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Introducing drama for ESL

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RESUMEN

El recurso del arte como medio para enseñar un idioma nuevo ha sido muy efectivo para motivar al aprendiz a expresarse, y poner en práctica lo aprendido. El drama recurre a diversas técnicas que se describen en este artículo en el sentido de poder aprender en un contexto cuasi real. PALABRAS CLAVE: Drama, Aprendizaje del Inglés, Enseñanza del Inglés,

Técnicas de drama , Drama para propósitos especiales Art as a resource for learning a new language have been too effective to motivate the students to express themselves , and to practice the new learning , drama has different techniques that are described in this paper and gives the learner in a quasi-real context.

Keywords: Drama, English Learning, English Teaching, Drama Techniques , Drama for special purposes.

In my experience as a professional actor and English teacher I found that Drama implies action, play and create and we learn through doing action more than thinking. So Drama enriches education, it gets enjoyment and a sense of belonging. it gives opportunity to

use creativity and encourage motivation for further studying. They serve as a powerful tool for creating social bounds and general social maturity. To participate in drama techniques in the class includes also cooperating with one's classmates and working with them in a team. This supports interpersonal relationships and prepares students for real life.

Drama techniques in education generally develop also students' imagination. Not everybody is so confident as to create something spontaneously. It often appears that people are not used to consider imagination and creativity to be anything useful or valuable. When students pick up the courage to get involved in drama techniques they find out, surprisingly enough, that abilities they once thought of as non-existent or since childhood long forgotten are inside waiting for being carried out. Having discovered this hidden potential, students usually experience a considerable amount of joy.

Drama helps in the teaching and learning process, it develops logical thinking, memory and cognitive skills. The process itself, when students get involved in drama techniques, and what they learn through the process, is the aim



towards which we head. The output is not only mastering the target language, but also the development of the whole personality and its inner growth, artistic and social skills including. As to the language it can be observed that when using classical methods little or a very slow progress in language speaking abilities is usually reached, whereas by using drama techniques the language seems to be expressed more spontaneously

I am going to focus this workshop in three aspects that the participants can develop with their own skills from body, voice, creativity and imagination:

The Role

we are going to encourage the participants to create a role from their own creativity and focus in a specific situation where other roles doing for other participants are involved, finally they are going to create a character with a way of speaking, moving, thinking etc.

Each person has a given role in connection with their relationships, e.g. mother, father and teacher. One person can have more roles depending on the situation. A child is in a subordinate role to their parents and their teacher. The same child can give instructions and demands discipline from their younger siblings, etc.

When an individual accepts their role in the society, it helps him/her in the process of socialisation. It is possible to say that we socialise through learning our roles and through living them. Our role can be understood as a tool for dealing with ourselves. We can get to know ourselves better and we can learn how to master our roles in life. It also helps us get to know other people better and influence our interpersonal relationships.

IMPROVISATION

To improvise means to play, sing or act by using one's own imagination instead of only the written or remembered material.

In drama techniques improvisation allows students to give more from themselves to playing the role. As Valenta writes about the "second reform of theatre in the 60th and 70th (11): "It seems that the actors here stop serving the role, they almost stop playing, but offer their own authenticity of a concrete person "not hidden" behind the role. By this the theatre enables both the actor and the spectator to analyse the depths of authenticity. It is more about personal testimony and it manifests rejection of any pretending on the stage as well as in life

CREATING A DRAMA –STORY

It is one of the possible ways of using drama techniques in language learning process. The given story is supposed to be the basis for students' activities in the lesson. The roles and scenario can be offered, but scenario can be an object of different variations.

To create a story is important to propose a situation in which different characters participate and develop it, we have to follow this format

- 1 Introduction: in this part the characters present a general panorama about the place where they are, who they are, what they are doing
2. Conflict: As the column of the story the participants present a conflict where the characters are involved
3. Resolution: in which the characters present a solution of the conflict.

The use of drama which can be developed in the four main skills in the learning of a language :

- **Listening :** Drama encourages concentrated listening. Students have to listen very carefully when they act, so that they can react as the situation requires it. Drama provides context for listening. Listening exercises include listening to music, news, TV programmes, movies, telephone calls, small talks, directions, announcements and many more. All these can be easily linked with drama activities.
- **Reading:** Drama stimulates the development of the intensive reading skill eliciting a grammar structure, function, vocabulary use etc.
- **Speaking :** The presence of drama and its techniques is an ideal tool to stimulate and carry on different speaking activities with the focus on fluency, pronunciation, stress, intonation etc. It provides a field for sufficient practice in acquiring the language skill.
- **Writing :** Through drama writing activities students gain deeper understanding of the need for learning writing as a skill and realize that there are occasions when writing is necessary and even inevitable. From a simple dialogue to a complex script, the students can develop this skill.

DRAMA TECHNIQUES

There is a great variety of drama techniques which can be used in language learning classes. It is up to the teacher to consider the age and level of English speaking ability of students. After considering these the right and suitable drama techniques can be chosen. It is also advisable to think about the didactic potential of each drama technique. It would not be wise to choose the particular drama technique according to the level of entertainment potential and leave the didactics behind. The more the teacher knows about the class, the more suitable technique they can choose. While thinking about how linguistically

demanding the techniques are the teacher can devote some time to adapt the particular activity to the level of knowledge in the class. It is not without importance that the drama techniques, when they are to be used successfully, require non-threatening atmosphere in the class. In such lessons the teacher should avoid focusing on performance or achievement in these lessons. Neither the language nor the level of acting should be competitive, but it should be used as a great opportunity for nourishing cooperation among students.

ICEBREAKERS

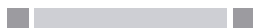
As Wilson suggests these activities are designed for new classes. Icebreakers are designed to make the first lesson attractive, entertaining and memorable. New names are easily remembered because these techniques connect them to the impressions of the first lesson. The language requirement should be manageable for most of the class. It often happens that students feel a bit of tension in the beginning of a new course and these activities will help them get rid of this tension. That is why the language development is less important than the social bonding. (13)

WARM-UPS AND PRE-DRAMAS

Warm-ups and pre-dramas are techniques which are used with the aim to encourage shy students or to get the class involved into speaking activities as such. Pre-drama activities are used when a drama activity is supposed to take place later.

Some of the activities are meant for the class where students already know each other, but the teacher is new to the class and, of course, the students in the class are new to the teacher.

All of these are very short activities covering the time of maximally 5 minutes. As Ken Wilson says: "The activities are best used in the middle of a class, when attention levels and energy are failing." (9)



Valenta states that “Playing roles is educational and pedagogical method which leads to reaching the aim of personal growth and education by the means of preparation, playing and reflecting of situation with valuable educational contents. This situation is realised through actors’ (students’) playing who by their acting represent fictitious objects (people, animals, things) including representation of one’s own self.” (31-32)

Playing roles in drama techniques can completely change the atmosphere in the class, the relationship among students as well as the relationship between students and teacher. This is the result of the process when students have to cooperate, solve problems together and discuss the ways of different approaches to the roles. The level of freedom in improvisation teacher gives students can influence how close to each other can students get. The roles can be different. They can be taken out of a real life, from a fairy tale, science-fiction, etc. In the context of this thesis playing roles is used especially for language learning. The story or the topic can also carry a message. This message can be a part of an ethical code which can be transferred somehow “by the way”, so that students do not have to feel pushed or mentored. There is such a great variety of topics which can be chosen that any grammatical part of textbook or any message can be supported by them.

There is also another view – role playing brings students a great chance to grow in social contacts. They can spontaneously express different problems in interpersonal relationships with the help of their partners and observers. Role playing can also contribute to analysis of one’s own behaviour in life. Sometimes a student is given a role which he/she does not like (e.g. that one of Polonius in Hamlet). Surprisingly enough, there are students who find this role enjoyable. When a teacher uses role playing in the same class more often, he/she can discover what range of roles a particular student likes. By a careful

observation the teacher can learn a lot about their students. And even students themselves can learn something about themselves because the choice of roles can serve as a feedback.

ROLE PLAYS

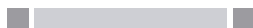
Miming

It could be presumed that miming does not have the attributes to be helpful in language learning, because it is not accompanied by speaking, but by silence. However, miming is known as very useful activity in language classes. It is true that it develops mainly the non-verbal part of communicative abilities, but it is necessary to take into an account that there is a teacher who is allowed to speak. Teacher’s way of speaking, his/her intonation and pronunciation gives students the opportunity to let their understanding skills grow. They have to react to the teacher’s instructions and act according to them. The fact that students react only by body movements and facial expressions can bridge the gap between what they want to express and what they are able to say. This will be appreciated mainly by those on the lower level of knowledge because it rescues them from their past experience of frustration due to lack of their language speaking ability. Miming is just a different channel to show that they understand and are able to react.

TEACHER-IN-ROLE AND STUDENT-IN-ROLE

A teacher according to Neelands and Goode “adapts a suitable role in order to: excite interest, control the action, invite involvement, provoke tension, challenge superficial thinking, create choices and ambiguity, develop the narrative, create possibilities for the group to interact in role”

A teacher can play a role or take a part in a certain activity him/herself. It is a method which enables the teacher to influence the action from inside. He/she can get students, especially the



shy ones, into the process of playing. When a teacher adapts a certain role it can also help students grasp more of a language because teacher's talking is expressive enough that it makes the whole matter not only more exciting, but as to the language considerably "catchy".

DRAMA FOR SPECIAL PURPOSES

Drama can provide context for the learning of specialised vocabulary and for learners to actively practise work-related (oral) activities and genres, such as meetings, making appointments, business dinners, etc. As Brennan & Pearce (2009), DiNapoli (2001; 2009) and Pearce & Jackson (2009) outline in their articles about the dramatization of case studies or of particular concepts from the business world (such as the life-cycle of products), topics and material which might appear 'dry' to students at first glance can be made more accessible and memorable as students start to identify with characters in case studies and experience emotional involvement through dramatic tension.

Dramatic play simulating business life can show students the importance of emotions in professional contexts. Marketing and design are fields where customers' emotions have long been recognised as influential factors, but research in behavioural economics shows that the field of finance is not as rational as previously assumed by theorists. Even students from science and engineering, who possibly tend to take a predominantly rational view on life, might profit from being aware of the 'soft' factors in communication as they can be explored through drama.

Drama activities encourage learners to explore topics of identity, as students can literally experience 'walking in somebody else's shoes' when they take on fictional identities. This can be beneficial for exploring professional roles, both linguistically (register, jargon) as well as on a more personal level, and help young

graduates to negotiate their own eventual future professional identity.

According to Garaventa (1998), alternative perspectives on business topics (such as moral values in business, leadership, etc.) can be explored through reading and acting out dramatic literature such as Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* to explore business ethics. Augustine & Adelman (1999) examine connections between Shakespeare plays and leadership topics, such as confronting change or crisis management. Similarly, DiNapoli (2001) suggests early 20th century plays such as *Waiting for Lefty* and *Death of a Salesman* as examples for study, but Internet sources also offer more contemporary plays, specifically written to explore work-related issues such as *Recycled Dreams* and *Bunk*.

- Thought-tracking is a dramatic convention where a scene is frozen and the actors voice the thoughts.

Drama activities have potential for teaching intercultural competence in a holistic way: For example when intercultural encounters are role-played in combination with thought-tracking and these scenes are then discussed. In such an exercise students will see the behaviour of the persons acting in the scene (exterior perspective). They will also see what the actors are thinking (interior perspective). They will become aware that behaviour they perceive as offensive may have been shaped by different cultural standards and may not have been offensive at all to someone from a different culture. To illustrate this: A student playing a Chinese guest at a business dinner scene slurps when eating. The student playing the European host shows irritation. The thought-tracking reveals that the Chinese guest was trying to be especially appreciative of the food and is now confused that his host is apparently angry at him. The host, on the other hand, reveals in his thoughts that he tried to please his guest with



special food and is now hurt that the guest doesn't seem to appreciate it. Nowadays employers expect their staff to be "skilful negotiators in increasingly intercultural work situations" (Sercu *et al.* 2005: 1), thus language teachers have to pay more and more attention to the (often non-verbally mediated and emotionally charged) differences in communication styles between people of different cultural backgrounds. Role-playing exercises such as the one described above combined with a group discussion can provide helpful tools for exploring this topic (cf. Byram & Fleming 1998).

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