



Conference: **READING WITHIN THE LIFE CONTEXT**

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READING WITH MOVEMENT AND READING IN A MOVEMENT

Movement is the natural ability of people. It has become a part of communication. Actually, people have completely made up the name “dance”. Dance is just another way to express a message through movement. In the past, classical dance was connected with librettos, with stories. Therefore, in my pedagogical practices I have naturally used stories from books as an inspiration. When we started working with the book “Rozprávka o oslíkovi” (The Tale of a Donkey) by Ján Milčák, I found out that children had very poor skills of perception and reception of texts while reading or listening. So, we started to read this book through movement. As a result, some non-readers became readers.

Movement is a person’s natural ability. The name “dance” has been completely made up. Basic elements of dance include the step, the hop, the leap, the vault, and the jump down and turn round. These moves are combined by weight transfer. All these elements are part of natural movement that we use in our everyday lives. Dance is created by the alternation of all these elements and weight change.

Dance, as well as any kind of movement, helps us to express ourselves and our individual emotional experiences. Dance is a communication tool. For example, weight transfer is not only an important part of physical movement, but it also parallels inner emotional stability.

Throughout the centuries, various forms and genres of dance have developed. The most common genres include folk dance, classical dance, and modern dance, which has many variants. Dance has always been connected with singing and music. Music and singing usually stand for the text (often narrative, epic) of a dance.

In previous centuries, the classical dance was danced according to patterns. Stories were expressed through ballet librettos. Therefore, it was natural for me to use, in my pedagogical practice, the stories from books as inspiration. Based on them, my colleagues and I taught the elements of movement, and later created complicated dance choreographies. This method was very important in my teaching. My goal was to make children understand both what they dance, and what they dance about. Later on, our dance theatre came out as a result.

When we started working with the book *The Tale of a Donkey* by Ján Milčák, I found out that contemporary children had acquired a very low level in perception of reading and listening to texts, in comparison with children 15 years before. Therefore, we started working with books in a different way. We started reading them through the movement.

Let me introduce a few examples of how the children’s understanding of the text changed with the help of music, and how their attitude toward certain situations changed as well.

We worked with a book *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* written by an American writer, Kate DiCamillo. It is the story of a toy rabbit, who is not interested in having any relationships. In the rabbit's character, the author expresses many negative traits of children, including the culture of narcissism. She also points out the uncertainty, fear, disappointments, and confusion, that are hidden in themselves, as well as their fragile contact with reality.

My students were confronted with their own uncaring nature, and with the fact that they had not experienced many of the situations described by the author, when the rabbit suffered. For example, they did not know what it was like to be hungry. They did not understand what it is like to desire something and not have it. They did not understand the concept of "poverty". How could Sarah Ruth be hungry and have no toys? Their first understanding of the meaning of poverty was: "It is when your parents don't buy you a new notebook, or when you have an old car." It took me a long time to recover from this reaction. In the past, the children responded with more empathy. They used to think about how they could actively help.

Let me describe one situation from the story: the rabbit Eduard becomes the victim of a farmer who hangs him to a stake, and uses him as a scarecrow to frighten off the crows.

Though it is a very strong symbolic picture of how one feels as a victim under the strong pressure, the children, again, were not able to, or did not want to, identify with it. Their responses were: "After all, he's only a toy. He doesn't care. He doesn't feel. Even if you destroy him, it doesn't matter, because he doesn't feel." They were unable to create a personal relationship with the text, through which they could experience the situation. We finally started to rhythmize the text into the form of rap, which helped. It seemed to be a mocking idea at first, but we held on, and the more we put it into practice, the better the children were able to understand the situation. Finally, they were able to perceive the situation differently.

Demonstration (working with the auditorium):

After leading children through this process of rhythmical perception of the text, they finally showed empathy with the plot and their reactions became sensitive.

We not only rhythmized the text, but also expressed the text through movement, which helped a lot.

Let's try to put the movement into the text of the fairytale as well. If you would be so kind, please stand up. We will express the behaviour of the crows. You may try it with me.

Now, may the text please be read? (Timotea reads, the interpreter has the English version) + music (quietly)

Thank you, you were awesome!

We may continue.

I will now describe a situation in which we worked with a more difficult text. It was a philosophical fairytale *The Tale of a Donkey* by Ján Milčák. This text is about the importance of fighting against the evil, even when it seems we don't have enough strength to fight. It says that we always have a tool to stop the evil, though it may seem to be of no use. In this story, a painter with his friends and artistic pieces stand for the good. A dog named Orlando, and others of his kind, represent the evil.

The children, with relative difficulty, understood the concept of stealing one's happiness. At first, they were unable to understand the meaning of happiness and what it means to take away someone's happiness. The children connected the word "happiness" with material values. Only a small percentage of the children thought that happiness means to be healthy. However, even these children did not grasp the full value of health. They wanted to be healthy only so that they could go on a holiday. Likewise, other children wanted to be educated, but only because they wanted to earn money and thus afford a high standard of living. Out of a group of 30 children, only six saw happiness in the beautiful moments spent with their beloved, parents, and family, laughing, playing, and working, as well as going through everyday difficulties together. I was pleased with the response of the one and only girl who was still able to find happiness in an old music box with a ballerina gifted her from her grandma, which, in turn, had been handed down from her great-grandma. This girl valued it as her most precious belonging. In that moment, I realised that working with contemporary children is not hopeless. It is both worthwhile and necessary to dedicate ourselves patiently to children, and help them to learn that everyone has feelings and emotions. Because, we need emotions to live just as much as we need air and water. And we need them far more than any kind of money.

Let's again try to do what we did when we worked with the text from *The Tale of a Donkey*.

Two texts

May the text please be read? (Timotea reads, the interpreter has the English version)

Please be so kind and stand up. Imagine that you have a painter's palette. And a perceptive eye. Put all your nice memories or moments on your imaginary canvas. (Music) - a sudden change of music: (Vierka comments on the change of music): such a pleasant atmosphere was changed by the thieves of happiness. Thank you for your cooperation. Please be seated.

You have now had a sample of my experiences from my personal teaching practice, in which I learnt that written text, music, movement, and picture, are all tightly related. Together, they create a great number of experiences which help us to understand ourselves and those around us better, and to make our life more valuable and more beautiful. It is movement that helps children find both the positive and negative emotions inside themselves and deal with them.

Regarding the thieves of happiness, it is up to us whether we protect our happiness, and whether or not we are able to help our children and the following generations to find happiness, value it, and protect it.