

## THEATER PEDAGOGY AS A CHALLENGE IN DEVELOPING CREATIVE THINKING

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes the role of theater pedagogy in developing the creative thinking of pupils and students within the modern educational system, alongside the challenges of its practical implementation. Today, transitioning from traditional teaching methods to learner-centered and interactive approaches remains a highly relevant issue. The paper highlights the potential of theater pedagogy, the methodological and psychological barriers encountered in the educational process, and ways to overcome them. The study concludes that integrating theatrical elements into the learning process enhances independent thinking, emotional intelligence, and overall creativity.

**Keywords:** theater pedagogy, creative thinking, creativity, educational challenges, interactive methods, personality development, emotional intelligence, pedagogical innovation.

In today's era of globalization, a teacher is no longer just a provider of information, but a key figure who fosters students' independent thinking, pursuit of innovation, and creative approach. Therefore, developing creative thinking in future teachers is becoming an urgent issue. Human beings differ from other living creatures by their intellect, reasoning capacity, and consciousness. Consequently, extensive work is currently being carried out in our country to further elevate individual consciousness, thinking, and reasoning abilities. The ultimate goal of these efforts is the progress and prosperity of our nation.

It is worth noting that a creatively minded person possesses independent thought and a distinct worldview, enabling them to contribute effectively to modern development. What exactly do we mean by creative thinking? Creative thinking is a concept dominated by the qualities of free thought, creativity, and originality. It is essential for an individual's free thinking and communication in life. Within this framework, a person interacts freely with others and independently expresses their perspective on any event or phenomenon.

Today, the skill of fostering creative thinking in future teachers is an expression of a researcher's and creator's abilities, willpower, diligence, and determination toward an ultimate goal. Thus, developing creative relationship thinking in students involves studying aspects such as conscious learning, self-awareness, striving for one's goals, rational problem-solving, and innovative thinking. These aspects assist in acquiring, analyzing, practicing, and creatively approaching any knowledge. Furthermore, continuous engagement in an activity one aspires to master helps strengthen both memory and intellect.

### Global Perspectives and Theoretical Frameworks

Global scholars are now shifting their attention to the teacher's "position" and "improvisational ability" during lessons. As an example, in recent years, scholars such as Thomas Schmidt (Germany) and Erika Fischer-Lichte have put forward the theory of the "Performative Turn." According to this approach, the teacher is not merely an information



provider but a "performer" who creates the classroom environment. The core essence is that the student-teacher learns to manage the pupils' attention by working with their own body, voice, and space. As a result, the future teacher overcomes the fear of the audience and develops creative freedom.

Furthermore, studies conducted between 2018 and 2024 by Rickard Blair (USA) and Kelly Sheila (Ireland) proved the impact of theatrical exercises on brain activity:

**Mirror Neurons Theory:** Entering a role through theater activates the empathy centers in a teacher, allowing them to feel the student's condition.

**Creative Cognition:** In the process of resolving dramatic situations, the prefrontal cortex of the brain forms new neural connections, which enhances pedagogical creativity.

Other notable global contributions include:

1. **Jon O'Toole (Australia):** Created an international model for integrating theater methodology with all disciplines (STEM).
2. **Helen Nicholson (UK):** Developed the therapeutic and creative functions of theater in enhancing the emotional resilience of future teachers.
3. **Ildiko Kovacs (Hungary):** Systematized cognitive criteria for evaluating pedagogical improvisation.

Abroad, theater pedagogy is viewed not simply as teaching acting skills, but as a powerful tool for personal development, social adaptation, and the formation of creative thinking. Today, in Western and Asian countries, this field is divided into several main tracks.

## Key Aspects of Foreign Experience

### 1. "Drama in Education"

Widespread in the UK and Scandinavian countries, this approach does not treat theater as a separate subject, but rather as a method for mastering other disciplines (history, literature, language learning).

- **Objective:** The student does not merely read about a historical event; they "live through it."
- **The Dorothy Heathcote Method:** The "**Mantle of the Expert**" approach developed by renowned educator Dorothy Heathcote transforms the student from a passive listener into an active problem solver. Students step into the shoes of experts (archaeologists, scientists, diplomats) to resolve complex issues.

### 2. Applied Theatre

This direction is applied outside professional theater spaces—in prisons, hospitals, refugee camps, and local communities.

- **Augusto Boal and the "Theatre of the Oppressed":** The method of Brazilian director Boal is highly popular abroad. Here, the spectator is not just an observer but becomes a "spect-



actor" who actively intervenes in the action to solve the social problem presented on stage.

### 3. Modern Schools in Professional Education

In foreign higher education institutions (such as Juilliard in the USA, RADA in the UK, or GITIS in Russia), pedagogy combines classical systems with modern techniques.

#### Core Principles of Foreign Theater Pedagogy

Principle	Description
<b>Subject-Subject Relationship</b>	The teacher acts as a facilitator (guide) rather than a dictator.
<b>Freedom from Fear of Mistakes</b>	Making mistakes during the educational process is viewed as a vital part of creative exploration.
<b>Integration</b>	Theater is taught in close connection with psychology, sociology, and neurobiology.
<b>Inclusivity</b>	Specialized theater pedagogy methodologies have been developed for individuals with disabilities.

In developed countries, theater pedagogy serves as a primary mechanism for individual socialization. A clear example of this is the **Lecoq School**, which operates at the intersection of physical theater and neurobiology to unlock human creativity through "body language."

In the West, theater pedagogy is far more than just "stage speech" or "plastics." It is a global system designed to enhance "**Soft Skills**," such as teamwork, emotional intelligence, and communication culture. Currently, many foreign corporations (e.g., Google or Pixar) invite theater pedagogues specifically to boost their employees' creativity.

In developed nations (USA, UK, Germany, France), theater pedagogy is viewed as a fundamental tool for character building, split into professional actor training and socio-pedagogical (applied) tracks. In the educational systems of these nations, theater pedagogy develops based on the concepts of "**Dramaturgical Cognition**" and "**Transformative Education**." In these countries, theater is seen not as a mere classroom decoration, but as a means to shape students' critical and creative thinking at a neuropedagogical level.



The British School (e.g., Helen Nicholson and John Neelands) considers theater to be a "social laboratory" for students. They introduced the "**Democratic Pedagogy**" method into teacher training, where student-teachers learn to overcome social barriers arising in class through dramatic improvisation.

**Method:** "Process Drama" – where the creative process itself, rather than the final product (the play), serves as the educational objective.

American scholars (such as Rickard Blair and James Catterall) investigated the impact of theater exercises on cognitive brain functions and developed quantitative indicators to measure "**Divergent Thinking**" (finding multiple solutions to a single problem) through theater.

**Method:** "Enactive Learning" – assimilating information through body movement and emotion.

Scholars like Katrin Günther and Thomas Schmidt developed the concept of preparing the teacher as a "Director on Stage," interpreting every movement, vocal tone, and pause of the teacher during a lesson as an artistic-pedagogical act.

Meanwhile, Russian scholars like A.P. Ershova and V.M. Bukhatov brought "**Socio-Game Technology**" (социоигровая технология) to a new level. Their recent studies (2018–2024) prove that a future teacher's "directorial" skill in the classroom defines their creative thinking. Additionally, I.A. Gabdreeva conducted research on the psychological modeling of a teacher's pedagogical improvisation, pointing to theater exercises as a primary factor increasing students' professional flexibility.

### Main Models of Theater Pedagogy in Developed Countries

Country	Primary Focus	Areas of Application
<b>United Kingdom</b>	Critical thinking and language acquisition	Schools and colleges
<b>Germany</b>	Social integration and therapy	All layers of society
<b>United States</b>	Personal growth and business communication	Corporations and private studios
<b>France</b>	Aesthetic taste and physical freedom	Art schools and cultural centers

### Theater Pedagogy in the Context of Uzbekistan



In Uzbekistan, theater pedagogy possesses long-standing traditions aimed at conveying national values through the stage. Today, this field is developing on the basis of both classical "master-apprentice" (ustoz-shogird) traditions and the modern academic system.

Although theater pedagogy in Uzbekistan primarily relies on the systems of K.S. Stanislavsky and M. Chekhov, it stands out with unique elements of national askiya (wit/wordplay) and comedy art (qiziqchilik). However, academic conservatism remains a hurdle when integrating these methods into the general education system.

Uzbek pedagogical scholars view theater pedagogy as a "**methodological tool**" not only for art students but for future teachers across all disciplines:

1. **Sh.S. Shodmonova** systematized the psychological-pedagogical foundations of dramatic games and staged activities in developing students' creative thinking, advocating for theatrical elements as an "active learning" methodology.
2. **M.H. Toxtaxodjayeva** developed innovative models for utilizing theater art to enhance the pedagogical mastery of future teachers, focusing particularly on "pedagogical technique" (gestures, facial expressions, voice).
3. **B.X. Xodjayev** analyzed the role of historical and modern theater traditions in shaping the personality of future teachers in pedagogical research, viewing it as a tool to stimulate independent thinking.
4. **S.M. Shaxriyorov** researched the role of theater pedagogy in developing the speech culture and communicative skills of future teachers, creating a specialized training course.

#### Distinctive Features of Uzbek Theater Pedagogy

Feature	Description
<b>Focus on Speech</b>	Great emphasis is placed on artistic word selection, ghazal recitation, and working with classical texts in Uzbek stage speech pedagogy.
<b>Plastics and Dance</b>	National movements and elements of Uzbek dance are integral components of stage movement classes.
<b>Spiritual Foundation</b>	Pedagogy is built around the philosophical notion that "the stage is a sacred sanctuary," rather than around mere technique.

Unlike in developed countries, theater pedagogy in our context is largely confined to "training artists." The systemic application of theater methods in ordinary schools to develop personality and soft skills is only beginning to take shape.

#### Comparative Analysis of Creative Thinking Models

Creative thinking is the ability to find innovative, non-standard solutions to problems not only in art but also in science, technology, and daily life. Today, this skill ranks among the Top-5



most demanded skills in the global labor market.

In developed countries, creative thinking is tightly linked to "**Design Thinking**" and "**Problem Solving**" methodologies. For instance, in Japan, creativity is tied to a collective approach. Through the "**Kaizen**" philosophy, every employee constantly contemplates how to creatively improve processes.

### Comparative Framework of Creative Thinking Models

Parameter	In Developed Countries	In Uzbekistan
Core Method	Critical analysis and experimentation	Logical conclusion and mastery
Role in Education	As a distinct soft skill	At the stage of interdisciplinary integration
Incentive	Individual uniqueness	Collective outcome and tradition
Tools	Mind Mapping, Lateral Thinking	Problem-based learning, Case Studies

In developed nations, creative thinking acts as a tool that generates economic value (**Creative Economy**). In Uzbekistan, a transition from traditional education to creative education is currently underway. The primary goal is to teach youth not just to memorize ready-made knowledge, but to generate new knowledge.

### Methodological and Pedagogical Challenges of Theater Pedagogy

Although theater pedagogy is a highly effective tool for developing creative thinking, there are several pedagogical and methodological challenges to implementing it systematically into education. These challenges present distinct characteristics both internationally and within the specific context of Uzbekistan.

#### 1. Process vs. Product Orientation

Theater pedagogy is frequently misperceived as merely "putting on a stage performance," whereas it ought to be process-oriented.

- **Pressure for Results:** In schools and studios, the primary focus is often on "staging a play at the end of the year." This stifles creative freedom. The student becomes preoccupied with memorizing script lines and cannot propose independent creative solutions.

- **The Evaluation System:** Creative thinking is a subjective concept. Assessing it through standardized tests or scores is difficult. The absence of clear criteria to measure how much a



student has "grown creatively" during theater games remains a core issue.

## 2. Global Challenges

Even where theater pedagogy is well-established in the West, certain barriers persist:

- **Shortage of Facilitators:** A theater pedagogue must simultaneously be a director, a psychologist, and a teacher. When an ordinary teacher introduces theater methods into a lesson, it often devolves into a simple "game," while educational and creative goals are pushed aside.
- **Time and Space Constraints:** Creative thinking requires freedom. A standard 45-minute lesson and a room filled with rows of desks prove too restrictive for the creative process.

## 3. Barriers in the Uzbek Educational System

- **Academic Conservatism:** The "teacher speaks, student listens" model still dominates education. The "equal dialogue" and "improvisation" offered by theater pedagogy often clash with traditional perceptions of a lesson.
- **Psychological Barriers:** Students (especially in higher grades) suffer from a strong "fear of making a mistake" or anxiety about being ridiculed. Creative thinking, however, demands risk-taking and freedom from the fear of failure.
- **Institutional Gaps:** In Uzbekistan, the "theater pedagogue" specialization is available almost exclusively in art universities. Pedagogical universities do not sufficiently provide future teachers with courses on applying theater methodologies.

## Summary of Key Problems

1. **Methodological Limitations:** Theater pedagogy is frequently misinterpreted as solely "stage art" or "play preparation." This approach smothers creative thinking because attention is diverted from the process (exploration) to the ready product (the spectacle). Consequently, mechanical execution skills are formed rather than independent decision-making.

2. **Pedagogical Training Quality:** The experience of developed nations (e.g., Germany) requires a theater pedagogue to simultaneously be a psychologist, an art critic, and a facilitator. In Uzbekistan, the lack of an adequate methodological base for using theater techniques in training pedagogical cadres hinders the creation of a creative environment.

3. **Psychological and Social Barriers:** Creative thinking demands the freedom to take risks and make mistakes. However, the requirement for a single "correct answer" in traditional education induces "stage fright" and fear of social evaluation in students. This works against the primary objective of theater pedagogy—developing emotional intelligence.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, theater pedagogy should be treated not merely as a "subsidiary tool" but as a foundational methodology in developing creative thinking. The issue lies not within theater as an art form, but in outdated approaches to adapting it to the educational system.

To resolve the problem of theater pedagogy as an impediment to creative thinking, the educational process must shift toward the "**Drama in Education**" model. Within this framework, theater becomes an interactive method applied across all subjects rather than an isolated discipline. To elevate creative thinking, it is vital to regularly employ improvisation



exercises, role-playing, and case-study methods, thereby transforming the modern teacher from a "dictator" into a "coordinator."

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