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**A CHILD IN SPACE OF THE THEATRE OF YOUTH CREATIVITY
(РЕБЕНОК В ПРОСТРАНСТВЕ ТЕАТРА ЮНОШЕСКОГО ТВОРЧЕСТВА)**

Описывается опыт педагогической системы Театра Юношеского Творчества Государственного образовательного учреждения «Дворец творчества юных», созданной педагогом и режиссером Матвеем Дубровиным в 1956 году. Театр рассматривается как свободное и художественное пространство, в котором ребёнок (подросток) может реализовать свои творческие способности, но главное – актуализировать свою личность.

Theatre of Youth Creativity or Teatr Younosheskogo Tvorchestva (TyuT) is both the famous children theatre placed at the Anichkov Palace of Saint Petersburg and the unique pedagogical system which was thought out by the outstanding teacher and theatre director Matvei Grigorievitch Dubrovin in 1956.

The main idea of Dubrovin is that the theatre could be a fabulous space for a child to develop his/her personality, to investigate the world, to learn by doing and communicating. According to the Eric Erikson's Developmental Theory "Adolescents must establish basic social and occupational identities, or they will remain confused about the roles they should play as adults." The Dubrovin's pedagogical system is a space where children and adolescents can fulfill their psychological goals.

The clue is that Dubrovin uses the magic and spiritual theatre world as environment for a child developing his/her Self in its entirety. Entirety is the most worthily item of the Dubrovin's pedagogical concept. The traditional Russian educational model compartmentalizes the various aspects of a child's personality. Rather than a subject centered system, Dubrovin's holistic pedagogical system is child centered. The child becomes an active agent in promoting theatre realities spiritual, cultural, social and industrial. He/she profits by discovering his identity through experiencing various opportunities and bearing significant responsibilities.

The second important issue for Dubrovin is to make everything at the theatre on a high professional level. He insisted that only the most talented professionals had a right to work with children. For collaboration he used to contract famous Russian composers, choreographers, scenic and costume designers to give children examples of the deepest artistic expression. Making a highly artistic theatre production was never the aim but always the method for creating an environment for child self-actualization. That balancing demands a huge amount of experience and wisdom.

The Theatre structure looks very simple. As I have already said everybody attending the Theatre has to take two classes: Acting Group and a Creative Technical Workshop. It means that the child is supposed to develop his/her creativity in both areas.

According to the Dubrovin's idea a workshop for a person is no less than a magic "window" to the world. Each workshop is based on a "subject" which in Dubrovin's context means the essential workable elements of human life. The "subject" was vital in Dubrovin's pedagogy because without this "ground element" teaching would be superficial with no expansion of the human personality. Most of the subjects deal with the "mode of life" for the era portrayed.

They are eleven Creative Technical Workshops: Stagehands, Stage Managers, Theatre Carpenters, Costume Construction, Wardrobe, Make-up Artists, Prop Masters, Administrators, Sound Operators, Lighting Designers, and Painters. Students are given four months to rove and investigate these areas. Then they must choose their field of interest. Once they have chosen they will be trained in that technical area for five or six years.

It's delightful to watch the process of setting up a production by our technical theatre staff. Stagehands are the first to start their work led by one of the students in charge. At the theatre they are called "The Stage Knights", though at the first glance their labor is hard and in many ways very primitive. The stagehands are called to take care of the most sacred place at the theatre – the Stage therefore they feel themselves honored and special. I love watching a bunch of the teen boys working on stage: cleaning the carpet, hanging up the stage clothes, climbing the galleries to set up the scenery sometimes very complicated. Juniors and less experienced work on the floor, handling with simpler things and watching their expert partners.

While stagehands work on stage sound operators and electricians check sound and lighting apparatus, make-up artists conjure with actors appearances; administrators open a cash desk and prepare the hall and lobbies for the audience, and a stage manager puts his eye on everything going on, off and back stage. Entirely there are more than 30 children and teens intensively and independently working together to fulfill the task of setting the production in order to touch one's soul, change one's life and thus helping saving the world.

Acting is a very important part of the theatre pedagogical concept too. As all the kids attending the theatre pass through a number of various auditions mostly those who are very much gifted and thus motivated in acting become the theatre members. Basically there are three age groups (10-11, 12-13, 14-16) with 15-20 children in each. The goals of the first year educating is to help kids in opening up, developing their creativity and imagination, teaching them the beginning skills of the Living Theatre: self-confidence, concentration, acting in given circumstances, picking up characters, etc. Usually the first year ends up with a show on the basis of a piece of drama, or a self-written script, or some acting exercises and improvisations. Besides that we try to help them in solving some of their psychological problems: raising self-esteem and self-awareness, improving communicative skills, exploring their personalities.

Next year all of the former freshmen find their way into various Creative Groups that had already existed or new-arranged. In these groups they work on a production. Production is a powerful spiritual and cultural space for bringing up a child's soul. Therefore Theatre bears a huge responsibility for all energetic elements of the production: both spirits and quality of dramaturgy, directing, lighting, costumes, sound, set. Dubrovin wanted to work seriously with children because he took them seriously and trusted them much.

For a director it's the most worthy thing to find a right play to work on, because the production is the space all the theatre will be involved in. Vakhtangov determined three purposes the production should match: time, troupe, play (plot). It means that it should be of a sharp importance to stage this very story with this particular troupe at this period of time. We always try to pick up good pieces of drama with deep ideas and talented dramaturgy not to spoil the young people's taste. Some years ago just after the Perestroika when the communistic ideals had failed but the new ones didn't appear we were seeking for a piece of drama which could support the process of filling up that spiritual vacuum. Evgeni Sazonov, the Artistic Directed of the Theatre suggested I take a script called "The Boys" a story from Dostoevsky's "Brothers Karamasovs", part of which takes place in a monastery. Thus we have reason to face the ideals of Christian Religion which were totally forbidden during the 70 years of the Soviet Power.

It was a difficult task. I've got a group of naughty adolescents who never had read the Bible so ideas of Repenting and Forgiveness didn't make any sense for them. When we were reading the play they laughed. In order to break the wall. I made a decision to bring them to the monastery portrayed in the novel. We made a two-day trip to the small ancient Russian City of Kozelsk, and then to the lonely Optina Pustyn (Holy Place), which was then recently returned to the Orthodox Church. A couple years later we went to the Sergiev Posad and stayed for some days with the children of the Boarding House for blind-and-deaf children to make sure they were completely like us though they the different way of communication – that time the theatre was working on the production of "The Miracle Worker" by blind-and-deaf American writer Helen Keller.

Playing a role is very much about deep understanding a super-super objective of both a production and a character. Then it supports a young person in discovering his/her own life sense and clarifying his/her system of values. It helps to express him/her because any actor can't play worthily a part without investigating and reflecting his/her own inner world. A thoughtful mentor could help a student to work out his psychological problems with casting him on a certain role. Of course a big number of acting skills are necessary for creating a character: analysis of both a play and a role, discovering the "seed" and the background, carrying out the logic and character's attitudes towards other personages, etc. Besides that the actors have to be flexible and play in ensemble, get a sense of genre and the style, and still to be confident, relaxed and expressive. Basically we avoid using special terms in working with children not to confuse their creative nature which is still very close to the nature of acting. Totally we spend about two years for creating a show rehearsing four-six hours a week, and very often hold successful productions for about three-five and in some happy cases ten years in our repertoire. As to the actors they keep playing their parts in ready productions and at the same time get some new roles in other ones.

One could wonder if children have chances to express themselves besides memorizing lines written by someone else. Definitely, children and young people have these opportunities. Sometimes we make shows based on our kids' personal stories, but mostly they make plenty of small and big productions themselves. Some of them are brilliant, some of them not, but basically it doesn't matter. We support all of them, and it's a significant part of the community life. We have one more special thing at the theatre: songs. For the entire theatre history our amateur poets and musicians have made about two thousand songs. Many of them are both poor and sweet, but some are really talented. We keep them carefully handing from one generation to another, and new ones never stop to appear.