant observation in Gill's workshop, (2) observations of gatherings and meetings at the camp, (3) two interviews with Gill, (4) interviews with teachers and pedagogues who have previously worked with Gill, and (5) interviews with the students from Gill's workshop. I recorded group gatherings and interviews using my phone. Although I did not record my observations during the workshops, I wrote field notes immediately after each session (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011). The combination of participant observations and interviews allows for data triangulation (Denzin, 1978; Hastrup, 2013).

In the analytical phase, I applied narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008; Rolón-Dow & Bailey, 2022). Accordingly, I examined the stories that could be identified in the empirical material at multiple levels. This includes the personal stories that the drama pedagogue and the children bring into the workshop, reflecting how they understand themselves and with whom and what they identify. I also analyzed how the workshop context enables certain stories to be told, how relationships among the children and between the children and the drama pedagogue develop, and how conflicts emerge and are either resolved or left unresolved. Concretely, the analytical process involved constructing narrative accounts based on systematic coding (Holton, 2007), comparing participant observations and interview data, and developing story plots (Rolón-Dow & Bailey, 2022). The narrative analysis is made visible in the article through

a narrative approach to academic writing (Schnorenberg, 2013). Accordingly, personally experienced observations constitute the primary material through which the story of the drama pedagogue is presented. The interviews are therefore not described in detail; rather, they serve to supplement the narrative and to support or nuance selected interpretations. Finally, there is a strong affinity between the analytical approach, the writing style, and the drama pedagogical methods described. In particular, forum theatre methods seek to empower participants through the telling and transformation of stories, which resonates with the narrative orientation of both the analysis and the presentation.

Because my investigation and analysis are naturally influenced by my own background, it is important to outline my experiences and knowledge within drama pedagogy specifically, and aesthetic learning processes more generally. Although I do not hold a bachelor's or master's degree in drama pedagogy, I have worked with drama in various contexts throughout my life. My professional journey began as a music educator within social education in Denmark, where I worked from 2002 to 2015. During this time, I collaborated closely with drama educators and also taught drama myself. Later, I transitioned into research (2011–2026), focusing on creativity, pedagogy, and aesthetic learning processes. In this role, I had the opportunity to observe and interview drama pedagogues as part of numerous research projects (e.g., Boysen et al., 2024; Boysen & Kiørboe, 2018; Sørensen et al., 2019).

Based on these different forms of engagement with drama pedagogy, I approach the practice with both fascination and skepticism. On the one hand, the potential of drama pedagogy as a means of empowering young people seems undeniable. On the other hand, drama can also be risky, precisely because the personal stakes can be very high (Boal, 1979, 2002; Diamond, 2004; Lloyd, 2006). In this regard, I have always harbored some skepticism toward the seductive aspects of drama pedagogy, particularly its emphasis on the notion of »saying yes,« which is frequently highlighted in drama pedagogical literature (e.g., Kirk, 2018). From a research perspective, I am therefore interested not only in exploring what works, but also in examining what does not work, or when drama pedagogical processes become difficult, problematic, or challenging. In other words, as Donna Haraway expresses it, I am interested in »staying with the trouble« (Haraway, 2016).

As the aim of this article is to describe and discuss Gill's struggle for honesty and freedom, the content is quite personal. Therefore, ethical issues must be considered with respect to both Gill and the students in her workshop (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Gill Dowsett is not anonymized in the article, as it is important that she is credited for her work. The students, however, are anonymized. Furthermore, contextual aspects of the story (such as the location, nationalities involved, and characteristics of the students) have been altered to ensure anonymity. I have also replaced some of the students' comments and actions with similar comments or actions that do not change the essence of the story (see Stam & Kleiner, 2020). After writing the article, I sent the manuscript to Gill Dowsett, who approved it. Regarding the students, it is important to note that a consent form and information sheet were provided to all students and their parents at the camps included in the study.

Who Is Gill Dowsett and What Are Her Sources of Inspiration?

Meet Gill Dowsett, the central character in this story. The scene is a picturesque countryside camp surrounded by vast fields. The camp includes spacious houses and barns used for communal activities. Nearby lies a large lake and a small village with local shops and a beautiful old church. Excitement fills the air as students from three different countries, all in the 7th or 8th grade, arrive by bus on the camp's first morning. The group consists of around 40 students, each accompanied by two teachers or pedagogues from their respective countries. Additionally, there are three workshop leaders dedicated to dance, circus, and forum theatre.

Personally, I am excited to meet Gill. We have crossed paths before at a previous camp, though we did not get a chance to converse then. During the initial meetings, it quickly becomes apparent that Gill is a person of strong and clearly articulated values. At one gathering, teachers and workshop leaders discuss ways to help students from different countries quickly get to know one another. When someone suggests forming mixed-nationality groups on the first evening, Gill responds with witty sarcasm, highlighting her opposition to forcing such interactions. It becomes evident that she respects the students' autonomy and their freedom to choose how and when to engage with others. In my first interview with her, Gill's values become even more apparent. She describes her extensive experience working with vulnerable children and young people and emphasizes the potential of drama pedagogical approaches. Through drama, she seeks to illuminate the stories and thoughts of young participants and empower them to recognize their own agency and influence in shaping their futures. As she explains:

I can't tell you how many hundreds and thousands of young people I have worked with who love to be very loud and disruptive or completely withdrawn from any engagement. I have measured my work by a glance of the eye, the peeking out from a 'hoody', the sitting on a chair for a couple of minutes, right up to the magical moment I see a light go on in someone's eyes as they have a personal epiphany or insight or understanding.

A few biographical details about Gill Dowsett may help illuminate the foundations of her values and perspectives. Gill began training as a drama teacher in 1971 in the United Kingdom. After one year teaching in mainstream education in England, she went on to work with emotionally and behaviorally challenged young people and later within youth services. Subsequently, she trained with Augusto Boal and later founded the educational charity *Theatre Fforwm Cymru*. Throughout her career, she has taught drama in numerous projects and countries, including the project *Art as a Tool*, led by Bo Otterstrøm and the organization *Arttrain*. In addition to Augusto Boal, Gill refers to thinkers such as Ivan Illich, Paulo Freire, Carl Rogers, Paul Ekman, and Martin Seligman as important sources of inspiration. These influences reflect her engagement with positive psychology and forum theatre methodology, as well as her commitment to social equality and democratization. Her way of connecting forum theatre with broader life values and theoretical and psychological perspectives demonstrates that, for Gill, forum theatre is much more than a method. Rather, it reflects the political and social ambitions that characterized the development of forum theatre from the beginning.

Forum theatre is widely recognized as a participatory dramatic methodology developed within Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*. It stages a social conflict or situation of oppression

that is intentionally left unresolved and invites audience members to intervene directly in the performance by replacing characters and experimenting with alternative actions. In this way, spectators become »spect-actors,« exploring possible responses through embodied experimentation rather than abstract discussion (Boal, 1979, 1992). The method does not aim to present correct solutions but rather to rehearse social change, enabling participants to critically reflect on power relations, agency, and collective responsibility. As Boal famously states, »theatre is a rehearsal for reality« (Boal, 1979, p. 141). Consequently, forum theatre is widely used in educational and community contexts to foster dialogue, empowerment, and democratic participation (Prentki & Preston, 2009; Nicholson, 2005).

As the following narrative will illustrate, the social values embedded in forum theatre permeate all of Gill's pedagogical dispositions. Although she employs forum theatre as a concrete workshop method (e.g., Austring et al., 2024), its underlying principles extend throughout her broader practice. In this article, I therefore focus primarily on the first days of the workshops, when levels of uncertainty, challenge, and conflict are at their highest and pedagogical values are most visibly tested in practice.

No Bullshit

Gill's core values come into sharper focus during the initial gathering of students at the camp. Once the warm-up exercises are completed, we gather in a circle. The three workshop leaders take turns presenting their workshops, with the first two keeping it brief. However, when it is Gill's turn, she spends a significant 7-8 minutes introducing herself and her workshop, setting the stage for the principles that will permeate her work. Here is an excerpt from her presentation:

Gill introduces herself warmly: »I am Gill. I have already said hello to most of you. It might take a while before I get your names. But I will try very hard to do that. Forgive me if I get it wrong. I am looking forward to meeting you. Really meeting you. I am interested in story listening. I see my job as listening to other people«. It is clear, with these words, that Gill emphasizes that she is interested in each individual student and aims to see and know them as more than just students. After this introduction, we all listen to a Tibetan singing bowl, where we practice listening and being attentive. After this exercise, Gill starts asking questions. With her questions, she apparently seeks to get people to acknowledge that we all make mistakes, we all lie, we all can feel small, but we are okay anyway. We do not need to play a role that is different from who we truly are. If we realize that others have problems similar to our own, it becomes easier to be honest and shed the masks and roles.

»So I have a question for you. Could you please be honest with me and put your hand up if this applies to you. If you have ever been in a classroom, and a teacher was asking something, but you hadn't been listening and you didn't know what to say [most students raise their hands]. Okay. Another question. Put your hand up if you've ever been in a conversation with somebody else and you didn't understand a word they were saying, but you pretended you did [many students raise their hands, and some laugh]. Okay. I am feeling comfortable now. I am feeling more comfortable now because it's reminding me that I am not the only one. I like when I don't have to bullshit. Can you put your hand up when you know somebody is talking bullshit [many raise their hands]. Okay. Hands up if you have ever talked bullshit yourself [many students raise their hands, and many laugh]. So, I am interested in finding ways of working with people where none of us have to talk bullshit. Where we can be who we

are. Cause who we are is enough. too often we get told by others that we are not enough. But we are«.

True Stories

Twelve students have enrolled in Gill's workshop, spanning a five-day period. The initial sessions of the workshop revolve around exploring various forms of storytelling, wherein students narrate their own experiences while attentively listening to one another's narratives. The storytelling is structured through engaging games, including a well-known activity where participants form a circle with one chair left vacant. One student stands in the center and shares a personal story, prompting others who can relate to that experience to find a new seat. The process continues, with the last person standing in the center narrating a fresh story. At the outset, the students share relatively innocuous stories, like a boy recounting a vacation in Portugal, which prompts those who have also visited Portugal to promptly change seats. However, as the sessions progress, the stories delve into more personal realms. For example, a girl reveals her fear of insects, leading others to open up about their fears as well. Another student shares experiences of jealousy when a friend forms new connections, prompting a cascade of stories revolving around jealousy.

Throughout the workshop, various methods are employed to encourage the students to express their desires for self-improvement or change. One student expresses a desire to be taller, while another, who appears reserved, admits his longing for more self-confidence. In a heartwarming moment, his two schoolmates offer comforting support, showing the power of empathy and friendship. Yet, the most touching moment occurs when Gill shares her own experience of being bullied as a child due to her weight. In a moving turn of events, a girl quietly mumbles, »the same happened to me«.

The Boys Who Say No

From the very first day at the camp, three boys stand out because of their funny and creative inputs but also their somewhat disruptive behavior. They all three have a knack for injecting humor into serious situations, often catching pedagogues, teachers, and artists off guard while they try to establish a common focus. However, their ways of being disruptive pose a considerable challenge to manage. For instance, they playfully make loud funny noises with their voices that distract the other students. The boys' interactions are a mix of ambiguity, making it hard to gauge their intentions. Their inputs can be both polite and boundary-pushing, disruptive yet open-hearted. Here are a few examples of such instances: During one of the camp sessions, the dance workshop leader joins the drama group to minimize disturbances. Afterwards, one of the boys expresses gratitude to the dance teacher with the words »thank you very much«, which can be seen both as a very polite gesture and as a challenge to Gill's authority as the leader of the drama group, as he appears to speak on behalf of the whole group. In another situation, while playing the storytelling game described earlier, Gill attempts to steer the stories towards more daring topics by saying sentences like »change places if you have ever drunk alcohol«. Afterwards, several students share semi-dangerous stories, such as farting in public or watching pornography. However, one of the three boys says, »change places if you have ever liked to beat somebody«. On one hand, such a comment completely aligns with Gill's explicit wish for honesty. However, there is furthermore something boundary-pushing about this statement, which can be perceived

as testing the boundaries of the space. Despite these ambiguous moments, it is mainly the boys' constant talking and commenting that disrupts the drama group's focus. They often whisper and giggle, making it challenging to create an environment conducive to the others' participation in the group's activities. To ensure a smoother pedagogical process and give space to other participants, Gill realizes that some action must be taken.

How to Appeal Without Controlling

In the beginning, Gill seeks to address the problem within the group through the exercises and games she organizes. For instance, she encourages the boys to avoid forming a group together. However, despite her efforts, they still end up forming their own group. Gill sticks to her principles of allowing students to make their own free decisions, and she does not want to dictate which groups they should be in. In another situation, Gill subtly communicates a message to the boys during a round of storytelling about uncomfortable situations. She asks, »have you ever tried to be in a place together with people that didn't want to be there?« One of the boys apparently picks up on the remark as a message to him and his friends, and he says, »I want to be here«. However, Gill also directly addresses the boys from time to time. For example, she says, »It's respectful to listen to the others in the group«. Eventually, Gill specifically addresses the problem and speaks directly to the three boys:

»This is a two-way process. It only works if you want it to work. It only works if everybody wants it to work. You know this, don't you?« One of the boys responds, »yes, very much«, while his two friends giggle. Gill continues, »You are far too old for me to say, 'don't do that.' You have to do it yourself. I am not doing it for you. Right now, you just go along with whatever is going on in the movement. But we have to work together. I cannot do this alone. I don't have the power. I gave up teaching in schools because I didn't want to work like that. To force people to do things. You have to do it yourself. And you can. You really can. You really got that power. I know. I have seen it in action«.

My experience in this situation is that Gill takes the three boys seriously and treats them as equals, rather than attempting to assert her authority over them. She works diligently to address unproductive power dynamics between teachers and students, where resistance and control hinder progress. Gill's vulnerability in acknowledging her limitations and the need for mutual cooperation fosters an atmosphere of respect and understanding. Despite the obvious conflict between Gill and the boys, there does not appear to be a hostile relationship. Gill organizes a trip to the local city and during the trip, one of the boys approaches Gill, and they walk together, engaging in friendly conversation along the way. By the end of the day, the same boy approaches Gill and expresses that he had a great time.

Gill Opens Up Her Heart

On the third day of the workshop, something remarkable happens. Gill begins by sharing some personal news – the loss of a close family member. She admits that she might be a little distracted due to these thoughts. To connect with her students, she asks if any of them have experienced a similar feeling of being distracted, and many nod in understanding. Despite this, Gill expresses her genuine happiness to be there with them and looks forward to the day ahead. The atmosphere in the room is intense as the session kicks off, with everyone showing great focus, including the three boys. However, as time passes, the boys start to slip back into their usual patterns. They become fidgety and often interrupt others while they speak. It is

somewhat surprising because I thought Gill's personal story and appeal for understanding would have a more significant impact. Despite these disruptions, it should be noted that the three boys consistently contribute valuable insights, which are duly acknowledged by Gill. Throughout the session, the participants engage in small group activities, yet the boys' noise significantly impedes the progress of other groups. While at times Gill tolerates the disruptive behavior, on other occasions, she openly admits her uncertainty about how to guide them towards better focus. Nevertheless, it is intriguing to observe Gill's unwavering inclusivity towards the boys, as she refrains from employing coercive methods such as reprimanding. Instead, Gill endeavors to connect with the boys by cultivating an environment of openness, freedom, and honesty for everyone involved, including herself. It can be argued that is what Gill means by »no bullshit«.

Practice What You Preach

The noteworthy aspect of Gill's narrative lies in her unwavering commitment to honesty and her dedication to fostering the empowerment of young individuals, rather than imposing strict authority and control. This approach presents various potentials and challenges. Primarily, I perceive her work as an endeavor to establish exemplary teaching, wherein she strives to embody her own principles of honesty and equality in her instructional practices. Nevertheless, actualizing one's ideals is a complex task. Within the context of self-study research in education, a key focus is to achieve coherence between teaching methodologies and the teacher's underlying values, as there often exists a disparity between explicit ideals and pedagogical implementation. Vicki Kubler LaBoskey articulates this as follows: »[Self-study research] seeks to determine whether or not our practice is consistent with our evolving ideals and theoretical perspectives. [W]e wish to transform ourselves first so that we might be better situated to help transform our students, their students, and the institutional and social contexts that surround and constrain us« (LaBoskey, 2004, pp. 820-821). The fundamental questions that arise concern the extent to which Gill achieves this goal, and whether it is indeed feasible—or even desirable—to fully embody the ideals she professes. In the following analysis, I will examine these questions in relation to the so-called pedagogical paradox and the concept of appeal.

From Paradox to Appeal

Gill's commitment to honesty and equality in her teaching can be contextualized within the framework of the »pedagogical paradox«, a concept often discussed in educational literature (Benner, 1987; Oettingen, 2001). The pedagogical paradox refers to the seemingly contradictory nature of modern education, where the goal is to foster independent thinking and autonomy in students through external influence. In the past, people were meant to follow a specific path in life and reproduce society's structures and norms. But gradually society changed towards greater freedom for people to choose their own paths in life and potentially break with traditions (see for instance Kant, 1783; Fietch, 1796). This created the background for the problem referred to as »the pedagogical paradox« which in the words of Leonard Nelson can be condensed to the question: »How can teachers, through external influence, form independent individuals not determined by external influence?« (Nelson 1922, cited in Fransen 2020, p. 45). Henrik Vase Frandsen has examined this paradox and proposed that »appeals« can be utilized to reconcile this tension and thereby promote freedom through

external influence (Frandsen, 2020). An appeal involves addressing students in a manner that goes beyond the teacher's personal interests, encouraging them to act for reasons beyond mere compliance with the teacher's wishes. For instance, an appeal might remind students that making noise in class disrupts their peers' learning experience. For an appeal to be effective, it must be perceived as genuine, rather than manipulative or an exertion of power.

In her teaching approach, Gill extensively employs appeals rather than resorting to reprimanding or dictating. She emphasizes values of broader significance that can serve as guiding principles for her students. For instance, she emphasizes the importance of honesty, affirming that students are valued as they are. Gill also encourages active listening and respect among students. These appeals seem to be successful, as the students demonstrate a willingness to listen to one another and engage in open sharing. Gill's appeals are perceived as genuine, likely because she exemplifies these ideals in her own actions. This is indicated by the interviews in which the students emphasize that »Gill means what she says«, »Gill truly wants the best for us« or »to her, we are not just students«. She consistently listens to her students and shares personal stories, reinforcing the value of her appeals through her authenticity and unwavering commitment to her principles. Similarly, the three boys are also accommodated in Gill's teaching through appeals that highlight the value of community participation. Gill seeks to convince the boys that their influence and voice can be strengthened through active engagement within the group's collective efforts. While the success of these appeals may vary, what remains significant is that Gill refrains from relying on an unargued exercise of power or her authority as a teacher. Instead, she continues to listen to the boys, acknowledges their input, engages in dialogue, and appeals to them based on the fundamental values that underpin her teaching approach. In this manner, the integration of the three boys into her teaching serves as a demonstrative example of how Gill's values are seamlessly interwoven into her pedagogical practice.

The Ambiguities of Honesty and Freedom

Naturally, Gill's pedagogical approach can also be discussed from a more critical point of view. First of all, it could be contended that Gill's pursuit of honesty may be considered excessive from an academic standpoint. In the realm of pedagogy, there exists a prevailing emphasis on educators incorporating personal perspectives into their professional work while refraining from divulging private matters (Laursen, 2003). Adhering to such principles ensures that teachers do not inadvertently prioritize their own needs, inadvertently dominating the educational space with excessive revelations about their private lives. However, Gill's instructional methods appear to deviate from these conventional principles. This is evident in Gill's explicit desire to transcend traditional teacher and student roles, fostering an environment where both parties can genuinely engage as individuals in their own right. Notably, Gill's candidness about her own experiences lends authenticity to her intention. Without her willingness to share personal stories, this ambition might be deemed less genuine. In this regard, Gill's approach can be interpreted as an expression of professionalism, aligning with the tenets of self-study research, as articulated by LaBoskey (2004), among others. By deliberately seeking to synchronize ideals with practices, Gill endeavors to create an environment that fosters students' individuality and personal expression. Her commitment to promoting students' unique voices finds professional support in her own openness and honesty.

On the other hand, the fact that Gill insist on sharing personal stories can be criticized from an ethical perspective. Within drama pedagogical literature it has been emphasized that a drama teacher's sharing of personal stories can force the students to tell personal stuff about themselves even though they might not be ready for it (e.g., Thompson 2014; Dwyer 2016). The interviews with the students did not indicate that this was the case. On the contrary, the students seemed eager to tell how Gill created a safe space in which they felt comfortable. Still, it cannot be excluded that some students felt forced to share personal stories. However, it is important to stress that Gill employed different methods to avoid this. First, she explicitly appreciated all students' inputs, both the very personal stories and the less personal stories. Furthermore, she repeatedly underlined that the students didn't have to share their personal stories. Nevertheless, Gill's intention was to create a room in which personal stories could be shared and therefore some students might feel forced. It is a pedagogical challenge and dilemma how to invite people to tell personal stories without unintentionally manipulating them into doing so.

From an ethical point of view, Gill's appeals to the three boys can also be questioned. In the workshop, the boys were occasionally pointed out by Gill as someone that disturbed the collective process. This approach can be related to an individualizing approach that has been criticized by several educational researchers and practitioners (Søndergaard & Hansen, 2018). Instead, the boys' behavior could possibly have been dealt with on a group level. The question is whether that would have been a workable solution in the specific context in the sense that a clash between Gill and the boys' different interests seemed unavoidable. Anyhow, Gill's pedagogical approach was seemingly to admit her own weaknesses and openly express her thoughts and reflections about challenges in the workshop. If this strategy had not been accompanied by her explicit respect and compassion for the three boys and the other students, this could easily have been ethically questionable. But in the specific workshop, the pedagogical strategy rather left the impression that Gill insisted on taking the group processes and the students seriously.

Gill's approaches can also be discussed in relation to the drama pedagogical methods that constitute her sources of inspiration. Particularly within forum theatre, the aim is to give participants a voice and to empower them to find solutions both individually and collaboratively, enabling them to influence their own futures and, ultimately, society. In the well-known quote by Boal, referred to above — »theatre is a rehearsal for reality« (Boal, 1979, p. 141) — Boal emphasizes that real-life scenarios can be explored and tested within the framework of forum theatre. However, one might question whether this logic fully applies to the described workshop. Rather than functioning merely as a rehearsal for reality, the workshop itself becomes reality. The sharing of stories and the distribution of power within the workshop are therefore not symbolic or preparatory; they are real and consequential. This also means that clear boundaries between the drama pedagogical method and the other dynamics unfolding in the workshop cannot easily be established. Some might argue that the drama pedagogical method is the key to resolving many of the conflicts that arise in such settings. According to established drama pedagogical approaches, one of the crucial tasks of a drama pedagogue facilitating a process is to establish ground rules and a drama contract with the participants at the outset (Neelands, 2009; Toivanen & Pyykkö, 2012). Such a contract consists of jointly and democratically agreed principles for cooperation within the

group. During the process, both participants and teacher can refer back to these principles as a shared framework. It is possible that such a democratic structuring of the work might have helped to prevent or mitigate conflicts. However, the pedagogical choices employed by the drama pedagogue in this case appear to differ from this model. For her, all interactions and relationships within the group are part of real life and must be engaged with directly in order to foster greater awareness, honesty, and growth among the participants. There does not seem to be a clear distinction between what takes place within the frame of the drama workshop and what belongs outside it. From a critical perspective, this also means that the rules of the workshop become less transparent and therefore leave students with less power to navigate the workshop and contribute to it.

According to Gill, her intention is to create a space where students are free to »be who they are«. In other words, she seeks to cultivate a space of honesty. From the perspective of social constructivism and narrative theory, however, a stable or essential core identity that can simply be revealed hardly exists. Rather, the workshop enables participants to come into being in particular ways within this specific context (Haraway, 2008). The boys who emerge as potential »problems« in the workshop are therefore also constituted as such through the interactions between the students, the drama pedagogue, and the framing of the workshop itself. Nevertheless, the drama pedagogue maintains that masks and roles can, to some extent, be set aside, making room for more nuanced and open conversations about who we are and what we struggle with. Drawing on Goffman (1959), this could be interpreted as an attempt to offer participants a temporary release from the »front stage,« allowing them to meet one another »backstage« for a while.

Concluding Reflections

I would like to conclude this article by expressing my sincere gratitude to Gill, the three boys and all the students who actively participated in the camp, with special recognition to those who engaged in her workshop. Throughout this account, I have been captivated by Gill's teaching methods, attitude, and values. My personal experience in her presence was profound, as I found myself drawn to her emphasis on honesty and the inherent value of every individual, which served as a source of inspiration. However, it is essential to acknowledge that my narrative provides only a limited glimpse into Gill's extensive practice as a drama educator. Her career spans many years, during which she has employed various methodological approaches and worked in diverse contexts. Similarly, my portrayal of the three boys is confined to the encounter I had with them during the camp. Consequently, I lack insights into their behavior in other settings. However, the article is grounded in the perspective that people are shaped by — and shape themselves — through their relations with others. Accordingly, the article provides an account of how the three boys, the other students, and Gill come into being within this specific context, and of the possibilities for action that appear to be available to them. The story is therefore not any less real because it offers only a brief glimpse into these individuals' lives and behaviours. Rather, it illustrates how interactions between students and the drama pedagogue within a particular teaching context generate both new opportunities as well as conflicts and challenges. It is a story from which educators, pedagogues, teacher education students and social education students may potentially learn. As such, the article contributes to knowledge on how the pursuit of honesty in

drama pedagogy may foster a free space for children and young people, while simultaneously illuminating the pedagogical challenges and dilemmas educators must navigate. Ultimately, the narrative is intended to serve as a source of inspiration for educators more broadly, encouraging them to uphold their pedagogical ideals and to cultivate the courage to stay with the trouble, even when confronted with seemingly insurmountable challenges.

As part of the project *Art as a Tool*, this study is partly funded by *Erasmus+*

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Biography

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