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The complex role of drama teaching and drama teachers' learning trajectories in an Icelandic context

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to shed light on the complex role of drama teaching and drama teachers' learning trajectories. Within a socio-cultural framework of understanding, an ethnographic study was conducted on the culture and context of drama implementation in schools. The theory of practice architectures by Stephen Kemmis and Peter Grootenboer is used to interpret the findings. The findings reveal that the learning trajectories of drama teachers can both be seen as illustrating the significance of recognition and the importance of community and that drama teaching is recognised as a complex and demanding career.

KEYWORDS

Drama; drama teaching; learning trajectories; novice drama teachers

Introduction

Transition from education – from being a teacher student, to the world of work – is always a challenge. For the teaching profession, the step from education to work seems to be even more demanding than in other professions as teaching is increasingly recognised as a complex and demanding career. Teachers experience higher levels of stress and burnout than other professions (Watt and Richardson 2014). It is also a common experience among novice teachers in general teaching that the first year in teaching is demanding and many teachers leave the profession after the first year (see, for example, Leenders, De Jong, and Van Tartwijk 2003; Smith et al. 2014; Watt and Richardson 2014; Välijärvi and Heikkinen 2012). DiPardo and Potter (2003, 317) have written about the role of emotions in teachers' professional lives, stating that teaching is emotionally charged work due to the stress of overwork, too little relational and material support, and students who present ever-larger challenges. DiPardo and Potter discuss how school reforms influence teachers, and they stress how important it is that school reformers pay attention to the relationship between optimal learning conditions for students and supportive working conditions for the teachers. According to Kari Smith et al. (2014), many novices are often given the most difficult classes and expectations run high until school reality turns out to be quite different from what many novice teachers had envisioned. Smith also states that teachers who fail to create a relationship of trust and respect with their students and colleagues, and are mistrusted by the authorities, are more likely to leave the profession as burnouts (Smith et al. 2014). This is often called the *practice shock*, and the higher the expectations, the bigger the fall (Leenders, De Jong, and Van Tartwijk 2003). Borko and Livingston (1989, 474) emphasise the differences

between expert teachers and novice teachers: 'Expert teachers notice different aspects of classrooms than do novices, are more selective in their use of information during planning and interactive teaching and make greater use of instructional and management routines'. Their learning trajectories are different. The concept of learning trajectories highlights the timelines in which competence building occurs. First, this term can help to make the diversity and multidimensionality of learning processes salient (Lahn 2011, 53). Second, to speak of trajectories rather than developmental processes takes the diversity and multidimensionality of the learning processes into account, according to Lahn (2011). Third, this term points to the embeddedness of trajectories in systems that vary along temporal and spatial dimensions. Experiences are interpreted and re-conceptualised in creative ways along stretches of timelines. There are four important dimensions of teachers' learning trajectories, according to Wittek and Bratholm (2014, 20–24). These are: (1) Learning trajectories are dynamic and always moving. (2) They are constituted by the ways tools are used and interpreted. (3) The third dimension states that learning trajectories are formed in activities. (4) The fourth dimension states that learning trajectories transcend the context; that is, a teacher can be a boundary crosser and connect different practices. Learning trajectories are formed through interaction and through meeting points.

Short overview of the literature

This article draws on some of the literature concerning drama teacher identity and professional development. In Andy Kempe's (2012) research on drama teachers' professional identity, he identified three interconnected elements of a drama teacher's identity: *self*, *role* and *character*. The research project sought to explore the relationship between teaching and drama. The findings showed that the trainees were split more or less equally between describing themselves as a teacher whose art is drama or a teacher whose art is teaching drama, while fewer saw themselves as a dramatic artist who teaches (Kempe 2012). The findings highlight the importance of drama being an arts subject, and that teachers teaching drama are arts specialists. Professional development is the growth a teacher achieves as a result of increased experience and by systematically examining his or her teaching (Anderson 2002). In his PhD thesis, Michael Anderson (2002) focuses on four drama teachers' professional development and conceptualises their experiences as a journey that both encourages and discourages. The findings revealed that two of the teachers used a change of context to improve their satisfaction and confidence levels, whereas the two fledgling teachers struggled to survive the difficulties of their first year, and both seriously considered leaving teaching (Anderson 2002). A practice theory for drama teaching can be seen as a theory informing the actions taken by the drama teacher. Anderson (2006) draws attention to the fact that Heathcote's ground-breaking pedagogy was first called *transformative pedagogy*, referring to the power of drama practice to interrogate situations and characters and to suggest, formulate and change attitudes. Anderson considers that a gift for future drama teachers is to 'equip them for the inevitability of change' (102). He states, furthermore, that the drama teacher has the opportunity to be at the centre of the educational discussion rather than on the fringes. There is a significant body of research literature that explores early career teaching struggles when beginners try to gain foothold in the profession, as well as research literature about drama teachers in general (see, for example, Nicholson 2009; Neelands 1996; Taylor 2003; O'Toole 2015) but

not much literature exists about novice drama teachers and their learning trajectories. Thus, there is a knowledge gap. Therefore it is important to shed light on the complex role of drama teaching and drama teachers' learning trajectories. Hence the research question for this article is: *How can the learning trajectories of drama teachers throughout the school year be described and understood?* The article is based on my PhD study entitled *Understanding drama teaching in compulsory education in Iceland. A micro-ethnographic study of the practices of two drama teachers*. For beginning teachers in the drama teaching profession, classroom leadership skills are conceptualised as decisive for choices when moving in and out of role within the drama process, they have developed (Anderson 2006, 105). Therefore, it is interesting to discover how competences to teach drama develop in teachers and look into what characterises their learning trajectories in becoming experienced and skilled teachers.

Theoretical background

The rationale for this study is that drama was included as a compulsory subject for all students in primary and lower secondary curricula in Iceland. As a result, there were considerable tensions connected with how Icelandic schools could or should embrace this newcomer to the curriculum and whether the necessary competence existed to teach it. Who has the competence to teach this subject, and, if it is to be used as a mode of work or technique to support learning in other subjects, then who can elaborate on this technique in a way that best brings out its potential as an art subject? When a new national curriculum guide for drama is created, what kind of support is needed from the education system in order to make this work? Those points are examples of myriads of questions that must be asked when a new subject is made obligatory at the same time as fundamental changes are presented in the national curriculum. This article aims to answer the questions about the complex role of drama teaching and drama teachers' learning trajectories. But first I will briefly explicate the concept *practice architectures* and the feedback loops and their relations to dialectical tensions as I used the practice architectures to interpret the findings. The concept *practice architectures* refers to the specific cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements found in or brought to a site (Kemmis et al. 2014). Kemmis et al. (2014) explain practice as organised bundles of *sayings*, *doings* and *relatings* that hang together in the project of practice. This is about what is considered appropriate to say or do in a particular practice, and what kinds of relations between people within the practice are necessary and proper according to the culture of that practice. Practice is a form of socially established cooperative human activity where people become speakers of shared languages and develop shared forms of understanding. They also take part in activities (*doings*: what people describe as skills and capabilities) and they share ways of relating to each other (*relatings*). Simply put, the project of practice is what people answer when asked: 'What are you doing?' while they are engaged in the practice. When a person enters a practice, there are already practice architectures that regulate what can be said and how and what can be done and how, as well as how relations, hierarchies and solidarity function. In other words, these are arrangements that decide whether the practice is possible or not (Thorkelsdóttir 2018).

In [Figure 1](#) three columns are displayed: To the left, the practice and the practitioner with *sayings*, *doings* and *relatings*; to the right, the arrangements in the practice architectures

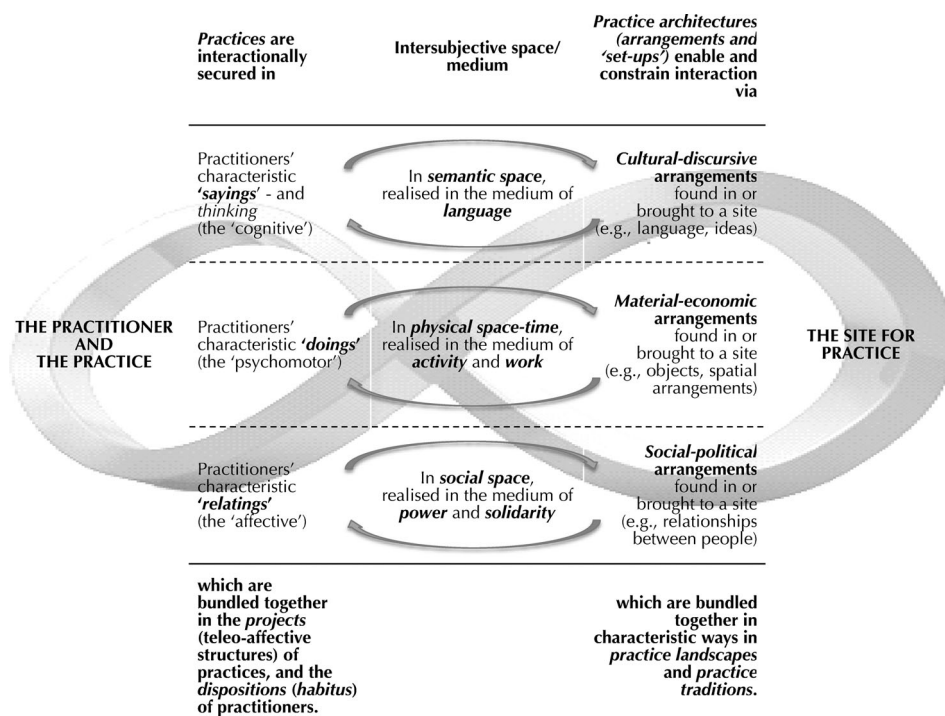


Figure 1. Theory of practice architectures. Source: Kemmis et al. (2014, 27; with permission from Kemmis et al).

consisting of cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements. The column between the practice column and the practice architecture column is called intersubjective space, where communication between the practice and the practice architectures is realised, in the semantic space through the medium of language, physical space–time realised in the medium of activity and work, and social space realised in the medium of power and solidarity. Figure 1 also displays a shape of a 'feedback loop' centred in intersubjective space. The feedback loop can be characterised as a 'learning loop' within intersubjective space, as a space for communication, or in other words, a communicative space. The feedback loops have the potential for learning to happen, transforming the understanding of the participants. The dialectical tensions can be of different kinds, but a main tension is the one that arises between the personal dreams, visions and hopes, (Thorkelsdóttir 2018). The theory of practice architectures suggests that when a teacher enters a community of practice, for example, a school, this site is in part already formed. Practice architectures are partly made by the previous practices of people in the site, and some practice architectures can be changed by people's practices.

Methodology

In this study, I have chosen a qualitative approach in order to catch the fine-grained and subtle aspects of drama teaching as well as dimensions of the professional life of the drama teacher. Within a socio-cultural framework of understanding, a micro ethnographic

study of the culture and the context for the implementation of drama was carried out. A micro-ethnographic approach focuses on language or discourse-in-use (the drama discourse), as Baker, Green, and Skukauskaite (2008, 79) maintain. An ethnographer studies the meaning of behaviour, the language and the interaction among members of a culture-sharing group (Creswell, 2007/2013; O'Reilly 2012). The main focus is on two drama teachers' teaching practices, (Jóhanna and Kári), in two schools in compulsory education during the school year 2013–2014. One is a novice teacher and the other is an experienced drama teacher. The research discussed in this article sets out to explore the learning trajectories of drama teachers as drama is part curriculum in compulsory education in Iceland. Hence the research question for this article is: *How can the learning trajectories of drama teachers throughout the school year be described and understood?* I have tried to visualise the drama teaching learning loop and their learning trajectories by making a model of the dialectical tension between drama teaching practices and practice architecture through meeting points. The design entails systematic data collection over one school year, with observations and interviews as the main sources of information regarding cultural behaviour. I gathered different types of data: field notes, video observations, interviews with both students and teachers, and later on with principals. I have also examined documents such as teachers' journals, photographs, the school curriculum and drama-teachers' lesson plans, as well as the national curriculum competence criteria for drama. The research is based on a socio-cultural understanding of learning, and on the basic assumption that we are social and cultural individuals who interact and think together with others, and we always learn. Knowledge is constructed and it is based on the societal and cultural context (see Säljö 2016; Vygotsky 1978). I will now turn to the learning trajectories of drama teachers throughout the school year and how they can be described and understood.

The narratives of the two participating drama teachers and their learning trajectories

I will now present the findings of the participating teachers' stories about teaching drama and the role of drama from the teachers' perspective. As an ethnographer, I focus on the interpretation of my data. Wolcott (1994) mentions three procedures for an ethnographic analysis: description, analysis and interpretation. The researcher tries to understand how interaction emerges and how meaning is created within the group. In this phase, the researcher can use theory for the interpretation. I have chosen practice theory connected to practice architectures in order to find a good structure for my interpretation.

The narrative analysis is presented in the third person because I edit the interview text and combine it with excerpts from the written teacher journals. The configuration or emplotment gives the reader a sense of causality in the chronology of the story. When I have identified the central aspects of each teacher's story, I proceed to a thematic analysis studying the themes as dimensions in the learning trajectory of the teacher.

Jóhanna's narrative – a lonesome path for a novice teacher

Jóhanna was a novice teacher in her first year of teaching at the beginning of the research project. The class she was teaching comprised students in 5th grade (10–11 years old). She was teaching drama in a 50% position (10.6 h per week in drama), and she had to teach

other subjects in order to fulfil a full-time teaching position. A full-time teaching position for a novice teacher in Iceland is 25 teaching units, with one unit consisting of 40 min. She taught 33 lessons per week. She graduated from the University of Iceland, School of Education, in 2010 as a qualified teacher who specialised in drama. She felt that she needed more education in drama and therefore applied for entrance to a drama school in London from where she graduated in 2013. She thinks drama is really important to students and would like to be part of further implementing drama in schools.

Novice teacher

The same year Jóhanna graduated she started working as a drama teacher. She was employed for one year in the beginning of the school year, and her task was to replace the previous music teacher who had also taught some drama. The fall semester was hard for her. When she started to work, she was in a broken state because of personal issues. She was highly fragile from the very beginning of the school year, and seriously doubted her competence as a teacher.

When I began working, I had serious doubts with regard to my competence, since the position is very mentally demanding, and I knew that I had less to offer than I would under more normal circumstances. I had to do a lot of teaching, more than a 100% workload.

In need of a mentor

Jóhanna felt alone in her school, and she found it difficult to have no one to talk to. She wanted to have a discussion with her peers about how to shape specific ways of teaching drama as an art form, as opposed to drama as a teaching method. She pointed out that it is perhaps difficult for a novice teacher to structure drama teaching without first having a fruitful discussion about what kind of opportunities she has available to her, especially regarding ways to demonstrate progress, and so on. Jóhanna believes it is extremely important to exchange reflections, ideas and views concerning teaching in order to gain an oversight when experiencing difficult times.

I wasn't always certain what I was allowed to do in my class. Could I stage performances, and so on? The space that I was allotted wasn't very impressive and I didn't always have access to the classroom and I was forced to use other classrooms that were jam-packed with tables and chairs, and a lot of time was wasted on moving them around in order to begin the drama class.

She had 'thousands of ideas' for projects she wanted to teach, but she felt she needed guidance and support from other teachers. 'The possibilities are, of course, endless, but it would have been invaluable for a first-year teacher to have access to a mentor who taught the same subject, and who had some experience of that field in order to guide and advise in relation to what one can request in schoolwork and how one could structure the teaching', she wrote in her journal.

Struggling with the pedagogy and structure of drama teaching

Jóhanna struggled to find a certain frame to help her to better organise her teaching so the winter term would become a holistic process that effectively encompassed the learning outcomes stipulated in the national curriculum.

I am not saying that I object to drama being part of the elementary school activities or that it has no place in the national curriculum, but rather that my experience is limited and I lack experience in discussing with other drama teachers how to shape specific ways of teaching that I would use to teach drama as an art form as opposed to drama as a teaching method.

Too much time was spent on disciplinary issues. The lack of time (she was teaching 33 lessons per week), and lack of a teaching plan was also an issue, as reflected in her journal.

Frankly, the most difficult thing about the teaching is not having had time to plan the teaching. I needed that. To have a teaching plan for the whole winter that had a flow from the beginning to end. That is what I needed. I need to be more organized and find out what kind of a drama teacher I would like to be and I need to make some rules about how the students should behave in the drama class. I think that is the key to successful drama teaching. Drama has to be planned, and the drama teacher needs to have a clear goal with the teaching.

Jóhanna did not manage to organise her teaching. She was teaching too many lessons per week. In Iceland, it is expected for a novice teacher to teach 25 lessons per week. Jóhanna was teaching 33 lessons per week, and only half of them were in drama.

Developing leadership skills

For a novice teacher, developing leadership can be a challenge. 'In the beginning, the boys were not fully capable of working independently like the girls were. The work often led to raucous behaviour and competition and I had a hard time devising ways to reach them when this occurred in order to keep them focused', she wrote in her journal. She also described how sometimes she could get them going, but at other times they would not engage in what was planned:

However, the boys showed an interest in composing a piece themselves and they were very interested in creating characters and did a great job, and I perceived a vast difference in the boys – how they worked and where they got their ideas from. They told me that they didn't like performing musicals because they would have to stand and sing; they rather wanted to create something themselves. While the musical *Ronia the Robber's Daughter* was being rehearsed, I attempted to get them to create their own scenes to use in the play, but it didn't work out well and after we had discussed it, they told me that they preferred to stand and sing like they had done in another musical, and not act. This was a great change and, in my opinion, came about due to an increased confidence in performing, their development and an understanding of the art form and confidence within the group. I found it very interesting to observe them work and the great leap they had taken over the period I was teaching them.

She had lots of ideas for projects but found it difficult to decide how much time she could spend on them. She admitted that she often allowed students to take control, but also that she wanted to consider their needs and interests:

I have a certain tendency to allow my students to take control and stand on the outside, which I also consider to be one of my strengths: to follow and observe with a very attentive eye and then to intervene and spark discussions and strengthen the students as individuals. However, at the same time this was too time-consuming, allowing them this amount of freedom, and here I was lacking a lucid frame.

When Jóhanna let the boys compose a piece themselves, she started to develop her leadership skills. Even though the boys were deciding what they liked to do, she managed to lead them in the direction she wanted.

Exhaustion – taking a break

Around Christmas, Jóhanna was absolutely exhausted after having taught much more than corresponds to a full position, including other subjects that were not part of the drama class. She could not carry on, and before the Christmas vacation Jóhanna met with her principal and wanted to resign.

Before I spoke with her, I discussed the issue with my confidant, who agreed with me, i.e. that I required a different job, which wasn't as mentally exhausting. My principal disagreed and wanted me to continue and she wanted us to discuss the matter further during the week, which never occurred, as I was so busy that I didn't have the time to see her.

When Jóhanna came back after 5 days' break from work, she felt a bit stronger and wanted to continue in her position until the spring. But she was far from happy, and even though she liked her colleagues, she was confused and did not know how to structure her teaching. She wrote in her journal:

/.../ I didn't feel good at the workplace, and even though I liked my colleagues and the spirit was good, there were several other issues such as the housing and the work facilities, which I didn't much care for. I found it sad and difficult that we didn't work more as a team, but at the same time I thought that maybe it was up to me to put it into practice and assemble a team. I was very confused and lost in all of this and I simply wasn't aware of what I wanted myself, as a drama teacher, how I wanted to structure the teaching. Nevertheless, there is still a rattling within me which has a whole lot to say about this issue, but I believe that now is just not the right time since I am not sufficiently strong mentally and I want to experiment with other aspects of drama; that is, my theatre-group and teaching drama with other teachers and teaching students who specifically seek to attend drama classes.

Jóhanna appeared to be both physically and mentally exhausted after the school year. The lack of support played a major role in her wanting to leave her position and also the lack of understanding about what kind of job drama teaching is.

Lacking support and respect

Jóhanna also felt a lack of respect from others because other teachers did not know who she was; she was often referred to as a music teacher, although she had nothing to do with that subject. After the show in the spring all the props and the scenario were taken down and placed in the drama room, something that she was not happy about as she expressed in an interview at the end of the school year.

I don't know why everything is put into my classroom? It has happened before with the props and dresses from the annual festival (which is a festival for students in the 8th to 10th grade) and I was expected to clean up. Rósa, the janitor of the school, a wonderful person, would help me but not the classroom teachers. Why did they not help me? We were supposed to be doing the play together. I told Rósa that I did not want to look for them all over the school: if they did not find it in them to help me, I was not going to be a bother. But the thing is, I had to do everything like arrange the chairs before and after the show. It just shows that there is no cohesion in the group and everyone is working in his or her own dark corner.

Jóhanna thought it would have been invaluable for a first-year teacher to have access to a mentor who taught the same subject and who had experience in that field in order to

guide and advise in relation to what one can request in the schoolwork and how one could structure the teaching.

Because, in my opinion, you obtain the clearest holistic view and proper insight into this field as a subject within the elementary school through conversations with those who have rich experience and knowledge, as well as with those who have less experience but are teaching the same subject. I believe it is extremely important to exchange reflections, ideas and views concerning the teaching. And this is a matter which I intend to be more active in pursuing myself. Sometimes you are not able to gain oversight when you are experiencing a difficult time or if you are juggling too many things at once.

Jóhanna found this experience valuable, and she felt she understood better what she could expect and what she could request from the school administrators 'because their support is imperative and if you don't actively pursue the support then you might be forgotten', she said. She thought the teaching went well when she directed the play they set up in the spring, and many rehearsals produced something significant. The musical went very well and she would have wanted more time to work on it and slightly more cooperation and support from colleagues.

However, the cooperation with other art teachers was fruitful, and it is of utmost importance to be able to show the students how it is possible to utilize more than one art form on stage and in the theatre, as well as how multifaceted theatre is and composed of many aspects, all of which are equally important. The students were well aware of this after the performance, and I was glad that I had spared some time for discussion and brief questions that they answered afterwards.

Jóhanna was in need of more support. Even though some parts of her teaching had gone well, she was in desperate need of more collaboration and mentoring from her peers. What is interesting is that her warmest words are towards Rósa, the janitor, as her main support with the props and stuff after the play.

Struggling and leaving teaching

Jóhanna found it difficult to assess drama and to apply the assessment she had compiled to the school curriculum.

I have to establish more fruitful ways of assessing the students. I have to find the best ways of measuring and applying registration methods, which span the whole winter, given that this concerns an ongoing assessment. Then I tried to register as they did in arts and crafts subjects, the behaviour of the students and their productiveness in each class, but I thought I would possibly require a more appropriate way to do so. I also discovered that I should have determined precisely beforehand what specific assignments (a part from the musical) should have been graded if I wanted to include them. However, given the fact that this is a bit open-ended and that written assessments are usually given instead of grades in arts and craft subjects for this age group, it is extremely important to have clear methods of assessment and to make it clear to the students which assignments are being graded and that they are assessed following each class.

Even though Jóhanna is leaving the school, she believes it is extremely important to exchange reflections, ideas and views concerning the teaching to gain oversight when one is experiencing a difficult time. On the other hand, she thinks that the time she spent in the school was a valuable experience.

I understand better and know better what I can expect and what I can request from the school administrators.

Jóhanna says she has not abandoned drama teaching, and she considers this year to have been a year of useful experience, but so strenuous that she does not want to teach drama at primary school level next year. She wants to strengthen herself in another field before she returns to the primary school, ‘but there is no question about whether or not I will be returning’.

Emerging themes in Jóhanna’s narrative and her learning trajectory as drama teacher

The storyline of Jóhanna’s narrative can be described through the aspects marked as headings in her story: *being a novice teacher in need of a mentor, struggling with the pedagogy and the structure of drama teaching, developing leadership skills, exhaustion – taking a break, lacking support and respect, struggling and leaving teaching*. Her storyline displays a mostly negative experience of her role as a teacher, with one exception; that is, when she enjoyed fruitful collaboration with the other teachers during the rehearsal period for the performance. The narrative analysis has also provided an insightful assessment of the teaching experience as being valuable for her, even though Jóhanna quit her position as drama teacher by the end of the school year. Jóhanna’s main theme seems to be a sense of lack of recognition in her professional life. Other prominent themes in Jóhanna’s narrative are her feeling of loneliness, a need for dialogue with her peers and a sense of professional insecurity. These themes connect strongly to her sense of lack of recognition. Jóhanna did not feel competent, and she felt that she did not develop her teaching methods during the school year. Her feelings of loneliness, insecurity and lack of respect from her colleagues arose from the fact that she did not initiate the dialogue she needed. She was missing dialogue with other teachers, failing to create a relationship, and it was as though she was not part of a larger system, the school community.

Jóhanna’s learning trajectory

The learning trajectory (see Figure 2) shows Jóhanna’s development as she positions herself in the role of a drama teacher over one year. In this comparison, she does not strongly claim a space for herself. She even wants to quit in the middle of the school year, but is persuaded to continue until the school year is over. The four dimensions of

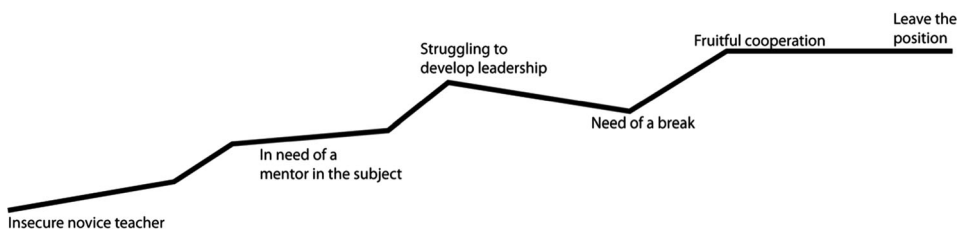


Figure 2. Jóhanna’s learning trajectory.

importance in a learning trajectory, as presented by Wittek and Bratholm (2014), are visible in Jóhanna's story.

First, she was in a dynamic process throughout the school year: struggling with difficulties in her private life, and with the common insecurity novice teachers recognise when meeting the complexity of teaching. The dynamics were not as constructive as Jóhanna needed and she required more support and collegiality in her learning trajectory through the school year.

Second, she experienced insecurity in how to use the tools of teaching drama; the curriculum plan, and how to handle assessment in drama were challenging aspects and she did not feel she had a good grasp of them. Third, her learning trajectory was formed through activities she perceived as bearing too heavy a workload as she attempted to develop her leadership skills in the drama classroom. The fourth dimension concerns the teacher as a boundary crosser, and features some positive aspects of her story as she was a successful boundary crosser in forming collaboration with other teachers in the performance project. However, she neither managed to form collaboration within the school that met her need for a mentor, nor cross the boundaries of the school and seek collegiality with other drama teachers outside her own school. When deciding to resign as a drama teacher, she mentioned that she wanted to do more artistic work with her own company (out of the school context). In the beginning of her narrative, she made the point that she wished to take part in implementing drama in the school. In the conclusion, she said that she would return to teaching drama sometime. The learning trajectory of Jóhanna highlights the importance of recognition, as well as the importance of community – in her case, a professional community.

Kári's narrative – an experienced drama teacher longing for renewal

Kári, is an experienced actor and teacher with a background in children's theatre. The class he taught were in 6th grade (11–12 years old) and 76% of his teaching position was meant for teaching drama.

He received his teaching diploma through the Iceland Academy of the Arts and has taught drama for six years. His children's theatre career spans over 20 years. Kári has been working as an actor for many years both on stage and with his theatre company.

My theatre company, which is a travelling theatre, has been visiting most of the compulsory schools with a special show about prevention of bullying and education. I just thought it would be a good move, on my part, to get a diploma in education. I wanted to do something different.

Claiming a space for drama

In the beginning of his teaching career, Kári also had to teach other subjects, but now he works solely as a drama teacher and has done that for a few years now.

When I started teaching I was teaching drama and other subjects as well. The pressure of running around and trying to find a space within which to teach drama was exhausting. It wasn't until a few years ago that I started to solely teach drama. From that time onwards, the attitude towards me as a teacher has changed. Other teachers realized that what I was

doing was important for the school, so they have stopped asking me to put on a show now and then without any notice.

However, it has not been this easy the whole time. The stress and strain of having to teach too much was wearing him out. He was at risk of exhaustion.

All I wanted was respect and recognition from the other teachers. I tried to do everything at the same time, but it was not working. I reduced my working hours from 80% to 76%, and after I started to teach only drama my work has been flourishing.

The school has a happening every Friday, where each class puts on a small performance or a show for the other students to watch. Kári was expected to help or to stage a play while he was teaching subjects other than drama. 'It was, of course, impossible, but all of that changed when I was hired solely as a drama teacher,' he said. The principal managed to allocate him his own classroom to teach in, and his timetable was designed for teaching drama and to help with the Friday-happening and to produce a forest play. The principal of the school believes that drama helps the school spirit, Kári says. He made sure that the drama teacher, like other teachers at the school, had his own classroom and that after the first year his timetable was designed for teaching solely drama. That support from the school principal and the school community (the staff of the school and the parents) has made Kári's work easier. Kári concludes by stating that he could not do this without support and cooperation from the other teachers.

Today, I do have the respect I was longing for. My principal is very interested in drama and he sees many opportunities for the school regarding drama. Support and interest from the principal makes all the difference. Without that support I would not be teaching drama.

Claiming space for drama was a response to the workload that teaching drama together with other subjects placed on Kári, and a way to gain recognition and respect. The results were that a space was made in the timetable and arrangements made catering for Kári's professional expertise in drama and allocating the physical space of his special room. These were constructive responses which formed part of the response loop, supporting his professional development and success. Claiming the space did not just happen by itself, it was a result of Kári's initial experience and the creation of the forest play. By providing a plan for a play, in collaboration with other arts and craft teachers, the principal's support was secured. After the first year of the forest play, Kári got his own classroom, and his teaching schedule was only drama.

A self-confident teacher – actor director

Kári worked with the students in grade six on the forest play in the drama class for the whole winter (autumn and spring). The first part of the school year he worked with the students through games and improvisations, and after Christmas, they started to work on the script through improvisational work and short scenes. Usually, he would have had the class which is going to do the forest play in drama the year before, in the fifth grade, but that was not the case this year due to structural changes in the school curriculum. Kári did not know these students well as he had only had them six times in drama in the previous school year.

With this group, because I did not have them as much as I wanted last year, I tried to do as much beginning drama as I could so I could find out their strengths and weaknesses.

He thinks of himself as an actor who teaches; that is, an artist whose art is teaching drama, and when he is teaching he is self-in-role as director:

If I tell the students about the theatre, they become really interested. So I try to make the play happen as you would when rehearsing a play in a professional theatre.

Kári thinks of himself as director, directing the students with extended rehearsing time. But, unlike the theatre, in school you have discipline problems, as Kári points out:

When working with 50 students you are going to have a discipline problem. What I do is use the forest play to discipline the students; they know that if they do not behave in the drama class, they will not get a good part in the play. It works. They try to behave and they try to behave in other classes as well.

Even though Kári works in the classroom as he would in the theatre, he still has to deal with the realities of teaching in compulsory education and respond to the challenges of disruptive behaviour.

Drama teaching is a demanding job

Kári talked about the stress and the workload of being a drama teacher. He thinks the job has changed from the time when he started teaching drama. He is worried about losing his voice and about the mentally demanding aspect of the job.

When drama is working well, the school community wants more and more drama, but I can only do as much as I do. As I only work 80% of a full time teaching position, the salary is low, so I have to work somewhere else. I'm putting on the show about Ronia in another school, also as a director. I work with them on Fridays for two hours from January to May. I really like to step out of the school and direct, even if it means that I am a little torn between the two schools. However, as a freelance director I can do different things from what I usually do and I have a fresh perspective on the play.

However, it has not been that easy all the time, he says. In the beginning the stress and strain was too much. 'I feel lucky, I have my own classroom to teach in, and to me that is important,' he said. 'It gives the students the message that drama is important in the school. In here, they behave in a certain way. In here, we are making drama' he said.

When I was a classroom teacher as well as a drama teacher I was starting to get worn out. Everybody wanted me to do something: 'just do something', they said. Can't you just do something with the students? I wanted to get respect and recognition so I just tried to do everything and anything.

When asked what stands out in his teaching, he immediately answers: 'The recognition of my job as a drama teacher and the first time I became a teacher trainer. To have someone watching you and learning from you, that stands out.'

His dream position as a drama teacher is to teach fewer hours and to give guidance to other teachers on how to use drama. 'I would like to teach in an upper secondary school in order not to have to deal with the discipline problem. I would also like to work more with my theatre group.'

Emerging themes in Kári's narrative and his learning trajectory as drama teacher

The storyline of Kári's narrative can be described through the aspects marked as headings in his story: claiming a space for drama, a self-confident teacher – actor director, drama teaching is a demanding job. The main themes in Kári's story seem to revolve around his feeling of competence, and being recognised as a professional in the school community (see Figure 3). He is a drama teacher finding his place in the school community through collaboration with other teachers. Another theme is a wish for continuous professional development, a desire for renewal. Kári is really proud of his work, but he knows that this kind of work is possible only because of the support given to him from the principal. Despite this, he was still at risk of becoming worn out, but he managed to change the practice architecture in his favour and is now flourishing in his teaching. Kári was able to change the practice architectures in his school by receiving support from the school principal right at the beginning (the social space). By gaining his support, the rest (location and physical site) followed. He managed to prove to other teachers that what he was doing was of importance to the school community and that it gives the school a cultural profile. By including other teachers and by being in dialogue with them, he can experience positive response loops between the practice and the practice architectures.

Kári's learning trajectory

In his seventh year of drama teaching, Kári is able to relate different practices to each other, to compare and contrast, and he can position himself. He knows that he contributes to the school community with his own competence as a drama teacher. He has experience from both his acting career and his work with his children's theatre. The four dimensions of importance in a learning trajectory are visible in Kári's story.

At first, when he entered the school community, he was ready to take on a different role as an actor that teaches. Second, his learning trajectory is constituted by his security in the

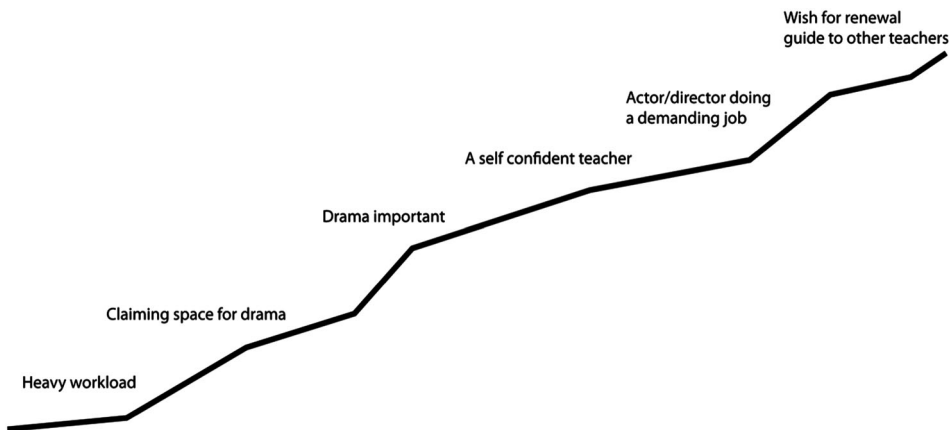


Figure 3. Kári's learning trajectory.

use of tools for drama teaching. Further, Kári realised from exploring different experiences in a creative way that it was important for him to only teach drama. Third, through interaction with other teachers and through the context of his work, he managed to do that, as his practice became part of a larger system, the school community. The fourth dimension is that he was in dialogue with other arts and crafts teachers, and he travelled in and out of different practices through interactions with other teachers. He had the dialogical meeting points he needed, and the dialectics of the response loops between his practice and the practice architectures strengthened his feeling of competence as drama teacher. He managed to organise himself in his teaching, and, even if he had no prepared syllabus for the class, his experience and knowledge of drama made his teaching a holistic process. Still, he communicates some kind of wish for renewal by mentioning other work possibilities like being in upper secondary school. He also wishes to tutor other teachers in drama teaching. This dimension in his learning trajectory can be looked upon as boundary crossing work and as a wish for continuous professional development. Also, prominent themes in Kári's learning trajectory are the importance of recognition and the importance of community.

Discussion of the main findings of the learning trajectories of drama teachers

The main findings from the narratives of the learning trajectories of drama teachers can both be seen as the *importance of recognition* and the *importance of community*. Still, their learning trajectories differ from each other rather drastically, as one teacher wants to quit and does so, while the other wants to use the achieved competence in the tutoring of teachers. However, it must be recognised that there are similarities between Jóhanna's experience and the first year(s) of Kári's drama teaching which clarify certain challenges of novice drama teachers.

The importance of recognition

Teaching is increasingly recognised as a complex and demanding career. Teachers experience higher levels of stress and burnout than other professions (Leenders, De Jong, and Van Tartwijk 2003; Smith et al. 2014; Watt and Richardson 2014; Välijärvi and Heikkinen 2012). When teachers have a high level of professional support, they are more effective, and their sense of wellbeing improves as in the case of Kári. This, however, was not the case with Jóhanna who felt a need for a lot of professional support from the school's authority or teachers. Teaching drama is often part-time, so teachers need to teach beyond their field of expertise to maintain a full-time position which can lead to higher levels of stress. Also novices are often given difficult classes and expectations run high until school reality turns out to be quite different from what many novice teachers had envisioned (Smith et al. 2014). For recognition, teachers also need to consider the subject they teach to be of importance (Kempe 2012). As drama does not in general have a strong place in the school community, it is worth noting that the drama teachers in this study consider their passion for the subject to be a driving force in their teaching, but that they still need 'something more' connected to their artistry. They want to go deeper into the art form, and with the restricted time in school they seem to need

inspiration for their professional development outside school, in the theatre groups they have created. This is in line with Kempe findings about the importance of drama being an arts subject, and that teachers teaching drama are arts specialists (Kempe 2012). The dialogical meeting points occur through collaboration with other teachers when travelling in and out of different practices. The practice architectures of the school are strengthened outside the school, and the communicative spaces are extended to response loops with a larger community (Kemmis et al. 2014). Often the work of the drama teacher is only visible in a school production. What goes on in a drama classroom can look like misaligned chaos to those who do not know what drama teaching is about, and this can lead to incomprehension of the drama teaching practice among other teachers. The isolation of being the only drama teacher in the school and the lack of dialogue, both within the school and with other teachers in other schools, can result in flawed recognition of a drama teacher's profession.

The importance of community

Schools are made up of a community of teachers, students and other staff members who all communicate and interact with one another on a daily basis. In order for teachers to gain recognition and secure their professional identity, it is important to belong to a community. If dialogue in the community is missing, the risk of isolation for the teacher increases. Both teachers needed to have a dialogue with the other teachers. Kári was able to have a fruitful dialogue with his peers and through that he was encouraged and felt that he belonged to a community, whereas Jóhanna did not experience the same community. The lack of communication made the teachers question her competence as a drama teacher. Smith states that teachers who fail to create a relationship of trust and respect with their colleagues, and are mistrusted by the authorities, are more likely to leave the profession as burnouts (Smith et al. 2014). I concluded that the drama teachers in this study consider recognition and community as being of decisive importance to their wellbeing and their resilience in order to stay on in the drama teaching profession. Having a welcoming community in the school and being included and supported seems to contribute to student satisfaction and to the drama teacher's feeling of recognition and appreciation. Thus, the school community is part of the cultural discursive environment, as well as of the socio-political circumstances. The material-economic arrangements such as the provision of a space for drama in the form of a drama studio, or at least a room suitable for drama, can also be considered part of the goodwill of the school community, thus either contributing to an enabling or restricting feedback loop. Supportive working conditions of drama teachers can make a difference, in acknowledging the emotions and challenges faced by novice teachers and by providing closeness and dialogue and belonging to a community (DiPardo and Potter 2003).

Conclusion

In this article, I have focused on the key findings that emerged from the ethnographic data relating to my research question: *How can the learning trajectories of drama teachers throughout the school year be described and understood?* From the stories told by the

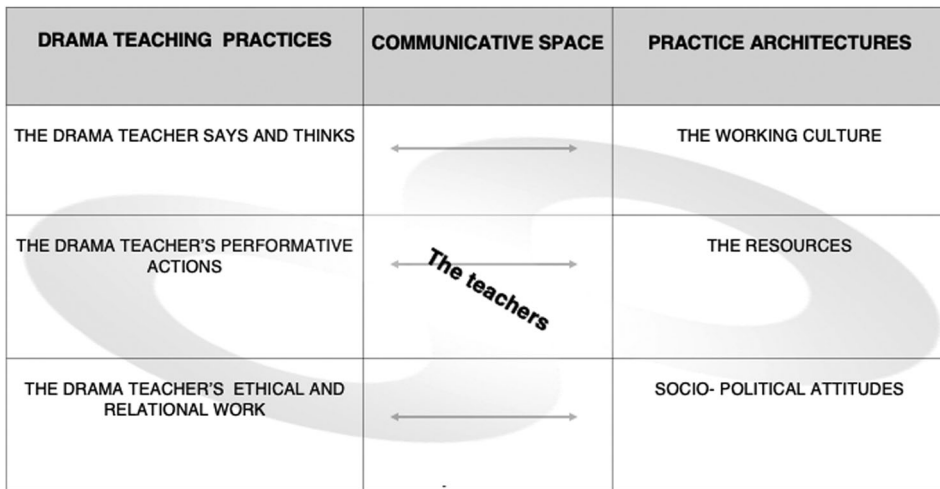


Figure 4. A model of a drama teaching learning loop.

participating drama teachers, two themes seemed to be of importance for their wellbeing and resilience as drama teachers: recognition and community. What is interesting is that despite both the teachers being qualified drama teachers with a degree in acting, they describe themselves as teachers whose art is drama instead of seeing themselves as dramatic artists who teach. The stories of the teachers are important in order to better understand the drama teaching culture and the options for drama teachers' professional development as well as that of their identity and self-understanding as subject specialists. In [Figure 4](#), I have made a model to explain the dialectical tension between drama teaching practice and the architectures drama teachers have to negotiate in the communicative space where they design their practice.

The feedback loop can be characterised as a learning loop within the intersubjective space, as a space for communication, or in other words a communicative space. Kemmis et al. (2014, 57) explain, that in the intersubjective space the negotiation between practice and the practitioner, on the one hand, and the practice architectures, on the other, takes place through continuous dialogue; that is, argumentation elaborating upon the dialectical tension between practice and practice architectures. If this negotiation functions well, there are dynamic feedback loops between these, and they feed and sustain each other. The feedback loops have the potential for learning to happen, transforming the understanding of the participants. The infinite loop is not only realised in communication in the semantic space; it is also realised in physical interactions in physical space–time, and in social interactions in social space. The communication part only occurs in semantic space. This attribute underlines the necessity for a drama teacher to be prepared for the inevitability of change. In Kemmis' and Grootenboer's (2008) practice theory, the dynamic aspects of the practice architectures are underlined in the formulation that practitioners can change the practice architectures of a site, as Kári managed to do.

So why does a drama teacher persist in or quit teaching drama? The findings indicated that the teachers' own wellbeing and whether teachers stay or leave their profession is

dependent on how well the practice architectures work in the school community in relationship to the media and space in which sayings, doings and relatings exist. Kári was at risk of becoming worn out, but with support he managed to change the practice architecture in his favour and is now flourishing in his teaching. In Jóhanna's case, she was not aware of the formal practice architectures in her school, and it did not occur to her that she could change something. She made one attempt, though: talking to her principal. But it was also her lack of experience. She could not reflect on what she had learned as a teacher to become a better teacher. In fact without any help and professional support, the chances increase that the teacher will become worn out or even a burnout teacher after only one year of teaching, as happened to Jóhanna. But is this news to anyone that teachers who do not receive support will drop out or burn out? No, probably not, but in order for drama teachers to last and flourish in their profession, we need to define, both for the drama teachers and for the schools, which factors are supportive when teaching drama and which have a deterrent effect. There is a long path from drama/theatre education and the vision of the teachers to the reality of the drama class. The main reason for drama teachers leaving the profession is often poor working conditions, personal stress, anxiety and lack of trust. In short, the difference between expert teachers and novices is that expert teachers use their information during planning in a different way from novice teachers and they make greater use of instructional and management routines. Drama teachers find their professional development and identity as drama teachers to be crucial for their professional growth and there is a strong interaction between a teacher's personal and professional life. Drama teachers value their subject specialist knowledge and their ownership of their profession. The findings illustrate that being a drama teacher can be very a lonely and difficult job. It identifies the crucial importance, for drama perhaps more than for most traditionally established school subjects, of support for teachers. The findings also show that a number of different forms of support are equally crucial. It could be argued to some extent that it is beyond the teachers' control whether the practice architectures work in their favour or not. In Iceland, if the principal is in favour of drama, he or she will both make the space for drama and invest in the subject. So, what needs to be changed in order to make drama teachers want to stay in compulsory education? First, the physical, spatial and temporal environment must at least make teaching drama possible, also suitable and designated spaces and appropriate lesson times (sayings, doings and relatings). Second, the subject and the teacher must be respected, and their importance acknowledged with comprehension by their colleagues and collaboration with colleagues and consultation with them are both indispensable. Third, professional development must be made available on a regular basis, and some form of induction programme into drama and into the syllabus is needed, essential for the novice teacher. Support and respect given by the school, and by the parents and local community, is also important. By knowing which factors affect both the teachers and the subject of drama and being able to change them, drama will hopefully maintain its existing place and hold its ground.

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