

Is ELT possible through the use of drama as a pedagogical tool?

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Abstract: Learning a second or foreign language can be incredibly disconcerting to learners especially if they are not exposed to the target language on a regular basis. One of the guiding principles of ESL/EFL teaching and something that teachers are expected to promote is the learner's classroom involvement. But shyness, lack of reflection, and often inexperience may account for many learners' linguistic apprehensions and often unwilling to engage in any group/pair activity. The conventional English class hardly allows the students to use language authentically. So an alternative to this is teaching English through drama because it gives a context for listening and meaningful language production, leading the students or forcing them to use their language resources, thus enhancing their linguistic abilities. Using drama in teaching English also provides situations for reading and writing. By using drama techniques to teach English, the monotony of a conventional English class can be broken and the syllabus can be transformed into one which prepares students to face their immediate world better as competent users of the English language because they get an opportunity to use the language in operation. Drama strengthens the bond between thought and expression in language, provides practice of supra-segmental, para-linguistic aspects, and fosters integrated linguistic competence. Drama facilitates every student to become more intuitive in English as a Second/ Foreign Language. Drama is both a creative and holistic form of Learning which maximizes students' classroom involvement. The present paper is a sincere effort to thoroughly reflect upon all these ideas.

Keywords: ELT, Drama-Based Learning, Conventional Learning, Drama as Motivator.

As teachers, EL teachers have to inspire their learners to get 'absorbed' in the learning process. But, it often becomes challenging for a second/ foreign language teacher. It is challenging for English teachers to manage the widely differing linguistic competence of large classes of mixed-ability students, lack of motivation, students' language anxiety, and many more. Even after years of English teaching, the learners need to gain the confidence of using the language in and outside the classroom. But, the EL teachers, too,

need to work on their affirmative action programs despite the constraints of their situation. Drama is concerned with both the product (the performance) and the language learning process.

Many a time, teaching the English language needs to fulfill its goals. Learning a second or foreign language can be incredibly upsetting to learners, especially if they are not regularly exposed to the target language. One of the guiding principles of ESL/EFL teaching and something that teachers are expected to promote is the learner's classroom involvement. But shyness, lack of reflection, and often inexperience may account for many learners' linguistic apprehensions and often unwilling to engage in any group/pair activity. The conventional English class hardly allows the students to use language authentically. So an alternative to this is teaching English through drama because it gives a context for listening and meaningful language production, leading the students or forcing them to use their language resources, and thus, enhancing their linguistic abilities. Using drama in teaching English also provides situations for reading and writing. By using drama techniques to teach English, the monotony of a conventional English class can be broken, and the syllabus can be transformed into one which prepares students to face their immediate world better as competent users of the English language because they get an opportunity to use the language in operation.

The use of drama to teach English results in honest communication involving ideas, emotions, feelings, appropriateness, and adaptability; in short, an opportunity to use language in a situation that is more or less absent in a conventional language classroom. Such activities add a more comprehensive option of learner-centered activities to a teacher's educational strategies. As an educational tool, the use of drama fosters the child's social, intellectual, and linguistic development. Tarlington states that drama centers on "language development, personal awareness, group cooperation, sensory awareness, and imaginative growth" (113). The value of drama can be best summed up by Susan Stern, who looked into acting in a second language Learning from a psycho-linguistic point of view. She stated that drama "heightened self-esteem, motivation, spontaneity, increased capacity for empathy, and lowered sensitivity to rejection. All these facilitate communication and provide an appropriate psycho-linguistic climate for language learning. Humans are physical, mental, and psychological beings. When encouraging students to learn another language, the teachers need to recognize and satisfy their 'whole person' needs and abilities. In other words, they need to address the students' physical, mental, psychological, and linguistic needs. Typically, traditional language learning is confined to the mental world of problem-solving, rule application, and artificial contexts. Drama unlocks the 'whole person' and develops physical, creative, imaginative, and emotional responses to learning contexts.

Drama activities have multi-fold advantages for language learning. Some of them are:

- To give learners an experience of using the language for genuine communication and actual life purposes; and by generating a need to speak. Drama is an ideal way to

encourage learners to guess the meaning of an unknown language in a context. Learners will need to use a mixture of language structures and functions if they want to communicate successfully.

- To make language learning an active, motivating experience.
- To help learners gain the confidence and self-esteem needed to use the language spontaneously.
- Students can escape from their everyday identity and hide behind another character by taking a role. When the students are given memorable roles, it encourages them to be that character and abandon their shyness.
- To bring the real world into the classroom through features like problem-solving, research, consulting dictionaries, real-time and space, cross-curricular content, etc.
- To emulate the way students naturally acquire knowledge through play, make-believe, and meaningful interaction.
- To make what I learned memorable through direct experience and affect the emotions of learners with different learning styles.
- Drama activities can be used as a means of reinforcement of language known. It helps to extend, retain and reinforce vocabulary and sentence structure through role-play and communication games.
- When students dramatize, they use all the channels like sight, hearing, physical movement, etc.
- To stimulate learners' intellect and imagination.
- To develop students' ability to empathize with others and thus become better communicators.
- It helps learners acquire language by focusing on the message they are conveying, not the form of their utterance.
- The problem of mixed ability is reduced when drama activities are used. Students who are more fluent can take leading roles, which require more oral communication. The weaker students compensate for their lack of linguistic abilities by paralinguistic communication, e.g., body language and general acting ability or miming.
- Teaching English as a Second/ Foreign language inevitably involves a perfect balance between receptive and productive skills, where drama can effectively deal with this requirement.
- Drama can minimize learners' language anxiety by providing a fun atmosphere. It engages feelings and attention, which further enriches learners' experience of the language. It reduces stress by providing a healthy outlet for the expression of emotions.
- Through drama, a language class can address, practice, and integrate reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. Moreover, theater incorporates several advantageous learning principles, such as:

1. Interactive Learning

2. Learner-centered Learning- this kind of instruction involves the giving over of 'power' in the language learning process to the learners themselves. It also strives to allow for personal creativity and input from the students and consider their learning needs and objectives.
3. Cooperative Learning- This concept stresses the participatory nature of the classrooms. Students share information, help, and achieve their learning goals as a group.
4. Whole Language Approach- The philosophy of whole language is based on the concept that students must experience language as an integrated whole.
5. Multiple Intelligence- Drama games, activities, and productions develop all of Gardner's intelligence but are particularly strong in Spatial, Bodily/Kinesthetic, Interpersonal, Linguistic, and Intrapersonal Intelligences. Using drama as a teaching tool activates many innate human bits of intelligence often neglected by traditional teaching methods.
6. A Multi-Sensory Mode of Learning-
7. Participatory and Engaged Learning- This type of Learning can also be realized through drama.
8. Multi-directional Interaction Process- Drama promotes multi-directional classroom interaction.

Drama-Oriented Activities for Language Classroom

Following are some ideas of drama- oriented activities for language classrooms:

1. *Role Play Activities from the Textbooks*- If a prescribed book is being used in the classroom, the teacher can have the learners start by 'acting out' dialogues from their textbooks. Additional scenes to cover what happened before and after the conference can be created and added for even more dimension. Moreover, a variety of role-playing activities can be introduced in the classroom. For example, in one role-playing activity, the teacher can give students a card with a picture of a personality- a monk, a homemaker, a doctor, etc.- or with the name of a famous character- a politician, an actor, a scientist, etc. Students will have to imagine their life being that personality, and each one will have to justify their selection of nature. Social role games and job interviews are also good possibilities.
2. *Acting out Video Scenes*- If there is a video from the same course book, the learners can act these out too. In this case, additional before and after scenes can be created and added to expand and deepen the role-play context. If the performances are recorded- whether video or audio later on, the teacher can easily demonstrate improvement in technique, speech, language use, fluency, etc., to the students.
3. *Using Scenes from Movies*- the language teacher can use dramatic scenes from movies and scenes from movies and films as a basis for situational conversation/ dialogue practice. Famous, popular, or memorable movie scenes work best.

4. *Exploiting Scripted Play-* in choosing the script, it should be ensured that the language is accessible to the learner and relevant to their needs and the topic arouses their interest. For example, plays like 'The Refund' by Fritz Karinthy and 'Daughter-in Law' by D. H. Lawrence can be used as instructional materials for this purpose.
5. *Creative drama* is the improvisational, non-exhibition form of drama in which learners are led to imagine, enact and reflect upon human experiences. Verbal games, creative movement, improvisation, etc., are some aspects of creative drama. For example, the simple game 'information Please' can be played to help learners know each other's names and share background information. This game can be helpful in teaching/practicing 'wh-' interrogative sentences. Another such drama game can be 'Who Am I?' in which the teacher needs to place a variety of props in a box and each participant has to choose one item and use it in some way, and the group has to guess who the character is. For example, someone choosing an eye mask may be superman or a robber. This game helps with speaking activities. Another game can be 'If Sandip were the Prime Minister!' This is a game in which the students in the group are given a political persona. This can be done in a round. For example, 'If Sandip were the prime minister, he would make dance compulsory in the parliament' because he likes dancing. The following student may add, 'If Sandip were the prime minister, he would make classical dance compulsory in the parliament' because he wants classical dances. 'If' construction can, thus, be taught with the help of this game.
6. *Dialogue Skit-* In it, the teacher should divide the group into pairs and give a topic to each group, such as "At the supermarket counter" or "Two American tourists at the Mumbai Central Railway Station," etc., and each set of pairs have to prepare an amusing skit based on these topics.
7. *ABC Conversation-* The idea is that each new sentence in an impromptu conversation starts with the following letter of the alphabet. The teacher can start a conversation like this:
Agra is a beautiful place. The following person in the round has to create the next scene with a "B ." Each one will utter the sentences with good gestures and accents:
A: Agra is a beautiful place.
B: Beautiful, too.
C: Certainly, its beauty lies in the Taj Mahal.
D: Dawn to dusk, tourists are seen there.
8. *Drama Game/ Pantomime-* Drama games are short activities with different objectivities like ice-breakers, warm-up exercises, or to encourage, etc. One such game is titled 'guiding the blind' in which pairs are formed, and one of the students pretends to be blind. The blind person puts a hand on the partner's shoulder who, on his request, is giving them directions to place.

9. *Narrative Mime through Action Verbs*- In it, the teacher needs to adapt to a story from fairy tales/ myth/ legend which is to be demonstrated by the learner with the help of the action verbs.

Some Practical Procedural Strategies

Following are some of the practical drama-oriented procedural strategies for language classrooms:

- *Explain the Rationale*- The language teacher needs to tell the students why they are doing these activities. If the aim is to develop oral fluency, explain to the learners that it is essential for them to try to speak in English rather than in their L1. The teacher must make curricular/ syllabus connections with drama activities and help the students see that drama is not an isolated event in their curriculum but a part of their daily lives.
- *Prepare Students Thoroughly*- Before any communicative activity, learners need to have a sufficient controlled practice of the language they need to perform the tasks.
- *Give Clear Instructions*- The teacher needs to set the ground rules immediately, i.e., limits on space, touching, talking, etc., to have a signal for starting and stopping actions like clapping hands, tambourine, words such as 'freeze' etc. Communicative activities are often complex to set up, so the teacher needs to give clear instructions.
- *Allow Plenty of Preparation Time*- students need time to prepare their ideas and rehearse the language before they can perform a complex communicative task. A lack of preparation time will produce a poor-quality performance, leading to frustration and disappointment.
- *Prepare the Formation of Groups Carefully*- The composition of groups is essential. Learners should have a variety of focus and interact with as many different learners as possible. Teachers need to consider balancing strong/ weak learners and considering personalities, gender, etc. while forming the groups.
- *Feedback*- After every communicative drama task, there should be a feedback stage where the learners reflect on their performances. The focus should be on how effectively they performed the activity in terms of their linguistic or communicative competence.

Conclusion

Drama strengthens the bond between thought and expression in language, provides practice of supra-segmental, para-linguistic aspects, and fosters integrated linguistic competence. Drama facilitates every student to become more intuitive in English as a Second/ Foreign Language. Drama is both a creative and holistic form of Learning which maximizes students' classroom involvement. Since drama reflects the famous saying- 'Tell me, and I will forget; Show me, and I will remember; Involve me, and I will understand'- exploiting drama as an educational resource in the language classroom

will help the language teacher succeed in making the language learning not only experiential but joyful as well for the students.

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