

USING DRAMA TECHNIQUES AS COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

English language teaching which is done so far mostly fails in reaching its goals. Even after years of English teaching, the learners do not gain the confidence of using the language in and outside the class.

The purpose of English teaching is to create learners who are communicatively competent. Being communicatively competent means that the learners are able to use the language actively in real communication. To achieve this goal, teachers of English should provide instructional materials as well as situation in which students have the opportunity to produce the language in context. One of the possible ways is by applying drama techniques namely *Role Questioning, Telephone Conversation and Thought Tracking*.

Using drama to teach English results in real communication involving ideas, emotions, feelings appropriateness and adaptability; in short an opportunity to use language in operation which is absent in a conventional language class. In addition, the four skills can be covered with these activities.

Key words: Drama Techniques, Communicative Activities.

Rationale

English language teaching which is done so far mostly fails in reaching its goals. Even after years of English teaching, the learners do not gain the confidence of using the language in and outside the class. Their output in the language is limited to writing answers and producing grammatically accurate, but, isolated sentences. Real communication involves ideas, emotions, feelings, appropriateness and adaptability. The conventional English class hardly gives the learners an opportunity to use language in this manner and develop fluency in it. Thus, the main purpose of the language teaching course, i.e., developing skills in communication, is unfortunately, neglected.

The purpose of English teaching is to create learners who are communicatively competent. Being communicatively competent means that the learners are able to use the language actively in real communication. To achieve this goal, teachers of English should provide instructional materials as well as situation in which students have the opportunity to produce the language in context. One of the possible ways is by applying drama techniques.

Using drama to teach English results in real communication involving ideas, emotions, feelings appropriateness and adaptability; in short an opportunity to use language in operation which is absent in a conventional language class. Such activities add to the teachers' pedagogic strategies giving them a wider option of learner-centered activities to chose from for classroom teaching, thereby improving their efficiency in teaching English.

As an alternative, teaching language through drama gives a context for listening and meaningful language production, forcing the learners to use their language resources and, thus, enhancing their linguistic abilities. It provides situations for reading and writing. It is very useful in teaching literary texts as it helps in analyzing plot, character and style. It also involves learners more positively and actively in the text. Rivers (1983) states, "the drama approach enables learners to use what they are learning with pragmatic intent, something that is most difficult to learn through explanation." 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 learners to face their real world better as competent users of the English language because they get an opportunity to use the language in operation. Using drama techniques also fulfills socio-affective requirements of the learners. Moreover, this learner centered approach makes the syllabus personally fulfilling.

In this paper, the writer considers to apply the techniques on the teaching of *narrative* text.

The Drama Activities: The Hot Seat

Even though the effectiveness of drama in teaching English teaching may not be doubted, it is natural for someone who has no experience in it to approach it with hesitancy. There are so many things that have to be taken into consideration before one leaps into putting up a play. A teacher may come across several constraints such as an already prescribed text to "cover" in a time period, lack of space, and lack of understanding. These are just a few questions that could bother you. Do not let these questions prevent you from seeing the value of drama and exploiting it, especially in the teaching of English. Gavin Bolton (in Dougill J. 1987) states, "drama is a unique tool, vital for language development as it simulates reality and develops self expression." You need not go into a real or full production and public performance. You could begin with incorporating *hot seating* drama activities stretching as less as five minutes in your class where students perform for each other. Drama activities or techniques are equally successful in making learners experience language in operation and provide motivation to use language embedded in a context and a situation. The simple "acting- out" requiring the learners to adopt a new position involves them creatively.

The Ice-Breaker

Divide the class into teams. Each team, usually after a collective discussion, gives one member of the other team who has volunteered to mime, a name of a film or a book to guess (of course, films are by far more popular). Initially it is a good idea if you choose the titles as you can ensure that they are easy to mime. Only one member of the team is shown the name/title and he or she has to mime it without saying any of the words for his own team members who have to guess it. If they guess it correctly within a time period (three to five minutes) they win a point. The actor can indicate the number of words in the title and, also, there are common gestures for articles and prepositions which can be discussed before the game begins. Students can be creative in getting the title/ name across to their team mates. For example, they could indicate that they are miming a rhyming word instead of the exact word if that is much simpler. Sometimes it helps to break up big words and students could indicate that they are doing so.

This game is going to tell you a lot about your students. It will also loosen up the atmosphere of your class and prepare you and your students for doing drama.

The drama activities / techniques that are going to be described are *Role Questioning*, *Telephone Conversations*, *Thought Tracking*.

Role Questioning

Role questioning involves one of the learners (the teacher could also take on the hot seat in case there aren't any student volunteers). In this activity the "character" can be questioned about their motives, actions, and attitude to a situation or other people and so on. In case the level of the learners' questions remains literal, or barely relevant, the teacher should intervene and give lead. This technique is done in a controlled manner and is very useful for the teacher who is new to drama.

Goals

- Comprehension and interpretation of character
- Taking down notes
- Practice in writing

Steps

The class is told that they are newspaper reporters at a press conference to interview the character after his/her action. The 'character' (a learner who has volunteered to take on the role) sits in the front, facing the rest of the class and answers questions posed by the reporters. He is interviewed for no more than 10 minutes. The reporters ask not just questions, but, also take notes in order to write a news story or a more descriptive feature article for the next edition of their paper. A learner can be given the role of a moderator who introduces the "character". After the interview is over, the teams of "reporters" work together for the writing. The learner who has been questioned in the role of the character can join one of the teams of the reporters.

Follow-up

The reports are read aloud in class and the learners discuss with the teacher which are the good ones and why. Good reports are put up on the class wall magazine.

Alternatives

Different learners can volunteer as the character to be interviewed. Later, the class decides which learner gave the best interview and this interview is used to write the report or the feature article.

Telephone Conversations

Telephone conversations test the learners' ability to react quickly and, though the learners are free to say whatever they like, they have to bear in mind whatever is said by the other speaker

and continue the conversation accordingly. This technique helps in enhancing the speaking-listening skills of the learners.

Goals

- Being able to sustain a meaningful telephone conversation
- Interpretation of character

Steps

The class is divided into groups of two learners. The learners sit with their backs to each other so that they can only hear their telephone conversation partner. The learners in each group are to imagine that they are two different characters. A particular situation from the story/text is taken for which every pair has to build up a telephone conversation. You could ask them to discuss another character or some specific event from the text.

Follow up

The conversations can be later written down in the note books. Each learner writes down the entire conversation that she has had with her partner. These can be exchanged and read by different pairs.

Thought Tracking

This drama technique can be exploited for interpretation of the literary text and, especially, for understanding a fictitious character. In this particular technique, the learner gets into the character and thinks from his/her point of view. It is suggested that literary texts having an omniscient narrator would be more suitable in comparison to pieces of writings/essays giving accounts of personal experiences.

Goals

- Reading comprehension, especially interpretation of text and character.
- Expressing personal feelings and thoughts.

Procedure

The class is divided into groups. In groups, learners select an important point of time in the main character's life in their text. It could be a time of success, failure, disappointment, loss, rejection, elation, isolation or struggle.

Having selected a point of time, the individual member of the groups says aloud the thoughts of the character to each other. After having heard each others' interpretations, the group has to work on a final one which will be presented in front of the class by a student as if he were actually the character going through that moment.

Follow up

After the representatives of all the groups have 'performed', the class discusses which were the better selections and performances. This could be consolidated by writing in the form of diary entries in their notebooks later on.

Alternatives

The teacher could give a specific point of time in the life of the character to all the groups. All the groups could be either given the same occasion or different occasions.

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