

Drama : simply performing or more ? infant primary

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The normal understanding of this word by teachers in our country is that of an end-of-year performance planned at the beginning of the school year and prepared for over the school year.

It also implies hard work for both teachers and pupils.

Nowadays, thanks to new thinking either in learning styles or in teaching methodology, drama is a subject in the national curriculum in some countries, such as the UK, whereas in others it is considered as a technique to improve learners' skills.

As all subject teachers may be involved in drama work it fosters cross-curricular lesson- planning and team-work. That means that children's needs and learning processes can be focused on during the whole activity.

Why use drama ?

There are many good reasons for using drama activities in infant and primary classes, here are some:

Drama helps children to:

become aware of their own identity

In drama sessions children learn about emotions, problem-solving and relating to other people. In this way they build up an image of themselves and of the outside world.

become aware of their social role

Children feel part of a group, learn how to work co-operatively with their classmates and get ready to face up to any situation.

become confident

Through their experiences in drama, they can develop their imagination, creativity and learn how to learn. As a result, their confidence will increase and they will build a positive image of themselves.

learn according to their own style

As in drama any kind of expression is accepted, any intelligence can be fostered and valued. As a consequence, an individualised learning process is guaranteed.

Resources for drama

A useful resource to start a drama session is a story. You can use any story you like, from a traditional to a modern one. Traditional stories can help children to understand a foreign language better as they already know its content in their mother tongue but that isn't a good reason for limiting your choice and not exploring your pupils' creativity.

With my young learners I prefer short action stories as I have found that they are a good way of training them for drama purposes. They are in fact enjoyable and enhance the children's imagination and creativity, as well. In using them, children have the chance to experience body language, to get into the story more easily and to acquire a considerable amount of language.

Other resources for drama can be any objects, collected by the children, which may fire their imagination and become a part of a setting or even a character to whom they can give a voice. All the objects can be stored in drama resource boxes and used when the time seems ripe. Children should have the chance to access them easily in order to find the props which will enable them to express their creativity.

Arts and crafts

Children love making things like masks on their own. Through these they can get into the characters and the story events more easily. Don't feel frustrated if some characters have in part or totally lost their original features.

The fact is that each child has his own way of interpreting the outside world.

When making things, give the children clear instructions in L2 (and in L1 if necessary) while showing them what to do. In this way children will be able to take on board a considerable amount of language without feeling pushed into learning it.

A drama session outline

Here's how you can do an **action story**:

- **Material** – prepare all the material you will need such as flashcards or board pictures of the characters and the objects mentioned in the story.
- **Preparation** – Learn the story by heart and practise it.
- **In class** – Use the flashcards to introduce the characters and to teach new words.

Here is a drama lesson path I planned and followed with my six and seven year-old pupils.

Level : absolute beginners

Age group : five to seven

Aims

Language : to practise listening and acquire some food- vocabulary

Other: to work together to perform a story, to share ideas in order to create a script, cast the characters and perform a play.

Time – a 50 minutes-lesson for telling the story and another four lessons for creating a script, making masks and performing the story.

Material : Pictures of the story- sequences and flashcards related to food items.

Procedure

- Tell the children that they are going to listen to a story called **A hat ? Yummy, Yummy!**
Mime the title in order to help them understand the meaning.
Show them the pictures of the characters (a dragon, some children and a rabbit) while naming them.
Use the flashcards of the food items to teach the words. Ask the children what the story will be about and listen to their ideas, expressed in L1.
- Get the children to mime actions and words as follows

Words to be mimed	Actions
Small	Put your hands together as if you were holding a small ball
Dragon	Blow hard while moving your head backwards and forwards
Hungry	Rub your stomach
Yuck !	Make a disgusted expression with your face
Horrible	Make a shocked expression
Yummy	Rub your stomach and chew while you make a happy face
A rabbit	Raise your hands and flip them so that they look like a rabbit's ears
Basket	Make a circle with your hands in front of you
Taste	Move your closed mouth as if eating something good

<p>Give</p> <p>See</p>	<p>Stretch out your hand</p> <p>Point with your index fingers first to your eyes then to something in the opposite direction</p>
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Story **A hat ? Yummy, Yummy!**

This is a story of a small dragon called Lochnie

Lochnie goes for a walk in the park.

He is hungry, very, very hungry.

He sees a picnic basket near a bench.

Lochnie looks into the basket: there's a pear, some chips, an apple, a hamburger and some yoghurt..."

A boy comes and gives him an apple.

"Have an apple" he says

Lochnie tastes the apple

"Yuck! I don't like apples" the dragon says

Lochnie is hungry, very, very hungry.

Other children come and offer him some yoghurt, some chips and pizza.

Lochnie tastes the yoghurt, the chips and the pizza.

"Yuck! I don't like yoghurt, chips or pizza" the dragon says.

Lochnie is hungry, very, very hungry

"Have a sandwich!" a girl says

Lochnie tastes the sandwich

"Yuck! I don't like sandwiches" the dragon says

Lochnie is hungry, very, very hungry.

"Have a hamburger" a boy says

Lochnie tastes the hamburger

"Disgusting! I don't like hamburgers!" the dragon says

"I have got an idea!" Charlie, the rabbit, says

"Hey, friend!" he says "Have my hat!!!"

Lochnie tastes the hat...

"Mmmm...Yummy, Yummy!" the dragon says "I like hats"

And he eats up the hat

(adapted from a book for young learners)

- Tell the story and mime it. Encourage the children to join in the actions with you.

Creating the script

It is important to introduce the dialogue to the whole class before giving the children their parts. Prepare some pictures related to the main sequences of the story and help the children to re-tell the story in a very simple way. Take note of all the chunks of language they have used and write a simple basic dialogue for each scene.

If you work with very young learners, the following dialogue could be an example to be used to perform the story of the dragon.

Script

Lochnie –Hungry!

A boy – An apple ?

Lochnie (disgusted) – Yuck!

Lochnie – Hungry !

A boy – Some crisps?

Lochnie (disgusted) – *Yuck! Horrible!*

Lochnie – *Hungry!*

A girl – *A sandwich?*

Lochnie (tasting the sandwich)– *No, thank you!*

Lochnie – *I am hungry !*

A boy – *A hamburger?*

Lochnie (smelling the hamburger)– *Disgusting !*

Lochnie – *I am hungry!!!*

Charlie (amused)– *My hat?*

Lochnie (smelling the hat)– *Yummy, Yummy!!*
Mmm,good!!

With older children, who already have experience in drama sessions, it is possible to get them to write scripts in which the original characters and events have been in part or totally replaced by new ones.

Casting

Divide the class into groups and ask them to decide who will be who. With very young learners it may be difficult for them to make a decision, in this case you will decide for them. Each group will take a turn in performing the play in front of their classmates who will be the audience. Before the performance, with the children's help, choose a place in the classroom where the pupils will perform their plays. Help the pupils to get into the characters by listening to them while practising the dialogue and suggesting facial expressions and body movements to them.

Evaluation

As happens in any teaching and learning process, on-going evaluation is necessary. Once you notice that your pupils are losing interest, be ready to make any change that may be useful to raise their motivation: always keep in mind that learning happens only through involvement, imagination and creativity. Don't forget to listen to your pupils' comments and suggestions. I still remember what one of my eight year-olds once said: " I could remember all the lines of the dialogue but it was very difficult for me to speak because I had this mask on my face. Why don't we wear the masks round our chests and tie them on behind?". Would you ever have thought of this!?

Most of the time we spend a lot of time planning our lessons in great detail. That's fine, but we should never forget that we are a part of the class and we too can learn a lot from our children.

Pupils's comments on drama

Here are some comments of my fifth-graders on drama:

Giovanni: " *Drama is fantastic. We learn a lot of English and have fun*"

Marco : " *While you are acting you don't care about mistakes because you are another person*".

Elisa : " *At first I didn't like acting because I'm shy and I was worried about my friends' comments. I love it now because I have realised that I'm very good at doing it*".

