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https://doi.org/10.29316/9788368103137_30

TO DRAMA OR NOT TO DRAMA? BENEFITS OF USING DRAMA TECHNIQUES IN A LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

STOSOWAĆ CZY NIE STOSOWAĆ? KORZYŚCI Z WYKORZYSTANIA TECHNIK DRAMOWYCH W KLASIE JĘZYKOWEJ

Summary

The article discusses implementing drama techniques across the curriculum, and in foreign language (FL) education. It concentrates on the benefits and the potential for developing the whole learner and their language skills. Using drama in language classrooms brings numerous gains as it helps to create a beneficial linguistic environment, facilitating learner output and meaning negotiation in the target language, which are directly connected with learner motivation and educational success.

Keywords: drama-based activities, speaking in EFL, language teaching

Streszczenie

W artykule omówiono techniki dramowe do zastosowania w edukacji oraz w nauczaniu języka obcego, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem ich potencjału w globalnym rozwoju ucznia oraz w kształceniu jego umiejętności językowych. Stosowanie dramy na lekcjach językowych przynosi wiele korzyści, gdyż pomaga stworzyć korzystne środowisko językowe, ułatwiając uczniom skuteczne komunikowanie się w mowie w języku docelowym, co jest bezpośrednio powiązane z motywacją i sukcesem uczniów.

Słowa kluczowe: techniki dramowe, mówienie w języku angielskim jako obcym, nauczanie językowe

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Introduction

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2001) recommends the learner-centered approach in language teaching to promote an autonomous attitude to learning, leading to the development of authentic communication skills. Drama techniques are a fitting solution to such a quest and, therefore, seem the perfect choice across the curriculum and in language education. Firstly, they integrate all the language skills in a way that few other activity types can, as learners develop their listening, speaking, writing, and reading skills, requiring language input and facilitating creative language output. Drama techniques allow the whole learner to grow, as they integrate the physical, cognitive, and emotional domains in verbal and non-verbal communication. Drama also helps to make communication meaningful and allows teachers to cater to individual learner needs, as they can rely on their strengths, developing self-awareness, self-esteem, and motivation. Finally, using drama techniques in the classroom helps to shift the atmosphere and allows real teambuilding through enjoyable tasks, requiring creativity and imagination (Maley, Duff, 2005). Whether acting in a role-play, performing in a scripted play, or improvising, language learners concentrate on their body movement, mimicry, or how to modulate their voice, which also lowers anxiety.

McFarlane (2012) goes further and claims that using drama techniques guarantees not only active learner participation in body and mind, but also activates the emotional sphere, which often has an empowering effect: "[f]ighting off dragons with a shield you have made yourself, pulling a sword from a stone with your classmates as witnesses, or flying around the room as Superman (…) is something you will remember far longer than just writing or talking about it. (…) [I]t is something you will remember in your heart, rather than only in your head (McFarlane, 2012).

Participating in drama-based activities in the language classroom leads to the development of fluent oral communication. According to Beatty (2015), "Drama provides an authentic arena for natural language use in real situations with an emphasis on reciprocal, synchronized, unpredictable audience interactions" (p. 30). When a play, a role-play, or a simulation is sufficiently rehearsed, the learners begin to own the language. As stated by Kao and O'Neill (1998), "drama does things with words. It introduces language as an essential and authentic method of communication. Drama sustains interactions between students within the target language, creating a world of social roles and relations in which the learner is an active participant (…) the language that arises is fluent, purposeful and generative because it is embedded in context" (p. 4). In short, using drama in the language classroom ensures that communication is practiced within a meaningful context and that

language learners are active participants. It also points out that both language and drama are socially conditioned, which makes drama techniques perfect for efficient language learning.

Employing drama techniques in education

Benefits of using drama across the curriculum and in language teaching

Employing drama techniques in the classroom has been recommended due to many potential benefits in all domains: the linguistic, cognitive, social, and emotional (Batdi, Batdi, 2015; Batdi, Elaldi, 2020; O′Hanlon, Wootten, 2007; Schenker, 2017). According to the Arts Council (1992, in: Thompson and Evans, 2005), drama techniques can greatly enhance not only language skills but also social interaction: "it is a multi-sensory tool, which combines listening, speaking, thinking, exploration and use of the immediate environment" (Thompson, Evans, 2005).

Using drama techniques in the classroom can be a great tool because it does not require financial resources or lengthy preparations. It can be easily inspired by a picture, an everyday object, or a photograph to develop the roles and a particular scene and to create an entire play. It can also be easily supported with music. Besides, learners can introduce their ideas to help themselves express what their role requires to the extent they want to, or are prepared to (Thompson, Evans, 2005; Beddall, 2006).

Another reason to use drama techniques in the classroom is that they are enjoyable to most learners. Drama techniques are usually found appealing because the outcome might be unpredictable and surprising, but also because, when introducing drama to learners "we inevitably restore some of the neglected emotional content to language" (Maley, Duff, 2005). As Beddall (2006) suggests, fun drama techniques can change lesson dynamics and serve as a channel for energetic and excitable groups. Additionally, the idea of a performance usually appeals to learners including the reserved ones. Finally, all types of intelligence are involved when learning a language through drama techniques, not only visual and auditory, but also kinaesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, etc. (Beddall, 2006). Nespeca and Reeve (2003) enumerate considerable gains in the growth of creativity, imagination, and independent thinking among learners, growth of their self-esteem and social skills, oral expression, tolerance and acceptance towards others, as well as a release of their emotions and creatively channelling them.

Interestingly, Boudreault (2010) underlines that participating in drama-based activities can have great therapeutic value, as it helps release stress. Consequently, learners more often commit to the lessons (Vernon, 2015). Another benefit is mentioned by Harmer (2015), who suggests that drama

creates an opportunity for students to "hide behind their roles" (p. 393) and express their own opinions without dealing with the potential consequences. While becoming a character in a play, students can abandon shyness and anxiety for the acting time (Anderson, 2006; Giebert 2014, in: Tseng, 2021). Besides, drama is considered an emotionally intense activity (Dakowska, 2005), so teenage language learners will find a much-required emotional outlet.

Social growth also awaits teenage learners as drama helps improve teamwork (Vernon, 2015, Tseng, 2021) and friendly relationships between students (Anderson, 2006). Taking part in drama-based activities supports the development of understanding and acceptance of the learners themselves and other people. It expands such skills as arranging a task completion, information sharing, dealing with difficulties, and claiming responsibility for the task outcome (Boudreault, 2010). Preparing a performance can inspire a discussion concerning, i.e. the positioning of actor-learners on stage, ways of presenting particular scenes, choreography, and the most appropriate techniques of delivering a text (Maley and Duff, 2005). A wide selection of benefits across different domains is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Benefits of using drama-based activities for participating learners

SELECTED BENEFITS OF DRAMA–BASED ACTIVITIES ACROSS DOMAINS			
COGNITIVE	**AFFECTIVE**	**SOCIAL**	**EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT**
increasing the level of knowledge	providing individuals to express themselves more comfortably	providing opportunities to work in groups	providing a comfortable communication environment
providing opportunities for learning through problem-solving	making the individual feel good about himself/herself	providing an exchange of ideas	facilitating the fusion of the individual with society
facilitating learning	encouraging introverted pupils to communicate easily	providing individuals the opportunities to express themselves in different communities	offering the ability to explore talents
providing a better understanding	keeping the interest of the individual alive	supporting creative thinking skills	providing learning by doing and experiencing
helping to get answers to personal questions	gaining mutual respect and empathy	strengthening effective communication skills	providing opportunities for learning to learn

providing the development of verbal skills	developing self-esteem by exploring the unknown	providing an opportunity to resolve communication problems	providing the possibility of making joint decisions
providing the development of teaching skills in teachers	developing the ability of objective and subjective criticism	developing speaking skills	requiring the division of labour
developing creative thinking skills	offering the ability to use imagination in different roles	facilitating friendship development	providing the development of kinaesthetic skills
learning to generate new ideas	encouraging the use of different sensory organs	limiting stringent and consequential thinking	providing concretization of learning
gaining the habit of asking questions	providing the development of supportive relationships	contributing to solving communication problems	offering solutions to the current problems
providing permanent learning	developing language skills and confidence	providing individuals with opportunities to become entrepreneurs	ensuring permanence with a fun learning environment
–	developing positive attitudes toward school	–	through conducting a situational assessment, it develops critical thinking

Source: Own elaboration based on Batdi, Elaldi, 2020, pp. 445-446.

Although drama is widely recommended in teaching due to its numerous benefits, educators should be aware of potential difficulties. Firstly, less confident students might perceive theatre-based activities as threatening. Secondly, planning to perform a play is bound to be time-consuming as many aspects (i.e. props or acting, etc.) are to be thoughtfully designed and directed, and the play itself rehearsed (Angelianawati, 2019).

Another factor that ought to be considered is the choice of a play to be performed, as the performance needs to satisfy both age and proficiency demands (Vernon, 2015). If scripted plays are to be performed by language learners, they should be enjoyable, of suitable length, and culturally understandable (Abraham, 2018). Sari (2022) agrees that learners are less likely to benefit from drama-based activities if the script does not match their language level. When required to act in an incomprehensible play, students may become annoyed or disinterested, jeopardizing educational or emotional objectives.

Mastering a foreign language is now rather common, and learning to speak the target language is often the main aim. Speaking is also the skill with

which learners assess their progress (Richards, 2015, p. 407); it is essential in all areas, especially in interpersonal communication, both in professional and private life (Aladini, 2020). However, it is considered a particularly challenging skill to teach (Dakowska, 2005; Bouzar, 2019). Some of the challenges stem from the need for a great variety of tasks, from the fact that some proficiency in grammar and lexis is necessary, as well as some level of self-confidence (Rao, 2018). The affective sphere seems crucial as many FL learners experience the debilitating effect of classroom anxiety, especially when required to speak (Horwitz, 2017).

Increasing language learners' self-esteem is one of the most significant advantages of introducing drama-based activities (Anderson, 2006; Vernon, 2015). Speaking with confidence in the target language and the courage to perform in front of an audience, seem vital (Vernon, 2015; Tseng, 2021). As mentioned by Maley and Duff (2005), performing in a play can fulfil this demand, as students notice their input into the success of the performance. The feeling of accomplishment often results in further learning of the less appealing language features. What seems particularly useful is that language functions can successfully be taught through role-play tasks, and they are: recommending, making requests, seeking explanations or help, or providing explanations (Anderson, 2006). Generally, drama can play a great role in the development of all four language skills (Tseng, 2021).

To successfully apply drama techniques in language lessons, important aspects need to be taken into consideration, such as checking the level of students' interest in a particular drama activity or in presenting a task, but also a rearrangement of the classroom settings (Anderson, 2006). Naturally, the students' age, set objectives, or abilities to be developed also need to be considered (Mardiningrum, 2016). To deal with potential difficulties, teachers should assist learners in stepping into the characters, e.g. by allowing them to re-enter the classroom just before a scene. Equally important is being aware of the existing classroom dynamics and using props as it encourages movement. Another important suggestion is that learners should be given time to prepare before any performance (Anderson, 2006).

Drama techniques vs. learner differences in a language classroom

Theatre-based activities contribute to the growth of each language learner as they cater to different learner needs (Anderson, 2006). Following the Multiple Intelligences theory (MI) suggested by Howard Gardner, learners represent different strengths or their unique combinations. Some learners show strength in the linguistic, logical, or mathematical sphere, while others represent visual-spatial, kinaesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal talents. According to Baldwin and Fleming (2003), each

such talent can be easily strengthened when participating in drama activities in the language classroom. For instance, the linguistic learner can benefit through working with a script and the teacher's language input while actively participating in role-plays, or improvising; the logical learner will develop while creating choreography and the chronology of action. The visual-spatial learner will develop when different visions of, i.e. scenes, are made and altered, and when students are working with motion. Motions, dramatic dance, activities stressing spontaneity, and miming will also be desired by a kinaesthetic learner. The musical learner will enjoy such activities as ensuring suitable tracks and combining them with emotions on stage, creating their own soundtrack, or even compositions. Interpersonal learner's growth will be enhanced as students participate in team tasks, improvise, perform in group scenes, or pose for a living picture (in French: tableau). Understanding the emotions of the played character may lead to reflections and a greater understanding of the feelings of others (Baldwin, Fleming, 2003).

Combining drama and EFL speaking activities

Theatre-based elements incorporated into foreign language (FL) classrooms can create numerous possibilities to practice oral communication (Rao, 2018; Sirisrimangkorn, 2018:19). Richards (2015:433) distinguishes three objectives of implementing drama into teaching speaking: 1) creating patterns of dealing with various matters, 2) rehearsing speaking in turns, and 3) mastering fixed phrases.

Drama techniques seem especially useful when practicing speaking. Learners practicing drama need to apply particular expressions written for the played characters and scenes, therefore, when participating both actively and passively in drama-based activities learners can become familiar with the language, its impact on concepts, viewpoints and actions (Baldwin Fleming, 2003:18). Language practiced in drama is more life-like than in other activities, students can train using it in new situations, however, still perform it in a safe environment (Thornbury, 2005:96).

Theatre-based activities are the reflection of authentic conditions. Hence, learners participating in role-plays can enhance language proficiency using their skills in natural settings. Drama enables students to receive a message from the teacher or fellow students and to respond appropriately. Simulation can introduce combining skills, that in real life are used together: i.e. receiving and producing a message (Altun, 2019:243).

However, not every pupil is likely to open up sufficiently to act in the classroom, not to mention a more public performance. The crucial elements of a teacher's attitude are approachability and acting under the student-focused approach. There are certain tools at the teacher's disposal to make

the students more relaxed and willing to act, for instance: the teacher's sense of humour, creating a safe, entertaining atmosphere in which learners can enjoy themselves while not being scared of a misstep, stepping onto the stage and presenting some of the proposals to increase student's confidence and to set an example (Galante, 2018:1).

Apart from practicing communication, one of the advantages of combining drama with FL speaking practice is improving pronunciation (Boudreault, 2010). Students practice these components in line with rhythm and stress during enjoyable rehearsals and are willing to put extra effort into exercising all of the mentioned aspects of speaking as they are motivated by the perspective of performing in front of an audience. Another pronunciation feature that can be learned through drama is intonation (Galante, 2018).

Examples of drama techniques suitable for a language classroom

Drama techniques suitable for the language classroom are based on those used by actors while training for the stage or screen. They allow learners to draw from many sources: their personality, their natural ability to imitate, mimic, and express themselves through gesture and facial expression; they also draw from their imagination and memory, or their natural capacity to use to their advantage important past experiences. Among the most popular drama techniques helpful in developing language skills, Thompson and Evans (2005) enumerate: 1) role-play, 2) puppetry, 3) improvisation, 4) freeze frames, 5) storytelling, 6) debating, or 7) miming.

According to Nespeca and Reeve (2003), drama techniques include: 1) creative dramatics – a spontaneous few minutes action and dialogue without a text to learn; 2) storytelling with props and participation, where the teacher/teller modulates his or her voice and performs limited actions (afterwards learners can use the props to retell the story); 3) telling stories through movement– as in a pantomime and improvisation (in pantomime no words, sounds or props are used, while in improvisation learners create the story as they go along, without a provided script; 4) choral speaking – learners read or recite whole phrases or sentences (suitable for a large group, this activity can be done in different ways: i.e. all learners speak together – in an antiphonal way – divided into two groups, and each group speaks different part), 5) cumulative choral speaking – where individuals or smaller groups have different parts which are added along the story, 6) solo choral speaking – where individual learners have their own lines of text; and 7) line around choral speaking – where individual learners speak within the group their assigned lines; 8) readers theatre – learners read a prescribed text using a modulated voice, i.e. the voice of an army general or a tiny mouse. Other techniques involve using puppets or masks, charades, or magic (Nespeca

and Reeve, 2003, pp. 29-31), but also acting from a script, written either by the coursebook authors, playwrights, or by the students themselves, or simulations and role plays (Harmer, 2001).

According to Alshraideh and Alahmadi (2020), dramatization allows learners to successfully operate with the target language resources in diverse situations. Theatre-based tasks have an advantage over traditional methods as they are engaging and highly motivating. While working in a team, students have the motivation to broaden their linguistic resources and improve the effectiveness of their language operations.

Galante (2018) proposes several activities to improve intonation while speaking. In a role-play, for instance, where students need to accomplish a task (e.g. pass the information about a location to another person) they will put extra effort into giving an understandable, properly pronounced message using the right, perhaps exaggerated, intonation. Another technique is called the reader's theatre, where learners read their roles aloud as if acting, i.e. as somebody angry, scared, or tired. It can also be changed into a group game, where the rest of the learners need to recognize the intended emotion based on their peers' delivery of the text (Jafari, Karimi, Jafari, 2021:160; Anderson, 2006; Maley, Duff, 2005).

Cocnlusions

The power of using drama across the curriculum cannot be overestimated, and it applies both to content subjects and to language education. The importance of drama and drama techniques lies in the special contribution they can make to the whole child's development and their learning experiences. During a short drama activity or when performing in a play learners allow themselves to surrender to the fictional situations, they project themselves into these situations and get a chance to experience new issues and conflicts, the actions of fictitious characters, and the consequences of those actions. Drama provides a unique opportunity to learn what might be otherwise inaccessible to the learners. When considering the various genres available to educators, such as comic, absurd, tragic, or fantastic, it is not surprising that drama can be a motivating way to learn. As stated by Chazan (2002) 'play occupies a realm outside of everyday events. It has to do with imaginings and trial action. Anything is possible, and no consequences need intrude' (p.19).

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