

Effectiveness of Drama in Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract: *This article discusses the effectiveness of drama in learning English as a foreign language. It attempts to list the benefits of using drama in English language classroom, as drama engages students in the learning process. Drama motivates students, and encourages their critical thinking. It also tells us why drama is important and which language skills will be improved by employing drama activities. The article is written based on library research method and uses reliable sources in the ground.*

Keywords: literature, drama, English language

1. Introduction

Drama is considered to be as an effective and valuable teaching strategy because of its unique ability to engage reflective, constructivist and active learning in the classroom as well as enhancing oral skills development (Di Pietro, 1987; Via, 1976; Heathcote cited in Wagner, 1976; Mezirow, 1990; Schon, 1991; Donato and McCormick, 1994; Lukinsky, 1990; Miccoli, 2003).

Drama has the potential to empower the students, give them many opportunities to have pride in their work, it teaches them responsibility, problem solving, management and directing proficiencies. The many activities of team work force students to develop organizational skills and to think on their feet. These are tools that can be used in all aspects of their lives. These skills will be useful in the future job market when the students need to work with others or even in the future job interview when the potential employer asks an unexpected question and you need to think quickly.

A great strength of drama is in its appeal to various learning styles yet many teachers are wary of using it for many reasons. Some of these concerns may relate to fear of losing control in the classroom, students who may become too boisterous or unruly, unnecessarily loud noise levels, disturbing nearby classes and/or mass chaos. With clearly structured activities, most of these fears are unfounded. Students enjoy the activities, work together in groups and share their creative expressions. Even the shyest students are able to benefit from drama when they take on a new role and imagine themselves to be someone else.

Howard Gardner (1983) described his vision for schools which use multiple intelligences to incorporate authentic learning. Drama has the capacity to provide authentic learning as most of the intelligences are utilized in learning activities. For example, drama incorporates *verbal linguistic* learning through the use of language, scripts, vocabulary and reading.

2. Benefits of Using Drama in the EFL Classroom

There is a common saying of Benjamin Franklin who says "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn." Students' involvement in the learning process has become the main aim of modern approaches that focus on student-centered class rather than teacher-centered class. Clever involvement that demands a student to use creative thinking skills is the kind of involvement that helps student to learn effectively. Many methods have been used to assess students' effective involvement. Drama is one of the most important methods that provide much more involvement for both teachers and students in the learning process. In foreign language classroom, drama is an effective method as Mattevi (2005) states "the use of drama in the language classroom allows the teacher to present the target language in an active, communicative and contextualized way. Dramatization helps the teacher address the four skills of language learning (speaking, listening, writing and reading), and it also favors and facilitates the study of some often neglected aspects of language such as pronunciation and body language." Blanch (1974) also points out "the two elements of drama are action and dialogue, and both have a place in the foreign-language learning experience. They may be introduced into the classroom by means of a "drama lab," a learning activity that permits students to act out foreign language materials such as tableaux, poetry, ballads, folklore, and plays. Drama allows the student to express his individuality, and the material, if it is culture-related, brings to life the cultural context of the foreign language." Campbell (2008) study proved the effectiveness of using drama on students' achievement whereas the effect of drama in foreign language teaching and learning has been the aim of many researches such as Barreto (2014), Gomez (2010), Baraldi (2009), Uddin (2009), Ntelioglou (2006), Culham (2003) and Gaudart (1990). Drama also approved its effectiveness on developing creative thinking. Özdemir and Çakmak (2008) states "Drama enables students, in all levels of education, develop their intellectual skills such as creativity, problem solving, communication, socialization and empathy and it gives individuals the opportunity for self-actualization, group work and sharing their responsibilities." Many studies

Volume 8 Issue 8, August 2019

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revealed the effect of drama on creativity such the study of Ortiz-Seda (1984), Dupre (2006) and Taskin (2013). Using of drama in foreign language class has many advantages. Cunico (2005) states that "drama is an under-exploited resource in the foreign language classroom for promoting intercultural competence and developing an awareness of the interpersonal dimension embedded in the language we use. Drama also offers ample opportunities to explore nuances of the foreign culture as well as conflict situations and emotions which are seldom encountered in textbook dialogues and material, thus opening up to the students a world which is often denied to them in the foreign language classroom".

Emphasizing this, Gasparro and Falletta (1994) point out "The use of poetry as drama in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom enables students to explore the linguistic and conceptual aspects of the written text without concentrating on the mechanics of language. Students are able to develop a sense of awareness of self in the target culture through dramatic interpretations of the poems. Teachers using this technique need to consider poetry that matches their students' language skills, ages, and interests." Even (2008) adds that through drama, "Students enter imaginary worlds that they cooperatively construct, experience, furnish, arrange, and change. Thus, drama situations can liberate and at the same time deeply stimulate and challenge learners' take on communicative situations, grammar, and literary texts. The effects of drama also extend to the affective skills of the students. Özdemir and Çakmak (2008) points out "a number of studies of the effects of drama on individuals' cognitive and affective characteristics have been carried out recently. These studies revealed that drama had positive impact on students' development of communication skills, socialization levels, development of emotional intelligence, social skills, empathic skills and empathic tendencies regardless of the grade levels of the students". Kao, et al. (2011) also stressed, "In drama-oriented English as foreign language (EFL) classrooms, teachers often ask questions to shape the story, unveil the details, sequence the scenes, create a beneficial linguistic environment to elicit student output and promote meaning negotiation in the target language."

Therefore, "for more than 30 years drama has been promoted as a valuable teaching tool for language learning. Recent research results have reinforced this position" (Dunn & Stinson, 2011). Culham (2003) observed benefits from using simple drama activities with students and in teacher-in-service workshops as follows:

- 1) Students are able to express themselves in ways other than through words.
- 2) Drama activities offer community-building opportunities in a classroom where there are students of varying levels of language proficiency
- 3) Teachers are also able to use non-verbal cues to demonstrate caring and concern for students in a way that more formal language instruction does not allow, bound as it is by the physical constraints and the pressure to understand.
- 4) Non-verbal drama activities provide an excellent means of releasing the stress of language learning.

- 5) Students, often hesitant to speak out, can become confident when the language expectation is removed entirely.
- 6) "Total Physical Response is enhanced through drama activities.
- 7) In all drama work, power dynamics shift as the teacher becomes a participant alongside the students.
- 8) Non-verbal drama activities transfer directly to verbal ones, and subsequent verbal interchanges are triggered by these non-verbal activities.

On the other hand, Burke and O'Sullivan (2002) identified seven reasons to incorporate drama in the second language classroom:

- 1) Teachers and students can concentrate on pronunciation.
- 2) Students are motivated.
- 3) Students are relaxed.
- 4) Students use language for real purposes.
- 5) Risk-taking equals heightened language retention
- 6) Community is created.
- 7) Students and teachers can approach sensitive topics

Emphasizing the importance of drama in language teaching, Kao and O'Neill (1998: 4) state in their book "Words into Worlds:" "Drama does things with words. It introduces language as an essential and authentic method of communication. Drama sustains interactions between students with the target language, creating a world of social roles and relations in which the learner is an active participant. "Drama focuses on the negotiation of meaning. The language that arises is fluent, purposeful and generative because it is embedded in context.

William Shakespeare claimed that
All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages.
As You Like It Act 2, scene 7, 139-143

If so, then maybe we need to use drama more in the schools. Using drama in the ESL classroom is not a new concept. Drama provides an excellent platform for exploring theoretical and practical aspects of the English language (Whiteson, 1996). The improvisation aspect of drama gives students opportunities for developing their communicative skills in authentic and dynamic situations. By using drama in the English classroom, we can use English with our students in intriguing and useful ways. The language can be used in context and makes it come to life. Drama has the potential of making the learning experience fun for the students and even memorable because it is interactive and visual.

There are many studies about using drama to learn English. Wan Yee Sam talks about the communicative approach, drama techniques, value of drama in education, advantages and disadvantages (Sam, 1990). Alan Maley and Alan Duff, (1982) stated that there are classic sources for the benefits of using drama techniques; how it helps to learn new vocabulary, builds confidence, motivates the students and

helps shift the focus from the teacher to the students (Maley, 1982). Drama is a special communication situation which makes considerable demands on the flexibility and skills of the teacher (Kao, 1998). We have Morrow (1981) who gives some guiding principles behind the use of the communicative activities. Susan Holden (1981) adds some definitions as to what drama is and how it provides opportunities for a person to express themselves. The personal nature of improvisation provides many outlets for self-expression. We even hear that children need to play as an important developmental process.

Drama puts the teacher in the role of supporter in the learning process and the students can take more responsibility for their own learning. Ideally, the teacher will take a less dominant role in the language class and let the students explore the language activities. In the student centered classroom, every student is a potential teacher for the group.

Drama for second language learners can provide an opportunity to develop the imagination of the students. The students can go beyond the here and now and even 'walk in the shoes' of another. It provides an opportunity for independent thinking (McCaslin 1996). Students are encouraged to express their own ideas and contribute to the whole. Creative drama will offer exercises in critical thinking and the chance for the students to be creative. A good example of this is role-plays in small groups. The ESL/EFL group will have many situations where they can develop their own ideas as well as skills of cooperation when interacting with classmates. The group work builds social awareness and understanding as we walk in the 'shoes of another'. Drama gives an excellent method for studying human nature and working in harmony. The play acting provides the opportunity for a healthy release of emotion in a safe setting which can work to relieve the tension of learning in a second language.

3. Drama Engaging All Learning Styles

Drama has the unique ability to engage many different learning styles, thus facilitating connections with students and motivating most learners today. As teachers, we understand that people learn differently and at different paces because of their biological and psychological differences (Reiff, 1992). Learning styles not only comprise the cognitive domain, but also the affective and physiological domains (Oxford, Hollaway & Horton-Murillo, 1992). Even one learning style is now considered to be multidimensional (Kinsella, 1996). Strong, Silver and Perini (2001) divide verbal-linguistic intelligence into four learning preferences including mastery (knowing), interpersonal (connecting with people; social skills), understanding (discovery and reasoning) and self-expressive (creativity). If learning styles are matched with appropriate teaching approaches, then students' motivation, performance and achievement is more likely to increase.

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boisterous or unruly, unnecessarily loud noise levels, disturbing nearby classes and/or mass chaos. With clearly structured activities, most of these fears are unfounded. Students enjoy the activities, work together in groups and share their creative expressions. Even the shyest students are able to benefit from drama when they take on a new role and imagine themselves to be someone else.

Howard Gardner (1983) described his vision for schools which use multiple intelligences to incorporate authentic learning. Drama has the capacity to provide authentic learning as most of the intelligences are utilized in learning activities.

For example, drama incorporates *verbal linguistic* learning through the use of language, scripts, vocabulary and reading. *Intrapersonal* learning relates to the feelings and emotions involved in drama, characterizations and how we respond as an individual, while *interpersonal* learning comes from working with others to create a scene or role play. *Kinesthetic* learning activates the physical self, the body and doing actions. As students re-create images, pictures, visual details, staging, movement, location and direction with drama their *spatial* learning skills are developed. *Logical* learning follows from using rational patterns, cause and effect relationships and other believable concepts involved with the drama. Sometimes *music*, or even the music of language, is also used in working with drama.

4. Drama Brings Literature to Life

Most teachers see the value of drama in offering training in speech. What is not obvious is how even abstract learning is easier when acted or demonstrated. Drama can also be used to bring literature to life for the students. It is more dynamic than simple text and helps the visual learners as well as recycles new vocabulary. While drama does have a characteristic of recreation, the fun aspect should not be under-estimated. When the students are enjoying an activity, they are learning and letting their guard down. The shyness and fear of using English very often blocks learning. When the students are submerged in an active fun activity, they are more open to new concepts and learning will occur. When the students are having fun, they let their second language guard down and become less inhibited. The student will tend to relax and stop blocking out the new language. They will forget how hard it is and start absorbing the ideas presented. Changing the students' perception of the language learning from a negative to a positive is a huge plus for the learning process.

A good example of the attributes of drama being used outside the classroom is the game of theatre sports. It is started out in Loose Moose Theatre Company in Calgary, Canada (Johnstone, 1999). This drama activity has grown to become an international endeavour, taken up by practitioners the world over, which involves the audience as much as the actors in creating a very spontaneous event. Theatre sports demonstrate how powerful a motivating force role-playing can become for the actors as well as the audience. There are presently teams in many different countries using different languages that put on an unrehearsed game for countless spectators and the appeal is only growing.

5. Drama Reveals Aspects of the Human Condition

When you think about drama in the classroom, it is a method to reveal aspects of the human condition; life is nothing more than a grand series of improvisations (Price 1980). Through the games, the students begin to realize the importance of shared space, time, attention, information and ideas. The games spark spontaneity and minimize self-consciousness which often inhibits learning. The games are also good for developing concentration and trust in the classroom. While the students are having all this fun, they are developing skills of coordination, imitation while focusing on the task at hand. The improvisation enables the students to flex their emotional, mental as well as physical muscles in a safe and controlled setting. A good example of this was a role-play one group performed where they displayed their displeasure with the school principal. There was no harm done and all the students were feeling the same.

Drama in its purest form gives the student several avenues to self-awareness. It is one of the closest literary forms to life itself. It is a dynamic process that reveals and examines aspects of the complicated lives we lead (Price 1980). All of this leads me to believe that there are many subtle benefits to drama in the ESL classroom.

The benefits of drama to develop the imagination should not be undervalued. In our rote school routines of memorization and compulsory subject matter, we sometimes do not spend enough time on encouraging our students to use their imagination. It is the spark that makes the ordinary into something incredible. Imagination is the magic force that is beyond facts, figures and techniques which can inspire new ideas. It is with imagination that the ordinary is transformed into something significant. There is a need to cultivate this trait in our students. Imagination is closely linked to dreams and inspires us to get up every morning. Drama has the capability to keep this alive and/or rekindle what our routine daily lives are burying in ourselves. We need imagination to make a better world. In order to accomplish anything worthwhile, we first need to imagine and dream it. We should not neglect this facet of human sentience. It may seem like a trivial point, but dreams without imagination would be like life without color. We would all be worse off without it.

6. The Power of Transformation with Drama

We all present ourselves in everyday life as we want to be perceived. Erving Goffman (1958) talks in detail about how we present ourselves in everyday life from a sociological perspective. We all act out theatrical performances to present ourselves in regard to how we wish to be seen. When we are in the presence of others, we are to some extent on stage. We will act and communicate in our own interests to influence the people around us to act voluntarily in accordance with the individuals plans (Goffman, 1959). We are in essence, recreating ourselves all the time as our social world evolves. In everyday life, first impressions are so very important. So, how we are perceived often depends on a

blink of a moment which may define us for a long period if not forever. Our communication skills are so important in how we are seen by others. Our words and body language project subtle messages to those around us and others respond in accordance to what they perceive as "us". In life, we are all playing many roles; therefore, we are wearing many masks.

In a sense, and in so far as this mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves- the role we are striving to live up to- this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be (Goffman, p.30).

We know that an individual will attempt to induce the audience to see them in a certain way. The more convincing we are in our own roles only help to create the persona that we wish for. The better we are at communicating our ideas helps ourselves to become who we want to be.

Therefore, it makes sense that dramatic skills can help us become the person we want to be. In this way, drama has a wider reach than simply making us more fluent in a second language. It has the potential of making our lives better as we will be better understood and may help us become the people we want to be. Drama is all about how we present ourselves. If the student can communicate better, the more likely others will see him/her as he/she wishes to be seen. Therefore, the skills of drama can help the student become the person that he/she wants to be.

Also Drama fosters and sustains learners' motivation as it is fun and entertaining and because it engages feelings it can provide a rich experience of language for the participants. Drama as a process is inevitably learner-centered because it can only operate through active cooperation. As a social activity embodies much of the educational theory that has emphasized the social and communal such as Vygotsky's Social.

Interactionism in the 1960's as opposed to the purely individual, aspects of learning. Being a collaborative and participatory teaching approach it contributes positively to the development of the learners' self-esteem and self-efficacy (one's beliefs about their capabilities in certain areas) especially to those they have rather low levels (Williams and Burden, 1997).

Transferring acquired skills from educational settings to real life situations has always been a challenging task in education. The value of drama is often attributed to the fact that it allows the creation of contexts for different language uses, thus fostering students' language awareness. In both language teaching and drama, context is often thought to be everything. Children talking and listening to each other in a dramatic play situation use language in a communicative way (taking turns, interacting verbally, using body movements, gestures and facial expression, listening actively). Hutt et al. (1989) found that in a role play children's verbal responses were longer and included more adverbs than in other situations. Because speech has its origin in social action and life (Lantolf 2000, Merleau-Ponty 1962, Vygotsky 1987) dramatic play and improvisation are advantageous to language acquisition as the created

situations place the emphasis on social interaction and thus, facilitate knowledge transfer from the classroom to the outside world.

According to Schejbal (2006, p. 6) drama in foreign language teaching context does not mean using a classical play or performing a theatre performance. Drama inhibits an active involvement of learners. Thus, the learners, who experience using a language in the classroom, become similar to the real-life experience. The use of drama in foreign language teaching is not a new concept. Having been used to teach foreign languages since middle ages, drama plays an important role to learn target language and culture (Tum, 2010). Current theory in second language acquisition supports the assumption that drama activities can enhance communicative competence and thus facilitates language learning in general (Savignon, 1983).

According to Savignon (et al., 198), the most effective language program is that involves the whole learners in the experience of language as a network of relations between people, thing and event. Theater arts, one of her suggested approaches to shape communicative language curriculum helps the learner involve them in the created imaginary world. This setting, according to her, provides an opportunity for real language use and allows learners to explore situations that would otherwise never come up in the classroom setting. Smith (1984), a professionally trained actor and a teacher of English as a second language draws a parallel between the theater arts and the language learning. He suggests that actors and learners share a common goal of communicating intended messages, have the similar obstacles of dealing with new roles and language, and therefore can use the same strategies to overcome the difficulties and achieve the aims. Smith proposes that language learning will benefit linguistically or socio-linguistically, from the techniques applied in the theater arts (1984). Via (1987) suggests that "a great deal of our everyday learning is acquired through experience, and in the language classroom drama fulfills the experiential need by accepting the power of theater arts for language learning. Drama is an ideal way to bring the skills of grammar, reading, writing, speaking, listening and pronunciation together in a course where the focus is not on form but rather fluency and meaning (Dodson, 2000).

7. Conclusion

Using drama in a language classroom is a good resource for language teaching. It is through the use of drama that learners become familiar with grammatical structures in contexts and also learn about how to use the language to express, control and inform. The use of drama raises the students' awareness towards the target language and culture. In this context, the use of drama as a tool rather than an end gains importance in teaching a foreign language. The language learning should be culture-free that is the context of the drama should fuse into a language learning process with high interest, relevance and enjoyment. Learners should make use of drama to promote their comprehension of life experiences, reflect on particular circumstances and make sense of their extra linguistic world in a deeper way

(Sarıoğan 2004:15). The educational benefits of drama, according to (Lenore 1993), are as follows:

- stimulates the imagination and promotes creative thinking,
- develops critical thinking skills,
- promotes language development,
- heightens effective listening skills,
- strengthens comprehension and learning retention by involving the senses as an integral part of the learning process,
- increases empathy and awareness of others,
- fosters peer respect and group cooperation,
- reinforces positive self-concept,
- provides teachers with a fresh perspective on teaching,
- transforms the classroom strict atmosphere into a humorous atmosphere.
- exposing the learners to the target culture as well as to the social problems a society may be undergoing,
- helping learners improve their level of competence with respect to their receptive and productive skills,

Therefore, the use of drama seems to be an effective technique in today's communication-based, student-centered foreign language teaching. Since it is an authentic material, it helps students to promote their comprehension of the verbal / nonverbal aspects of the target language they are trying to master. Particularly, teachers, who wish to make language learning more colorful, motivating and interesting, can make use of drama in their language classes. Since drama is the reenactments of social events, students improve their personality and code of behavior. Thus, they can achieve more meaningful and realistic teaching from which students can benefit to a great extent.

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