TEACHING THROUGH DRAMA

Introduction

Drama activities are a valuable tool in the language teacher’s tool belt. They can give students and teachers alike a break from the daily routine of worksheets, grammar drills, and tests. While maintaining limits, they can give children a sense of being in control of their language use. Although many teachers are most comfortable with a teacher fronted classroom and in their role as dispenser of knowledge, drama activities call for the teacher to model language for the children and to monitor children in groups, pairs, or while completing tasks alone. While participating in drama activities, children are involved in a process of constantly discovering new ways to express themselves in the target language.

Rather than merely concentrating on grammatical structures, drama activities such as emotional release, eliciting, and physical activity incorporate students’ feelings, intellect, and bodies for a truly creative and social language learning experience. Drama activities can also foster self-motivation among students who may find other forms of language learning boring. Although teachers still set up activities by pre-teaching vocabulary or modeling grammatical structures, drama tasks aren’t seen as chores one has to do, but as likable activities that students look forward to. Because children enjoy drama activities and have some control over the content, students start to take control of their own language learning. In addition, drama activities have a direct correlation to real world activities. By seeing and participating in familiar events being carried out in the target language, children start to see the target language as a living, meaningful part of their world, rather than dead print on a page or meaningless memorized responses to a teachers prompt.

Through the tools used in learning language through drama, children can discover new ways to experience the target language that is not only fun but is also an effective teaching method.
Applicable Theories and Approaches

There are many social and emotional reasons to use drama in the classroom, but as teachers we are evaluated on how well our students remember the prescribed syllabus of our schools/institutes. The easiest events, facts, or skills to remember are those that have meaningful connections to our lives. Teachers help children to make connections between the material being taught and what is already know to the student, so in a sense teachers are really “memory makers.” When considering how we are going to teach a lesson we must consider what will have the strongest “memorable impact.”

Earl Stevick has found that language learning memories are organized around emotions and purpose (Stevick, 1993). This view suggests that aspects of language learning that are connected to emotions or purposeful behavior will be retained longer and will be easier to recall than learning that does not have such connections. In Stevick’s view, one of the goals of a language teacher is to design lessons where language learning/use is connected to an emotion and/or is used in a purposeful task. Authentic language is usually connected to emotion or a purpose if not both. Making these same connections in the classroom can be more of a challenge. Because drama is a reflection of actual human interactions, the language used in drama is also usually connected to emotions and or purposes. Let’s look at how adding an aspect of drama to a common classroom activity can help students to create emotion and a purpose.

A common classroom game might be to divide the class in half and have each team try to make a correct sentence using a word shown on a flashcard. If the team can make a correct sentence they get a point. The teacher might hold up a picture of a baseball, and one team might respond, “I like baseball.” The team receives a point and they are all excited. On the surface this seems to meet the goal of connecting language with emotion and purpose: the team is excited to receive the point and the purpose of the language was to get a point. Where this activity falls short is that the emotion and purpose are not connected to
the language they are connected to getting the point. A creative teacher can use drama to connect the emotion and purpose to the language.

Instead of simply holding up a flashcard and asking for a correct sentence, the teacher can become the “director.” In the director role, the teacher could say to students, “Imagine you really like baseball. And you are trying to hint to your grandparents that you would like a baseball for your upcoming birthday. Now, say the expression in such a way as if you’re “dropping a hint.” The team is then awarded the point only when they “act out the situation” convincingly. So, the teacher may have to give them some direction like a real director to get them to really act it out well, such as, “One more time, but with more enthusiasm. Remember, you really like baseball. And you really want this baseball for your birthday. Now, do it again.” In this way, the students are “repeating,” but with this means of “dramatic repetition,” the students are thus strengthening the “emotion and purpose” of the sentence, and are thus strengthening the memory of the language.

The use of drama in the classroom is supported by several theories. Among the methodologies/theories we will discuss are: Creative Drama, Functional Grammar, Rodger’s Humanistic Psychology, TPR (Total Physical Response) and Multiple Intelligences Theory.

In the language classroom, Creative Drama is based primarily on improvisation and creates an opportunity to develop a student-centered classroom. For young learners, Creative Drama is also called dramatic play. Nellie McCaslin (2000) defines dramatic play as: “the free play of young children, in which they explore their universe, imitating the actions and character traits of those around them.” Although improvisation or dramatic play seems easy and fun, it is not as spontaneous as it sounds. It takes a large amount of planning by the teacher to create a classroom activity that flows naturally. The teacher must organize the students, observe the situations, and give the students meaningful feedback.

While Creative Drama works as a fun alternative to an ordinary sit down formal grammar lesson, teachers must always focus the lesson
plans on linguistic goals. Teachers can call on the work of Functional Grammarians to inform their lesson plan decisions. Functional Grammarians believe in creating a meaningful context first to induce language. Linguist, Graham Lock (2002) states: “To be of real use to language learners and teachers, a description of the grammar of a language needs do more than simply lay out the forms and structures of the language. It needs to show what they are and how they’re used.”

While Functional Grammar is vital for linguistic analysis within our stories and plays, there are other theories that inform teachers’ decisions regarding lesson plans and classroom environment. First, teachers must create a soothing atmosphere while encouraging children to express themselves. Carl Rodgers spoke of an approach to teaching that helps teachers create an environment that best fits Creative Drama (1983). Rodgers believed that the usual competitiveness of classrooms is too stressful, making students “defensive,” within a “survival mode,” and potentially shamed. If the motivation for learning is not positive, the child reacts despondently and shyly. Within the second/foreign language classroom a child may feel especially uncomfortable and vulnerable when faced with performing an exercise in front of a group so it is important that we make them feel accepted and loved. Stephen Krashen’s idea of an affective filter also supports Rodger’s claim. Krashen suggested that a “filter” or imaginary border was put between the learner and the language input. The stronger the filter, the more anxiety the learner was feeling, and the less likely they were to learn or retain information.

By creating a “non-defensive environment” through drama techniques, such as breathing exercises, visualization, and emotional memory, teachers express emotion and are comfortable within their bodies, encouraging students to relax in the same way. The desired outcome is that children will feel comfortable and be better able to process new language input. Creating dramatic works based on personal experience also creates trust and intimate bonding that will be a “nurturing” environment to both students and teachers. Carl Rodgers also proposed that teachers try to step down from a place of
“superiority” and step into a place of being "congruent" (knowing thy self with the intention of getting to know the students).

Gardner’s theory of Multiple Intelligences also supports the use of Creative Drama in the classroom. To briefly restate what has been covered in earlier units, Gardner questioned the idea that intelligence is a single entity that can be measured by IQ tests. Instead he viewed humans as having Multiple Intelligences that may be more or less developed in individuals or at different stages in a person’s life. Creative Drama allows enough flexibility to design lesson plans that can make language accessible through a variety of intelligences.

Considerations for Bringing Creative Drama to the Classroom

When preparing to use Creative Drama in your classroom, it is important to remember not to be limited by a strict formula of prescribed motions of words. Creative Drama requires the teacher to adapt activities to the needs of the students. There are many good resources available as guides to using drama in language teaching, but activities available in these resources may not match the needs of the students. Before using Creative Drama it is advisable to gain a good working knowledge of drama teaching techniques. With this background teachers can employ these techniques to design lessons that will exploit their students’ strengths.

Though there are many schools of thought on drama technique, the techniques in this article will come from Method Acting. A few of the important techniques of method acting that are applicable to ELT include:

1) identifying the character’s objectives and personality
2) creating emotion
3) creating movements that correspond to the character’s objectives and emotions

The following is an example dialogue we would see in a text book:

A: Excuse me, sir. Where’s the store?
B: Go straight and turn right, and you’ll see the store over there.
Before the students act out the dialogue, the following is the kind of discussion that would give the needed background information. Keep in mind that the following dialogue will have to occur in the students’ native language or bilingually:

T: Who is “a”?
S1: A boy
T: How old is he?
S2: Eight
T: What kind of boy is he?
S3: Helpful and kind
T: Why is he going to the store?
S4: He is getting eggs for his mother who is preparing a big banquet feast for some very important guests.
T: Great! Good idea. So, is he in a hurry?
S4: Yes, he is in a hurry because the guests are coming soon.
T: OK. So, who is “b”?
S5: He is a really friendly, happy guy. He is also helpful.
T: So, where is “b” going?
S5: Nowhere, he is just a friendly old man sitting in the park. And he is happy to have a chance to help the boy who seems to be in a hurry.

Notice in the above dialogue, the teacher and students co-construct the characters’ personalities, objectives, and emotions. If you are short on time, you can tell the students what these are. To avoid chaos, this may also be the case with young children. But if time permits and it is appropriate for the students, a co-constructive approach to setting up the scene is often more memorable.

After creating scenarios, have students take turns acting out the dialogues in pairs. Or with large classes, you can even say, “Group A, you are the boy. And Group B, you are the elder man.” Then, the class performs the dialogue chorally. Once they start acting, as the director, you should help students to use movements that correspond to the situation/emotions in the dialogue.

The same “scenario approach” as above should be used when
teaching songs and chants with your course books. If scenarios are not created, songs have no meaning and are sung with no context. To help students create meaningful language memories, emotions and purposes must be a part of the song. Previous to teaching the songs, a scenario should be created by asking the same types of questions about the characters’ personality, the intention, and corresponding actions/movements should be created.

The following song from Sing, Chant & Play is similar to the dialogue demonstrated above. Just as in a musical play, the characters can first act out the language (like above) and then break into song.

Boy: Excuse me sir, where’s the store?
Elder man: Go straight and turn right, and you’ll see the store over there.
(Characters begin to sing the song.)
Boy: (singing) Excuse me sir, where’s the store? Excuse me sir, where’s the store?
Elder man (singing): Go straight and turn right. Go straight and turn right, and you’ll see the store over there.
(Procter & Graham, 1998)

Turning a simple dialogue/song into a “mini-musical drama” is a powerful “memory making” method that encompasses all the methodologies we know about good language teaching. Turning our dialogues into mini-dramas and musicals can be done simply by asking questions that establish scenarios. Doing such requires no materials or props, and can be done in any teaching environment.

**Drama Warm-Up and Ice Breaking Exercises**

The first step of most drama classes is to get students to warm up, relax, and develop focus simultaneously. The following exercises are some of the exercises practiced in professional drama schools.

Because drama class will also be a room where students do these exercises on the floor, it is a good idea that there is a place in the drama room where students don’t wear their shoes. The floor in this area should be clean. And there should be enough exercise mats for each student.
Call out and demonstrate the following poses (stretches). Encourage students to breathe in as they are moving into the pose and breathe out when they are in the pose. Encourage students to silently hold the pose as long as they are comfortable doing so. While in the pose, they should take several deep breaths. Now to the “acting stretches” …

Stand like a tree.
Stand like the “king of dance.”
Sit like an eagle.
Stand like a hero.
Stand like a heroine.
Act like a hero/heroine sitting in a chair.
Act like a camel.
Sit up like a cobra.
Make your body look like a horse’s face.
Act like a flying bird.
Act like a rocking boat.
Act like a rocking boat tipping over.
Act like a stretching dog.
Act like a strong, straight boat.
Act like a comfortable chair.
Act like a cat.
Lay down like a lion.
Act like a dancer.

Note: The above stretches ignite a lot of laughter. This is good. It gets everyone comfortable with each other. You may want to do these poses a few times with laughter. But require students to do it at least one time quietly and focused so as to develop focus and attention.

Yoga

Deep Breathing Exercises

Deep breathing is one of the most important calming methods that a teacher can use to prepare students for drama activities. Deep breathing, mixed with meditation and visualization, can be a very
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effective tool for better concentration, enhanced connection with the body, and as an introduction to creative play. It is effective with any age group.

If there is enough room, have students get on their backs, lying onto the floor. If there is not enough room, have the students put their heads down on their desks. Dim the lights and tell students to close their eyes. Use the following script for relaxation:

T: Close your eyes and pay attention to your breathing.

Breathe in and out.

Keep breathing and try to make your breathing slower and slower, getting quieter and quieter.

Feel your head on the desk, holding you up and keep breathing.

Feel your feet on the floor, resting. Feel your feet, relaxing.

Feel your legs, resting on the chair.

(Go all the way up to relax the whole body.)

This exercise calls for a lot of concentration because it is an introduction to the concept of deep breathing. After the execution of this exercise, variations on breathing can be better integrated into other activities.

Musical Dramatic Play

For young children, movement is the first and foremost vehicle through which they are able to communicate their feelings. To young learners, dance has nothing to do with performance. It simply provides a physical aide to verbal expression. Movement is a primary mode of communication for humans and it is important that it be developed as such. The goal of music and movement in early childhood is creative communication of feelings and ideas. Music and movement in the language class is a useful tool because creative movement is a function of our innate biological rhythms and coincides better with natural human expression than any other art form. The creativity that is inspired in children while performing dance/language activities makes the language lesson much more expressive and memorable.
Children will dance spontaneously all by themselves. The teacher’s task is to channel this expressiveness into lessons. Below are several activities that can be integrated into the EFL classroom.

_Dance like a . . . —_Children can act out almost any language through dance. Play some music and call out commands, such as “Dance like red./Dance like blue./Dance like a heart./Dance like you’re happy./Dance like a pen./Dance like a pencil./Dance like a doll./Dance like a top./Dance like a toy car.” You can also teach adverbs that you will use regularly in your class, such as: quietly, loudly, kind, gently. Use these adverbs in sentences, such as “Dance quietly./Dance loudly./Dance slowly./Dance fast.”

Note: There is nothing really the students couldn’t act out through dance. If you question the possibilities, just think of a ballet through which whole stories are told simply through dance. If you can’t think of a way to dance like a pencil or the color red, don’t worry, your students will be bursting with ideas.

_Flashcard Dance—_Review a set of flash cards for words you want the students to practice. Have the class sing a song to music. Put the flash cards in a box and pass it around while they are singing. When you call out “Stop!” the student holding the box pulls out a flash card. She or he stands up and dances in a way to reflect the object on the flash card. The class guesses what the word is.

_Dancing Letters and Numbers—_Have students write letters or numbers. They can tape their letters to the wall or floor. Then, ask them how they could recreate them using their bodies. Play some music, and have the students dance their letters or numbers. Initial movements may simply involve walking, hopping, or sliding the pattern out on the floor, or drawing it in the air with a hand or foot. The class can guess what the letter or number is.

Variation: Duets can be formed as partners walk out different pieces of the same pattern. By dividing students into small groups, one student can move other student’s bodies into shapes that mimic a given pattern.

_Emotions and Music—_Play various pieces of classical music (or
different styles). Ask the students to dance in the way the music makes them feel. Then, have them tell you the emotion they feel each time they hear a piece of music. They can make answers, such as “I feel happy/sad/angry/scared/sad/excited.” Extension: Ask students to describe a time when they felt that emotion.

*Draw the Music*—Play an instrumental piece of music. Tape a large sheet of paper to the floor for the students. Tell the class you are going to “paint some music together” and assemble some assorted art materials. As you play the music, ask the students to think of the colors or images the music makes them think of. If you are teaching colors, ask, “Listen to the music? What color is it?” If you are teaching shapes, ask, “What shape is it?” Ask other questions like this based on the topic you are studying. Children listen and paint what the music elicits in their imaginations. Hang the pictures on the wall when they are completed. Sit back, away from the pictures, and begin to talk about them with the students. Then, play the music and ask them to act out through dance the color, object, feeling the music made them feel. While dancing, ask individual students to tell you what they are acting out.

*Dance the Letters* (for groups and individuals)—Preparation will involve printing enough letters for each member of your class. Decide upon four or five letters to begin with and hand out individual printed letters to each student. Either with chalk or a marking pen, write a large letter on the board or on paper. While saying the name of the letter, have the students trace the letter with the index finger of their preferred hand. Can they make the shape of this letter using their whole body? Encourage them to experiment making the same letter in a different position, such as lying down, kneeling, or standing on tiptoe. Repeat this procedure using the four or five letters you have printed. After presenting each of the prepared letters, ask the class what letters were easier to make with their bodies, the hardest, the most fun, and so on.

Note: If you plan to complete the entire alphabet, this exercise will take many sessions to complete.

*Dancing Dialogues*—Using pictures drawn by the students
(perhaps in a previous class/exercise), ask the students to either perform a dialogue based on the pictures or identify the objects in the pictures. Then, ask them to make up a dance to go with the pictures as they perform the dialogues.

**Fine Art, Feelings, and Dance**—Even young children can see the emotion in many works of art. The ability to empathize with the feelings of others is something that should be fostered in all children. As teachers, we can use this ability to help students to talk about emotions. This activity requires paintings or pictures that display emotion. The artwork should be accessible to children; works that have children as the subject work well. Once you have chosen your works of art, point to each painting and ask, “How does the picture make you feel?” They can answer you in English or their native language. If they answer in their native language, help them to say the feelings in English. Give them a few minutes to construct a dance about this feeling or idea. They may want to add music or props. Children can construct their play-dances individually, in small groups, or in one large group. Play various pieces of music for the students to choose from before they perform their dances.

**Dancing Opposites**—Based on words the students have learned or you have used in class, generate a list of opposite words: big/small, good/bad, pretty/ugly, loud/quiet, happy/sad. You can enlist the students help in making this list. Then, have the students perform both words from a pair individually, constructing, for example, both a “loud” and a “quiet” dance.

**Cartoon Dances**—Children love to watch videos. Young children most readily respond to concrete images. Cartoon characters are purposefully caricatured so that children can immediately discern general personality features. Have the students watch a few video clips. Ask the students to observe the individual characters very carefully. Each child will select a character from one of the videotapes. Keeping their chosen character a secret from the others, students should develop the movements of their individual character so she or he is easily recognizable. The students will mime the character for the rest of the
class. Each character should be presented one at a time in a kind of
guessing-game format. You can ask, “Who is it? What’s his/her name?”

Variation: You and your students may choose to portray a student in
the class.

Puppet Play—Using language from your course book, you can
create mini dialogues. With more advanced students, the teacher and the
students may work together to write dialogues. Using puppets, the
students perform the dialogues. The following are some puppetry
suggestions. To prepare the class for making all types of puppets, bring a
large box to class and decorate it. Fill the box with all sorts of supplies
such as: construction paper, magazines, buttons, fabric, glitter, yarn,
tongue depressors, crayons, markers, paint, paintbrushes, straws, paper
bags, plastic bags, old jewelry, old socks, different kinds of hats, pasta,
stickers, and dolls clothes. You may want to construct a simple theater
for your class puppet. A simple theater can be constructed using a large
box, a piece of cloth, and a table. First, drape the cloth over the table.
Then, cut the bottom out of the box and place it on its side on the table.
This will provide a simple theater for the class’ performances. Students
can also decorate the box and cloth to make it more interesting.

Straw Puppets—Bring old magazines to class. Give each student a
drinking straw and a magazine. Instruct them to cut out one picture of a
person. Tape their pictures to one end of the straw.

Photo Puppets—Have the students draw (or use personal photos)
and cut them out. Children then glue the pictures to a tongue
depressor/craft stick. Have one of the students hold up his/her picture.

Sock Puppets—Have the students bring one or two old socks to
class. They can decorate the toe-end of the socks with eyes, a nose, and
mouth. The class can use the sock puppets to practice the language of
the units, role play, and put on plays.

Sticker Puppets—Have the students tape stickers to their fingers.
Then they can practice the language from any of the units, role play, or
tell simple stories.
Dramatic Play

Using language from your course book, you can create mini-dialogues. As students perform the dialogues, you can do the following activities to add a dramatic element to your dialogues:

**Masking!** —Bring large paper bags, or paper plates, to class. To make the *paper bag masks*, have the class cut the top half off of the bag. Then turn the bag upside down and cut an eight-inch circle from the front. This circle will be the face. Then, have the students decorate their masks with yarn, construction paper, different types of pasta, crayons, and markers. To make the paper plate masks, have the class draw a face on the paper plate. For hair, they can tape or glue yarn to the edge of the plate. Cut out holes for the eyes. Punch a hole in each side of the plate; tie a piece of yarn in each hole. Once the students are ready to wear their masks, tie the ends of the two pieces of yarn together. This will hold the mask onto the students’ heads.

**Act Out the Photos**—Have the class cut out pictures from magazines. Put the photos on the wall. Students choose the characters they want to pretend to be. Have students perform dialogues from the units, in the character of the people in the pictures they chose. For example, if the class is practicing body parts, one student would point to a person in his or her picture and say, “This is my nose./These are my eyes.” with the inflection and personality he or she imagines the character in the picture would have.

**Act Like a Toy**—Place many small toys in a large box. Have the class sit in a circle. Pass the box around the circle. Each student takes one toy from it. They pretend to be the toy as they perform a dialogue or say some expressions from the units.

**Let’s Talk!**—Have the class sit in a circle. Model nonverbal communication by demonstrating an emotion or behavior. For example, pretend to cry.

Example:

T: How am I feeling?
Ss: (with help) Sad.
T: Very good.
T: (Pretending to be happy by smiling). How am I feeling?
Ss: Happy.
Continue to practice nonverbal communication with other emotions or behaviors. Some suggested ways to use the body for this are:

Excitement—Clap your hands

Anger—Place hands on hips; glare at someone

Copycat!—Ask students to act out dialogues or expressions from the units in the role of an animal. The class watches the actor(s), and guesses which animal he or she was pretending to be.

Role-Playing—Create scenarios that teaches manners and politeness, such as eating together, playing together, meeting new people. Have children practice polite English words/expressions such as please, thank you, you’re welcome, I’m sorry, that’s OK, are you OK?

In Someone Else’s Shoes—Invite your youngsters to step in someone else’s shoes. In advance, collect a variety of different kinds of shoes, such as work boots, high heels, and swim fins. (Or find pictures of different kinds of shoes.) Display the shoes one pair at a time. Ask a child to pretend to put on the shoes. Then ask him questions to get him thinking about the person who would wear the shoes. How would someone wearing the shoes walk? What would the person do? What would the person say? Next ask the child to get up and walk around, pretending to be the person who would wear those shoes. Continue choosing different shoes for the children to dramatize. After the students have had a chance to “be dramatic” in these shoes, have them perform dialogues and expressions from the units, while remaining in character of the person who would wear the shoes.

Super Capes—Turn your little ones into super actors by providing students “actor capes.” Capes can be made out of pieces of any kind of fabric. But the really “fun” fabric would be satin, velvet, or fake fur. Capes can easily be made by sewing a piece of ribbon into a folded end of a piece of cloth. Students can wear the capes as they act out dialogues
and expressions from the units.

*Magic Wand*—As your students perform sentences/dialogues from units, suddenly touch them with a magic wand (a fancy wand, made by you), and say to them “Now you are a ....”) Fill in the blank with any fun character you would like to see the children act out. They continue their performance in the voice/persona of the designated character.

**Acting Exercises**

The following are short acting games/exercises that get the students to build their acting skills.

*Dramatic Greetings*—Two partners begin at opposite ends of the playing space. When they reach the center, they greet each other without using words, but in the following roles:

- jealous people
- angry people
- best friends
- two robbers
- athletes
- a movie star and a fan

The class receives the list of characters. They watch and guess which ones the pair is acting out.

*Emotional Memories*—There's a technique that actors sometimes use called “emotional memory." This exercise helps actors to work on stimulating particular emotions when acting.

Students get into pairs. One student is the acting teacher and the other is the acting student. Partner A gives Partner B some emotions to remember from the list below. Partner A listens, then closes his or her eyes and imagines for a moment. Encourage students to take the time to imagine and try to feel the emotion completely. For example, say, “Remember a time when you were ...”

- happy
- sad
• excited
• bored
• hungry
• tired
• angry
• jealous
• in a bad mood
• in a good mood
• laughed hard
• cold
• hot
• proud
• embarrassed

_Sensory Memories_—To practice sensory memories, students do the same activity as above, but they should recall the senses of the following experiences:

• eating a lemon
• peeling and eating an orange
• standing in the rain on a warm day
• swimming underwater
• standing in a hot shower

Extension: Students do the same activity again, but this time they pantomime as they imagine. They should be encouraged not just to pantomime but to really imagine and "feel" the experience as they do the actions.

Variation: Previous to the above activity, you can help students increase the power of their senses through a blindfolding activity. Students get into pairs. One is blindfolded and the other is his or her lead. The leader leads their partner around the room to pick up and feel/smell various objects such as fruits, herbs, vegetables, classroom objects, clothes with various textures.

Another technique actors use is to assume the facial expressions and postures of a particular emotion. Some acting schools teach that if one
makes the face and stands in the posture of a particular emotion, they will start to feel that way. Give students the reproducible on Pose the Emotion. After students read it, they can do the following activity.

_Become the Emotion_—Tell students to use their faces only to make you begin to feel the following feelings. Call out the emotions. Students make the facial expressions. They hold the (angry) expression a few moments. Then, ask them if they began to _feel_ the emotions.

The following is a list of emotions you may want to call out:

- fear
- happiness
- anger
- disgust
- sadness
- surprise
- resentment
- anxiety
- frustration
- loneliness

Note: If students seem to shy for pair work, this can be a whole class activity.

**Creating an Emotion**

It is natural that the first technique in teaching acting is to help your students create an emotional response. It is the challenge of all actors to “feel the emotion” out of the context of the situation. How can we suddenly make ourselves feel really happy, sad, angry, and so on. Actors use the technique of emotional recall.

In acting schools, students are given sentences to practice saying such as “I’m sad.”, “I’m angry.”, “I’m tired.”, “I’m sick,” and so on. Students get with partners, and the class is essentially quiet. Partner A sits and tries to remember a time when he or she really felt this way. But Partner A doesn’t say the lines until he or she really feels the feeling. Partners take turns doing this. Of course, this activity can be done to
teach any feelings, no matter what level our students are. Even kindergartners have had experiences with all these emotions before.

We have never said anything without the impulse or an emotion attached to it. Even when we say something as bland as “What time is it?”, there is usually a reason.

We can attach such simple structures as “What time is it?” “What’s your hobby?” “Can you swim?” “Do you have some …?” to any such emotional recall activity. If, for example, you are teaching “What time is it?” you could say to one group of students, remember a time when you were really in a hurry and you were worried you were going to be late. When you remember this, then feel it. When you feel the feeling, then ask your partner, “What time is it?” in that urgent way. Your partner should then respond accordingly.

You can set up scenarios that will elicit the desired language, such as for “What’s your hobby?” and “Can you …?” Ask students to remember a time when they met a new friend and they wanted to know about that person. Ask them to recall the feelings and then engage in a dialogue with their partners.

Invite the “most natural” actors to the front of the class to demonstrate, so that the class gets a sense that the point is to act natural.

Now, this is just an acting exercise. But it can be extended to any of your dialogues. When students are performing dialogues in their books, simply create situations and character backgrounds before they act them out. Determine with your students what emotions they may be feeling. And then have them act out the situations, using emotional recall to improve their acting.

Your course books will contain dialogues like the following one:

**At the Supermarket**

Girl: Excuse me, do you have apples?
Clerk: Yes, they are over there.
Girl: Those look good. How much are they?
Clerk: They are three dollars a kilo.
Girl: That’s expensive!
Clerk: The bananas are two dollars a kilo.
Girl: OK. I will buy the bananas.

Emotion can be brought into even simple dialogues such as the one above by asking questions. For example, What kind of character is the girl? Is she nice? Is she bad? Is she nervous/scared, very kind/very bad, super kind/super bad? Simply create a personality. Then, ask other questions. How old is she? Why does she want the apples? How does she feel now? What does she want now? What does she want to do now? Once you have answered these questions, the students will have an understanding of the character’s intention, motivation, and emotion.

Whether you ask the above questions in English or in the students’ native language depends on the level of your students. By asking these questions, the situation becomes more memorable for the students, they will be more likely to acquire the lesson. Thus, it is valuable in this case to use the students’ native language.

If your students need some support when you pose the questions, ask the questions in a “menu” or “choice” format. For example, Is she nice or mean? Then, students can simply answer “nice” or “mean”. This form is easy for them because the answer is embedded in the question.

No matter what the level your students are when you ask these questions, your students and you are playwrights as you establish the characters and the situation of your dialogue. As playwrights, it is your job to create an interesting story/situation.

After the students have established the characters and how the characters are feeling in the moment of the scene, ask them to remember when they felt this way before. Then, have them perform the dialogues with that feeling in mind.

If they have, for example, created a character who is mean, they may say that they have never felt that way before. Push them by asking when they felt really grumpy, tired, or irritable. If they have created characters with whom they are sure they can’t associate with such as a
conceded person or a greedy person, ask them to imagine how that kind of person would feel before they act out.

**Activities for Advanced or Bilingual Students**

* Becoming Characters—All of us have unique qualities that make us different from anyone else. Even people who have similar jobs or grew up in similar areas are different from each other. For each of the following situations, have students think of a specific person, whether or not he or she actually fits the type of situation or job. Then, have them go off stage (or to the side of the playing area) and enter the stage (or space), pantomiming.

**Situations:**

1) a police officer who has bad news to tell someone  
2) a student who just failed a test and is going to tell his parents  
3) a doctor who is going to tell the father that his wife just had a baby girl  
4) a worker coming home from a really difficult day at work  
5) a man who is going to tell his family that he has just been fired from work  
6) an actor who made a big mistake on stage  
7) a speaker is arriving one hour late to seminar; one hundred people are waiting for him  
8) a student coming home to tell his parents he won a prize at school for his good grades  
9) a boss who has to fire a friend  
10) a soccer player who is walking off the field after missing an important goal  
11) a woman swimmer coming home after she won an Olympic gold medal  
12) a scientist who is walking on stage to accept the most important prize in science  
13) a newspaper photographer in a hurry, try to catch up with the president so he can take his photo  
14) a preacher walking quickly to get to a wedding that he is thirty minutes late for  
15) a famous pop star walking on stage to get a prize

* Pantomiming Statements—After students have had a chance to act
out one of the characters above, they can then take turns acting out one of the statements below. The rest of the class watches and guess what they are acting out.

Statements:

1) I wish I could buy that. I really want it. But I don't have the money.
2) I am old now. I wish I was young.
3) This is the best day of my life.
4) Why did this happen to me? I am so upset.
5) I wish I didn't do that.
6) What's wrong with you?
7) I think I am doing this wrong.
8) Oh no! I made a mistake.
9) I have always wanted to do this.

Extension: Put students in pairs. One partner is a sculpture and the other is the sculptor. The sculptor puts his partner in a position that represents one of the above sentences. The partner guesses which one. Then the pairs do this same activity in front of the class. The class then guesses which sentence the student is acting out through his or her pose.

_Learning to Build Characters_—After students have become comfortable with performing in front of their classmates, they can begin to learn how to create characters.

_Kids in History_—The following are exercises that enable students to begin to “build characterization.” Provide students with historical photos of other children their age. The children in the photos are just random people, not necessarily famous individuals. In pairs, students write a character description of two of the children. They include what they think they’re like. They should put themselves in their places and figure out what sorts of problems the children may have had at that period in time and who else may have been involved in their lives. They should try to make something realistic, however, if they really wish, it can be humorous. But considering they were real people, they should be treated with respect. Brainstorming as a class what questions should be answered in their character descriptions can help the students to focus
on what questions they need to answer. The class brainstorming list can be written on the board to further support the students.

After students have written their descriptions, they decide on who is going to play which roles and they write a two, three or four minute skit with the two people in the photos as central characters. This skit doesn’t necessarily have to be performed in front of the whole class. That would indicate the need for a performance. This exercise is not designed to be a performance. But the objective is for students to become sensitive to characters and to begin to feel the characters.

Characters From The News—Find stories in the newspaper about people. Tell their stories at the level of the students. In these stories, your students can read real newspaper stories (at their language level) about interesting people. The stories should feature unusual people and events. For this exercise, students choose one story that interests them. The class breaks up into groups of four to six. The group brainstorms for ten minutes about how the person from the story can be the basis of a skit involving the group. After they have brainstormed they decide which idea they think will work best. Then they work out the details of a two, three or four minute skit or improvisation (depending on their ability to do so). They then present the skit to the class.

Talk Show—Students choose famous characters. They can be historical characters, folk story characters, movie stars, political figures, comic book characters, pop stars. It is the students’ choice. Students set up a mock interview talk show. One student is the talk show host. The others are the guests. The guests should focus on becoming and truly acting as that character. Previous to this activity, you may want to help students prepare to “get into character” by having students write personality descriptions of their characters. Do this as a whole class activity, by brainstorming on the board, with the class the questions a character profile should answer. This character profile will be the basis of how students act out their characters in the talk show.


**Realism in Acting**

It is important that the children learn that most acting we see on TV and in the movies is based on realism. It is actually a lot more difficult to act realistically than it is to exaggerate emotions. The following are exercises that help students develop their “realistic acting skills”.

**Realistic Acting**—Have students take turns doing at least two of the following. The rest of the class watches and guesses which one they are acting out. The students try to act out the situations below realistically. They should not try to be funny.

**Situations:**

1) an athlete after running three kilometers
2) a girl who lost a very important tennis game
3) a young mother carrying a baby and a bag of groceries
4) a famous movie star walking into a restaurant
5) an old man who was a wrestler when he was young
6) a ten year old girl who is wearing shoes that are too small
7) an 80 year old taking a walk
8) a scared teenager walking in a dangerous place
9) a robber escaping from a bank

**Realistic Facial Expressions**—Have students stand in front of the class and through any means other than words, they portray an emotion. They do this through facial expression, gestures, stance and movement. They should not exaggerate it or "ham it up." The focus is for them to act as natural as possible. They can use the following emotions or others:

- rage
- fear
- love
- hate
- worry
- anger
- pity
• sorrow
• joy
• anxiety

As soon as someone else in the class has figured out the emotion, this person should come to the front and portray the same emotion in a different way. This will continue until five different people have portrayed each emotion. Each person should have a turn at being first.

What’s the Situation?—Choose a word and a message that go together. For example, joy: I just got an A on a test. Then, go to the front of the class and act these out as the class tries to guess the word and the situation. Limit the time so that each student just has one or two minutes.

What’s the Relationship?—Students work in pairs. Through actions only, they show a relationship between the two characters. And they should demonstrate how they feel about each other. For example, they could show a coach yelling at his player. The coach could be angry and the player ashamed or embarrassed. Students can think of their own characters or choose one of the following.

Characters:
• best friends
• mother/daughter
• father/son
• father/daughter
• mother/son
• bully/victim
• boss/worker
• teacher/student
• coach/player
• older sibling/younger sibling
• set of twins
• salesperson/customer
• director/actor
• principal/teacher
Final Projects for Advanced or Bilingual Learners

For advanced learners, it is a good idea to let the class take a stab at “playwriting.” The following are three playwriting project suggestions:

1) Students will be given a number of funny skit scenarios to choose from. From the scenarios, they will write their own skits, practice, memorize and perform for the class.

2) Students write their own skits based on a realistic situation/problem they experience in their own lives.

3) Students take a traditional folk tale, or one they know and they change the ending. They put the story in the form of a skit.

Conclusions

To summarize, let us review the material covered in this unit, Teaching through Drama. First, we learned about relevant theories and approaches for drama activities. Second, we looked at the necessary preparation for facilitating appropriate and useful EFL drama activities. Next, we learned how to select, interpret, and adapt accessible stories (such as fairytales) into dialogue and movement. Finally, we explored ways to introduce and facilitate drama activities to students within the EFL classroom.

When considering educational theories and methodology, Creative Drama is the umbrella that covers or incorporates all others. Creative Drama works with TPR (Total Physical Response) by initially connecting with the body through meditation, and yoga. TPR is also used when continuing with movement through improvisation.

We demonstrated that equally important to Creative Drama is a supportive atmosphere. A safe place is necessary for students to express their feelings through Stanislavski’s “method acting” or “emotional memory.” Students must feel confident enough to not only speak in a foreign language, but share emotions and personal experience. This also
connects with Carl Rodger’s theory of a “non-defensive” learning environment.

However, as Creative Drama allows young learners to engage in what McCaslin calls, “dramatic play.” It requires teachers to carefully plan lessons based on supporting theories.

We showed how good drama lessons rely heavily on Functional Grammar to analyze materials. Functional Grammar is supported by Ausubel’s Meaningful Learning Theory. Both theories use students’ situational scenarios to take on meaningful words, phrases, and intonation. To set up such lessons, we demonstrated a number of methods for teachers and students to analyze character intention and Functional Grammar. By answering the same questions as the students, teachers are ahead of the game, anticipating responses and preparing relevant linguistic goals. We also taught how important it is to consider students’ attention spans, interests, as well as the need to be globally aware.

After explaining teacher preparation, we moved onto methods to create a fully student-centered lesson. Predicted dialogue was added for teachers to learn how to anticipate students’ response. By creating student/teacher dialogues, teachers can better plan for spontaneity as well as become more flexible in honing new language items.

In addition, we learned that constructivist theory also applies to adapting drama activities with Vygotsky’s theory of scaffolding. We showed how to adapt stories or real text by using scaffolding in two ways: to alter teaching technique and texts to make them both more “authentic, interactive, and purposeful” (Savignon 1991). For selecting stories, we kept in mind the limited resources of some teachers. Rather than using pre-written texts, we gave ideas for interactive worksheets for students to create their own drama materials.

We did the same when considering materials for craft projects, such as puppets and masks.

While adapting teaching styles, we placed students into groups or pairs rather than the more traditional approach that places the teacher
in front of the class, leading. This way the teacher can model the language for the class and then monitor the groups of students. Rather than getting minimal time to talk and waiting for the teacher’s approval, students get every opportunity to speak while the teacher monitors and encourages. The student becomes confident within him/herself. Rodger’s “non-defensive” environment also calls for teachers to become more “congruent” when teaching drama.

In addition, our application section used constructivist theory to explain EFL teaching techniques for drama activities. **Eliciting, concept check questions**, functional as well as **prediction** tasks were demonstrated as teaching methods for a student-centered drama lesson. **Intonation** was also utilized as a **Functional Grammar** method. The application section also included drama activities for inducing language such as: paired improvisations, describing the characters, letters to the characters, emotional memories, sensory memories, and various drama warm-ups and ice-breaking exercises.

While considering all theories applicable to **Creative Drama**, we also included **Gardener’s Multiple Intelligences** by employing the **body-kinesthetic, visual-spatial**, and **musical intelligence** through the Musical Dramatic Play section. These activities fully engage the students’ ability to create dances and songs for drama. Puppets also continue dialogues that started during the worksheets: letters and paired improvisation. Creating crafts also helps jumpstart children’s imagination when trying to play a part or become a character.

Teaching drama for EFL is fun, refreshing, and integrates a plethora of educational theories and methods. Drama and EFL also teaches us about the child’s perspective, learning styles, as well as linguistic goals. But this is only the beginning. Following constructivist theory, teachers and students will learn that process is more important than product. Every day, as we continue with the familiar tasks and duties of math, social studies, or history, we will still have the newness created by drama activities. By experimenting with various methodology, grasping educational and EFL theory, and inducing
imagination, teachers and students will enjoy drama time. Like a rush of fresh air, drama will continue to conjure the excitement and rejuvenation necessary for live language in the classroom.

References


