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I Congreso Internacional de Enseñanza de Inglés en Centros Educativos



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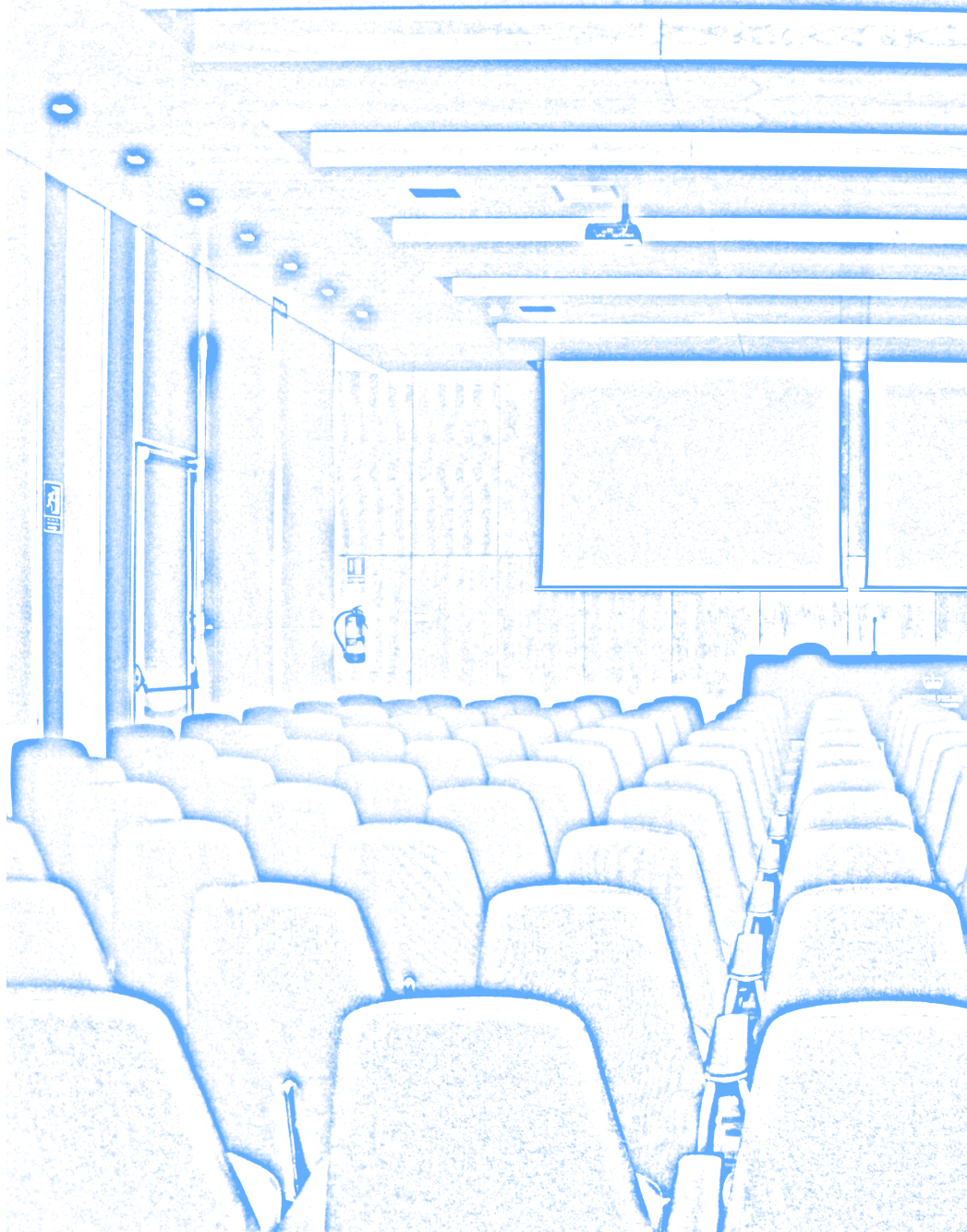


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**Actas del I Congreso Internacional de
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Drama in ESL lessons

CARLOS BUEDO A. G.

Resumen

Con este taller se pretende reflexionar sobre la importancia del teatro en la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras, así como presentar las últimas tendencias surgidas a partir de las investigaciones llevadas a cabo en este campo. Por una parte, se demuestra la presencia de elementos dramáticos en la mayor parte de los métodos y enfoques para la enseñanza de idiomas y se señalan los beneficios que aporta el drama a la clase de lenguas extranjeras, tanto desde el punto de vista de los investigadores como desde la propia experiencia personal. Por otra parte, se dan a conocer dos métodos para la enseñanza de idiomas basados exclusivamente en el teatro: el *Process Drama* y el *Glottodrama*.

Palabras clave

Teatro, métodos, enseñanza de idiomas, Process Drama, Glottodrama

Abstract

This workshop is aimed at reflecting about the importance of drama in second language teaching as well as presenting the last tendencies based on the research in this field. On the one hand, it is shown the presence of drama elements in most of the methods and approaches used to teach foreign languages and it points to the benefits in the second language classroom not only from the researchers' point of view but also from my own experience. On the other hand, *Process Drama* and *Glottodrama* are highlighted: two language teaching methods exclusively grounded on drama.

Key Words

Drama, methods, second language teaching, Process Drama, Glottodrama

Introduction

This workshop has a twofold objective. Firstly, it attempts to promote reflection on the importance of drama in ESL lessons and, secondly, it aims at providing the audience with the last tendencies related to the research on this subject. The workshop is divided into three sections.

1. *Drama "Connection"*: a warming-up for the audience to familiarize them with the world of drama and its importance in the teaching process.
2. *Drama and language teaching*: some activities oriented to engage the participants as well as to check the use of drama in their professional experience.
3. *Drama in the classroom*: latest most important approaches based on the use of drama in Second Language Teaching, *Process Drama* and *Glottodrama*.

Drama "Connection"

Since the 1970s, coinciding with the boom of the Communicative Approach, a lot of scholars have looked into the benefits of using drama in second language lessons. For that reason, we start with some "brushstrokes", which consist of several quotations taken from some authors who carried out research on this field. The quotations are divided into halves; the audience has to guess and match them. So they are given some food for thought for a start. Terms such as *learning by doing and communicating in context* get focused. Here are some examples:

What is Drama? Drama is doing. Drama is being. (Charlyn Wessels)

Words, which have been mechanically memorized, can turn to ashes in the speaker's mouth. (Maley & Duff)

Drama puts the emphasis on meaning rather than form. (Viola Spolin)

Drama forces us to take our starting point life not language. (Maley & Duff)

Be yourself in every language. (Carlo Nofri)

The audience has already checked some general ideas about drama given by specialists and now they are familiar with drama conventions, similarities between real life and drama and the different values drama can attach to words, that is to say we have reflected on the pillars which support why drama might be an excellent resource for ESL lessons.

After that, a video clip retrieved from *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* is viewed to remind Holden's concept of "let's pretend"¹ and its relevance as a life skill trigger. In this video clip, an actress plays different roles (she is sexy, she is in labour, and she is an annoyed teenager) but the text she uses is quite unusual for that situation (a recipe, a traffic report and a Wikipedia article); this would facilitate the understanding of the aforementioned concept. Susan Holden (1981) characterizes drama as any activity which demands the participant to portray himself or another person in an imaginary situation. Thus, drama is concerned with the world of "let's pretend". It offers an opportunity for a person to express himself through verbal language and gestures using their imagination and memory.

In this respect Holden (1981) distinguishes between the generic term "drama", referring to classroom activities "where the focus is on doing rather than on the presentation" (p. 8), and "theatre", which is concerned with performance before an audience, character development, physical setting, etc.

Drama and Language Teaching

Drama activities in the classroom

As a matter of fact, drama activities provide students with a variety of contextualized and scaffolding activities which foster participation and motivation. Besides, they improve language skills such as reading, writing, speaking as well as listening by creating a suitable context for the learning process and contrive a non-threatening and relaxed atmosphere.

John Dougill (1987) distinguishes different types of drama activities: warm-up exercises (including introductory warm-up, verbal and vocal warm-up, and trust and sensitivity exercises), mime, role-play, improvisation, simulation and scripts.

Having this in mind, the participants are invited to practice some of the previously mentioned drama activities. The first one (*Greetings*), taken from Lindsay Clandfield (2003), is an example of introductory warm-up exercise. Participants start milling around the room and greet each other. When the teacher claps his hands, they should stop and greet the person next to them in a specific way (as if s/he were a person they don't really trust, as an ex-boyfriend / ex-girlfriend, etc.). It's a good activity for breaking the ice and getting to know each other.

The second one (*Action Words*) is a vocal warm-up exercise. Students have to read a text, taken from Robert Cohen (2002), trying to show what they should "do" to the other person (i.e. - to alarm, to annoy or to calm the partner, etc.). While practicing their speaking, as they are given an intention previously, they could easily connect with their emotions and they automatically work on intonation.

The last activity (*Channel Hopping*), taken from Lindsay Clandfield (2003), is an example of improvisation. The class is separated into groups. Each group would be a channel of a TV show (a soap opera, a sportscast, the weather forecast, an action movie, etc.). Someone would point the remote at one group and pretend to turn on the channel. The group has to provide the speech of the channel or show they represent. The owner of the remote would change if s/he gets bored. All the participants are involved and have a lot of fun.

¹ "Drama is concerned with the world of 'let's pretend'; it asks the learner to project himself imaginatively into another situation, outside the classroom, or into the skin and persona of another person" (Holden, 1982, p. 1).

After having experienced the magic of drama, the audience is asked to answer a survey about the influence of drama on several aspects, such as pronunciation, speaking practice, vocabulary learning, writing, motivation, etc. And, before having a look at some different second language teaching methods and approaches, we discuss the benefits according to experts to check whether there are some coincidences with the results of the questionnaire.

According to Alan Maley (2005), these are the benefits of drama used in ESL lessons:

- It integrates language skills in a natural way.
- It integrates verbal and non verbal aspects of communication, thus restoring the balance between physical and intellectual aspects of learning.
- It draws upon both cognitive and affective domains.
- By fully contextualizing the language, it brings the classroom interaction to life through an intensive focus on meaning.
- It emphasizes on whole-person learning and multi-sensory inputs.
- It fosters self-awareness (and awareness of others), self-esteem and confidence.
- It fosters and sustains motivation.
- There is a transfer of responsibility for learning from teacher to learners.
- It encourages an open, exploratory style of learning where creativity and the imagination are given scope to develop.
- It has a positive effect on classroom dynamics and atmosphere.
- It is an enjoyable experience.

Methods related to drama

After creating a suitable atmosphere for drama, teachers are asked which language teaching methods they believe are linked to drama according to their own experience. After this brainstorming, they are given the list with the ones that might be considered most closely related to drama.

If we have a look at the methods and approaches used for second language teaching, we will find some parallels between them and those based on drama. For instance, both the *Direct Method* and drama activities approach language directly, using inductive strategies of the *here* and *now*. Besides, they both emphasize oral skills. Finally, some other elements of the Direct Method such as “contextualization”, “miming” or “learning by doing” can also be found in a drama oriented classroom.

Likewise, the *Communicative Approach* aims at teaching both “linguistic” and “communicative” competence. Drama provides the motivation and context for acquiring communication skills in the foreign language. On the other hand, a communicative classroom needs drama exercises, because they have a considerable impact on the development of communication skills and communicative competence. Other parallels between the Communicative Approach and drama in the language classroom are: student-centered activities, action-oriented learning, students’ active involvement, a low *affective filter* regarded as a prerequisite, contextual and textual exercises, and emphasis on conveying meaning through independent speaking and nonverbal language.

In this respect, the *Task-Based Language Learning* (TBLL), whose origins are in Communicative Language Teaching, is strongly connected to drama, because in this method communication tasks engage learners in a demanding mental process, expressing what they think or feel. At the same time, using drama in the language classroom seems to be a way of fostering both situational and interactional authenticity in language use: improvised dramatic activities and rehearsal promote the use of unplanned language, where every statement is open to a lot of possible responses. As Dougill (1987) states “drama activities help to bridge the gap between the cosy and controlled world of the classroom and seemingly chaotic composition of language in the world outside” (p. 6).

In the same fashion, the *Humanistic Approaches* have some characteristics in common with drama. For instance, the social base (*Community Language Learning*), the use of props and problem solving skills (*Silent*

Way), the emphasis on learning as fun, movement and here and *now* situations (*Total Physical Response*), and the creation of a relaxing and non-threatening atmosphere (*Suggestopedia*).

And finally, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) underlines the importance of culture and daily situations, which are also present in drama activities.

As we have just seen, the evolution of language teaching methodologies seems to move towards the use of drama techniques in the classroom. According to this idea, perhaps drama should be considered a useful and efficient tool for language teaching.

Drama in the classroom

The final section of the workshop focuses on the latest approaches used for teaching and learning a second language through drama: *Process Drama* and *Glottodrama*. They both engage the whole class in the project and are basically based on improvisation. Despite having their own characteristics, both of them have a similar structure. In fact, each lesson usually respects a pattern which distinguishes three main aspects: to stimulate → to act → to reflect. Thus, there is always an initial phase in which a stimulus (the textual or situational input) is given; then, the acting and linguistic performance phase and, lastly, there is a moment for debriefing.

Process Drama

The term *Process Drama*², widely used in North America (but originally from Australia), refers to a dramatic approach which proceeds without a script; it does not culminate in a final performance, and it is characterized by the absence of any external audience. All people in the classroom (including the teacher) assume different roles and become involved in the co-creation of a story.

The origins of Process Drama date back to the 1970s, when Gavin Bolton and Dorothy Heathcote started to practice and reflect on what was known as “drama in education”. It was firstly used to teach history, drama and English (L1) in primary and secondary contexts. Nevertheless, in the field of second language teaching Process Drama has gradually gained recognition as a valid approach in the last decades, thanks to the pioneering work of Shin-Mei Kao and Cecily O’Neill (1998) compiled in the book *Words into Worlds*.

Although Process Drama is based on improvisation for its *content*, it relies on a set framework for its *structure*. To begin with, the starting point for a Process Drama is a *pre-text* in a chosen context, an initial stimulus which launches the dramatic world in such a way that students will initiate and identify their roles and be responsible for what is going to happen in the development of the drama. The pre-text can be a story, an image, a newspaper article, an advertisement, the lyrics of a song, a short film or other item; any stimulus which triggers curiosity and motivation. After launching the pre-text, the Process Drama structure can be divided into three phases: the *initiation* phase, where participants create their own roles and become immersed in the dramatic situation; the *experiential* phase, where participants explore the dramatic world through several strategies, or ‘conventions’; and a *reflective* phase, where participants reflect on the learning, making their own meanings explicit. Within each phase, the participants experience a number of “episodes” which are not inter-connected in a linear, chronological sequence, but follow a non-linear narrative, playing with spatial and temporal dimensions in order to explore a theme, within the realm of human emotions and behavior.

During the experiential phase, the teacher makes use of *dramatic strategies*, or conventions, to structure the experience. Currently there exist over eighty Process Drama strategies (Neelands, 1999); each convention has a different purpose and can be used to create empathy, or distance, with respect to a certain theme or dramatic situation. Here are some examples:

- *Hot Seating*: A character is questioned by the group about his or her background, behaviour and motivation.
- *Still Images / Freeze Frames*: Participants create physical shapes by using their bodies to represent people, objects or abstract concepts.
- *Teacher in Role*: The teacher assumes the role of a character to guide and develop students’ learning.

² This final part of the workshop starts with a video, retrieved from the Griffith University website (2014), in which Erika Piazzoli, a researcher at the Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia, and currently a teacher at the Trinity College in Dublin, explains what Process Drama is.

Glottodrama

The *Glottodrama* method has been developed by an international partnership in the framework of the *Lifelong Learning Programme*. The project (<http://www.glottodrama.eu/index.php?lang=en>) started in 2007 and was aimed at the creation, scientific experimentation and validation of a totally drama-based methodology to teach foreign languages. It foresees a gradual and combined development of linguistic and acting skills.

Each Glottodrama course is divided into two sections. In the first one, which is called the “drama section”³, the participants work on the basic actor’s training using micro-texts, letting the students familiarize with acting activities and focusing attention on the gesture/word connection. In the second section⁴ they work with a more complex macro-text, which can be chosen from existing materials or can be self produced by the class.

The essential ingredients for a Glottodrama course are:

- Two teachers: one language teacher and one drama teacher
- A workshop classroom
- A “stage” area
- A video camera⁵
- An equipped grammar corner

Each teaching unit may require one or more lessons and represents an autonomous unit that, starting from a textual or situational input, preceded at the beginning of each lesson by a warm-up phase, initiates a circular pattern: performance → linguistic reflection → actor studio → back to the performance. To finish off, it follows a little explanation of how the elements of those teaching units are organized.

Input: every unit opens with the presentation and analysis of a text proposed by the teachers, sometimes reinforced with audiovisual supports. The student-actors should focus on and familiarize with the text or the situational input. This input might be immediately followed by an attempt at performance, as a “theatrical approach to the text”.

Linguistic reflection: this is known as the *Language & Grammar Corner*. The purpose of this phase is to discuss and explain the grammar and vocabulary from the text. This is achieved by students working autonomously in small groups and the teacher is a mere helper.

Performance: this is the rehearsal phase. The students’ performances are video-recorded and fully analyzed to provide support fostering self-evaluation.

Actor Studio: this phase of the teaching unit is the specific feature of Glottodrama. In this section, the drama teacher gives feedback and some clues about the students’ acting. Besides, this is the time for reflection on their intonational, mimic and gestural modes.

Back to the performance: there is a second performance in which the students fix the language structures, learn their roles and experience the expressive modes.

As we said before these phases have a circular pattern that has to be repeated over and over.

Final remarks

Drama uses the same tools that are used in the classroom. The constant evolution of the learning methods have facilitated that numerous techniques from the world of theatre have been increasingly adopted. The teacher’s role is also transformed and the participants in the classroom become not a mere part of the audience but active learning individuals communicating in the target language and connecting the classroom with real life. The teacher gets to be a researcher of their own practice which may evolve to a more comprehensive

³ This section allows a freer experimentation, the audience is made up of other students, and everybody is alternately actor and spectator, including the teachers, who put themselves into play just like the students. Everything happens within the group, and there are no time or organizational limitations as in the production of a full performance. This is the phase where the group learns to work together, where a cooperative spirit rises and different personalities emerge.

⁴ In this section, the course takes the features more clearly of “project-work”, and the goal of the activities becomes the “performance” before an audience within a given timeline.

⁵ The final performance will be filmed, and a copy of the film will be given to the students together with their certificates, as a lasting reminder of the work done.

approach to ESL, including the exploration of other forms of communication that go beyond verbal language, such as gesture, facial expressions, body posture, movement, intonation and other prosodic features.

As we have appreciated along this workshop, the final conclusion that might be drawn from it is that drama seems to be a useful tool for language teaching. All in all, I hope that this workshop has effectively shown the benefits and the importance of using drama activities in the classroom and consequently, I would like to encourage all the teachers to give an opportunity and make an attempt at using drama in the classroom as frequently as possible to experience the improvements we can obtain from it. I wish the audience had taken some useful ideas with them to put into practice in the future in order to share the magic of drama in language teaching.

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