

## **The Impact of Theatre Pedagogy on Student Teachers' Development of Beliefs about Good Teaching and their Pedagogical Ethos: An Exploratory Case Study**

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*Abstract: The development of student teachers' beliefs about good teaching needs to be integral to their education programmes. This study attempts to scrutinise the contribution of a theatre education course to the conceptualisation of a group of eight student primary teachers' notion of good teaching and a teacher's ethos. The findings reveal that, within the coursework, student teachers' learning experiences are interwoven with the ethics of the beautiful, the ethics of the dialogue and the ethics of the will. This nexus of learning experiences enabled them to identify three internal goods of good teaching: the awakening of learners' positive emotions; the activation of their learning energy through play; and the strengthening of their embodied understanding by using theatre semiotics. Concerning a teacher's pedagogical dispositions in good teaching, they consider trust, respect, empathy, open-mindedness, vigilance and playfulness as pivotal for the ethos of a teacher connected to both teaching and their pupils.*

### **Introduction**

Over the past three decades, an important research field in teacher education literature has been student teachers' beliefs about teaching and good teachers, and how these are (re)shaped in the context of their programmes (e.g. Fives & Gill, 2015; He & Levin, 2008; Horgan & Gardiner-Hyland, 2019; Korthagen, 2004; Pajares, 1992). It is widely acknowledged that student teachers' pre-existing beliefs about teaching serve as filters, frames and guides for conceiving and interpreting their new pedagogical knowledge and teaching experiences (Berger et al., 2018). This assumption connotes that both the apprehension and amelioration of their beliefs about good teaching comprise an imperative accountability for teacher education.

Given the plurality of definitions regarding beliefs, this study rests on a binary interpretation. Beliefs are "a set of conceptual representations which store general knowledge of objects, people and events, and their characteristic relationships" (Hermans et al., 2008, p. 128) and also "a disposition to act" (Rokeach, 1969, p. 113). Combining these two definitions, student teachers' beliefs compose a key source for the constitution of their pedagogical ethos. Dolev and Itzkovich (2021) define a teacher's ethos as "the set of beliefs that guide [their] thoughts and actions" and "concern *their* attentiveness towards both students and teaching profession" (p. 262, italics in original).

The aim of this study is to illustrate the contribution of *Theatre Education and Theatrical Play*, a course within a teacher education programme, to the growth of student teachers' notion of good teaching and a teacher's pedagogical ethos. Given this purpose, the study mostly takes into consideration three key theories. First, central to it is the

recommendation that student teachers' self-reflection and self-awareness regarding their pedagogical beliefs and values constitute an essential epistemological approach of teacher education to the remodelling of their perceptions about good teaching (Bullough, 2015; Domović et al., 2017). Second, it rests on the view that the exploration of teachers' beliefs is interlocked with their emotions, and therefore, these two areas are not studied separately (Gill & Hardin, 2015). Third, because theatre pedagogy, by its nature, has the potential to form a learning ecology of experiential knowledge, emotional interplay and personal deliberation, the data analysis of this study leans on aretaic pedagogy, as a paradigm of good teaching, which can construct such a learning ecology through dialogue, play and beauty (Hadjipanteli, 2018).

Building on these premises, this study examines three questions:

- What are student teachers' learning experiences within the course *Theatre Education and Theatrical Play*?
- What are the internal goods of theatre pedagogy that student teachers value as integral features of the notion of good teaching?
- What are the essential pedagogical dispositions of a teacher in the practice of theatre pedagogy that they consider crucial for their pedagogical ethos?

## Theoretical Background

### The Notion of Good Teaching

In modern educational theory, the conceptualisation of good teaching seems to originate from different dominant ideologies of the scope of teaching itself, regarding the flourishing of both learners and society (e.g. Biesta, 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Edling & Mooney Simmie, 2020; Sockett, 2012). However, the shift “from an industrial to a global knowledge economy” and the “international discourse of education policy” (Cochran-Smith, 2021, p. 416) have configured a prevalent academic culture that gives high priority to the technical dimension of pedagogy. As Mooney Simmie et al. (2019) argue, good teaching has been posited within a complex “messy narrative” of transition (Nixon, 2004, p. 121), adopting a reasoning far away from a holistic education and public-oriented values. In doing so, the concept of good teaching tends to reside in terms, such as “evidence-based”, “evidence-informed” and “expert”, which overall reinforce the idea that teaching is founded upon “a form of research inquiry” (Stolz, 2018, p. 145). This emphasis on the technical rationality of teaching is further indicated by characterisations, such as successful, effective, and quality teaching that are commonly treated as interchangeable with good teaching.

Recently, in *Defining teaching quality around the world* (2021), Darling-Hammond points out that the notion of good teaching has its own history, wherein “definitions of teaching quality often lurk under the surface and only occasionally come explicitly to the fore” (p. 295). Examining the perspectives on good teaching of five high-achieving countries – Australia, Canada, Finland, China and Singapore – she highlights that their educational systems have articulated standards that combine the pedagogical knowledge with the professional practice. For instance, the standards of the Australia Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) address three domains – professional knowledge, professional practice and professional engagement – which include seven specific standards similar to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards in the United States, as Darling-Hammond states. These standards, as shown in Tab. 1, prescribe a notion of good teaching associated with a broad spectrum of knowledge about content, pedagogy and learners. Yet, concurrently, this notion appears to be subservient rather to a unilateral model of good

teaching, as discussed above, with an unuttered reference both to the ethical scope of teaching and the ethical presence of teacher.

Professional Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Know students and how they learn.</li> <li>• Know the content and how to teach it.</li> </ul>
Professional Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning.</li> <li>• Create and maintain supportive learning environments.</li> <li>• Assess, provide feedback, and report on student learning.</li> </ul>
Professional Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement in professional learning.</li> <li>• Engage professionally with colleagues, parents and caregivers, and the community.</li> </ul>

**Table 1: Australia Institute for Teaching School Leadership Standards (AITSL)**

### **Aretaic Pedagogy as a Paradigm of Good Teaching**

Contrary to this existing pedagogical mainstream, aretaic pedagogy proposes an alternative ideological approach to understanding the substance of good teaching (Hadjipanteli, 2018). It is underpinned by the Aristotelian virtue epistemology, and this is connoted by the term “aretaic” arising from the Greek concept *αρετή*, which signifies excellence. Following Aristotle’s (1999) meaning of virtue defined as “a settled disposition of the mind” (1107a), aretaic pedagogy pursues students’ holistic development through the formation of “an ethics about living in and understanding the world, where virtues will be perceived as the underlying condition for good life” (Hadjipanteli, 2018, pp. 449–450). As Ignatieff (2017) contends, if people stop communicating with and sharing virtues of togetherness, “ordinary life cannot continue” (p. 29). Therefore, the key purpose of aretaic pedagogy is virtuous-dispositional learning, which can aid learners to grow both “as good persons and as community-minded citizens” (Hadjipanteli, 2021, p. 4). In light of this perspective, teaching is defined as an ethical virtue-driven practice, wherein both teacher and students can exercise and cultivate their intellectual and ethical virtues (Hadjipanteli, 2018). Both these kinds of virtues can be identified as the vehicle of a person’s settled virtuous dispositions of the mind shaped by good, action-driven emotions in ethical virtues, and by good motivations and intentions in intellectual ones.

The practice of aretaic pedagogy rests on three epistemological conditions (Hadjipanteli, 2018). The first is the constitution of teaching as a social practice, wherein teacher and learners work together as co-operators and co-creators, building a solid partnership. The second is the embedding of internal goods within the learning process. Internal goods are construed as potent means to determine the tenor of the teaching/learning process and amplify the achievement of educational aims (Higgins, 2011). In aretaic pedagogy, internal goods are concentrated on three areas of the intrinsic process of learning – formative habits, emotional experiences and motivational conduct – which are unfolded both during learners’ work and as a result of it. The third epistemological precondition is the amalgamation of learning processes with learners’ private knowledge (Hadjipanteli, 2018). When learners embed their own private knowledge, originating in their experiences, belief-holding self and identity, into their learning, they undergo a personal association with it (Sockett, 2012).

The internal goods of learning proposed by aretaic pedagogy derive from social and interactive activities and are dialogue, play and beauty (Hadjipanteli, 2018). Learners, by systematically experiencing these internal goods, become familiar with the aesthetics of what

is ethical and unethical, and therefore, can grow both intellectually and ethically. This aesthetics refers to a set of potential qualities and values that they may realise through their practical and sensory activation process within the space of these internal goods. In this respect, the conjunction of dialogue, play and beauty aims to create a spirited learning ecology that can inherently prompt the emergence of learners' virtuous intrapersonal and interpersonal dispositions within it. For instance, beauty, as "sheer physical enjoyment and energy" (Thompson, 2006, p. 56), can aid them in shaping a net of will-centred dispositions, such as zeal, determination and courage (Hadjipanteli, 2018).

Furthermore, such a learning ecology might promote the ethics of the beautiful (Winston, 2006). Drawing upon Scarry's (2000) analysis of Kantian concepts of – the beautiful and sublime – Winston (2006) formulates the ethics of the beautiful as that which exposes the "softer virtues of charm, sentiment and comfort" (p. 289). Bearing in mind that "[t]he sublime is principled, noble, righteous; the beautiful is compassionate and good-hearted" (Scarry, 2000, p. 84), Winston deduces that the sublime moves and displays an aesthetics of power, whereas the beautiful charms and shows an aesthetics of less power. In line with this notion, he indicates that the ethics of the beautiful may encompass the virtues of gaiety, compassion, civility, laughter, wit and humour.

### **Theatre Education in Teacher Education: Its Contribution to the Conception of Good Teaching**

In the context of this study, theatre education is meant both as art and methodology of teaching. As methodology, it merges holistic and authentic learning, urging students to experiment with meanings, emotions and theatrical conventions. As an art, it includes "all pedagogical, social and artistic forms of theatre" (Pigou-Repousi, 2019, p. 11), such as drama, theatrical plays and school theatre performances, which are centred on educational objectives. Lešnik (2018) argues that "[t]heatre pedagogy is a very diverse field" (p. 262), unifying all the sister arts of movement, music, visual art and creative writing (McCaslin, 2005).

During the last two decades, a growing body of research has demonstrated that theatre education can help student teachers apprehend concepts closely interlinked with what good teaching is (e.g. Bhukhanwala & Alleksaht-Snider, 2012; Desai, 2017; Souto-Manning, 2011). Wahl (2011) argues that theatre education encourages students to form their philosophy of education, as their "theatrical disposition toward a critical self-analysis in preparation for creating a character" signals "a useful starting point" (p. 20), from which young teachers can inquire into their own personal perceptions of good teaching. Similarly, Souto-Manning (2011) claims that this theatrical process influences the ways by which "they envision their roles as teachers and the pedagogies in which they plan to engage" (p. 1006).

For this specific purpose, a considerable number of empirical studies on theatre education have given student teachers the potential to delve into a wide range of socio-civic concepts and contemporary realities, such as immigration and xenophobia (Miller et al., 2019); racism and social justice (Desai, 2017); multiculturalism and diversity (Bhukhanwala & Alleksaht-Snider, 2012); and oppression and identity (Powers & Duffy, 2016). One common finding of these studies is that theatre pedagogy offers a dialogical, playful and communal space, wherein student teachers can experience a serious thoughtfulness and a personal reflexivity that propel them to new apprehensions of both their own and others' identity. As Miller et al. (2019) suggest, theatre pedagogy is a humanising pedagogy that can inspire student teachers to re-imagine and widen their views as future teachers, growing their sense of care for other people's lives.

Desai (2017) recommends that the Theatre of the Oppressed can play an important role in teacher education, because it helps “to prepare emancipatory teachers” (p. 230), who can deploy a political dialogue of social injustice and become pedagogically competent to engage their future pupils in critical consciousness. Also, the study by Bhukhanwala and Alleksaht-Snider (2012) reveals the conducive role of theatrical activities in preparing student teachers to cultivate their empathetic reflection and perspective-taking. Correspondingly, a case study within a drama education course shows that student teachers developed both interpersonal and intrapersonal virtuous dispositions – togetherness, sympathy, delight, self-reflection and willingness – which all synergistically served as a scaffold for configuring their pedagogical ethos (Hadjipanteli, 2021).

## **Research Methodology**

### **Exploratory Case Study**

This study is designed within a qualitative research paradigm. Following an exploratory case study defined by Merriam (2009) as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 40), great attention is paid to the use of multiple methods of data. While this is an inquiry strategy recommended for case studies (Creswell, 2013), it can amplify the gathering of critical information regarding participants’ experiences and views in relation to the research scope. However, since the social context of theatre education is so individualistic in each case study and cannot be reproduced (O’Toole, 2006), the findings of this study might offer new insights and illuminative meanings, but not knowledge for generalisation (Stake, 2010).

### **Theatre Education and Theatrical Play**

The theoretical framework of this course encompasses three thematic units: key notions regarding theatre and performance; design and implementation of theatrical plays (games); and storytelling as an art. Accordingly, the course aims to help student teachers:

- Comprehend and interpret the different aspects of the pedagogical value of theatre education (e.g. cognitive, emotional, social, ethical),
- Devise and apply theatrical plays (games) focused on concrete objectives of language teaching as well as on other subjects,
- Plan and perform a storytelling performance, with emphasis on the paralinguistic communication and transformations of body both within a role and as storytellers.

During the conduct of this study, which lasted a whole spring semester (i.e. 12 weeks of three-hour sessions), the theatrical plays that were devised and taught by students largely cover three themes: *emotions of goodness, different prospects of loneliness, and what it means to dream*. Concerning their storytelling performances, the students presented their own adaptations of four tales, both solo and in groups: *Walk with the Moon, Little Beaver and the Echo, The Yellow Hats, and Wolf Zacharias in the World of Fairy Tales*.

### **Participants**

Eight female fourth-year student teachers of primary education make up the group of this case study. This group represents one half of the class, which consisted solely of female students. They were self-selected after an invitation letter that was given to the entire class in

the third session. This letter included, aside from the key purpose of the study and explanations of the data gathering process, some other key information, such as the use of anonymity, the confidentiality of personal data and the option to withdraw from the research process at any time, without any consequence. The participants' profiles are presented in Tab. 1 (all names are pseudonyms), which shows their age and academic performance according to their Cumulative Point Average (CPA); their reasons for selecting *Theatre Education and Theatrical Play*; their initial views about good teaching; their characterisations of the course; and their depictions of theatre education.

Amelia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 21 years old, average student</li> <li>• I chose the course “to learn how to integrate theatre education into my teaching”.</li> <li>• “Good teaching is the building of an attractive learning environment.”</li> <li>• The course is “collective”, “interactive” and “philosophical”.</li> <li>• “I have drawn theatre education as a train in motion. Students are in different wagons, which shows that each group works separately, but at the same time, we share our ideas and stories with all class.”</li> </ul>
Anna	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 22 years old, above-average student</li> <li>• I chose the course “because I always loved arts and especially theatre”.</li> <li>• “Good teaching is a process that excites pupils’ engagement.”</li> <li>• The course is “very creative”, “full of surprises and new artistic experiences”.</li> <li>• “I have drawn theatre education as a meadow with beautiful flowers, which symbolises the wealth of ideas and performances of all my class.”</li> </ul>
Antonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 21 years old, average student</li> <li>• I chose the course “because I never had before the opportunity to have theatre lessons at school and wanted to become aware of the theatre pedagogy”.</li> <li>• “Good teaching focuses on pupils’ needs and their continuous engagement.”</li> <li>• The course is “joyful”, “interesting” and “contemplative”.</li> <li>• “I have depicted theatre education as a round table with students to sit around. This picture shows the collectivity and companionship within the course.”</li> </ul>
Margarita	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 23 years old, above-average student</li> <li>• I chose the course “because I am fond of theatre”.</li> <li>• “Good teaching depends on good communication between teacher and pupils and their commitment within the teaching/learning process.”</li> <li>• The course is “delightful”, “playful” and “vitalising”.</li> <li>• “I have sketched theatre education as a purple marguerite flower to illustrate the beauty of this field and how much it can inspire our thinking.”</li> </ul>
Nicole	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 22 years old, above-average student</li> <li>• I chose the course “because I wanted to extend my teaching competences”.</li> <li>• “Good teaching is creative, giving pupils the potential to act imaginatively.”</li> <li>• The course is “emotional”, “unpredictable” and “energetic”.</li> <li>• “I have drawn an image of a happy family to indicate that theatre education brings people very close and makes them feel safe.”</li> </ul>
Olivia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 24 years old, average student</li> <li>• I chose the course “to be acquainted with the teaching of theatre education”.</li> <li>• “Good teaching demands a very good preparation and a variety of activities.”</li> <li>• The course is “pleasant but demanding” and “keeps you vigilant”.</li> <li>• “I have depicted theatre education with the sunny weather to express the warmth and the nice feelings I experienced.”</li> </ul>
Sophia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 22 years old, average student</li> </ul>

Sylvia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I chose the course “because I was interested in learning how to use theatre education in teaching Greek language”.</li> <li>• “Good teaching offers pupils the space for meaningful learning.”</li> <li>• The course is “experiential”, “very useful” and “channels good energy”.</li> <li>• “I have drawn some happy children in a playground to show that many times theatre education made me feel like a jolly and carefree child.”</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 22 years old, above-average student</li> <li>• I chose the course “owing to my previous positive experiences of theatre education that I had gained in high school”.</li> <li>• “Good teaching supports pupils’ holistic growth.”</li> <li>• The course is “reflective”, “efficient” and “prompts students’ originality”.</li> <li>• “I have portrayed figures of people in different actions to stress that theatre education is all about stories of life and that each one decides how to act.”</li> </ul>
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**Table 2: Participants’ profiles**

### Data Collection

Aiming at gathering information-rich data, four different methods were used: interviews, documents, observations and audio-visual material. It is important to note that all methods, with the exception of interviews, were incorporated in the course’s activities. Reflective diaries and midterm examination papers are two types of documents that constituted a key source of information. Over the semester, students submitted four reflective diaries relating to the course’s specific activities/plays/conditions/elements (e.g. explain why you did/did not enjoy an activity in today’s workshop; describe your thoughts/emotions about your artistic work; what components of today’s workshop might underpin good teaching?).

Two person-to-person semi-structured interviews with each participant were conducted by the course’s teacher, who is the researcher of this study as well. The first interview, which was held in the fourth week of the semester for an average of 45 minutes, focused on participants’ views regarding their studies and expectations for *Theatre Education and Theatrical Play*, and also their perceptions of good teaching. The second interview lasted around an hour and concentrated on four issues directly related to the scope of this study: participants’ experiences of theatre pedagogy; their beliefs about the contribution of the course to the expansion of their understanding of good teaching; how their new knowledge of theatre education could enrich their practice of good teaching; and what their teaching experiences of theatre education were during their practicum.

Knowing the importance of the second interview, it occurred after the completion of the semester (mid-June), primarily, for ethical reasons. In that period, the participants would feel more exempted from any possible ethical barriers because of our teacher-student relationship and would have obtained a finer personal understanding of theatre pedagogy. Moreover, considering that the participants would be informed about their grades of the course, this could help them speak unequivocally with fewer hesitations and biases.

Lastly, the audio-visual data of the study consisted of video recordings of the participants’ storytelling performances and their drawings/posters of theatre education. According to Black and Halliwell (2000), participation in a drawing process can exhort students to reflectively examine their experiences and express their tacit knowledge and emotions, making connections between past and present. Both these data sources were harnessed in the second interview.

## Data Analysis

The case-based themes of this study resulted from coding and categorisation in conjunction with the constant comparison process (Gibbs, 2018). Provided that in this study the notion of good teaching is grounded on aretaic pedagogy, the emphasis in data analysis was placed on three parameters: participants' experiences of theatre pedagogy; the internal goods of theatre pedagogy understood by participants as critical in forming their notion of good teaching; and the pedagogical dispositions that they developed in its context that they regard as essential to a teacher's ethos.

In order to be ensured of the reliability and internal validity of the study, the data analysis process exploited three methods: data triangulation, member check and investigator triangulation (Gibbs, 2018). The first method was performed by using a variety of data sources and gathering both text-based and audio-visual data, which were then compared. When the data analysis process was at a final stage, the method of member check was applied, giving the participants the chance to read some key pieces of data analysis and to verify their content. In addition, an external researcher was involved in the analysis process, who initially independently interpreted data from different sources. Subsequently, we discussed together our thoughts and exchanged ideas about the emerging issues. We then jointly decided on a scheme of three general thematic categories.

## Research findings

### Student Teachers' Ecology of Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Experiences

Data analysis in respect to the first research question of the study identifies three areas of learning experiences that the participants became familiar with in the context of *Theatre Education and Theatrical Play*. These pertain to the ethics of the beautiful, the dialogue and the will.

#### *Learning Experiences of the Ethics of the Beautiful*

Central to the aesthetics of these sorts of participants' experiences are joy and gaiety, compassion and playful laughter. Their joy and gaiety, as evidenced, are interwoven with the pleasurable learning environment of the course and the stimulating artistic work of theatre education. When explaining what specific elements evoked these emotions, some of the participants concentrated on the safety and mature collaboration that they experienced within the course. Both these reasons are reflected in their illustrations of theatre education outlined in Tab. 2. Nicole, Olivia and Sophia depicted theatre education as "a happy family", "sunny weather" and "a playground", images that display, according to their captions, togetherness, warmth and delight. Amelia admitted that several times the course's mirthful climate affected the improvisation of her roles and narratives, and she wanted to transmit through them "the energy of this gladness". On the other hand, Margarita's joy was attached to the good cooperation and new challenges she had with her fellow students during workshops.

Compassion is an emotion that the participants manifested in the process of acting various imaginative roles. This theatrical process enabled them to become more sensitive concerning other people's circumstances and problems, attempting to reveal their deeper motivations through their social imagination. One representative instance of compassion is Anna's account:

*I played the role of a good wolf! I wanted to have friends, but other animals were hostile with me. They couldn't trust that I had a friendly mood. [...] When we pretend a role, it is important to go beyond stereotypical perceptions.*

For the participants, playful laughter was associated with the group preparation of their artistic work, the experience of spectatorship and the fun of theatrical plays. Their experiences of playful laughter unlocked a series of beneficial effects on their cognitive and social learning. They underline the role of their playful laughter in making intimate and friendly bonds. As Anna illustrates: “When we were laughing, we experienced a different energy, a sense of becoming friends.” As regards the fact that playful laughter functioned as a source of their attention, concentration and risk taking, Olivia states: “Laughter made me increase my appetite for work, boosting me to play roles and do things that are outside my usual temperament.”

### ***Learning Experiences of the Ethics of Dialogue***

As the nature of theatre education is cooperative and communicative (Pigou-Repousi, 2019), the participants spoke about diverse dialogical activities both in and out of role-playing that were critical in shaping their interpersonal and intrapersonal communion in the course. A few of these activities are argumentation within an imagined role, group and class discussion, taking decisions, rehearsal of artistic work, devising of theatrical plays and team storytelling. Within the practice of these activities, as the participants' experiences testify, they underwent a conscious acquaintance with the two dialogical conventions of dialectic and rhetoric.

Dialectic is a philosophical effort toward truth, resting on reasoning (Aristotle, 1926b, 100a25–101a4), and rhetoric “is the counterpart of Dialectic”, where “[t]he modes of persuasion are the only true constituents of ... [this] art” (Aristotle, 1926a, 1354a1–1354a5). Interestingly, both dialogical practices, as supported by the participants' comments, are interlaced with their ethical beliefs. This becomes perceptible in the cases where the participants deliberate their personal disagreements and confront others' contradictory standpoints. As ascertained in the next excerpt, Amelia gives an idea of how deeply their dialogue is embedded in dialectic and rhetoric as well as in subjective ideologies and life values.

*In my role as a wife, I had to talk to my son about his father's involvement in unlawful acts. It was difficult to decide: “Is it right to tell my son the truth?”, “Is it better to project convincing reasons for his actions?” As a mother, I wanted to do the best for my son, but I didn't want to vilify his father. Finally, I showed that I intended to help his father.*

### ***Learning Experiences of the Ethics of Will***

The participants' will for commitment to theatre education within the course, albeit directly connected with their experiences of the beautiful and dialogue, springs from the activation of their epistemological curiosity. Both the art of theatre education itself and their interest in learning how to incorporate this field into their teaching appear to be two strong reasons for the increase in their willingness. All participants who had never had any previous learning experiences of theatre education (see Tab. 2) state that every time they came to the sessions, they were very curious about what new challenges and novel theatrical experiences they would encounter. Sophia is an indicative case: “It is true that during the week, I was

waiting for the next session. I was wondering what new games, activities and roles we were going to play.” In the case of Anna, her curiosity seemed to be rather fixed on her effort to put into practice theatre pedagogy. In this same spirit, Sylvia, who was familiar with the art of theatre education when she enrolled in the course, mentioned: “I have the curiosity not simply to comprehend the art of theatre, but also its role in teaching. This research encourages me to have a vivid engagement in the artistic work.”

### **Student Teachers’ Notion of Good Teaching Built on the Pedagogy of Theatre**

Examining the second question of this study, which is centred on the impact of theatre pedagogy on participants’ perception of good teaching, first it is useful to discern the views they held at the beginning of the semester when they enrolled in the course. From the data presented in Tab. 2, their beliefs, as a whole, reflect an explicit interconnection both with progressive education (Dewey, 1938) and constructivist pedagogy (Steffe & Gale, 1995). The interpretation of research data reveals that theatre pedagogy helped them expand their initial notion of good teaching, apprehending the pedagogical utility of three internal goods of teaching: the stimulation of pupils’ good-energy-driven emotions; the excitement of their energy through play; and the reinforcement of their **embodied** understanding by using theatre semiotics.

#### ***Good Teaching Stimulates Learners’ Good-energy-driven Emotions***

This is a robust belief held by all participants that affirms their lively learning experiences within the course and, even more importantly, their teaching experiences during their practicum in primary schools. According to their views, good teaching is carried out in “a learning pleasant atmosphere”, which can motivate pupils’ “inspiring” feelings, aiming to distance them from “fears”, “dysphoria” and “dullness”. In particular, they explicate the significance of the emotions of joy, pleasure, enthusiasm, curiosity, freedom and togetherness in pupils’ learning empowerment. Sylvia mentions: “Such feelings can unlock pupils’ conscious work. Their faces and bodies are a canvas of their emotions in teaching. For us, as teachers, it is fulfilling to see jolly faces and vividly expressive bodies.”

From another viewpoint, Antonia and Anna state that pupils’ good-energy-driven emotions “boost their memory” and “excite their love for what they learn, because this occurs within a feel-good environment”. Equally crucial is this view from Nicole, who keeps in mind her first teaching experiences of theatre education in the context of Greek language. She speaks of her pupils’ uncommonly positive participation in all other lessons that day, owing to the fun and enthusiasm they externalised “through their artistic and creative activation”.

#### ***Good Teaching Excites Learners’ Energy Through Play***

The participants highly advocate the notion of the practicability of applying theatrical plays to any subject of school curriculum, provided that a teacher knows the process of devising or converting a known playful activity into a theatrical one. Because a theatrical play is a spatial, kinaesthetic and multimodal activity, they emphasise that it is also essential for a teacher to have a clear conception of how to organise and implement it in the class. The biggest benefits of the enactment of a theatrical play in teaching, as they explain, are pupils’ personal experiential apprehension of the taught topic and the creation of a pleasurable learning climate.

Realising the contribution of theatrical play to the practice of good teaching, the participants conclude that any learning activity contextualised within a playful structure, beyond the art of theatre, can similarly attract pupils' "attentiveness" and "involvement". Although they acknowledge that the advantages of play are manifold, they principally choose to underscore three of them: it operates as a motivation for learning; it prompts freedom of expression, creativity and fun; and it is a mode of self-consciousness. Regarding the last advantage, Margarita noticed that "like theatrical play, all other types of play also provide pupils with a fruitful space for self-exploration", making them "see latent qualities of themselves", such as "cleverness" and "courage".

### ***Good Teaching Reinforces Learners' Embodied Understanding by Using Theatre Semiotics***

Multimodality as an instructive methodology is one further dominant perception articulated by the participants of how good teaching can be applied practically. Affected by the pedagogy of theatre, they explain that an efficacious multimodal approach needs to involve a conjunction of real-life aesthetic activities driven by theatre semiotics. Similar to our daily life, theatre semiotics includes a network of signs, both visual and auditive (Neelands & Dobson, 2000). Spoken text, music and sound effects, for example, are key auditive sign systems of theatre, whereas expression of body, props and decor are visual ones.

Integrating this diversity of theatre semiotics in teaching, the participants envision a pedagogical approach that can enhance pupils' prolonged immersion in the learning process. Within this conceptual context, the participants focus on using stories to teach difficult concepts or other knowledge. Elaborating on this idea, Amelia and Sylvia recommended that the teaching of Greek language or history might be ideal learning spaces for the exploration of stories and characters through various theatrical activities and signs. In this way, they support the idea that pupils can optimise their "comprehension", "interplay", "sentimentality", and broadly, "experiential learning".

### **Student Teachers' Beliefs about a Teacher's Pedagogical Dispositions in Good Teaching**

In relation to the third question of this study, there exists ample evidence showing that the participants value a spectrum of pedagogical dispositions as essential for a teacher within theatre pedagogy, but also as fundamental to good teaching. All these dispositions, according to their views, can jointly lead a teacher to connect both to teaching and to pupils. Borrowing from Belenky et al.'s (1986) notion of "connected teaching", it is a practice wherein "connected teachers are believers" (p. 227), able to meet pupils' own worlds and perspectives, aiding them "in giving birth to their own ideas, in making their own tacit knowledge explicit and elaborating upon it" (p. 217). To this end, the participants primarily demonstrate both ethical-social and intellectual-poetic dispositions, such as trust, respect and empathy, open-mindedness, vigilance and playfulness.

Commenting on a teacher's social dispositions, Anna illustrates how supportive it is for pupils to feel that their teacher encourages and trusts them to try new things. The formation of a respectful climate in a classroom, as Margarita states: "is a powerful key for pupils, because they learn to be more cooperative". Some other participants indicate that theatre pedagogy demands a teacher's flexible and open-minded mode of thinking, as the artistic work "is so unforeseen and you never know how pupils will react". In teaching, this manner of thinking, as they elucidate, is correspondingly indispensable. Additionally, all participants share the conviction that a teacher's creativity and playfulness are of paramount

importance in theatre pedagogy, but equally vital in any teaching. As Amelia claims, these dispositions can “electrify pupils’ carefulness” and “make them join with an analogous spirit in the learning process”.

## Discussion

This case study aimed at illustrating the possible effect of theatre pedagogy on a group of eight fourth-year student primary teachers’ conceptualisation of good teaching and a teacher’s pedagogical ethos, in the framework of *Theatre Education and Theatrical Play*. The findings of the study give reason to argue that theatre pedagogy had a distinct and important impact on their understanding of what is good teaching and which pedagogical dispositions a good teacher might transmit in their class.

Influenced by the nature of theatre pedagogy, the participants conceptualised a fresh vision of good teaching by integrating three internal goods, specifically: the stimulation of pupils’ good-energy-driven emotions; the excitement of their energy through play; and the reinforcement of their embodied understanding by using theatre semiotics. These internal goods model good teaching as a practice that harmonises pupils’ activation of mind with their entire bodily engagement. This interpretation brings to light Merleau-Ponty’s (1962) theory of the holisticity of body and mind, according to which the whole body is a means to our knowledge construction process. It is obvious that the participants attempted to construct their notion of good teaching based on essential qualities of theatre pedagogy, which trigger a personal attachment to learning through embodied and play-driven knowing.

The above internal goods of good teaching might also be discussed from a twofold perspective. On the one hand, if we ponder the participants’ personal ecology of learning experiences within theatre pedagogy, we could appreciate that their constitution is at a great extent imbued by this ecology. Their familiarity with a diversity of artistic and playful challenges along with their cooperative and contemplative experiences enabled them to appraise the learning benefits of the ethics of the beautiful, dialogue and will. In the context of these types of ethics, they underwent a virtuous-dispositional growth, both interpersonal and intrapersonal. This circumstance encouraged them to become empirically aware of the positive learning consequences of virtuous-dispositional learning at an intellectual and ethical level.

More analytically, by expanding their intellectual dispositions of attention, risk taking, thoughtfulness and commitment, for instance, in combination with their ethical dispositions of safety, happiness, collaboration and playfulness, the participants originally gained a strong motivation for an intrinsic attachment to the coursework. After they had trusted the artistic work of theatre education, their epistemological curiosity was conjoined to the comprehension of its pedagogy with a view to making good use of it in their teaching methodology. Besides, the prominence they give to play is an additional indication of their own experiential sense of its pedagogical merit. Provided that they had experienced a vibrant emotional journey within theatrical play, practically conceiving its poetic freedom and constructivist aesthetics, they come to recommend play, in general, as an aesthetic space where pupils can (re)shape new self-images and get a feeling of their self-knowledge.

On the other hand, the participants’ conception of these internal goods of good teaching is a persuasive documentation of Gill and Hardin’s (2015) recommendation that teachers’ beliefs is a research domain indivisible from the investigation of their emotions. In the frame of this study, the participants’ ecology of learning emotions acts out as a powerful formative constituent of their dispositions, which subsequently pervaded the composition of their pedagogical ideas, as previously stated. This influential dynamics of emotions in the

formation of dispositions originates in the Aristotelian theory of the cognitive strength of emotions (Hadjipanteli, 2018). By such a verification, the study demonstrates the pivotal role of theatre pedagogy in inducing participants' good-energy-driven emotions, which operated as embodied senses of their experiential knowing and together an integral component of forming their pedagogical ideas.

Likewise, the study shows the contribution of theatre pedagogy to their understanding of the vitality of a teacher's pedagogical dispositions for the implementation of a good teaching. In their effort to realise what foundational pedagogical dispositions are required by a teacher in theatre pedagogy, the participants indicate trust, respect and empathy, vigilance, open-mindedness and playfulness. However, their teaching experiences during the period of their practicum helped them recognise this synthesis of dispositions as a necessary precondition of good teaching at a broader level. The most salient aspect of this finding is perhaps the inherent interdependence that the participants see between these pedagogical dispositions and pupils' learning. As they declare, when teachers operate with such pedagogical dispositions, these can regulate the mental, social and ethical level of their pupils' activation and can thus impel their virtuous learning dispositions. The capture of this interactive connectedness chiefly mirrors their understanding of teaching and learning as two interdependent virtue-driven practices, wherein teacher and pupils may reciprocally interchange their virtuous dispositions (Hadjipanteli, 2018). Critically, participants' views make manifest how theatre pedagogy assisted them in building their pedagogical ethos on a range of dispositions and beliefs in the care for pupils' learning aspirations (Dolev & Itzkovich, 2021).

## Conclusion

The findings of this case study principally imply the significance of educating prospective teachers with the parallel aim of comprehending and developing their beliefs regarding good teaching and a teacher's pedagogical ethos. This is a key recommendation for teacher education programmes that might be embedded in the context of any taught course that, as verified by this study, methodically merges theory and experiential work, enabling students to make thoughtful and empirical reflections on teaching (Bullough, 2015; Domović et al., 2017). Within such a framework, this study discloses the impact of theatre pedagogy on participants' growth of their beliefs about good teaching, and therefore, reinforces the existing literature that theatre pedagogy can play a critical role in helping student teachers to (re)configure their pedagogical philosophy (e.g. Bhukhanwala & Allexsah-Snyder, 2012; Souto-Manning, 2011; Wahl, 2011). It also strengthens the findings of other studies that theatre pedagogy can embolden participants to become conscious of teaching and learning as two spaces of understanding of good life, by developing virtuous dispositions (Cahnmann-Taylor & Souto-Manning, 2010; Hadjipanteli, 2021; Miller et al., 2019).

These conclusions lend confidence to the claim that if our wish is to inspire student teachers to (re)shape their pedagogical ethos, then theatre pedagogy could be nominated both as a constructive, spirited art and as a teaching, dialogic method towards this end. As becomes conceivable, theatre pedagogy rests on a holistic, person-centred approach to learning and this is a fundamental prerequisite for "reconciling the education of pre-service teachers with their growth as virtuous persons and as virtuous professionals" (Hadjipanteli, 2021, p. 2). In this regard, theatre pedagogy offered the participants the potential to experience and value internal goods both for their personal and professional life. This personal and practical consciousness obtains a notable gravity, especially in our troubled era wherein humanity undergoes multiple unpredictable circumstances and existential threats, as

we do have need of young teachers who will know how to create learning spaces of good life in their classes; spaces that will permit teachers and pupils to build connections of reciprocity, joy and harmony. Theatre pedagogy, as shown in this study, seems to spread such a needful hope.

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