

USE OF DRAMA IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Tatiana ARPENTII, lecturer

„Ion Creangă” State Pedagogical University

ORCID: 0009-0005-5936-8285

CZU: 371.3:82-2:802.0

DOI: 10.46727/c.10-11-11-2023.p139-144

Rezumat: Articolul prezintă un studiu metodologic centrat pe unele aspecte didactice de utilizare a jocului de rol în clasa de limbi cu scopul de a eficientiza procesul de dezvoltare a abilităților de comunicare în limba engleză. Sunt identificate și descrise tehnici relevante unor situații de comunicare, sunt enumerate beneficiile utilizării tehnicilor de dramatizare și, totodată, evidențiate unele sugestii metodologice cu referire la elaborarea sarcinilor pentru a realiza eficient activitățile planificate de către cadrul didactic.

Keywords : drama, teaching, role-play, game, creativity, communication

Drama is an effective tool that can be used to promote interaction and language skills in the ESL classroom as well as create a class bonding experience. It 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 [6].

Drama education is a powerful teaching and learning tool with profound positive effects on a student's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. It is a kinaesthetic teaching method that benefits those students who learn best by doing and engages mind, body, senses, and emotions to create personal connections to the material that improve comprehension and retention [3]. Drama is a great teaching method that reaches multiple learning styles, content areas, age groups, and levels of language and experience and it is an ideal strategy for differentiated instructions. Students with language difficulties, learning disabilities, or physical or mental disabilities can shine in drama, whereas they often struggle in traditional schooling.

A number of studies outline the benefits of drama in language teaching. The most important benefit of using drama activities with foreign language learners is that they do not learn but acquire and practise new words and grammatical structures [18]. First of all, drama is regarded as a valuable tool for language teachers because it stimulates students' further development and it holds their potential for learning. Secondly, using drama makes it possible to transform a traditional learning space into a meaningful environment: an office/airport/ restaurant/ court etc. In this way it allows to prepare the student for communication in real-life situations. It helps to overcome social and linguistic barriers in effective communication. Therefore, drama techniques provide students with situations that demand learners' ability to collaborate or to work in a team.

Among the numerous benefits of using dramatic techniques in a classroom mentioned above, a lot of scholars believe they are entertaining, fun and useful to motivate students learning. They create a great learning atmosphere and helps to overcome two main obstacles for learners in spontaneous speech: the fear of making mistakes and the fear of using the foreign language in front of others [12], [15].

In spite of the advantages of using these techniques, there are however *problems* that arise in drama based classrooms. They include:

- Learners use their native language persistently.
- Some of the students are afraid to speak loudly.

- Learners make lots of mistakes.
- There are dominant / shy students.
- Learners often get confused and do not know what to do.
- Noise and chaos dominate the atmosphere.

Such problems may occur in many learner-centred communicative activities and can be remedied by the following *solutions*:

- **Explain the reasons.** Tell your students why you do these activities. If the aim is to develop oral fluency then explain your learners that it is important for them to try to speak English and not their first language. Only by practicing speaking in English will improve their oral fluency.
- **Prepare students thoroughly.** Before any communicative activity learners need to have sufficient controlled practice of the language they need to perform the tasks. This will include relevant lexis, language structures and pronunciation practice.
- **Give clear instructions.** Communicative activities are often complex to set up. You need to have clear instructions and give them carefully. This usually involves the following stages:
 - Introduce the topic / aim of the activity.
 - Show any relevant materials.
 - Give clear instructions.
 - Check instructions by asking questions.
 - Briefly demonstrate the activity with a student / or make students do an example.
 - Put students into relevant pairs / groups.
 - Monitor students and help them as necessary.
- **Allow plenty of preparation time.** Students need time to prepare both their ideas and rehearse the language before they can perform complex communicative tasks. Indeed the more time they have to prepare the better they will perform the task. A lack of preparation time will produce a poor quality performance and this leads to feelings of frustration and disappointment.
- **Form groups carefully.** The composition of groups is important. You need to consider balancing strong / weak learners, as well as considering personalities, gender etc. If you do not plan groups carefully it is likely that the strong learners will dominate and the weaker learners soon lose motivation and interest.

After every drama task there should be a feedback stage where the learners reflect on their performance. The focus should be on how effectively they performed the activity in terms of their communicative competence. It should not be a stage where the teacher focuses on errors or language accuracy as the aim of drama based activities is to develop fluency. The feedback stage should also be an opportunity to praise the learners on their performance and highlight the progress and development they are making in their communicative competence.

As it was mentioned before “drama techniques integrate body, mind, and emotions and motivate students to use their personalities and experiences as resources for language production” [13].

Let's consider some drama games

- **Raining onto your face.**

The teacher verbally passes this instruction to the children:

Example: Lie down on your back and close your eyes. Now think you're lying on the grass. It is slowly raining. The rain drops on his forehead. Raindrops fall on your chin, nose, mouth, hands, arms. It's raining on your chest, on your stomach, on your legs, on your feet. Feel that your body is relaxed and relaxed.

- **Snowman is melting**

Children are asked such questions as what is snow, what is a snowman and what happens to the snowman when the sun comes out. Later, the children are all huge snowmen. Then the teacher explains the instructions:

Example: - You're a snowman - The sun starts to shine and you start to feel a warmth in your body. - The temperature has increased. Your head begins to melt. Your hat sways, sways, and slowly falls. The carrot on your nose falls to the ground. -Now your shoulders are warming up. Your arms and legs are melting. -Your legs are melting. They can't carry you anymore. -You're slowly moving down. - At the end, you have been completely melted. Now, you have become water.

- **The triangle**

Example: The whole group is divided into three. Those at the top of the triangle are selected as the group head. The other members of the triangle repeat by watching what the first one is doing. In this process, the important thing is not to look directly at the head of the group, but to take care to see what he is doing while paying attention to the field of view. It is important for the head to look in the same direction.

- **From seed to vegetable**

Example: Students stand apart from each other. They are asked to make themselves as small as possible. When commanded, everyone slowly stands up like a sprout from the soil, extending their bodies like a vegetable [13].

Mime

John Dougill defines mime as "a non-verbal representation of an idea or story through gesture, body movement and expression" [7]. It builds up the confidence of learners by encouraging them to get and do things in front of one another. Even unsuccessful students can make an agreement without using the language. So, their self-confidence increases thanks to the mime technique." [17]. Mime helps develop students' powers of imagination and fix language in the minds of the students. When the teacher teaches a new word, he uses the mime technique to give meaning when the words are insufficient. The following activity demonstrates how vocabulary items can be revised and reinforced.

- **A magic box**

Example: Placing a box in front of the class, the teacher mimes taking something out of it and asks students to take a guess at what it could be. The teacher then invites a student to approach the box and whispers the name of the object to the student, who in turn mimes taking the object out of the box while the rest of the class guesses. This activity may continue with other students miming until the list of words is finished.

- **In a shop**

Example: A good number of small cards are prepared by the teacher. On each card it is written such goods as food and beverages that can be purchased by means of mime. A student becomes the buyer and the other becomes the seller by turns. The buyer has to tell the seller what he wants with mime. However, the important thing is that the seller tells exactly what is written on the card. The cards are in the hands of the teacher and each student receives a new card from the teacher as they know what is written on the card. When the cards are finished, the students who can explain cards most are rewarded [5].

- **Listen/read and mime numbers**

Example: Individual students are asked to form the shape of a number (1-9) with their body, or pairs of students are asked to form the shape of two-digit numbers. (This can either be a 'listen and do' activity, where the teacher calls out a number in the target language for the students to mime, or it

can be a guessing game, where students close their own numbers to be guessed by the rest of the class in the target language).

Mimes are very good at teaching grammar subjects such as verbs or adjectives. For example teacher might ask students to differentiate verb tenses like the simple past and the past progressive (students mime actions like washing a car which suddenly starts rolling down a hill or washing a dog that suddenly bites) or the simple past and the past perfect (for example, the students act out a situation like "the child had already eaten all the cookies when mother got home"). These situations require that the students watching produce the correct verb tenses, forms of the verbs.

Simulation

A simulation activity is one where the learners discuss a problem (or perhaps a series of related problems) within a defined setting. In simulation activities, the students are either playing themselves or someone else. Simulation activities are also interaction activities with various categories of dialogues. One category would be social formulas and dialogues such as greetings, partings, introductions, compliments, and complaints. In fact, any kind of problem-solving activity where permission is asked for and given and where problems are negotiated and solved can form the basis of a simulation exercise.

Role-Play

According to Blatner, role plays help students to become more interested and involved, especially by applying knowledge to action, by solving problems, valuating alternatives and looking for original solutions [1]. Pupils manage to develop a wide range of abilities, such as initiative, self-confidence, group work and communication in general. Role plays prepare students not only for communicating in a foreign language, but also in another cultural and social context [10].

A role play should be selected carefully, by keeping in mind a series of characteristics. Kodotchigova describes six steps to follow in order to accomplish a successful role play in a classroom. First of all, the teacher has to set up a situation, keeping in mind the students' needs, interests, age and previous experience. For instance, a role play chosen for teenagers will not be the same one as for business people or adults in general. After choosing the context, the role play is developed. In order to achieve that, teachers have to consider students' level, so the role play will be designed depending on their competence in the foreign language [12]. The next step consists in a linguistic preparation, by predicting the language needed for the performance. Afterwards, students are given precise role descriptions and information, such as their names, age, characteristics, and so forth. In the fifth step such roles are assigned and the role play is represented. Finally, the follow-up activity is dedicated to debriefing, in which students can express their opinion about the performance [10].

- **Short speech**

Example: Students are divided into two groups and their role cards are distributed. Students are asked to read the cards and ask them if they understand or not. When they are sure they fully understand what is written on the card, they are asked to leave the cards and start playing the role [11].

- **A driving lesson**

Example: Two students sit side-by side in front of the class. One is learning to drive while the other is trying to teach her. As the driver asks questions (using modals) and makes mistakes, the teacher yells out what she's doing wrong and how to fix it (using modals). The class should be encouraged both to take notes of which modals are used and to call out other pieces of advice to the driver. This role-play is a great one in teaching modals. It can get quite lively, especially if the driver exaggerates her problems [5].

Improvisation

Improvisation is another effective drama technique that can be used in English teaching, in which learners are presented to a situation and challenged to respond to it. Students can create their script and agree on developing its idea and shaping its structure, but without any speech construction. The acting must be spontaneous and improvised. Due to this lack of script, there is no dependency upon reading or memory skills, and different levels of language students should be able to take part in it and enjoy it.

Improvisation develops creativity, imagination, and ability to think fast, and is one of the best ways to understand a given text as well as language development. To use improvisation for such purposes, students need to feel comfortable and to assimilate basic concepts. This spontaneous drama method works well with intermediate to advanced students, giving them a hypothetical situation that they must act out on the spot using their English vocabulary and language skills.

Frozen image building

- **Statues/freeze frame**

Example: Groups of students think of a particular incident or scene, for example, a road accident, a rock concert, surgeons in an operating theatre, etc. They take up a position and 'freeze'. Other students must guess what the scene represents. One way of preparing this is to ask the students in their groups to think of a sentence or phrase which on its own indicates an entire situation, e.g. 'tickets, please', 'pass me the scalper, and then to form the freeze frame.

Exploiting a scripted play

In choosing a script, the teacher should ensure that the language is accessible to the learners and relevant to their needs and that the topic arouses the students' interest. In order to extract the most out of a play, work on it should be done in stages. The students are asked to familiarize themselves with the text by reading it through on their own before listening to a recording of it. The teacher then discusses the text with the class before assigning the roles. The text is played a second time, with the teacher pausing to draw attention to or invite comments on particular utterances, attitudes, or emotions. Dividing the class into groups, the teacher asks the students to discuss the setting and characters in detail. Then the students should choose their roles and rehearse the play. The final stage would be the performance of the play or a scene. The performance could be recorded for the students to listen to it later. In any case, the performance should be discussed when it is over.

It can be concluded that the use of drama activities in the classroom gives the students the chance to explore different areas and improve a lot of skills that would not be stimulated in other cases. Drama is a great tool that puts language into context and makes students enjoy the experience of success in real life situations. They get confidence and become ready to deal with the world outside the classroom. By means of the use of drama activities the teachers can help create people with a better sense of empathy and tolerance towards others. Moreover, using them during the lessons teachers develop the students' fluency, maturity, motivation, language competence, physical involvement and personal development.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. BLATNER, A. (2009). *Role Playing in Education*. Retrived on April 12th, 2015 from <http://www.blatner.com/adam/pdntbk/rlplayedu.htm>
2. BOLTON, G. *Drama as education: An argument for placing drama at the centre of the curriculum*. Essex, England: Longman, 1984
3. DEMIREL, Ö. *Yabancı dil öğretimi*. Ankara: Pegem Akedemi Yayınları, 2003
4. DODGING, J. *Mime Three: For ages 13 and over*. Australia: Litho Arts Ltd, 1972

5. DODSON, S. *Learning Language through Drama*, Texas Papers in Foreign Language Education; V5 n1 pp. 129-141, 2000
6. DOUGILL, J. *Drama Activities for Language Learning*. London: Macmillan, 1987
7. HAMILTON, J, McLEOD, A. *Drama in the Languages Classroom*. A CILT Series for Language Teachers. Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research, London: Covent Garden, 1993
8. HUBBARD, P. *A Training Course for TEFL*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986
9. KODOTCHIGOVA, M. (2002). *Role Play in Teaching Culture: Six Quick Steps for Classroom Implementation*. The Internet TESL Journal, 7(8). Retrieved on April 12th, 2015 from <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Kodotchigova-RolePlay.htm>
10. LADOUSSE, G. *Role Play*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987
11. LIVINGSTONE, C. *Role Play in Language Learning*. Harlow: Longman, 1985
12. MALEY, A, DUFF, A. *Drama Techniques in Language Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982
13. ÖNDER, A. *Yasayarak Öğrenme İçin Eğitici Drama*. İstanbul: Epsilon Yayıncılık, 2004
14. PHILLIPS, S. *Drama with children*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003
15. SCHER, A, VERRALL, C. *100+ ideas for Drama*. London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1975
16. WESSELS, C. *Drama*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987
17. WHITESON, V. *New Ways of Using Drama and Literature in Language Teaching*. Bloomington, IL: Heinemann, 1996.