

## New Approaches in Teaching Drama

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***Abstract:** In a three – month – study at the School of Education and Professional Development in the University of East Anglia in Britain in 1996, I had the privilege to know, through my visits to primary, middle and high schools, new approaches of teaching drama. These approaches can be applied not only to plays, novels and short stories but to different subjects. Dramatization is considered a method of teaching that can be used in difficult subjects such as philosophy, history, grammar and humanities. Dramatization can take different techniques: debate, improvisation, tableau, the minute play, hot seating, production of ideas, design, subtext, theatre in education, pantomime and role-playing. These approaches extend the children's and students' imagination, make them learn through fun, entertainment and pleasure. Attending as many drama classes as I could, gave me a superb experience of new methods of teaching. They can help creating an atmosphere of learning through entertainment. I found out that the previous aim was one of Sprowston High's aims. That is why schools have to take such methods in their policy.*

Drama is not considered as a subject but as a method of teaching . Dramatization of lessons or teaching lessons using the method of introducing a story will be an innovative technique and an effective one as well . This can be used in drama lessons or any other subjects such as history , geography and humanities . My domain of interest is literature ; drama , novel , poetry and short story . My point of view is that dramatization can be used as a method of introducing moral judgment . This will enable the students to share in the events of the play or the novel they are studying . For instance , if they are studying King Lear and the characters are divided among the students , they can act and hold a trial of the characters . I think this will enable them to understand it and have their own views . They may have different viewpoints but they still shared in the process of learning .

Dramatization can be used in tough and difficult subjects, for instance , philosophy ; a teacher can hold a debate and choose some of his brilliant students to take the role of some philosophers . They can discuss several topics . Other students can play the role of ordinary people attending the debate and start asking questions concerning the topic being discussed . Other subjects can be explained in the same method and will give better results than presenting lessons in ordinary lecturing method . History is a rich subject and various events can be dramatized in class by the students . Teachers can play the role of a director . Teaching drama has new approaches which help giving an analytical pattern through enjoyment and fun :

There is a choice in education between ( a ) explaining the teacher's aims to the group and giving the group the analytical pattern that is being used for a critical appraisal , drama communicates in terms of gestures , facial expressions defining these and then discussing them , or ( b ) setting up a series of situations where those taught will discover for themselves elements of communication and make personal assessments about their value...

We would never use a direct analytical approach with younger children or groups where their cultural backgrounds are different from the tutors . This was the reason for disguising the analysis under game . ( Gowan 7 )

Drama is taught in level 6 in the English department in the Faculty of Arts and Admin., Bisha University . Drama is being taught in a traditional old method . It is based on the teacher who does the explanation of theme , plot , characters and checking students' understanding through questions and answers . In other words, The burden of explanation , introducing characters and reading extracts of the text in front of the class and giving analysis is on the teacher from the beginning to the end . What students do is just perceiving and listening without having a role of their own . Therefore, the connection between the students and the play is missing . This missing link leads to the conclusion of having dull time with a subject which is supposed to introduce enjoyment , fun , participation and acting . This has nothing to do with numbers of students , materials, having a theatre or various aids to make acting work out . I think that a teacher is the main linking circle in such a teaching process . Therefore , this idea of being helpless because of the previous causes has to be uprooted .

There are various methods to present drama in a language classroom. Drama , novel , poetry and short story can be presented in scripted text to be acted . Drama in a language classroom aims at having participants from the side of the students . It is about getting students talk in a situation which is interesting and motivating . They can acquire language easily through fun , enjoyment and acting . Creating a body language is a means to put an end to feeling shy or awkward to act . We can create a picture by which we are going to organize students . This technique is called Tableau . It aims at using volunteers to make a " photo " of a particular scene in groups . Thus , we will have people and treat them as puppets or manikins in a tableau . Other techniques can be used in teaching drama such as improvisation , the minute play , hot seating , production of ideas , design and subtext . All these techniques can be applied in drama classes .

Drama can be taught in language classroom using various approaches aiming at creating action , vividness and participation of students . Improvisation is closely connected to role play . A teacher can create a situation with a student through choosing a place like a mountain and improvise sentences and scenario . Then , it can be practiced among students ; each group works on its own dialogue , either entirely or by finishing off sentence prompts .

The one minute play is another technique of introducing the most effective and thematic events of a play. The scenes of the play can be divided among groups. Each group has to act the scene in one minute. If there are ten groups, the play can be acted in ten minutes concentrating on the most crucial events in the play. Students choose the key words and act it quickly. Thus, they will never ever forget the plot. One of the most vivid approaches is hot seating. This can be done after acting a play. We will have a hot seat and we put our characters on it one after one. Then, students ask characters "Why did you do that?" He/she has to answer in terms of the character. Answers are matter of opinion and debate. We can have the play: Taming of the Shrew as an example. The character of Kate the shrew can be put in a situation to defend herself on a hot seat. We can imagine the dialogue: "Why did you behave in a rude manner at the beginning of the play?" Kate's answer can be as follows: "I had to behave in this manner because everyone was praising my younger sister Bianca for her virtues and suitors only came for her. She was my father's favourite one. I was put in this situation. I was refused by everyone so I met their refusal with a stronger and severer one."

Subtext is another approach used for analysis. Students with the help of their teacher put the thoughts under the words. They try to get into the characters' thinking. They will have the character and another person behind him, trying to know what is going in his head, what is meant by his words and what is going under the surface. The dialogue between Hamlet and Polonius when Polonius asked Hamlet: "What are you reading?" Hamlet answer "Words ... words ... words." Maxims of speaking can be applied on Hamlet's words during the play especially when he was pretending to be mad. Teaching drama is an art of presenting and putting stories into action and involving students in the story. It aims at teaching and instructing students without feeling they are learning something. In other words, teaching through fun, enjoyment which will enable students to memorize the incidents of the play easily giving them time and place to participate.

In a three – month – study in the School of Education and Professional Development in the University of East Anglia in Britain in 1996, I witnessed new approaches of teaching drama. Theatre in Education is an approach of presenting plays in schools by real actors. This trend started in the sixties of the twentieth century by groups of actors, then by companies. Groups of actors or companies running such activities had a fund. Theatre in Education is a special theatre in Britain. Small groups of actors decided to create their work in schools for children. Theatre Education Company makes plays, goes into schools and presents them. In early days, plays were written, directed and acted by actors. Five or six actors talk about a particular point to make it more interesting than mere talking. They present up to date issues; social and political. students will learn a moral lesson or will be given time to think and have their own way of judging situations and have their opinions, therefore, they will not be easily led. This is what is meant by participation.

A play called Pow Wow was shown by a group of actors for young children . It was about North American Indian language . A real cow boy took the children to a place where they saw an Indian . Children saw an Indian in cage . Children started to talk to the Indian and moral issues about wild West were discussed . After the play different forms of participation can be done . Work shop is a kind of participation and hot seating for the characters of the play creates a vivid and alive situation . It gives the children a chance to express themselves easily .

There is another kind of theatre called Forum Theatre . It is a street theatre . A Brazilian actor called Augusto Boal performed plays in the streets . He wanted to break the barrier between audience and actors . The audience can change drama ; in other words , something can be created by the audience after finishing the play . For instance , one central character has a problem . It may be the protagonist , then one of the audience comes to the stage and says to the actor " You do not perform well . I will act instead of you ." This gives the audience a chance to use their wits and intelligence to change the situation . Theatre in Education can discuss crucial themes such as endangered animals , destruction of rainforests . Plays can be acted in open air . Open air theatre can be in a forest . After the play is shown , several kinds of participation can be done e . g ; hot seating , work shop and sort of Forum Theatre or adaptation of Forum Theatre . Theatre in Education is linked to National Curriculum in Britain .

I saw a play called The Ugly Duckling . It was for children from five to eight . It is a simple story of an ugly duckling refused by all animals in the farm . It discusses the themes of self – esteem and safety . After the play is shown , hot seating was done and participation from the children was the target behind hot seating . Sometimes a scene is repeated because some particular thing , they wanted to concentrate on . Obeying Mum from the point of view of safety message is introduced in the play . Children learnt a lesson from the play through fun and enjoyment . Theme of safety is stressed on in English schools . Crucial part of teaching children is to teach children something about the world not just to write and read .

Some companies present literature e . g . ; The Merchant of Venice .The teacher spends the whole morning till the time of the play in a session discussing the play . Drama students in universities have Theatre in Education in drama sessions , go to schools and do it as a part of their course .

My visit to Long Stratton High was of great help as it enabled me to observe teaching drama in different classes and methods . First of all, I attended an interesting period in which the teacher asked the students of year ten to write a scene of their own . The teacher asked this task after finishing scene six . They have to write scene six A . The teacher has given them a clue to the characters they have to use to run a dialogue . The play was Gregory's Girl . The teacher also asked them to design a cover for the play as it will be part of their file of the scenes they have written .

I attended a drama period in the hall where the students are divided into groups to develop scenes . It was a workshop of developing scenes of *Midsummer Night's Dream* . They have already finished the play and the teacher asked each group to choose a scene to be rehearsed . The students will not stick to the language of Shakespeare . They can use their own language . After they finish their rehearsal , each group will go on the stage and act their scene .

Year seven students were studying a science fiction story ; *Space Hostages* . The students were acting ; in other words , it was workshop where a novel is dramatized . It is a story of nine children who were kidnapped in a spaceship . The students were developing a scene . In the scene , there was an interviewer who is talking to the children's parents and the people who witnessed the kidnapping . The students were rehearsing in groups . Then , each group acts the scene which they developed in front of the other groups .

Drama is also taught through movements and sounds . Expression is not only through words . In drama it can be through gestures , body posture and sound . Sound can express different feelings e . g . ; boredom , confusion , anger . Gestures express horror , fear , thinking , love , pain , frustration , greed , sadness , disgust . We can say that gestures and body postures are body language .

The teacher asked the students to do a pantomime in two minutes working in pairs . They have to mime a car accident . They have to imagine how the two drivers express their anger , being sorry , or frustrated for being late through gesture , body posture and sound . Then the teacher asked the students to give the words the expression that suits them ; feelings , moods and emotions e . g . ; worried , excited, brave and courageous . The board is full of words expressing emotions . They are asked to work in pairs ; one of the students choose a feeling e . g . ; disgust , fear , sadness , playful , nervous , brave , or annoyed . Then , he / she tries to make a still statue or to stand still giving the facial expression , body posture and gesture to give of the words he / she has chosen . Then , they are asked to express the words e . g . ; happy , sad , love through movement , sound , body language and gesture.

The teacher asked the students to stand away from each other . In other words , there is a space between each two of them . They try to write their names in the air with their fingers , going into rhythm and doing it several times . Then , the letters getting bigger up and down and moving their legs touching the ground . They also make with their bodies the shape of the letters . Then , they are tracing the letters on the floor giving the feeling of the letter in their movements ; each student needs to make a harmonious movement .

## PANTOMIME

Pantomime production is part of school policy ; specially in High Schools . For instance , Long Stratton High has a big performance at Christmas every year . I saw two of the performances ;

Cinderella and Jack and the Beanstalk on video at the school library . With the pantomime productions they aim to encourage and foster an enjoyment and love of theatre within the school .Second , they will involve as many students as is possible on and off stage . Besides , they aim to involve as many staff as possible . Third , consequently , they will encourage responsibility and commitment from the students and maintain a " no star policy " , where everyone in the production is seen as being important and integral . Fourth , pantomime involves other departments within the school , such as music , technology , art and information technology . Fifth , the performance gives all students the opportunity to become involved in some way . Finally , pantomime aims to encompass the whole school in a united effort and motivate students to perform in a professional manner .

When Penny Down and Sue Hall joined Long Stratton High in September 1990 , they both became aware in a very short time that there was the need to extend the students' interest and participation in drama . During the summer term of their first year , year eight pupils participated in a Medieval week across the curriculum . The year eight pupils who opted for drama during this week wrote and performed to pupils , staff and invited parents . They performed The Summoning of Everyman : a modern morality play . As a result of this Mrs. Down and Miss. Hall decided to approach the Head regarding a pantomime . To date , there have been four productions written , adapted and directed by Sue Hall and Penny Down and produced by Ann Turner , they have been :

Cinderella	1991
Aladdin	1992
Dick Whittington	1993
Jack and the Beanstalk	1994

Mark Hardwick , Brian Orland ( teachers ) and the school orchestra are an integral part of the production .

There is no doubt that the pantomime have proved to be a phenomenal success not only within the school but within the community . This is mainly due to the efforts of the staff who have willingly given of their time every production . Support from the friends of Long Stratton High school and parents has also been considerable . With each year , the amount of pupils involved , on stage , back stage and front of house has increased . Listed below are the approximate numbers of staff and pupils involved in each production .

Cinderella	90
Aladdin	135

Dick Whittington 170

Jack and the Beanstalk 170

Every year , a dress rehearsal is performed for the local old peoples' homes , followed by traditional tea provided by year eleven pupils . The pantomime also provides opportunities for those pupils participating in the Duke of Edinburgh scheme to realize a skill . Each year the production is videoed and photographs are taken by a professional photographer .

One of the outcomes of the pantomime has been the reintroduction of drama of GCSE to the curriculum and the development of drama as an integral part of the pupils' educational experience at the school . There is no doubt that without the support of senior management and staff within the school these productions could not take place . The pantomime is now seen as an integral part of school life .

My visit to Sprowston High School enabled me to observe how drama is taught and considered one of the most effective subjects . Drama teachers have the responsibility of teaching pupils how to act through various activities . They consider pantomime one of the most important activities which creates a wonderful co – operation between school and community . Sprowston High School's pantomime was a proof of a phenomenal success not only within the school but within the community . The Importance of Being Earnest ; a comedy in three acts by Oscar Wilde was the play chosen to be presented as the school's pantomime in March 1996 . The production team consisted of set design and painting , stage management , technical team , wardrobe , prompts and ticket sales . I think they did a professional work . The students who performed the play were like professional actors . That is because drama is taught from the beginning to be acted not to be memorized through questions and answers .

The cast and everyone involved in the this production received help and support from different shops and centres e . g . ; Wyvale Garden centre for the loan of flowers and garden furniture ; J. Sainsbury PLC for the provision of cucumber sandwiches , muffins ; other shopshelped in arranging the flower tubs and for printing the programme at such short notice . Parents and members of the school community were of great help , some of them shared with her make –up workshop, others provided with wigs and helped in the gentlemen's hair – styling . They were provided with Victorian furniture . The efforts of staff cannot be denied as they give their time and advice . They do great work behind the stage to make this performance a phenomenal success .

There was a notice which summarized Oscar Wilde's ideas and philosophy . It included some of his famous words and how the doctrine of " Art for art's sake " was presented and welcomed by Oscar Wilde . Here are some of these words :

The Importance of Being Earnest " ... is exquisitely delicate bubbles of fancy and it has its that we should treat all the trivial

trivial ,  
philosophy ...

things of life seriously , and all the serious things of life with sincere and studied triviality ."

Oscar Wilde

I think this notice is of great help to the students and the audiences who need to know an idea about the play . The students who shared in selling tickets , notices and drinks did an integral part in the play's success . I think this will provide the school with fund to help it do more and more successful performances .

Role – Playing

Another dramatic activity which cannot be ignored is role-playing . According to Rosensweig ( 1974 ) " role-playing is the dramatization of a real - life situation in which the students assume roles . It ... presents the students with a problem , but instead of reaching a group in solving it , the students act out their solution. " ( Rosensweig 41 ) Rosensweig argues that correctly chosen role-playing scenes expose students to the types of situations they are most likely to encounter inside and outside of the classroom . Feedback from the teacher provides them with the cultural and linguistic awareness needed to function in such situations , thus improving their self-confidence and ability to communicate effectively . It is an excellent technique for communicative practice of structures sensitive to social factors .

A role-play can be related to improvisation as we create a situation in both of them . But we have certain aims in role-playing which make it a little bit different . It has linguistic and cultural aims which have to be functioned in the situations . Role-play is an extension of imagination . Children assume roles in their games which help them to learn about life and to solve their problems . However , it is not only children who are adept at this skill ; all of us practice it whether or not we realize it . A good teacher uses role-play constantly , slipping into a different role to make a point , to elicit information from children , or to tell a story . A more elaborate use of role-play is for a teacher to take on a researched role in order to make a lesson come alive . Historical events will become more exciting and more significant if the teacher assumes the role of a character from the period . Children respond well to this approach ; they enjoy it , they retain information well , and they are encouraged to ask questions . I will give an example of starting a role-play with a classroom . ( Historical subject may be easiest to start with)

### To Plan Your Role

Think about what sort of person you might be :

Make a note of :

Your name

Your occupation

Your age

The year

Family details

Where you live

What your house is like

What sort of life style you have

Who your neighbours are

What work you do out of the home

How to use the artefacts you are showing

Whether you earn enough to keep yourself and family

What sort of situation you might find yourself in

How you might react to these situations

What sort of feelings you might have

This should give a teacher enough to answer many of the questions .

The teacher can pick one or two artefacts to show to the children . ( These may have been lent by friends or borrowed from a local museum) The teacher decides who might have used these artefacts . Then , he /she reads up the historical background as if he / she were planning a lesson . The teacher also decides : what clothes he / she will need to suggest the character . What events he / she will talk about . What issues he / she will raise .

### To Do a Planned Role –Play

A teacher sets out his artefacts in the classroom . Second , he either leaves the room for a minute and come back in costume or put on his costume in the classroom . Third , he starts to talk to the children in his role – play . Fourth , he encourages the children to question him about the artefacts and his role . If he does not know the answer to a question , he may improvise but he should not come out of role . At the end of the role – play , the teacher takes off an item of clothing , indicating to the children that he is no longer in a role . ( This is known as " de- rolling ".) The teacher discusses the role – play with the children . Then , he tells the children if there were questions he could not answer . He asks them how they could find out the answers for him . The children will soon get used to this approach and will look forward to meeting new characters .

To recapitulate , one can say that teaching drama is an art of dealing with texts , pupils , community , different kinds of approaches to reach to the point that drama is an integral part of school – life . This confirms that school is not meant for teaching , instructing and having exams at the end , its role is larger and greater than that . Drama , pantomimes , Theatre in Education changed the dull face of school and turned it into a wonderful place to stay in more and more time having fun , entertainment and pleasure . All these things will be found at the same time with learning which will give learning a pleasant shape . I wish we could apply the same techniques and approaches in teaching drama .

### Works Cited

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