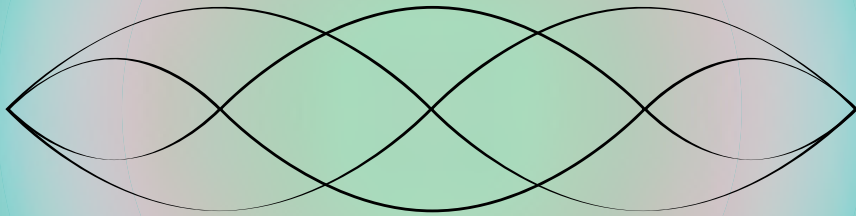


practising

theatre

pedagogy



*concepts*

*values*

*examples*

A selection of texts for a workshop in theatre pedagogy held during the International Contemporary Drama Festival DramaFest in Mexico

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Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute

Warsaw 2025

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A selection of texts for a workshop in theatre pedagogy held during  
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The texts accompanying the workshop in theatre pedagogy held at the International Contemporary Drama Festival DramaFest in Mexico were originally in the volume *Praktykując pedagogikę teatru. Pojęcia, wartości, przykłady (Practising Theatre Pedagogy. Concepts, Values, Examples)* published by the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in 2024. A wider selection of texts from the Polish edition was also published in Spanish in 2025.

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# FOREWORD

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We present a set of three texts on theatre pedagogy. These have been selected from a corpus of 25 articles comprising the publication *Praktykując pedagogikę teatru. Pojęcia, wartości, przykłady* (Practising Theatre Pedagogy: Concepts, Values, Examples) published by the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Poland in 2024. This volume reflects on two decades of the development of theatre pedagogy in Poland. In this relatively short time, theatre pedagogy has become one of the most significant trends in contemporary Polish theatre. It is practised in large cities and small towns, in theatres and at festivals, in cultural centres and non-governmental organisations, as well as in schools, art galleries, and libraries. Cultural institutions employ theatre pedagogues or establish specialised departments dedicated to this field. For over a decade, it has also been possible to undertake formal training in theatre pedagogy through a postgraduate programme run by the Institute of Polish Culture at the University of Warsaw in collaboration with the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute. Theatre pedagogy continues to expand into new areas, increasingly seeking its place not only within culture and the arts but also across a wide range of social contexts, bringing theatrical and performative practices to new groups of participants.

In this publication, we aimed to convey the unique characteristics of this field in our country. In Poland, theatre pedagogy has developed primarily through practice from the very beginning, enabling the creation of an integrated community of people developing their competencies in this area. However, this has not been accompanied by an equally intensive theoretical reflection. Work on the Polish edition of the publication began in mid-2023, with the involvement of a broad group of several dozen individuals engaged in various forms of theatre pedagogy practice and researchers. The final version of the book contains a wide range of reflections on theatre pedagogy. The texts not only explain key concepts and outline the philosophy and methodology of the work, but also recount what has occurred in this field in Poland to date. They offer a critical examination of the field and represent practitioners' diverse approaches, conveying their personal perspectives on the discipline.

The publication, featuring a different collection of texts, has already been translated into Spanish and published as *La práctica de la pedagogía teatral. Conceptos, valores, ejemplos. Selección de textos*. In this publication, we encourage you to acquaint yourselves with the three articles that provide important context for our workshop activities at the International Drama Festival DramaFest in Mexico. The workshop materials also include biographical

notes on the authors and information about the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute and the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, the partners of the Polish Focus section of the festival.

## 1. 'Performance-related Workshop. A Historical Outline and Workshop Practice'

Justyna Czarnota, Magdalena Szpak

The performance-related workshop is the most characteristic and widely recognised form of theatre pedagogy. It is an event that involves experiencing a performance and is designed for a group of spectators who participate in a series of creative and interpretive activities facilitated by a theatre pedagogue. The text is composed of two parts. First, the authors describe the context in which this form of work developed in Germany. They then outline the circumstances of the emergence of performance-related workshops in Poland, discussing the activities undertaken to popularise this practice. The second part of the text features a tutorial with exercises that encourage readers to design their own performance-related workshop. During the workshops held as part of DramaFest, we examined this mode of work in practice with the participants.

## 2. 'Totally Serious? On the Use of Play in Theatre Pedagogy'

A conversation with Tomasz Daszczuk, Michał Domański and Anna Maria Sadowska  
moderated by Justyna Czarnota

This is a written account of a discussion between four theatre pedagogues working in different fields and with various age groups. Together, they explore how the concept of play is reflected in their workshop-based practices. They analyse this issue by recalling situations from their professional experience and examining them through the lens of cultural theory and psychology. We also activated play as an element during our workshop meetings as part of DramaFest, and experienced it directly, as well as reflected on it to explore its essential role in building relationships, fostering understanding, and creating signs and meanings in theatre and everyday life.

## 3. 'Definition of Theatre Pedagogy Developed by the Theatre Pedagogy Department'

Justyna Czarnota, Katarzyna Piwońska

The first definitions of theatre pedagogy in Poland only began to appear after it had been practised for several years in theatrical and social life. These definitions differ from those in Germany, where the field developed in response to local contexts, drawing on elements of theatre education, contemporary pedagogical theories and performative practices. In the text, the authors outline the history of the definition developed at the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in 2019, comparing it with other definitions of the concept developed in Poland over the years. The article concludes with a discussion between the authors about selected formulations included in the definition. This discussion is intended as an invitation to 'open up the definition', that is, to explore the meaning of what has been named and assign personal meaning to experience. In Mexico, we also encouraged workshop participants to do this, inviting them to take a critical look at their workshop experiences and relate them to the definitional formulations. We also created an opportunity to explore local contexts in which theatre pedagogy is already developing in Mexico, both within theatrical practice and in social life.

We hope that reading the texts will provide an inspiring space for you to better understand theatre pedagogy. And will encourage you to experience it, reflect on it, and exchange ideas. You are warmly invited to [get in touch with us](#).

Maria Babicka-Janiszewska,  
Krystyna Mogilnicka,  
Katarzyna Piwońska

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**MARIA BABICKA-JANISZEWSKA** – Theatre pedagogue and sociologist. Since September 2023, she has served as Head of the Theatre Pedagogy Department at the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute. She is a PhD candidate and a member of the research team at the Department of Methods of Cultural Research at the Institute of Applied Social Sciences, University of Warsaw, and a tutor in leadership development programmes (including the PAFW Leadership Programme run by the Zbigniew Petczyński School for Leaders Foundation). Her research interests focus on amateur theatre movements, theatre education in Poland, and family-based practices of participation in theatrical life. She is a graduate of Sociology at the Institute of Sociology, University of Warsaw, and of the Theatre Pedagogy School at the Theatre Institute. A member of the Association of Theatre Pedagogues, she conducts workshops for participants of various ages, primarily supporting educators in their professional development.

**KRYSTYNA MOGILNICKA** – Doctor of Humanities, cultural anthropologist, translator, editor, theatre producer, and cultural project manager. Graduate of the Institute of Polish Culture at the University of Warsaw and Theatre Studies at Charles University in Prague. Between 2005 and 2015, she was based in Prague, where she organised international theatre and dance festivals as well as artist residencies. She also collaborated on performances and their international distribution. Since 2016, she has been working at the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute, where she heads the International Cooperation Department.

**KATARZYNA PIWOŃSKA** – Editor, theatre pedagogue, tutor. She collaborates with cultural institutions on research into cultural education, as well as on programmes related to theatre pedagogy and the professional development of cultural sector staff (including the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute and the School for Leaders Foundation). She is a subject-matter editor of publications in the fields of theatre, accessibility, and education. She leads workshops, individual and group supervisions, conducts diagnoses and evaluations, and designs developmental processes.

# Performance-related Workshop. A Historical Outline and Workshop Practice

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**JUSTYNA CZARNOTA** – Theatre pedagogue and cultural manager. As a freelancer, she conducted workshops for various institutions and organisations throughout Poland and designed educational and development materials. Since November 2024, she has been the director of the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw.

**MAGDALENA SZPAK** – Theatre pedagogue, trainer and tutor. She co-created the Department of Theatre Pedagogy at the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw, where she currently runs the Teatroteka Szkolna. She graduated from the Department of Theatre Studies at the Aleksander Zelwerowicz Theatre Academy, the Group Training Course at the School for Leaders, and the Sto Pociach Foundation's School of Trainers for Support Groups. She is a certified tutor at the School for Leaders. She runs workshops primarily for adults, supporting the professional development of teachers and educators. She also runs support groups for parents.

## What do we mean by a performance-related workshop?

In this text, we use the term 'performance-related theatre pedagogy workshop' to refer to an activity designed and scheduled for a group of viewers before or after a performance in the theatre. This concept originates in German theatre practice. In the foundational publication that gathers key terms of German theatre pedagogy, *The Dictionary of Theatre Pedagogy*<sup>1</sup>, the performance-related workshop does not appear as a separate entry; instead, it is included within the broader category of 'preparation for attending a performance and post-performance discussion'<sup>2</sup>, which is elaborated as follows:

(...) the aim of the educational and theatrical programme accompanying the performance is twofold: to stimulate the audience's interest in theatre and to convey knowledge about how to understand it. The various means used to achieve this aim are referred to as 'preparation for viewing' and 'discussion of the performance'.<sup>3</sup>

Gerd Taube, author of the above quote, adds that the performance-related workshops combine two types of methodology:

1. Discursive methods related to conveying and acquiring information, discussion and the exchange of views.
2. Intuitive methods, as understood by the authors of this text: creative and performative methods such as theatre games, activities, and joint creation during workshops.

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In Polish tradition, the term 'performance-related workshop' has come to describe activities associated with a theatrical production, regardless of whether they take place before or after the performance. The workshop is designed by a theatre pedagogue based on the performance's aesthetic and theme. Viewers who become workshop participants take part in shared performative activities that allow them to experience theatre firsthand. This creative process is intended to encourage collective recognition of the fact that every spectator has their own perspective on theatrical reality, and to acknowledge and confront these differences.

## Performance-related workshop in the context of the development of theatre pedagogy in Germany

The development of theatre pedagogy and, consequently, performance-related workshops in German institutional theatres dates back to the 1970s. This was the result of processes that had been taking place in this field of art in Germany since the late 1960s. A new generation of directors, playwrights and theatre managers, including Claus Peymann, Peter Stein, and Klaus Michael Grüber, contributed to a profound transformation of theatrical language at that time. This led to greater formal diversity and the exploration of new themes over time. Audiences, especially younger viewers, often struggled to understand the rapid changes in contemporary theatre. This created a need for activities that would foster interest in the art form and support audiences in experiencing and interpreting performances. Workshops accompanying performances emerged to address this need.

<sup>1</sup> *Wörterbuch der Theaterpädagogik* [The Dictionary of Theatre Pedagogy], ed. Gerd Koch, Marianne Streisand, Milow 2003.

<sup>2</sup> 'Vor- und Nachbereitung' [Introduction to and Analysis of a Performance], *Wörterbuch der Theaterpädagogik*, op. cit., p. 350. *Vorbereitung* and *Nachbereitung* are two separate words, with the former meaning preparation/introduction to watching the performance (*vor* means before), and the latter "going through something again, step by step to allow it to sink in" (*nach* means after).

<sup>3</sup> *Wörterbuch der Theaterpädagogik*, op. cit., p. 350.

In German literature, two approaches to thinking about this format are identified. Researchers Ingrid Hentschel<sup>4</sup> and Manfred Jahnke<sup>5</sup> highlight the work of Berlin's GRIPS Theatre and its post-performance booklets<sup>6</sup>, developed by the theatre's ensemble from 1974 onwards. Ute Pinkert<sup>7</sup>, meanwhile, draws attention to an earlier initiative, namely the *Study of Theatre for Children and Young People*<sup>8</sup>, which was conducted by the German Stage Association<sup>9</sup> in 1971. In response to changes in theatrical language, the authors of the aforementioned report identified educational activities within theatre institutions as an area requiring particular reflection, alongside theatre education in schools. These theatre pedagogy activities were intended to bridge the growing gap between theatre and young audiences. At that time, they were seen as supplementary activities accompanying performances, primarily aimed at children and young adults who lacked knowledge of the language and contexts of contemporary artistic production.

The concept of viewers' aesthetic literacy, or equipping audiences with the tools necessary for engaging with contemporary theatre, was shaped by successive changes within theatre itself and within the humanities and social sciences. Richard Schechner's concept of the 'performative turn'<sup>10</sup> involved a shift in how performances were understood: they ceased to be staged dramas watched by audiences. They became events taking place in the present moment between specific ensembles of performers and audiences. In his influential work, *Postdramatic Theatre*, Hans-Thies Lehmann wrote about a shift in emphasis: postdramatic theatre shifts the focus from stage-based elements, such as tensions between stage characters and live dialogue, to the relationship between the theatron, i.e., the performers and the audience<sup>11</sup>. It was recognised that each spectator participates in the event on equal terms and influences its course. One of the most prominent German playwrights, Heiner Müller, built on this idea with the concept of 'the seeing sight', highlighting that the recipient of the message decides what to focus on, thereby co-creating the artistic event. Everyone comes to a performance with their own unique way of perceiving the world, a set of experiences and a singular sensitivity. Therefore, the spectator is not passive, but actively engages in emotional and intellectual processes while watching, co-creating meaning.

These insights prompted theatre-makers to adopt intentional strategies and experiments to build relationships with audiences during performances. These practices, together with the development of theoretical reflection, directly impacted theatre pedagogy activities designed within the context of specific productions. As in Polish literature, there are relatively few descriptions or scholarly studies devoted to this form of theatre pedagogy work

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- 4 Ingrid Hentschel, *Kindertheater. Die Kunst des Spiels zwischen Phantasie und Realität* [Theatre for Children: The Art of Play Between Imagination and Reality], Frankfurt 1988, p. 106.
- 5 Manfred Jahnke, 'Von der Bedeutung der Theaterpädagogik und Dramaturgie im Kinder und Jugendtheater' [On the Significance of Theatre Pedagogy and Dramaturgy in Theatre for Children and Young Adults], [in:] *Grimm & Grips 19, Jahrbuch für das Kinder- und Jugendtheater 2005/2006*, ed. Eckhard Mittelstädt, Frankfurt 2005, pp. 23–31.
- 6 Post-performance booklets (Hefte zur Nachbereitung) – a type of publication, first produced in the Grips Theatre in Berlin in 1974, featuring exercises to accompany specific performances. They were addressed to educators who wanted to continue reflection on the performance they watched with their students, with a view to elaborating on the different viewpoints and behaviours manifested by the actors, and next to identify and discuss references to the daily lives of the students.
- 7 Ute Pinkert, *Theaterpädagogik im Theater* [The Concept of Theatre Pedagogy in Theatre], ed. Mira Sack, Berlin 2014, p. 29.
- 8 *Studie zum Kinder- und Jugendtheater* [Study of Theatre for Children and Young Adults], Deutscher Bühnenverein 1971.
- 9 The German Stage Association (Deutscher Bühnenverein) – an organisation bringing together public and private theatres in Germany, dealing with organisational, political and employee issues relating to the functioning of theatres in these areas. It was founded in 1846.
- 10 See: Richard Schechner, *Performatyka: wstęp* [Performance Theory: An Introduction], transl. Tomasz Kubikowski, Wrocław 2006.
- 11 Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Teatr postdramatyczny* [Postdramatic Theatre], transl. by Dorota Sajewska, Małgorzata Sugiera, Kraków 2004, p. 206.

in German-language literature<sup>12</sup>. The most comprehensive account is offered by Pinkert, who identifies three types of strategy employed by theatre pedagogues during workshops held before or after performances (listed in order of appearance in academic discourse):

**interactive** – stemming from a shift in the educational paradigm and the abandonment of *ex cathedra* knowledge transmission in favour of action-based work in interaction with the group,

**semiotic** – focused on building the competence to read theatrical signs (all the more necessary for audiences as the language of theatre continues to evolve),

**performative** – related to experiencing performative tools on oneself and from a redefinition of how the position of the audience in theatre is perceived.

Pinkert adds that these strategies are currently employed to varying degrees, depending on the objective of an encounter with the audience.

Over the years, workshops held alongside performances at German theatres have become an essential means of fostering understanding between the stage and the audience. Individual sessions may focus on different aspects of this field. For example, they may deepen interest in the themes of the performance, reveal the multidimensional nature of the theatrical process or support interpretation by allowing participants to experience specific aesthetic solutions firsthand<sup>13</sup>. To this day, this approach to audience engagement remains a key part of German theatre programming. In truth, such an effect has never been achieved in Poland, despite the Theatre Institute's efforts to promote the idea of performance-related workshops as part of its mission to implement theatre pedagogy in the Polish context. Perhaps, as employees of this institution, we pursued this aim ineffectively — the next part of this text will be devoted precisely to our efforts in this area.

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### Shaping the concept of performance-related workshops in the Polish theatrical context

Performance-related workshops emerged in Poland's institutional theatre alongside a wave of German influences at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century<sup>14</sup>. Justyna Sobczyk, a graduate of postgraduate studies in theatre pedagogy at the Berlin University of the Arts<sup>15</sup>, introduced the concept into the Polish context when she began working as a theatre pedagogue at the Theatre Institute in 2005. Soon after, she initiated the 'Teatralny rebus' (Theatrical Rebus) project, namely monthly performance-related workshops from the repertoires of Warsaw theatres, addressed to upper-secondary school pupils and university students. During the 2005/2006 season, she also launched a Warsaw-based programme called 'Theatre and School', involving four theatres and four schools. As part of this collaboration, the institutions organised educational activities for their partner schools throughout the entire theatre season.

12 In addition to the aforementioned publication by Pinkert, readers may refer to the journal *Zeitschrift für Theaterpädagogik – Korrespondenzen* – issue 70, which contains five articles describing specific examples of performance-related workshops. The authors are students of the Department of Theatre Pedagogy at the Berlin University of the Arts, who were asked to take part in five to six workshops for the performance. For the purposes of the publication, they were asked to describe one of their experiences, taking into account the context, concept and strategies used by the theatre pedagogue. The entire publication can be found at: [https://www.archiv-datp.de/downloads/zft\\_70.pdf](https://www.archiv-datp.de/downloads/zft_70.pdf) (accessed 25.11.2024). In *The Concept of Theatre Pedagogy in Theatre*, Pinkert also mentions Nadine Griese's 2010 bachelor's thesis on performance-related workshops.

13 Ute Pinkert, op. cit., p. 37.

14 This does not mean, however, that Polish theatre had not previously undertaken activities aimed at the audience, accompanying the performance and relating to a specific play. The tradition of educational work related to performances is long-standing, but there is virtually no research on this subject. The literature on the subject often mentions Jan Dorman's activities related to the children's performances he directed or Anna Hannowa's initiative – Klub 1212 at the Polish Theatre in Wrocław – but this area requires research, which has not yet been carried out.

15 See: <https://www.udk-berlin.de/en/university/> (accessed 30.09.2025).

However, the nationwide scope of the Theatre Institute's work meant that thinking about theatre pedagogy shifted quickly from ad hoc local initiatives towards training professionals capable of running performance-related workshops across Poland. In 2007, the first initiative for adults interested in theatre education emerged, enabling them to participate in such workshops themselves. Entitled 'TISZ Annex'<sup>16</sup>, this two-day event consisted of four theatre pedagogy workshops, each designed around the same performance, *Albośmy to jacy, tacy* [We Are What We Are], directed by Piotr Cieplak. One of the workshops took place before the performance, while the others were held afterwards. A subsequent programme under the same name ('TISZ Annex: A course in theatre pedagogy') in the 2008/2009 season took the form of a year-long series of classes. From that point onwards, all subsequent courses for theatre pedagogues organised by the Theatre Institute (including the School for Theatre Pedagogues and, later, the postgraduate programme Theatre Pedagogy, co-organised with the Institute of Polish Culture at the University of Warsaw<sup>17</sup>) have included a module devoted to designing performance-related workshops.

For the sake of clarity, we would like to note at this point that the Theatre Institute's theatre pedagogy practices were closely intertwined with the work of the Association of Theatre Pedagogues (SPT – Stowarzyszenie Pedagogów Teatru)<sup>18</sup> at that time. The association was established by participants on the 'TISZ Annex' course in the 2008/2009 season, and its members included staff of the Theatre Institute, including the authors of this text. The Association's activities secured funding for projects that served shared organisational goals. At that time, the SPT launched two initiatives to promote the concept of performance-related workshops and to train practitioners in this field.

**Teatr CTRL+V (CTRL+V Theatre)** – A project implemented in 2008 and addressed to schools from small towns. It involved class trips to theatres: children and young adults attended a performance and took part in a performance-related workshop. As part of this initiative, a brochure for teachers, entitled 'Jak skutecznie wklejać teatr' (How to Effectively Paste Theatre into School) by Justyna Sobczyk and Sebastian Świąder, was also produced; it included a section on designing this type of activity.

**Teatralne Spięcie (Theatrical Short Circuit)** – A project implemented in 2013 that connected theatres and schools. A total of ten puppet and drama theatres from across Poland took part. Each of them organised a four-day cycle of workshops for teachers,

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16 The name 'TISZ Aneks' (sometimes also 'TiSZ ANEX' and 'TISZ ANEX') is an abbreviation of the Polish words *Teatr* (theatre) and *Szkola* (school). It refers to all of Justyna Sobczyk's initiatives from 2007–2010, conceived as a supplement or appendix to her main activity, i.e., the TiSZ – Theatre and School programme based on long-term cooperation between selected schools and theatres, inspired by the Berlin TUSCH (Theater und Schule) programme. 'TISZ Annex' included training initiatives (workshops, conferences) for people who would conduct educational workshops in theatres as part of the Theatre and School programme. The first initiative was 'TISZ Annex' in 2007, an event during which participants could take part in several different workshops related to the performance *Albośmy to jacy, tacy* [We Are What We Are] (a play based on Stanisław Wyspiański, directed by Piotr Cieplak at the Zygmunt Hübner Powszechny Theatre in Warsaw, premiere on 26 May 2007). A detailed programme of this event can be found at: <https://encyklopediateatru.pl/artykuly/39502/tisz-anex-w-instytucje-teatralnym> (accessed 26.11.2024). Another event under this slogan was the international conference *TISZ Aneks. Kto kocha edukację? O edukacji w teatrze* (TISZ Annex. Who loves education? About education in theatre), followed by a series of workshops for pedagogues entitled 'TISZ Annex' – a course in theatre pedagogy, held in 2009–2010, which resulted in the establishment of the Association of Theatre Pedagogues.

17 The postgraduate programme in Theatre Pedagogy was established in 2014 in cooperation between the Institute of Polish Culture at the University of Warsaw and the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute. It is aimed at people who want to gain the knowledge and experience necessary to conduct various types of theatre work and participatory projects with groups in schools, theatres, cultural centres, occupational therapy workshops, social welfare homes, non-governmental organisations and local communities. The programme consists of classes devoted to cultural analysis, theatre workshops and classes introducing the psychological and pedagogical context of group work. To graduate, participants must design and execute a participatory project.

18 The Association of Theatre Pedagogues (SPT – Stowarzyszenie Pedagogów Teatru) has been operating since 2010. Initially, it brought together mainly pioneers of theatre education in Poland who worked in institutions and organisations throughout the country. Currently, networking within the theatre education community is not a central focus of the Association's activities. It implements numerous original educational, artistic and artistic-social projects. It conducts its activities in schools, theatres, universities, cultural centres, and independent spaces, and also participates as a partner in other organisations' activities. See: <https://pedagogzyteatru.org/o-spt/> (accessed 30.09.2025).

led by members of the Association of Theatre Pedagogues, with the support of staff employed at the host institution. The aim was to promote new forms of work among school practitioners focused on engaging with a performance they had seen.

Over the course of many years, especially before 2016, we also undertook initiatives at the Theatre Institute aimed at popularising performance-related workshops through various programmes, including:

**Teatr Polska (Theatre Poland)** – A programme launched in 2009 aimed to present theatrical performances in areas with limited access to culture<sup>19</sup>. In 2013, the programme regulations were amended to require beneficiaries to carry out performance-related educational activities. At the same time, we began running training sessions and consultations on activity-based scenarios for theatre company representatives, as this mode of theatre education was unfamiliar to most. However, the project's educational module proved a significant burden for participating theatre groups, requiring additional time and disrupting the work of other production team members. Moreover, it was only of interest to a small segment of the audience, and cultural centres were not always able to attract participants. Additional activities are still carried out within the Teatr Polska programme, but performance-related workshops are no longer endorsed.

**Konkurs im. Jana Dormana (Jan Dorman Competition)** – A programme implemented between 2015 and 2020, in which selected theatre companies received funding to produce and tour performances for children and/or young people in educational institutions<sup>20</sup>. An integral part of each school visit was educational activities related to the performance. The groups often prepared socially engaged productions, leading to frequent attempts to convey additional contexts for the issues addressed that were not directly present in the performance itself.

**Teatroteka Szkolna (School Theatroteque)** – This is an online portal for people working in schools who wish to use theatre in the classroom and beyond<sup>21</sup>. The database includes lesson plans related to performances viewed with a group. These include universal activity frameworks that can be applied after any performance, as well as materials developed for specific productions, available online (including those in the Ninateka<sup>22</sup> and TVP VOD<sup>23</sup> collections). Between 2019 and 2023, the Theatre Pedagogy Department collaborated with iTeatr TVP for Schools<sup>24</sup>, for which we designed

19 'Teatr Polska' (Theatre Poland) is a programme initiated by the Theatre Institute to facilitate access to Polish theatre performances for residents of smaller towns and cities where there are no institutional theatres. The performances selected by the programme's selection committee are presented in the auditoriums of local cultural centres. Every year, a variety of performances, diverse in form and theme, set off on a tour of Poland, addressing audiences of all ages. See: <https://teatr-polska.pl/idea/> (accessed 30.09.2025).

20 'Konkurs im. Jana Dormana' (Jan Dorman Competition) aimed to encourage professional theatre companies and institutional theatres to create performances intended for presentation in educational institutions and to improve the artistic quality of such productions. An important criterion was the consideration and creative use of school conditions (e.g., space, class duration) in the project. In this way, the competition was intended to help break down barriers to the school community's access to high-quality theatrical productions. Jan Dorman, an outstanding Polish theatre artist, director, and educator, long-time director of the Zagłębie Children's Theatre in Będzin, known for his experimental approach to art and his subjective treatment of children – both as creators and recipients – was chosen as the competition's patron. See: <https://www.instytut-teatralny.pl/dzialalnosc/pedagogika-teatru/konkurs-im-jana-dormana/> (accessed 30.09.2025).

21 See: <https://teatrotekaszkolna.pl/> (accessed 30.09.2025).

22 Ninateka is a Polish VOD service offering feature films, documentaries, animated films, recordings of performances, concerts, conferences, meetings with creators and lectures, audiobooks, and radio plays. See: <https://ninateka.pl/> (accessed 30.09.2025).

23 TVP VOD is a VOD service provided by Telewizja Polska (Polish Television), which also includes a database of theatrical works (including video recordings of plays from the repertoire of theatres and original projects by Teatr Telewizji (Television Theatre). See: <https://vod.tvp.pl/teatr> (accessed 30.09.2025).

24 Internetowy Teatr TVP dla szkół or iTeatr TVP dla szkół (Polish Television Online Theatre for Schools) – a project implemented by Telewizja Polska (Polish Television) between 2012 and 2023. Regional TVP centres organised monthly online broadcasts of selected repertoire theatre performances for primary and secondary schools.

and developed performance-related workshop scenarios for the monthly broadcasts of theatrical performances, which were subsequently published on the portal.

**Szkoła Pedagogów Teatru (School of Theatre Pedagogues)** – A now-defunct training system operated under this name within the ‘Summer at the Theatre’ programme<sup>25</sup> from 2013 onwards. The training sessions took various forms, depending on the field’s needs as identified at the time, but a module devoted to creating performance-related workshops was always present in some form. The workshops derived from this structure were critical to us, and we conducted them as a duo under the title *Szkoła Pedagogów Teatru. Projektowanie warsztatów do spektakli* (School for Theatre Pedagogues: Designing Performance-related Workshops). As part of these sessions, we watched performances with the participants in selected theatres. On the first day of the training, we led an integrative workshop to introduce and establish a shared understanding of the basic categories related to theatre pedagogy workshops. On subsequent days, participants were invited to design performance-related workshops in small groups for one of the performances and then run them for the rest of the group. Our experiences of preparing for and delivering these editions of the School for Theatre Pedagogues led us to refine our methodology for designing performance-related workshops, which we will share in the next part of this text.

Given the wide range of initiatives described above, it may be surprising that, although almost every institutional theatre in Poland and many independent theatres now offer educational programmes and performance-related workshops, the latter appear only rarely. Perhaps our ideas for promoting this format lacked systemic character because they were consistently implemented alongside other programmes and in service of their goals. Currently, performances are more often accompanied by talks or meetings with the acting ensemble. At the same time, school groups are offered theatre tours or tool-oriented workshops, such as puppetry or voice training or acting. Performance-related workshops constitute only a small part of theatre pedagogy activities, most often related to performances for young audiences. This situation is undoubtedly influenced by institutional realities. Still, it is also significant that, apart from postgraduate studies in theatre pedagogy, there is currently nowhere to develop the skills needed to prepare this type of activity. We hope that the next part of our text will be helpful for anyone who would like to design and run a performance-related workshop scenario independently.

### Design your own workshop

As previously mentioned, performance-related workshops combine different types of activities (discursive, creative and performative) and the overarching aim depends on whether the activities take place before or after the performance. A pre-performance workshop introduces the audience to the performance, focusing their attention on the theme that will soon be presented on stage or allowing them to experience the performance’s aesthetic forms firsthand. The activities proposed in a post-performance workshop aim to extend the experience of the performance: a carefully designed creative situation provides an opportunity to discuss the performance and exchange different perspectives and experiences. The group shares observations and impressions of the performance, and this collective experience

25 ‘Lato w teatrze’ (Summer at the Theatre) is a grant competition which each year selects entities to run two-week summer art workshops for children and/or young people. The centres that receive funding also gain access to development activities. The development module in the programme has changed over the years – depending on the edition, it has included training courses, workshops, networking activities, supervision and study visits. There have also been and continue to be activities aimed at people who are not implementing projects in a given edition (consultations on applications that have not received funding, training for people interested in a specific area of work with children and young people, and the like). See: <https://latowteatrze.pl/o-nas/o-programie-lato-w-teatrze> (accessed 30.09.2025).

enables an additional interpretative layer to emerge that could not be achieved through individual experience alone. All of these activities are conducted by a theatre pedagogue who selects the workshop's specific goals and adjusts the exercises accordingly. Each workshop is different, just as each theatre pedagogue and each participant is different.

In the following section, we present information that we hope will inspire the design of performance-related workshops. Readers are encouraged to design their own activities based on this definition, bearing in mind that they constitute an authorial proposal or an invitation for a group to work in a way that reflects their own unique perspective on the performance.

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#### STEP 1:

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##### Watch the performance

The work discussed here assumes that the performance is the central focus. You therefore need to know its final form before beginning work on the performance-related workshop. While this may seem obvious, the realities of working in institutional theatres often mean that an educational pathway must be designed before the premiere. Those responsible for its development attend rehearsals, have access to the script and see costume designs and stage sets. They also often talk with the creative team behind the production, enabling them to stay close to the performance's creative process. All of these aspects can be helpful; the tools or exercise proposals devised at this stage may genuinely engage with the stage material presented later. However, sometimes an excess of knowledge (and emotions) can be overwhelming for the person designing the workshop, prompting them to want to convey or reinforce a message that is important to the creative team. Instead, what is needed is to create a situation in which the spectator is invited to assign their own meanings to what they have seen and share their reflections, rather than focusing on receiving what the creators intended. This follows from the assumption that interpretation contains a creative element. The theatre pedagogue's role is therefore to mediate between the work and the audience, enabling them to deepen their reception experience. For this reason, we recommend preparing performance-related workshops based on the post-premiere version of the performance, as only then is its complete structure visible, and contact with the audience enables us to observe how the work is received as a whole.

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#### STEP 2:

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##### Get to know the realities and set the organisational framework

Before choosing the issue you want to explore with the group and selecting the most suitable exercises, check whether a performance-related workshop is the correct format. Sometimes, the organiser or artistic director may require an educational activity for the whole audience. In such cases, other forms of group work will be more effective, such as moderated discussions with the audience or inviting participants to discuss the proposed questions or issues in pairs or slightly larger groups. In our view, the optimal group size for workshop activities involving performative engagement is around twenty people. It is also essential to consider the duration of the session, as this will help you to choose an appropriate format and plan individual exercises more effectively. The space designated for your work is also significant, as the conditions in which you will conduct the workshop can themselves become a source of inspiration. For example, if the space is a busy foyer with stairs, you could incorporate them into one of the exercises. A large hall with poor acoustics will lead to different exercises than a small, intimate space with a dance floor. You will conduct a performance-related workshop differently if you are in a theatre than if you are in a classroom or

community cultural centre. Therefore, define the conditions first, then design a workshop tailored to them. The questions below will help you with this.

Ideally, you would be able to decide on the group, time, and place of the activity. However, our work is usually shaped by various limitations or external requirements. Nevertheless, start by answering the questions as if you had complete freedom, as this will help you recognise your own style and priorities in workshop practice. Then consider which of these elements you can influence and which are non-negotiable.



For whom will the workshop be organised? Describe the group of people. Consider whether you know the participants and whether you have experience working with them. Check what, if anything, you know about them at this stage.

Do you know if the group will be available before or after the performance?  
How long will the workshop last?

What does the space in which you will conduct the workshop look like?

Are you able to access the stage on which the performance will be presented?

Can you use the props or other elements used in the performance? Do you have access to the text, music or other materials?

### STEP 3:

#### Use your own reception in designing activities

As theatre pedagogues, we sometimes feel that our responsibility for designing a workshop means we have to watch a performance with a specific goal in mind, as if we were trying to identify aspects to explore in the workshop. This is, of course, one possible preparation strategy, and we often use it ourselves. However, we would like to remind you that theatre pedagogues are also spectators who fully participate in the event, creating meanings in their own minds and receiving the artwork in their own unique way. We propose adopting a perspective in which our own experience of the performance can inspire the design of a workshop related to it. Your emotions, initial thoughts, questions, or difficulties in understanding can function as clues, suggesting directions in which it may be worth developing the activities. Therefore, after watching the performance, try doing the following exercises.



Draw one scene that stuck in your mind most vividly after watching the performance. Why do you think this one stayed with you in particular?

Create a mind map of your thoughts after seeing the performance. They do not need to form any logical structure; simply write down whatever comes to mind.

What emotions are you experiencing now, and which ones emerged while you were watching the performance? Name them and draw them on a chart.

Take a moment to think and complete the following sentence in its various forms:

If this performance were a tree / vehicle / animal / piece of furniture, etc.,  
it would be \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_

What questions would you like to ask the people who created the performance?

You can propose each of the above exercises to your group as the first activity during the workshop you are facilitating. You can then develop subsequent work based on the responses you receive.

We have both run post-performance workshops following productions we considered artistically unsuccessful because we found them incomprehensible. Thanks to the group's

collective insight, we were sometimes able to change our thinking and gain a better understanding of the performance. For this reason, we believe that personal evaluations of productions are largely irrelevant when designing performance-related workshops. Such evaluations have sometimes led us to favour a pre-performance workshop, as this format allows us to sensitise participants to a particular aspect of the production, making it more comprehensible and enabling a more profound reception. However, this approach is sometimes criticised for directing the audience too much and inhibiting the natural process of reception.

We would also like to point out the difference between introducing one's own perspective as a workshop leader, creating an open structure that allows for multiple interpretations, and running a workshop aimed at reaching conclusions the leader has already formed. In our view, workshops with a predetermined outcome pose a serious risk, i.e. when exercises are selected to influence participants to confirm the viewpoints of the workshop leader on a given performance or one of its elements. It is difficult to explain this without referring to a specific production, but let us try to rely on well-known cultural codes. You would design a thesis-based workshop if, at the end of a post-performance meeting about *Little Red Riding Hood*, for example, you wanted participants to conclude that one must obey one's parents. Similarly, after watching *The Revenge (Zemsta)*, you might want participants to conclude that one must not deceive one's partner. A similar risk arises when you propose working with stereotypes, intending first to expose them and then to dismantle them with the group.

Why is a workshop with a thesis a trap? Because you project your own interpretation or beliefs onto others. As a workshop leader, you can influence interpretation. Still, the purpose of a post-performance group meeting is to enable everyone to share their perspective and create a space for autonomous, free expression. After all, the role of a theatre pedagogue is to design open interpretative situations in which participants can reflect more deeply on the theme or aesthetics of the performance and experience them firsthand.

We recommend looking for exercises that genuinely spark your curiosity and that you feel like doing yourself. If you suspect that you already know the expected answers and will be bored waiting for them, the task will likely not engage the group either.

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#### STEP 4:

##### Analyse the performance

Our experience shows that a careful analysis of a performance, treating it as a theatre study, can also help design a performance-related workshop. You may wish to try answering some of the questions below, which we often use to support this process. Due to the diversity and constant evolution of contemporary theatre languages, these questions will not necessarily apply to every production. We encourage you to select the most relevant ones and to invent your own.



List all the characters and give a brief description of each one. What aspects of the acting caught your attention? What about the costumes?

Create an outline of the events. Title the individual sequences of the performance.

Alternatively, consider the structure of the performance: what does it look like? Present it in graphic form.

What formal solutions did the creators use? If this question is unclear, consider the following:

Are puppets or multimedia used in the performance? Are there any songs? If so, what is their purpose?



Are there more monologues or dialogues? Or are there any non-verbal forms of expression (if so, which ones and when)?

How is the narration delivered? Do characters simply converse with one another, or are there any asides, spoken stage directions or other types of text? What impression does this create?

Describe the set design of the performance. How did it change during the show, and did those changes carry meaning, in your view?

What words would you use to describe the music or soundscape of the performance?

Was its significance particularly visible in any scene? What function did it serve in the performance and in its individual scenes?

Think about stage movement. Did any characters move distinctively? Were there groups of characters? Were there any recurring sequences within the structure of the performance?

What themes did the performance address? Start by identifying the most critical issue, then list any others that come to mind.

Each of the above questions can also serve as a blueprint for an exercise you can propose to your group during the workshop you are running. The activities can then be developed based on the responses obtained. After completing this exercise on your own, you can choose one element, theme or issue to devote the entire workshop to.

## STEP 5:

### Design your workshop

Each workshop consists of a series of exercises proposed by the workshop leader to the group. Choose or create exercises that align with the theme and/or aesthetics of the performance you are preparing for. Designing a performance-related workshop is a creative act, grounded in all your previous experiences, that can be carried out individually or collectively. There are no universal rules here. For this reason, you can be sure that different people will propose different workshop ideas. We are not writing this to leave you without concrete exercise ideas, but to encourage you to trust your instincts and see it as an opportunity to experiment.

#### | First proposal

The broadest collection of performance-related workshop scenarios can be found on the [www.teatrotekaszkolna.pl](http://www.teatrotekaszkolna.pl) website. Some of these scenarios were prepared for online recordings. As part of your preparation, we suggest watching a performance recording, carefully reading the workshop description, and noting your reflections. Participating in a performance-related workshop yourself can also serve as a good starting point. This works best if you arrange to do this work with another person, as afterwards, you can exchange observations and discuss the topic.

#### | Second proposal

You may draw inspiration from our favourite dramaturgical structure. In this case, the workshop consists of:

- An introduction, sometimes called a contract, in which we present the organisational framework, announce the theme and/or reveal the structure of the activities, and establish the rules that will apply during the workshop with the group.
- At least one warm-up exercise (often several) inspired by the performance. These are designed to prepare the group both intellectually and physically for the next part of the workshop.
- The main performative activity, which refers to the performance and allows for a creative transformation or discussion of the selected issue. Sometimes, this task may also be developed in subsequent stages of the workshop.
- A short closing summary, which enables participants to conclude any open threads and allows the facilitator to gather feedback.

If you opt for this structure, the first step is to devise the main performative activity. This usually takes the most time, but it is also key to designing the rest of the performance-related workshop. Next, we consider what the group needs to carry out the main exercise creatively and plan different activity options.

#### STEP 6:

##### Work on quality

Never assume that the first structure you create will be perfect or final. This rarely happens. Designing a workshop and running it are different processes. The work of a theatre pedagogue depends on the specific group and how responsive we are to them during the workshop. In closing, we propose two ways of reflecting on your workshops. These are worth revisiting for your regular professional development, but also whenever you feel uncertain or ambiguous after a session.

Summarise the workshop in writing. Write down everything that happened during the session step by step. Put the notes aside for a few days, then return to them and read the material as if it were someone else's account of the event. What reflections arise?



Describe the workshop to someone who works in theatre pedagogy and ask them which aspects of your account they find most important. Alternatively, you could formulate a question that you and the listener could explore together. Remember that the other person's views are only hypotheses; they are not always right, but another perspective can enrich our way of thinking.

Theatre pedagogues strive to find a teaching method that fosters a sense of safety while enabling participants to act and reflect. This is a difficult balance to strike, but gaining experience helps. We hope that we have inspired you to design and run your own performance-related workshop. This intellectual endeavour will deepen your own appreciation of performances and enhance your enjoyment of theatre visits. We wish you good work and a lot of fun!

# Totally Serious? On the Use of Play in Theatre Pedagogy

Justyna Czarnota talks to  
Tomasz Daszczuk, Michał Domański and Anna Maria Sadowska

**JUSTYNA CZARNOTA** – Theatre pedagogue and cultural manager. As a freelancer, she conducted workshops for various institutions and organisations throughout Poland and designed educational and development materials. Since November 2024, she has been the director of the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw.

**MICHAŁ DOMAŃSKI** – Theatre pedagogue and video artist. He designs and coordinates theatre, video, and performative workshops for young people and adults. He creates performances and performative projects at the intersection of film and theatre. As a theatre pedagogue and co-producer, he collaborates on participatory productions including *Autokorekta* (Auto-correct) (directed by Jakub Skrzywanek), *1981* (directed by Wojtek Faruga), *Pustostany* (Vacant Spaces) (directed by Hanna Kłoszewska) and *2030* (directed by Michał Buszewicz). He has developed a series of workshops in collaboration with TR Warszawa, Teatr Ochoty, the Polish Theatre in Bydgoszcz, ASSITEJ Poland and the Dwie Siostry publishing house, among others. He is a two-time recipient of the Warsaw Cultural Education Award.

**ANNA MARIA SADOWSKA** – Cultural animator and co-founder of the Realistyczny Theatre in Skierniewice and the Polka Collective. She incorporates theatre, performance and drama into her work with children, young people, adults, and individuals with disabilities. She is also a coordinator of educational and cultural projects, a theatre pedagogue and a director of performances for children and young audiences. From 2017 to 2020, she coordinated the Projects Laboratory programme at the Bemowo Cultural Centre. She is currently Head of the Programme Department and coordinator at the Old Town Cultural Centre, where she empowers professionals working in Warsaw's cultural institutions.

**TOMASZ DASZCZUK** – Director and theatre pedagogue, and a certified teacher at the Warsaw Centre for Cultural Education (SCEK – Stołeczne Centrum Edukacji Kulturalnej) daily. He seeks inspiration by travelling to the borders of convention. As a result of these explorations, he received an award in a competition organised by the Children's Art Centre in Poznań in 2023 for his theatrical text, *Kto? Co? Czasownik* (Who? What? A verb) for children and young adults. He was awarded the Mazovian Cultural Inspiration Award IMPULS KULTURY and third place in the Warsaw Cultural Education Award for the interdisciplinary project 'TRYPTYCH' (TRIPTYCH), created in collaboration with General Józef Bem Secondary School no. 65.

**JUSTYNA**: I invited you here so that we could talk about play as an element of theatre pedagogy practice. I remember that, around a dozen years ago — roughly when Justyna Sobczyk's<sup>1</sup> production of *Teatralny Plac Zabaw Jana Dormana* (Jan Dorman's Theatrical Playground) was in development at the Theatre Institute (it premiered in 2012) — play was a frequently discussed topic. Two contexts predominated. The first was to encourage people running theatre classes in preschools, schools and cultural centres to create performances based on children's improvisations and allow them to play on stage instead of reciting memorised fragments of other people's texts. The second, inspired by Dorman's work<sup>2</sup>, concerned drawing on children's games and play as a source of dramaturgical material. I also vividly remember the family workshop series 'Teatranki'<sup>3</sup>, organised at the Theatre Institute, which focused on unleashing the energy of shared play with loved ones through uninhibited creativity.

Having led workshops for adults working in education and theatre for many years, I can say with full conviction that the topic of play is addressed far less frequently today. More often, current discussions focus on participation or the ethics of working with people who have no professional training in performing on stage.

I am recounting all of this to initiate a conversation about the role of play in theatre pedagogy activities, and to clarify from the outset what play means in my own practice. For me, it is crucial that the people I work with play together and experience the joy of creating collectively. What is your relationship to play in theatre pedagogy?

**ANNA**: I have been interested in this topic for many years. I spent countless hours playing tag, hide-and-seek and Mafia<sup>4</sup>. I cut my teeth on these games, playing and laughing so much that, to this day, I joke that I got a six-pack from them. I used play primarily as a tool for theatrical work, but not in the theatre itself, rather in building courtyards and playgrounds — places where children simply spend time. Often, before I even started talking to the children, I would throw a ball around and see what happened. Observing spontaneous play taught me a great deal about a given group or community: who the ball passed to, who got it often, who avoided it, who was afraid of it, and who showed off.

That was over a decade ago — I began working in 2007. At the time, I was young and did not yet have a well-thought-out methodology. I knew that theatre conventions might be incomprehensible to children from these settings, so I relied on intuition. The opportunity to reflect more deeply on the role of play in my work arose during two editions of the 'Theatre as a Social Art' Course, which the Realistyczny Theatre ran together with

1 The touring project of the Theatre Institute, *Jan Dorman's Theatrical Playground*, consisted of a performance for younger primary school pupils, workshops, and an educational booklet for people working in schools. An additional component of the project was research into theatre education in public schools. The main venues for presenting the performances were primary schools across the country. The project was inspired by three-stage productions by Jan Dorman, an outstanding theatre director and pedagogue. The essence of the activities lay in free, unrestrained play, intended to introduce audiences to the world of theatrical convention. Detailed information can be found at <https://www.instytut-teatralny.pl/dzialalnosc/projekty-i-programy/archiwalne/teatralny-plac-zabaw-jana-dormana/>.

2 Jan Dorman (1912–1986) was a pedagogue, director, theatre manager, actor, playwright, and visual artist who focused on creating high-quality theatre for children and on expanding theatrical experience with new elements. The archive of Dorman's works is housed at the Theatre Institute and continues to inspire the work of many contemporary theatre educators. More information can be found on the website dedicated to Jan Dorman: <https://www.jandorman.pl/kategorie/13/projekty> (accessed 18.11.2024) and at <https://culture.pl/pl/tworca/jan-dorman> (accessed 30.09.2025).

3 'Teatranki' is a workshop format developed at the Theatre Institute in 2009, co-created by members of the Association of Theatre Pedagogues. Initially, the sessions took place at the Theatre Institute on Sunday mornings and were addressed to family groups, i.e. children (aged 3–9) and their parents (or other close adults). Each meeting in this format is based on shared creative activities within family groups, organised around a single theme proposed by the workshop facilitator. Over the years, the sessions have addressed a wide range of issues, for example, key theatrical concepts such as actor, stage, dramaturgy, or intermission, as well as topics drawn from social life. In these partner-based activities, children and adults become guides for one another. The aim of the meetings is to develop children's and parents' creative imagination and sensitivity, and to support close relationships between them.

4 These are names of popular children's outdoor games.

the Grotowski Institute<sup>5</sup>. I led a workshop on incorporating the element of play into this course. While preparing for it, I revisited Roger Caillois's *Man, Play and Games* and Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. It was then that I realised two themes from these texts resonated particularly strongly with me: the voluntariness of play and its lack of a predetermined goal. I am here simply because I want to be. I have no idea how it will end or what will come of it — there is an element of mystery to it, and that delights me. I also want to remember that play brings laughter, ease, rest, and relief from over-intellectualisation. It allows people to come together and has the potential to bind a group.

**TOMASZ**: I used to search for different methods, take part in courses and learn exercises and ready-made scenarios. I would use them once or twice, but then they would start to feel outdated. They might work, but doing the same thing over and over again is boring. Now, I trust my intuition more, building on the ideas that the young people I work with every day bring to our theatre classes at the Warsaw Centre for Cultural Education (SCEK – Stołeczne Centrum Edukacji Kulturalnej). I try to make the situation we create together a form of play for everyone. In the long term, it is essential to continually raise the bar. First, it is a challenge for me to keep proposing new things while drawing inspiration from what the young people contribute. Secondly, it is vital to keep the group mobilised, to provoke them to go beyond themselves and grow.

**JUSTYNA**: Play emerges when there is no routine or repetition of what is already known and obvious. It begins when, during a meeting, we move together towards the less obvious and both sides are in motion, in a state of joyful flow...

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**TOMASZ**: Exactly! A good example of what you are talking about is a project we did at a school. We thought it would be fun to experiment there a bit and temporarily change the place. In the end, we decided to come in at night for a photo shoot and 'paint with light'. I knew there were two musicians in the group, which inspired me to take it a step further. I suggested they put on a kind of nocturnal mini-concert tour. They chose places that were meaningful to them and where they wanted to perform. It was great! They played on the Polish teacher's desk, in the toilet, outside the headteacher's office and in a vast empty car park, with the group following them around with amplifiers. This made the school seem less mysterious, and I had a great time too because I genuinely enjoy playing!

More generally, I often use the phrase 'playing theatre'. Recently, however, I have realised that theatre is too limiting a framework for me and that I need to broaden my thinking about it. I need to step outside theatre buildings, turn towards different art forms and see what happens on this new terrain that I do not yet know so well. For example, I experiment with sound and visual arts. I also feel the need to experiment with different intellectual approaches to theatre. Sometimes I tell high school students, 'Don't try to analyse this — it's simple, and it's more about clearing your head'. On the other hand, however, I also enjoy sitting with a group and simply talking to see where that might take us.

5 The Grotowski Institute in Wrocław is a municipal cultural institution that carries out artistic and research projects. Its mission is to respond to the challenges posed by the creative practice of Jerzy Grotowski and to document and disseminate knowledge about his achievements, as well as to build various forms of reflection on phenomena in contemporary theatre life that are rooted in Grotowski's artistic legacy. See: [http://en.grotowski-institute.pl/?page\\_id=613](http://en.grotowski-institute.pl/?page_id=613) (accessed 30.09.2025).

**MICHAŁ**: My friend Alicja Brudło<sup>6</sup> once described me as a trickster. I really took to that label because it genuinely describes my style. I question everything, and I like to joke around. In fact, I like to take it a bit too far. Until recently, I was employed as a theatre pedagogue at TR Warszawa<sup>7</sup>, so I often worked with artists. I once attended a meeting with young people working on a production titled *2030* directed by Michał Buszewicz. I sensed a certain tension, as if they were constructing an intellectual cathedral. I normally need to let off some steam and to start with play, and only later move on to more serious topics. It is not about showing how cool or funny I am. What matters most to me is avoiding that moment in working with young people when artists become frustrated and give up. 'But what do you want to say? This is yours, after all. Surely you have something to say? You are young. What interests you?' I think one has to be very careful in situations like this, because the pressure to find answers can lead young people to fabricate things to please the artist or an adult.

**TOMASZ**: This approach feels very familiar to me. After all, we only meet once for the final performance, but all the fun and laughter we have along the way is ours to keep! Life is filled with rational decisions and actions. Playing offers an opportunity to do irrational things in a safe space without focusing on results. For me, good play buds and grows, spreading into different areas. And if it takes on an additional meaning along the way, even better! If, in the process, we build something and can invite audiences to see how we played, that is wonderful. Audiences come with different expectations. Some like linear forms, while others prefer the opposite. This is why I never try to guess their preferences. I trust the process: I look for play in practically every meeting, and the final form of the performance emerges from that.

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**MICHAŁ**: Exactly! I think a lot about how to arrange a situation so that it becomes pure play, which I define as action without a goal, not aimed at reflection or gathering material for a show. What matters to me is designing and facilitating the process so that each exercise, task or stage of work has enough freedom and space for the final outcome to emerge naturally, without effort or pain.

**JUSTYNA**: Can you explain what that means in practice?

**MICHAŁ**: Absurdity amuses me, and I like to provoke it when running workshops. Sometimes, I pick the most ridiculous idea that arises from the group and suggest developing it. Other times, I invent a strange game based on a sentence I overheard. This can lead to something interesting, but it is often simply a way to exhaust all the ideas for creating a serious, large-scale performance. This allows us to escape the constraints of a type of art that categorises actions as either constructive or non-constructive, or as either marketable or not. At the same time, the various forms of provocation, laughter and play that I use make it possible to question the status quo. After all, you cannot get used to every absurdity. However, you can use it as a tool to think more deeply about situations or conventions that we take for granted, such as school, family or theatre.

I often work with video, simply turning on the camera and seeing what happens when we do the most senseless things. It is a wonderful form of play. I also like to play a game where we try to make each other laugh. I love the moment when it turns out that something is not actually funny. I then try to draw attention to that, not by saying

6 Alicja Brudło is a cultural manager and animator, a theatre pedagogue, and a theatre and performance artist.

7 TR Warszawa is a Warsaw-based institutional theatre founded in 1949 as Państwowy Teatr Rozmaitości (State Variety Theatre).

'This does not amuse me', but by asking the group: 'OK, what can we do to make it even more absurd, even more about nothing?' This radical letting go of the weight of art and focus on creating a performance causes the performance to emerge as a by-product of pure play.

**ANNA**: Hearing you talk, I realised that our respective situations are polar opposites: you work within the framework of 'theatre classes' and use play to release the tension of its conventionality. I, on the other hand, use play to introduce theatre because I feel I am unable to do so directly. In the environment in which I work, theatre is burdened with associations that I wish to avoid, which is why I am cautious and uncertain.

**JUSTYNA**: Anna, I understand this difference as follows: you work with groups for whom play is still a natural language and way of functioning. You therefore begin the conversation with them in that language, while simultaneously discovering its theatrical potential. Meanwhile, Michał and Tomasz are talking about working with older groups who may have forgotten how to play, and these activities allow them to rediscover it.

**ANNA**: You could put it that way as well. In theatre pedagogy work, these are two completely different situations for the workshop leader. I felt that the children's readiness to enter the world of play depended on my attitude as the person leading the process. When working in courtyards, for example, I focused on being charismatic and visible. I wanted to somehow catch the group's attention and introduce elements of theatrical convention into their reality while remaining non-oppressive and friendly. I had to listen and understand the process that the children were going through outside of the activities, but I also could not interfere with their existing neighbourhood life. Ensuring participants' safety was crucial to me. It was a very delicate and complex matter.

**JUSTYNA**: While we are discussing this, I am thinking about my own theatre pedagogy practice with adults. I choose activities that recall forgotten ways of spending time together. They use crayons and paint, improvise and create short scenes using objects from their backpacks. They also make shapes and movements with their own bodies. At the same time, I try to draw their attention to the fact that play contains much more than meets the eye: it enables you to gain new knowledge about yourself, both as an individual and in relation to your role within a group. I think that, among adults in particular, there is a dominant way of thinking that goes like this: first comes learning / work / effort, then comes rest / play / meeting friends. I feel it is worth blending these aspects during workshops.

**MICHAŁ**: From my experience of working with adults, they tend to become irritated more quickly when they feel that something is pointless or non-constructive. That's when they say things like, 'OK, but why are we even doing this?' I always reply: 'Do we have to? Is that really necessary?'

**JUSTYNA**: After workshops, adults often tell me that they initially perceived some of my proposals as trivial, sometimes it is about bringing markers or crayons to a session, and at other times it is about moving a part of the body that is not usually used in workshops. During training sessions, when I ask people to stand up and start a warm-up, I sometimes see ironic looks or quiet giggling. What helps me then is my self-confidence and clarity of purpose. I know why I suggest certain activities, and I am aware that if we start by focusing on breathing and loosening up, it will make it easier for us to communicate as a group later on. I know that, rather than talking about something, if we try to express

it differently, for instance, through a drawing, a monologue or a poem, we can access layers of sensitivity within ourselves that may have been forgotten. An element of my style of working is ease: I do the exercises together with the participants, allowing myself to be silly and say funny things. For example, I might talk about how rarely we show our armpits to anyone, and how right now we can do exactly that. Or I might talk about the fat on my thighs that I am about to wiggle and invite others to join me.

**MICHAŁ**: In my view, play requires ease on the part of the workshop leader. I do not mean performing or trying to be cool at all costs; I mean an ease that is rooted in a person's character and what genuinely amuses them. It is from that place that you can create enjoyable activities for others, too. But it is risky, as well. I get excited about my work and often find myself getting carried away with play to the point where I start to behave like a participant. But that is not really what being the workshop leader is about.

**TOMASZ**: I agree that to have fun with a group, you need a sense of humour and to be able to laugh at yourself. When I am genuinely excited about a game, I can honestly pass that excitement on to others. I feel like a big kid who has found his toy cars and gets to play with them. But you also have to adapt the play to the group's needs. Sometimes, when I notice signs of shyness or withdrawal, I say, 'Come on, let us listen to the world', and that is all we do. However, if my group is feeling more confident and wants to venture into the public space, I say: 'We're going to the Old Town Market Square for forty minutes. Take out a pen and exchange it for something else thirty times. Then we will talk about what you ended up with'. I sit in a corner and watch them approach people, seeing how they overcome their shyness and step out of their comfort zones. I also observe people's reactions — it is amusing yet deeply engaging. When we return to our workshop space, everyone is breathless and eager to share their experiences. I like that moment because play allows experimentation and the opportunity to learn from mistakes, not just tolerating them, but recognising them as a necessary part of success.

**ANNA**: I am thinking about what you said in the context of carnivalisation, or the questioning of established social norms. The example you gave shows that play begins with the agreement to temporarily create a fictional reality, one governed by alternative rules. This is more than just wordplay or a game; it involves a shift in how we function and the activation of a new perspective. When we perceive play in this way, we enter the realm of theatre because both theatre and play operate through convention and make-believe, being serious and not serious at the same time. A change of rules opens up the possibility of understanding the world from a perspective other than the everyday one.

One more thing just occurred to me. When your group went outside to talk to strangers, they also left their comfort zone. However, this was still within a certain framework, as the young people were acting as part of a group, you were present, and they knew they could discuss it with you afterwards. They faced forty minutes of the unknown, but they also trusted the workshop leader. It is beneficial when each participant approaches a session with the mindset that: 'I can do this, but I do not have to; I might succeed, but if I do not, it will not reflect badly on me'. If that is the case, it means the workshop leader has properly addressed the group's sense of safety.

**TOMASZ**: I, personally, would not dare go into the Old Town with just any group. After all, it is not supposed to be a task like: 'I, the theatre pedagogue, will now show you how to step out of your comfort zone'. It is more about raising the bar, as I mentioned at the beginning, but not at any cost.

**ANNA**: Yes, 'never at all costs' is something I also tell myself. I do not have to be funny or excited. All of that can happen, but it does not have to. I pay close attention to building the framework for the work because my main task today is to create safe conditions for the people I work with. I would like everyone who runs workshops and works with groups to ask themselves: How can I ensure the group's safety, and what might that entail? They should consider this on different levels: what kind of atmosphere do they introduce into the sessions? Do they create the possibility of refusing to take part in proposed activities? Do they give space to question the world that is being brought into being during the sessions? It is worth asking what kind of social life is made possible within my proposal. Underpinning every game is a process I understand as group formation and relationship-building.

I realise this may be controversial, but I am currently not interested in the artistic process at all. I am an artist and have always been drawn to it, but at a certain stage, I let that go. I prefer to observe how the participants cooperate with one another because, to me, this is a kind of laboratory of social life. However, just so as not to idealise play, there is no democracy, equality or parallelism in play. There are simply roles and attitudes. It is a mixture of whatever we bring with us on a given day. Nevertheless, I believe in attentiveness, a well-established framework and, quite simply, the facilitator who understands group and pedagogical processes and focuses on them.

When I am in that role myself, I want to reach a situation quite quickly where I am playing with the group in games that emerge from them, based on the world I created at the beginning i.e., that safe framework. I really enjoy the moment when I allow myself to be guided, and the person taking over my role knows I am looking out for them and will end the game if necessary. For me, this is also about ethics and the subjectivity of children — or people in general — and the possibility of contributing, agency and all those fashionable themes that are probably more visible right now, because all of this crystallises in play one way or another.

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**JUSTYNA**: What really strikes me is your admission that you are not interested in the artistic process. This resonates with a question that occurred to me earlier: why is exchanging objects in urban spaces, or doing something at school at night, described as play rather than as an artistic vision?

**TOMASZ**: I get lost when I have to categorise reality. If you suggested a conversation about artistic processes, I would say the same thing because there's no clear way to define them. 'This is where the play ended', 'This is where we entered an artistic process', or 'Now we are going back because we agreed this was just play'. It is fluid.

**JUSTYNA**: It is no coincidence that theatre pedagogues are often said to deal with practice rather than theory in their discipline! (laughter)

**TOMASZ**: I think play does not tolerate professionalisation. Sometimes during rehearsals, a situation arises, and I say: 'This is great. Let us not rehearse it because we will ruin it. Let us just take it as it is into the final performance'. I tell the participants that if they want to pursue art, they will go to school and practise sequences individually endlessly, but for now, we should leave it alone so as not to spoil the pleasure of returning to that moment in the performance.

**JUSTYNA**: Since you mentioned the performance, I would like to suggest we consider another aspect. When material gathered through play needs to be assembled into the final performance structure. When we work on a production with a group, we face the challenge

of enclosing the diverse experiences of the creative and group processes within the framework of a performance. Although I do not often take part in such processes, I know that moment well: when something speaks up inside me, and I do not know how to name it – some kind of dramaturgical instinct, a spark of directorial creativity or simply ego – and I think to myself, ‘If only this were arranged like this, it would be wonderful! I know how to do it!’.

**ANNA** : I have been there many times and just sat on a landmine. I was tempted to make artistic decisions about the performance’s direction on behalf of the group and to use my position as workshop leader to intervene in the show. That was often difficult. Now, I try not to do that any more than anyone else in the group who feels they need to.

**JUSTYNA** : A significant challenge for me was accepting that I am also a member of the group and that I can have my own role and opinion within it, rather than just listening to others. I realised that what I was doing was not solely instruction, but creation as well. What helped me was learning how to communicate my role, position, and needs. I got to the point where I no longer felt the need to disappear and become invisible. Nevertheless, I still find this process extremely difficult. A particularly delicate issue for me is not going too far in the opposite direction and prioritising my own enjoyment. Looking back, I realise that I am fortunate to often work with groups who challenge my ideas, so I have plenty of opportunities to experience following other people’s lead. (laughter)

**ANNA** : This is part of the group process. When the group contests ideas, it means they are creating their own world. I like it when this happens, although I do sometimes have to grit my teeth (laughter). For me, the final outcome is the *crème de la crème* of everything that has taken place. If we are staging a performance, we have to choose a methodology for putting it together, and it can be very helpful to have designated people responsible for making decisions: ‘This stays, this is edited out, this needs to be done differently’. Sometimes I allow myself to be that person, but at other times I simply have to step back and give someone else the opportunity to take on that role, as their creativity needs to be fulfilled, too.

**TOMASZ** : I really like giving people space. If someone even timidly raises their hand, I try to notice and invite them in. I recently wrote a text on my own for the first time, for a competition organised by the Children’s Art Centre. The idea was that we would work on it with the group. But when I see that a boy from the group has written a text too, I immediately say: ‘Great! You direct it — go for it! I will help you switch the lights on’. Then his friend, who is interested in technical things, came along and replaced me. Everyone is having a good time. I might have had just as much fun working on my own text, but I thought to myself, ‘I am doing this for these young people’.

**MICHAŁ** : I have the feeling that the approach you are describing really brings participants closer to the adult. The accompanying adult is not just someone who says, ‘I will hug you if you are sad. I will support you. You’re safe. I’m always on your side’. Instead, they can build something with the group that is... how should I put it... wisely or unwisely, but accurately? It is simply a bond that creates comfort and safety while also encouraging independence.

**ANNA** : Creating that bond requires the adult to open up. During play, you reveal different aspects of yourself, and some truths about you as a human being emerge. Distance begins to shrink, and closeness emerges. It is a big responsibility to decide what I want to reveal

and what I want to keep to myself here and now, while also being able to work with what emerges accidentally.

**MICHAEL**: I am very alert to situations in which the group tests my boundaries. In practice, those boundaries can sometimes blur. It is important to me not to let things reach the point where the adult says, 'OK, we are playing, but not that much'. Boundaries should always be set at the level of personal participation in the play, by responding directly, for example, by saying, 'What you said hurt me'. Then it is not about going too far in play, but about going too far with me as a person. That affects me regardless of whether we are playing or not. This way, the play itself can remain intact.

**ANNA**: Yes, because people do say that play can be cruel, especially when some participants start having fun at someone else's expense. That is why I consider it so important to introduce a 'stop now' rule, whereby anyone can pause the play and step outside the frame to ask, 'What just happened here?'.

**JUSTYNA**: Oh, I remember many play situations in courtyards or at school when I was a child, when I would have liked to do exactly that. I feel relieved at the thought that anyone can use this rule to protect themselves confidently, but I still believe that, in theatre classes, it is the theatre pedagogue who should take care of this. This requires an understanding of the course of the group process and skill in working with it so that it supports the building of relationships among participants. From everything we have said here, it follows that, as theatre pedagogues, we constantly have a lot to do to ensure that the participants and we can truly enjoy playing.

## Definition of Theatre Pedagogy Developed by the Theatre Pedagogy Department

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The definition of theatre pedagogy developed by the Theatre Pedagogy Department of the Theatre Institute<sup>1</sup> is one of several attempts to approach this field from a theoretical perspective. Our article is composed of two parts. In the first part, we outline the context in which the definition emerged (both of us participated in its development) and discuss the assumptions that guided our work on it. We also situate the definition alongside other theoretical formulations of the term. The second part takes the form of a conversation between us. As theatre pedagogy practitioners, we share our reflections on the specific formulations of the definition. Through this approach, we aim to initiate a dialogue about the definition, treating it in two ways: as a means of reflecting on one's own practice and as a prompt for critically considering the field's frameworks and specific characteristics. We believe that this approach keeps concepts in relation to reality, enabling reflection on them and engagement with issues that are the subject of ongoing, lively debate.

### The process of developing the definition formulated by the Theatre Pedagogy Department

In 2017, the Theatre Pedagogy Department had the largest team in its history. The team comprised Maria Babicka-Janiszewska, Justyna Czarnota, Joanna Krukowska-Gulik, Katarzyna Piwońska, Justyna Sobczyk, Wiktoria Siedlecka-Doros, Magdalena Szpak and Joanna Zawadzka. We all had different levels of professional experience in theatre pedagogy, and many of us also had substantial experience in related fields such as cultural animation, art therapy, and theatre studies. During a departmental meeting to summarise our year-long collaboration, we realised that our use of terms that we each understood differently was hindering our collective work. We realised that this situation reflected the state of our field: we had received numerous signals that the lack of theoretical texts, definitions and clearly defined concepts also posed a challenge to other theatre pedagogues in their professional practice.

From the moment it was transplanted into the Polish context, theatre pedagogy has been a distinctly practice-oriented field within theatre life, in which knowledge has been transmitted primarily through workshop-based methods<sup>2</sup>. From the moment it was transplanted into the Polish context, theatre pedagogy has been a distinctly practice-oriented field within theatre life, in which knowledge has been transmitted primarily through workshop-based methods. Furthermore, almost everyone working in this field developed their own unique approach (sometimes in pairs or teams), drawing on their previous experience and building on it through subsequent courses and training, not only in theatre pedagogy itself<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, our situation has enabled us to recognise the significance, both for ourselves

1 The Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw was founded in 2003. It is a state cultural institution engaged in documenting, promoting, and animating Polish theatrical life. Its areas of activity include organising public debate on Polish theatre, broadening research perspectives, popularising theatre, and conducting and supporting educational activities in Poland. The institution has been carrying out tasks in this latter area almost since the beginning of its existence, and in 2014, it established the Theatre Pedagogy Department for this purpose.

2 See: <https://encyklopediateatru.pl/hasla/381/pedagogika-teatru> (accessed 30.09.2025): "In Poland, activities in the field of theatre pedagogy began to be introduced at the beginning of the 21st century. The precursor of this discipline is Justyna Sobczyk, a graduate of theatre pedagogy at the Berlin University of the Arts. Following her employment in 2005 at the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw, the institution began undertaking activities to popularise the new discipline. Initially, these activities focused primarily on inviting German theatre pedagogues and on transplanting work models from Germany (Theatre and School). Still, over time, they began to shift toward developing their own solutions rooted in Polish realities (...). To educate individuals interested in practising the new discipline, in 2009, the Theatre Institute launched a year-long course 'TISZ Annex – Supplement' for education specialists, and three years later, the School of Theatre Pedagogues. At the same time, organisations that had already been active in the field of theatre and theatre education (including Teatr Figur in Kraków and Teatr Węgały) became essential centres supporting development and enriching work methods for those seeking new techniques and philosophies of practice (...)."

3 Among the particularly popular paths of developing competencies were those related directly to theatre and various fields of art (courses for theatre instructors, drama method courses, creative writing courses, postgraduate studies in directing theatre for children and youth, and similar), as well as those related to working with groups (training methodology courses, facilitation courses, and similar) or communication issues (e.g., training in Nonviolent Communication).

and for our programmes, of the fact that, until now, practice has developed first and foremost. At the same time, theory has only accompanied it to a limited extent<sup>4</sup>.

We concluded that we needed meetings to share our experiences as theatre pedagogues and identify similarities and differences in our approaches. To begin with, we decided to examine how we were already communicating about theatre pedagogy in materials promoting the department's programmes. Each meeting was facilitated by a member of our team, either individually or in pairs. During these meetings, we discussed the following issues:

- What theatre pedagogy objectives does a programme pursue, and how are these realised through its initiatives?
- Are there any shared values across our practices?
- What defines the role of the workshop leader in the theatre pedagogy process?
- Why do theatre pedagogues need theatre?
- What is the relationship between theatre pedagogy and theatre education, and education more broadly?

Early in this process, we considered the outcome to be a definition of theatre pedagogy for use in the department. At the time, we did not have a clear idea of how to achieve this. Nevertheless, we decided to record and transcribe all our conversations so that we could return to this material later.

As a result of our work, Katarzyna Piwońska and Magdalena Szpak began implementing changes to the communication on the 'Teatroteka Szkolna' website<sup>5</sup>. This portal presents lesson plans and film materials developed for schools that use theatrical tools. They returned to the material from the departmental discussions and categorised it around key terms that could potentially form part of an explanation of theatre pedagogy. They subsequently initiated the formation of a working group explicitly dedicated to preparing a definition. This group started working in autumn 2018, with Maria Babicka-Janiszewska and Joanna Krukowska-Gulik joining the core team. The working group took the activities carried out within the programmes of the Theatre Pedagogy Department as its points of reference, as well as the individual professional practices of each co-author, including those beyond the Institute, and their knowledge of developments in theatre pedagogy in Poland. The primary objective of these meetings was to find verbal formulations that would describe the discipline and enable it to be related to the highly diverse practices encountered.

At the beginning of 2019, the department consulted the initial version of the definition, after which the working group continued to refine it. In April 2019, with the involvement of the entire departmental team, discussions about the final shape of the definition began; these concluded in autumn 2019. We then decided that the calendar produced by the Theatre Pedagogy Department as a gift for those implementing and participating in the department's programmes would be the first place in which to publish the definition<sup>6</sup>. Over time, we gradually included the definition on our websites and in programme-related materials. In October 2023, after supplementing it with historical context and making editorial revisions, it was published in the *Encyclopaedia of Polish Theatre*<sup>7</sup>. It currently reads as follows:

4 At that time, the Theatre Pedagogy Department ran several programmes ('Teatroteka Szkolna' and two grant competitions – 'Lato w teatrze' and 'Konkurs im. Jana Dormana'), which included a training component addressed to cultural and educational professionals, and it also co-ran postgraduate studies in Theatre Pedagogy with the University of Warsaw.

5 <https://teatrotekaszkolna.pl/> (accessed 30.09.2025).

6 Theatre Pedagogy calendar for 2020, Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute, Warsaw 2020, p. 8.

7 See: <https://encyklopediateatru.pl/hasla/381/pedagogika-teatru> (accessed 18.11.2024).

**Theatre pedagogy** (*Theaterpädagogik* in German) is an independent practical discipline that brings together theatre and pedagogy.

The practice of theatre pedagogy is based on:

- Respect for the diversity of views and experiences, the creation of spaces for encounters between differing perspectives, and the invitation to engage in creative dialogue;
- Employing the aesthetics of contemporary theatre;
- Taking into account both the creative process (the totality of actions and phenomena that lead to a new outcome, which is often artistic in theatre pedagogy) and the group process (all interactions and phenomena that occur when a group of people are together), balancing their significance in group work.

The most common form of work in theatre pedagogy is the theatre pedagogy workshop. These workshops can be used in one-off formats, such as accompanying a performance or a lesson, or in long-term processes with a group, such as preparing a performance or a cycle of thematic workshops.

A theatre pedagogy workshop is a form of group work that uses theatre to reflect on specific issues. The theatre pedagogue designs the session's dramaturgy by selecting tasks that are connected to the topic and to one another. During the workshop, each participant has the opportunity to express themselves as both a creator (through creative action) and a spectator (by sharing their responses). Adopting these two perspectives and engaging in group discussion provides a foundation for developing critical thinking about oneself, the surrounding world, and theatre. Individual theatre pedagogy exercises conducted within workshops may draw on any elements of theatrical language (words, movement, sound, singing, acting and scenography).

Theatre pedagogy operates at the intersection of theatre and pedagogy. Drawing on the tradition of critical pedagogy, it questions the assumptions, forms of work and outcomes of formal education, seeking to recognise and address social inequalities. Unlike traditional theatre education, arts education and theatre studies, theatre pedagogy does not teach methods, theories and/or practices related to theatre itself (as a stage work). Instead, it uses them to develop participants' self-reflection, communication skills, and social awareness. In this way, it strengthens participants' creative and receptive competencies in the arts, while simultaneously supporting their intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. Within the field of theatre, it considers phenomena and tendencies present in professional theatre and alternative movements, incorporating them in its work with groups. Theatre pedagogy emerged as a discipline in Germany in the late 1950s, becoming widespread in the early 1970s in response to the development of a new theatrical language.

We never aspired to present the above definition as the only valid one. On the contrary, we hoped that its presence would stimulate reflection, encouraging people to recognise themselves within it and to reflect on their own practice. We also hoped it would encourage people to engage in dialogue with others and to question the way we have delineated the field, even if it means disagreeing with us. It is also worth noting that the term 'theatre pedagogy' was already in use in Polish and had been discussed in various articles earlier (and subsequently). Aleksandra Denkowicz addresses this issue in depth in her text 'Teatr nigdy nie był bliżej.

Pedagogika teatru – współczesny model edukacji teatralnej<sup>8</sup> (Theatre Has Never Been Closer. Theatre Pedagogy as a Contemporary Model of Theatre Education), published in 2022 in the journal *Pedagogika Przedszkolna i Wczesnoszkolna*. In the following paragraphs, we would like to draw attention to several issues related to alternative definitions of theatre pedagogy.

The first definition to be developed in a Polish context was created by Magdalena Szpak and published in 2012 on the website of the Association of Theatre Pedagogues<sup>9</sup>. It has since become an essential point of reference for practitioners in the field. The author emphasised the discipline's autonomy, thereby distinguishing it from other educational and performative practices that utilise theatre, and outlined its framework clearly and concisely.

Theatre pedagogy is an autonomous discipline that sits between the fields of pedagogy and theatre, shaping conscious recipients and creators of art. It aims to enable participants in educational activities to access theatre through their own use of the language of theatre.

By filling the definitional gap, Szpak developed an article in which she presented the German theatre pedagogy context briefly and explained other basic concepts, such as the theatre pedagogue and the theatre pedagogy workshop. This carefully prepared material, which is accessible, practical and valuable, was published in the same year as the extensive monograph *Teatr w refleksji i praktyce edukacyjnej. Ku pedagogice teatru* (Theatre in Educational Reflection and Practice: Towards Theatre Pedagogy), by Wiesław Żardecki, Professor in the Department of Cultural Pedagogy at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin. However, that work received little response within the theatre pedagogy community. In our view, this was not only due to insufficient promotion of the volume but also to its size (nearly 600 pages). As an academic firmly embedded in the educational community, Professor Żardecki employed a discourse that was far removed from the language used by theatre practitioners in their daily work. He also chose not to provide a clear definition of the notion, instead elaborating on the 'distinctive features and branches of theatre pedagogy'<sup>10</sup>, which, in hindsight, was not helpful for those seeking straightforward answers and frameworks at the time.

In her article, Denkowicz does not mention Anna Rochowska's text 'Pedagogika teatru – próba definicji. Zwrot edukacyjny w teatrze'<sup>11</sup> (Theatre Pedagogy: An Attempt at a Definition. The Educational Turn in Theatre), published in 2019 in the journal *Kultura Współczesna*. Nor does she refer to the definition developed by the Theatre Pedagogy Department. However, this is less surprising, as until 2023 it was only available in the aforementioned calendars and on the Theatre Institute's programme websites. Nevertheless, it is striking that Rochowska's work, the then theatre pedagogue at TR Warszawa and currently the theatre's director<sup>12</sup>, and our collective work at the Theatre Institute unfolded in parallel and independently of

8 Aleksandra Denkowicz, 'Teatr nigdy nie był bliżej. Pedagogika teatru – współczesny model edukacji teatralnej' [Theatre Has Never Been Closer. Theatre Pedagogy as a Contemporary Model of Theatre Education] *Pedagogika Przedszkolna i Wczesnoszkolna* 2022, vol. 10, no. 1 (19), <https://czasopismoipis.uken.krakow.pl/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Aleksandra-DENKOWICZ-Teatr-nigdy-nie-byl-blizej.-Pedagogika-teatru-%E2%80%94-wspolczesny-model-edukacji-teatralnej.pdf>, (accessed 12.11.2024).

9 Magdalena Szpak, *Pedagogika teatru – definicje podstawowe* [Theatre Pedagogy – Fundamental Definitions], <https://pedagogizyteatru.org/pedagogika-teatru-definicje-podstawowe/> (accessed 18.11.2024).

10 Wiesław Żardecki, *Teatr w refleksji i praktyce edukacyjnej. Ku pedagogice teatru* [Reflections on Theatre and Educational Practice. Towards Theatre Pedagogy], Lublin 2012, pp. 490–494.

11 Anna Rochowska, 'Pedagogika teatru – próba definicji. Zwrot edukacyjny w teatrze' [Theatre Pedagogy: An Attempt at a Definition. The Educational Turn in Theatre], *Kultura Współczesna* 2019, no. 2 (105), [https://www.nck.pl/upload/2021/12/11\\_kw\\_2-2019-pedagogika-teatru.pdf](https://www.nck.pl/upload/2021/12/11_kw_2-2019-pedagogika-teatru.pdf) (accessed 12.11.2024).

12 TR Warszawa is a Warsaw-based institutional theatre founded in 1949 as Państwowy Teatr Rozmaitości (State Variety Theatre). Currently, many Polish institutional theatres have positions related to conducting various forms of education. Owing to Anna Rochowska's work, TR Warszawa became one of the first theatres in Poland to implement an education grounded in theatre pedagogy.

one another. Thus, at roughly the same time and in two different contexts, there was a need to clarify terms that had previously been in use.

From the perspective of our Theatre Pedagogy Department, the key objective was to define external communications, particularly for individuals interested in participating in our initiatives. Rochowska's text suggests that her motivation for developing a definition stemmed from her observation of an increasing number of publications on the subject in theatre journals, alongside the absence of a functional definition. Emphasising her perspective as a practitioner long associated with TR Warszawa and, thus, with an institutional theatre, Rochowska proposes that theatre pedagogy be understood as follows:

[...] a creative form of work carried out with a group of engaged participants, to foster deeper encounters among its members. It employs a diverse range of theatrical techniques and fosters a space for the exchange of ideas and for sharing reflections and emotions on an equal footing. This arises in the context of an agreed topic, a specific theatre performance, or another work of art.

It is telling that Rochowska then explains how she interprets the individual formulations, seeking to justify and clarify her personal perspective for others. We worked together to find formulations we could all endorse to describe the areas of theatre pedagogy in which we operate. The solution we arrived at attempts, on the one hand, to delineate the field as broadly as possible; on the other hand, it is undoubtedly shaped by our view of theatre pedagogy through the spectrum of initiatives carried out by us at the Theatre Institute. A significant difference is that Rochowska adopts the workshop leader's perspective in her definition, equating theatre pedagogy with working with a group. In contrast, the definition developed by the Theatre Pedagogy Department indicates that various forms are possible, though it does not specify them, mentioning only the workshop as the most common. While working on this text, we reflected on what might have influenced our assumptions, identifying three issues related to the specific nature of our experiences.

- We identified theatre pedagogy practices as an area in which activities can be carried out without a workshop leader such as performative walks for families based on a pre-designed script<sup>13</sup>, or conceived as individual work, such as performance-related brochures for audiences<sup>14</sup>. In such cases, theatre pedagogues design the activity concept but do not lead it directly.
- We implemented various initiatives combining multiple methods of work, including those originating outside theatre pedagogy, such as tutoring, supervision and facilitation. These initiatives were underpinned by a focus on their processual dimension and the creative contribution and agency of the participants. Hybrid projects emerged that could not always be described solely as 'working with a group', but which were strongly informed by theatre pedagogy categories in their design and implementation

13 An example of such activities is the *Spacerowniki* [Walking Guides] for children who take adults for a walk, created and implemented by the Theatre Institute as part of the project 'Spacerownik teatralny' [Theatrical Walking Guide]. The project's website offers unique walking routes through places connected with theatre across Poland – these are proposals for active leisure and for gaining knowledge about theatre and local history. Part of the collection consists of family walks that combine knowledge with elements of shared play – interested participants can follow the route and complete tasks according to the proposed concept at any time. An example route in Warsaw by Justyna Czarnota and Justyna Sobczyk: <https://spacerownikteatralny.pl/spacery/inst/warszawa-spacerownik-dla-dzieci-ktore-zabieraja-na-spacer-doroslych/> (accessed 30.09.2025).

14 Brochures for performances are materials containing sets of tasks inspired by the production's form and content. They are distributed among audience members, who can take them home and, by completing the suggested activities, continue their reflection on the work they have seen. Brochures are most often prepared for child and family audiences. An example is the brochure for the performance *Peter Pan* directed by Konrad Dworakowski, which premiered on 22 June 2019: [https://latow-teatrze.pl/upload/2023/04/piotrus\\_pan.pdf](https://latow-teatrze.pl/upload/2023/04/piotrus_pan.pdf) (accessed 30.09.2025).

(for example, study visits within the Summer at the Theatre<sup>15</sup> programme and projects centred on the Jan Dorman<sup>16</sup> archive, culminating in the conference ‘The Theatre of Jan Dorman: Explorations. Inspirations. Reflections’<sup>17</sup>).

- We wanted to indicate in the definition the potential for broad application of theatre pedagogy and, in a sense, anticipate the emergence of new forms.
- In closing this section, we would like to share three observations arising from our analysis of the available theoretical materials.
- Most attempts to systematise and deepen definitional reflection originate from individuals with many years of practical experience in the field, primarily gained within institutional theatres. These individuals include Marzenna Wiśniewska<sup>18</sup>, Kamila Paradowska<sup>19</sup>, Anna Rochowska, and Simon Blaschko<sup>20</sup>.
- The majority of articles addressing theatre pedagogy are, in fact, written for a general audience, primarily readers with a pedagogical background. Such texts have appeared in theatre journals and, more broadly, in publications on cultural studies.
- Most authors writing about theatre pedagogy have connections with the Theatre Pedagogy Department and/or the programmes implemented by us (many have also participated in the department’s training courses and workshops).

At this point, we would like to emphasise that, from our perspective, when the Theatre Institute decided to take on the mission of promoting theatre pedagogy, it began, from 2014 onwards and through the newly established Theatre Pedagogy Department, to define the scope of the field and actively shape it (a process further enhanced by the funding available for implementing these tasks). In its own narrative, the Institute consistently stressed

- 15 ‘Lato w teatrze’ [Summer at the Theatre] is a grant competition that annually selects entities implementing two-week summer artistic workshops for children and/or youth. Centres that receive funding also gain access to development activities. The programme’s development module has changed over the years – depending on the edition, it has included, among others, training sessions, workshops, networking activities, and supervision. Activities targeted at individuals not implementing projects in a given edition are also included in the offer (consultations on applications that did not receive funding, training for those interested in a specific area of work with children and youth, and similar). One of the components was study visits (which enabled visits to other centres implementing workshops within Lato w teatrze and the opportunity to learn about their methods and philosophies of work). See: <https://latowteatrze.pl/o-nas/o-programie-lato-w-teatrze> (accessed 30.09.2025).
- 16 Jan Dorman (1912–1986) – pedagogue, director, theatre manager, actor, playwright, and visual artist, who focused on creating highly artistic theatre for children and on expanding theatrical experience with new elements. The archive of Dorman’s works is housed at the Theatre Institute and continues to inspire the work of many contemporary theatre pedagogues. More information can be found on the website dedicated to Jan Dorman: <https://www.jandorman.pl/kategorie/13/projekty> (accessed 18.11.2024) and the website <https://culture.pl/pl/tworca/jan-dorman> (accessed 30.09.2025).
- 17 In addition to academic papers, the conference programme included, among others, performances, discussions with participants, performative seminars, and a laboratory experience. The full conference programme is available on the Theatre Institute’s website: <https://www.institut-teatralny.pl/2019/12/10/teatr-jana-dormana-poszukiwania-inspiracje-refleksje-2019-12-10/> (accessed 30.09.2025), and the conference presentations can be viewed on the Institute’s YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEjBE3xZS1Q&list=PLrQzJ-ljiNoiOmskBenLBowieCb2aPrT> (accessed 30.09.2025).
- 18 Marzenna Wiśniewska, ‘Teatrológ jako animator, czyli sprawa pedagogiki teatru’ [Theatrolologist as Animator, or the Question of Theatre Pedagogy], [http://www.prbt.e-teatr.pl/files/zjazd\\_pdf/Wisniewska\\_Teatrolog\\_jako\\_animator.pdf](http://www.prbt.e-teatr.pl/files/zjazd_pdf/Wisniewska_Teatrolog_jako_animator.pdf) (accessed on: 16.11.2024). This text is based on a paper delivered at the 1st Congress of the Polish Society for Theatre Research, ‘New Directions in Theatre Research. On the Centenary of Theatre Studies in Poland’, organised in cooperation with the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute and the Centre for Theatre Practices ‘Gardzienice’ (Gardzienice, 25–27.10.2013). Marzenna Wiśniewska is a professor at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń; in the years 2001–2011, she worked at Teatr Baj Pomorski (initially as a literary secretary, later as literary manager), where she carried out activities related to theatre education.
- 19 Kamila Paradowska, ‘Pedagogika teatru’ [Theatre Pedagogy], *Refleksje. Zachodniopomorski Dwumiesięcznik Oświatowy* 2012, no. 5, pp. 32–35. Kamila Paradowska worked at Teatr Współczesny in Szczecin from 2005 to 2018 (initially as a literary secretary, later as literary manager), where she was also involved in theatre education activities.
- 20 Simon Blaschko is a German theatre pedagogue – in Poland, he was associated, among others, with the *Lato w teatrze* programme and the improvised theatre scene, but he gained his experience primarily in Germany. His reflection on this subject is contained in a master’s thesis prepared at the Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw. Simon Blaschko, *Niemiecka pedagogika teatru wobec edukacji estetycznej* [German Approaches to Theatre Pedagogy and Aesthetic Education]. Master’s thesis written under the supervision of A. Kuligowska-Korzeniewska. Warsaw: Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Arts, Department of Theatre Studies, 2015.

that it did not claim to be the sole authority on theatre pedagogy and took steps to open up discussion of the field. Nevertheless, we believe that the Theatre Institute's role as initiator of processes and grant-giver inevitably gives it a strong influence on the discourse and on how this field is conceptualised.

### Two perspectives on the definition

The limited number of available texts, many of which are popularising in nature, suggests that theatre pedagogy remains a fledgling discipline that has yet to become fully embedded in the Polish socio-cultural landscape. In the next section of the article, five years after the first version of the definition was developed, we will examine how it engages with our experience gained in the meantime. Our focus will be on the section that outlines the foundations of theatre pedagogy practice. We hope that our reflections will encourage readers to join us in relating theory to practice.

*Respect for the diversity of views and experiences, the creation of spaces for encounters between differing perspectives, and the invitation to engage in creative dialogue.*

**JUSTYNA:** No one comes to a workshop without prior experience. Theatre pedagogy is based on the idea that participants want to express themselves and develop through art, so they should be given opportunities to do so. When everyone is given the chance to speak openly and share their views, differences inevitably emerge. This does not happen immediately — groups often remain at the stage of seeking out and exploring similarities for some time. However, the longer the process continues and the more the pedagogue builds on the ideas that emerge during the sessions, the more space there is for recognising that we are all different and perceive reality in our own way. From this perspective, theatre pedagogy seeks to demonstrate that, despite our differing views, beliefs, sensibilities, emotionalities and forms of sensitivity, we can function together. It teaches us to embrace diversity as a source of richness and a valuable resource.

**KATARZYNA:** Theatre pedagogy work often produces the excellent results you mentioned, but workshop practice also involves many pitfalls and challenges related to diversity. The instructor's role is therefore crucial in creating an environment that respects diversity by selecting working formats and communication strategies that enable participants to engage in partner-based discussions and collaborative activities, where everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute. Opinions, beliefs and observations expressed during the course of the work are not evaluated as better or worse by either the theatre pedagogue or the group. However, this does not mean that individual viewpoints cannot be discussed: just as everyone has the right to their own opinion, everyone also has the right to disagree with another's view for specific reasons. The person moderating such a conversation and creative situation must not merely acknowledge the differences between participants, but also create opportunities for them to recognise these differences within a broader context, for example, to understand where different approaches stem from and what their consequences are. These challenges demonstrate that many of the tasks undertaken by theatre pedagogues extend beyond the strictly theatrical domain, requiring the development of training, facilitation and communication competencies.

**KATARZYNA:** Theatre pedagogy emerged in Germany during a period of transformation in theatre language. It was intended to help audiences stay informed about developments within theatre institutions. Workshops held alongside performances offered participants the chance to engage with the language of new productions and discover how meaning is constructed within them.

**JUSTYNA:** Practitioners of theatre pedagogy observe emerging trends in theatre and incorporate them into their own practice. As creative individuals, they often propose solutions independently or further develop ideas that arise within the group. Sometimes, they also draw on historical conventions, primarily to test their relevance and applicability to the present. They remain open to questioning or challenging these conventions. Therefore, it can be said that theatre pedagogues seek to draw on a broad spectrum of artistic experience, tending toward conceptual art and performance. They foreground the presence of performing bodies on stage, make use of installations and performative walks, and design events that actively engage audiences.

**KATARZYNA:** It is worth bearing in mind that the aesthetic references you mention appear in both the preparation of performances and other artistic events, as well as in one-off workshop activities focused on a wide range of topics. Drawing on the language of contemporary theatre can therefore help to explore issues that are not directly related to theatre itself.

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*Taking into account both the creative process (the totality of actions and phenomena that lead to a new outcome, which is often artistic in theatre pedagogy) and the group process (all interactions and phenomena that occur when a group of people are together), balancing their significance in group work is crucial.*

**JUSTYNA:** It involves striking a constant balance between the perspective of the person facilitating group work, who is actively engaged in proposing exercises and tasks to develop the group's chosen topic, and guiding the group through successive phases of the group process. It also requires striking the right balance between caring for the group as a whole and its dynamics, and supporting individual participants and their views, while offering sensitive and attentive support for their emotional and artistic development.

**KATARZYNA:** The way in which the group process is shaped is strongly influenced by the context in which the work takes place, including its duration and frequency, as well as the degree of integration within the group. For example, different aspects come to the fore in a group whose members do not know one another, in a team that has been working together for a long time, and in a group with a mixed level of familiarity. Similarly, the challenges differ depending on whether it is a one-off meeting, an intensive time-limited project or a group that meets over the course of a year. There are many more such factors, and they all affect both the group and creative processes. When designing and running workshops, it is essential to bear in mind that these two processes unfold simultaneously. For me, this means that when I propose an activity, I consider how it might resonate in both the creative and relational fields.

**JUSTYNA:** To better understand how challenging it is to lead a group, it is essential to recognise that the pedagogue, especially one who identifies as a director, brings their own artistic preferences, aesthetics, beliefs, views and emotionality to the process. My years of experience have enabled me to identify three main approaches to finding creative solutions that are rooted in the group process. The first approach involves carefully observing events within the group and using them (for example, a conflict) as part of the dramaturgical structure. The second approach consists of selecting a central issue and working with the content contributed by participants, seeking ways to ensure that all voices are heard and their richness and diversity are conveyed. The third approach involves proposing exercises to the group, based on which fragments of a performance are created. Improvisations play a significant role here — they are not developed or refined during rehearsals, but only appear at the premiere.

In my view, a failure to understand the specific nature of theatre pedagogy is evident in the replication of the master–apprentice model, where the pedagogue makes all the key decisions and establishes the stage vision. At the same time, the group simply carries out these instructions. One example of this is preparing a performance based on an existing play, where roles are assigned, and rehearsals consist of finding a stage image for a given situation. This bypasses all the other stages of the process, such as discussing the text, exploring its meanings collectively, experimenting playfully with the situations in the script, identifying with a role independently and searching for one’s own voice within it.

**KATARZYNA:** I find it crucial to note that theatre pedagogy does not preclude working with specific texts or groups of texts. This mode of transmission may be valuable for the group at a given stage for various reasons. This is what the well-known principle of ‘following the group’ is about: the workshop leader recognises the multiple needs and creative aspirations of participants, seeks to understand their sources and shares their own perspective, looking for ways to connect it with the group’s interests. In my view, this is one area where the creative and group processes are balanced — the conditions and aspirations of individual participants, as well as those of the collective as a whole, can influence the creative work and its outcome. This brings a sense of influence and agency, as well as knowledge about oneself and others.

**JUSTYNA:** Theatre pedagogy strives to open up the field as widely as possible to participants, enabling them to express themselves in the ways they choose and feel comfortable with.

**KATARZYNA:** I agree with you that it aims to grant participants as much influence as possible, but I also think it seeks to remain self-aware in this aspiration. There may be situations in which a group or individual participants do not wish to exert influence over certain areas, or where the organisational framework of the work limits the scope of possible impact. When balancing these two processes, it is essential to recognise these factors and not impose a level of engagement beyond what someone has chosen.



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### **DramaFest 2025: Territory, Mutations, and Anachrony**

Theatre is a territory in which memory unfolds like a living map. It invites us to follow paths connecting Poland and Mexico, with Nuevo León as the meeting point. Here, memory is not a distant shadow, but an active presence that engages with the present and raises questions about our shared future on a wounded planet.

The works that make up DramaFest 2025 are seeds of critical thinking and shoots that challenge the social order, compelling us to perceive territory not only in geographical terms, but also as a shared experience – both a wound and a source of hope.

Mutations: the only certainty is change. Families, politics, bodies, and landscapes are subject to transformation; they are reborn, and they resist. The stage becomes a laboratory of humanity, where nature, laws, agreements, feminist struggles, migration, and politics intertwine in a sequence of perpetual motion. Theatre is both witness to and protagonist of these mutations, a mirror in which we see ourselves, yet do not recognise ourselves... in order to be reborn.

And finally, at the heart of DramaFest 2025 lies anachrony: this eternal return that unsettles dominant narratives, opening fissures for critique and resistance. The past is not static; it manifests itself in images and symbols that exist in the present, generating new perspectives and questions. Theatre thus becomes an act of resistance, a space in which power, official history, and social norms are questioned and reconfigured.

DramaFest 2025 is not just a theatre festival, but an invitation to consider the world through a theatrical lens, to acknowledge that memory is a territory and mutation is life. Above all, it is a call to imagine possible futures through a poetics of resistance..

For more information, visit <https://dramafestmx.com/>