



# DRAMA ACTIVITIES: A USEFUL TOOL TO PROMOTE SPEAKING SKILL

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# Outline of the presentation

- ▶ General Introduction
- ▶ Definitions of drama
- ▶ Values of drama activities in language teaching and learning
- ▶ Factors determining the success of a drama activity
- ▶ Types of drama activities
- ▶ Introducing drama activities into speaking practice lessons
- ▶ Pedagogical implications
- ▶ Suggestions to overcome teachers' reluctance to use drama activities in speaking practice lessons

# Introduction

- ▶ Speaking or oral communication has a relationship with drama activities.
- ▶ The relationship between oral communication and drama is established to bridge the gaps between the classroom and the world outside.
- ▶ Drama activities serve as an effective tool to enliven speaking lessons and promote speaking skill.

# The definitions of drama

- ▶ *“Drama is doing, is being and is such a normal thing. It is something that people all engage in daily when faced with difficult situations”;*
- ▶ *“Drama should be viewed as a technique of communicative language teaching. This is currently the dominant theory of language teaching” Charlyn Wessels (1987),*
- ▶ *“Drama is about filling the spaces between people with meaningful experiences”. Heathcote (1984)*
- ▶ *“It is applied to any activity which asks students to portray himself in an imaginary situation. In other words, drama is concerned with the world of “Let’s pretend” Susan Holden (1981)*

# Values of drama activities in language teaching

- ▶ Drama should be viewed as a technique of communicative language teaching.
- ▶ Drama stimulates reality, develops self-expression and allows for experiments with language.
- ▶ Drama activities can help teachers overcome some of the difficulties of teaching mixed-ability classes.
- ▶ Drama gives teachers an opportunity to explore their own creativity through exercises in voice, movement, improvisation, mime.....

# Values of drama activities in language learning

- ▶ Drama activities are an aid in helping learners become more confident in their use of foreign languages by allowing them to experience the language in operation.
- ▶ Non-verbal communication ability is much improved.
- ▶ Drama activities are one useful way to boost up interaction, cooperation and trust between learners.
- ▶ Fantasy and imagination are the two more values given by drama activities.
- ▶ Drama activities provide a means of improving students' fluency concentration, memorization and improvisation ability.

# Factors determining the success of a drama activity

1. The roles of the teachers: classroom manager, instructor...
2. The roles of the learners: active participants
3. Materials used for organizing drama activities:
  - ▶ Using course-book dialogues
  - ▶ Using texts
  - ▶ Using stories
4. Aids to drama activities
  - ▶ Picture cues
  - ▶ Sound cues
  - ▶ Written cues
  - ▶ Non-verbal cues

# Factors determining the success of a drama activity

## 5. Physical environment (Maley, 1989)

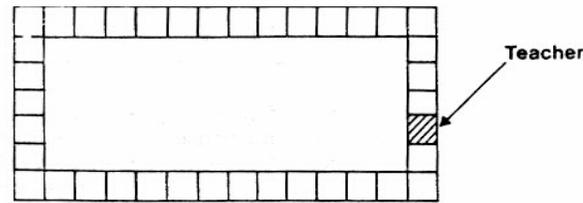


Figure 1

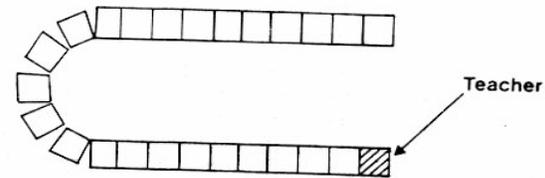


Figure 2

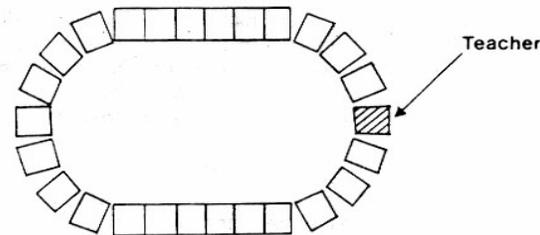


Figure 3

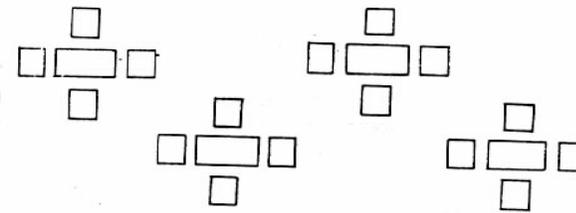


Figure 4

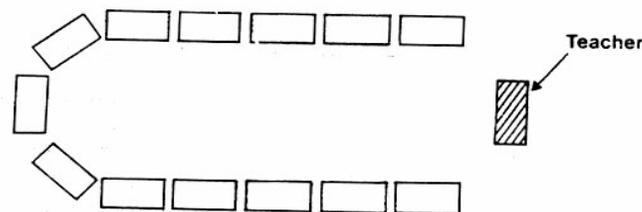


Figure 5

# Factors determining the success of a drama activity

## 5. Physical environment

- ▶ **Figure 1:** Tables/desks and chairs stacked against walls (ready for use) with a large space in the centre. Suitable for games, mimes and dramatized playreadings.
- ▶ **Figure 2:** Horseshoe/semi-circular arrangement (chairs only). Suitable for discussions followed by/following actions, pair and group work, plenary discussions, individual performance, and certain role-plays.
- ▶ **Figure 3:** Full circle (chairs only). Suitable for many games, simulations, and role-play. Also good for seminar presentation.
- ▶ **Figure 4:** The horseshoe arrangement again, but this time using desks. Suitable for most activities that also require reading and writing.
- ▶ **Figure 5:** “Group seating” – for simulations and other group activities (teacher circulates from group to group).

# Types of drama activities

- ▶ *Masked drama*: using **masks**, participants feel **less inhibited to perform and overact** while taking part in this form of drama activity. This type of drama activity is suitable and is commonly applied in teaching **small children**
- ▶ *Mime*: Mime is **a non-verbal representation of an idea or a story through gestures, facial expressions, movement and non-verbal sound**. Mime is often used in warm-up activities.
- ▶ *Role-play*: In role-play activities, learners are not themselves anymore and they are **put in either realistic or imaginative situations** to act as a tourist, a customer in a shop, for example.

# Types of drama activities

- ▶ *Simulation*: Simulations are generally held to be **a structured set of circumstances that mirror real life** and in which participants act as instructed. Requiring replication of the physical circumstances and behaviour, they are more difficult to set up than role-plays and often require **the use of published materials**. Simulations are complex, lengthy and relatively inflexible events.
- ▶ *Improvisation*: Improvisation is associated with **unrehearsed performance** before an audience, a situation guaranteed to make most people feel highly uncomfortable.
- ▶ *Drama games*: Drama games are defined as games that **involve action, exercise the imagination, involve both “learning” and “acquisition”** and permit the expression of emotion, linguistically and paralinguistically.

# Introducing drama activities into speaking practice lessons

## 1. Warm-up exercises in the form of drama activities

- ▶ *Introductory warm-up exercises*

### Activity 1: Handshakes

- ▶ **Purpose:** Introduction; ice-breaker
- ▶ **Method:**
  - ▶ The pupils stand up and move around the class in any direction they choose.
  - ▶ The teacher claps hands and the learners stop and introduce themselves to the nearest person.
  - ▶ The teacher tells the learners to move on after allowing 2-3 minutes.
  - ▶ The activity is repeated as often as seems desirable.
  - ▶ Afterwards the teacher sees how many names the learners can remember.
- ▶ **Duration:** About 10 minutes

# Introducing drama activities into speaking practice lessons

## 2. Using mime as a warm-up activity and for group cohesion

### Activity 3: Guess the situation

#### ▶ Method:

- ▶ The learners are arranged in groups of between 3 and 7.
- ▶ One person from each group goes to the teacher, who whispers a situation to them.
- ▶ The learners return to their groups and mime the situation, which the others have to try and guess. (Those miming should not speak, only nod or shake their heads.)
- ▶ As soon as someone has guessed correctly, he rushes to the teacher for another situation.
- ▶ The game continues until one of the groups reaches the end of the list.

# Introducing drama activities into speaking practice lessons

## 3. Using mime for fluency practice

Although no words are used during mime, it can be a spur to language use where there is the need for explanation, both in terms of the teacher's instructions and learners' discussion, if the mime involves pair or group work. If the mime is then performed for others, the target language can be used for interpretation and evaluation of what has been seen.

### ▶ Activity 5: Mimed scenes

#### ▶ **Method:**

- ▶ Learners work in pairs or small groups. They are given a theme or a topic to work on and asked to prepare a short mime (not more than 3 minutes' length).
- ▶ A time limit of 5 minutes is set for preparation and rehearsal.
- ▶ Learners perform their mimes in turn.
- ▶ After each performance the teacher asks the spectators to interpret what they have seen.

# Introducing drama activities into speaking practice lessons

## 4. Roleplay as a functional language activity

Role-play is organized in a great number of ways: through pictures, charts, cued dialogues, maps and so on. Role-plays controlled through cued dialogues are most frequently exploited.

Role-plays of this type can be done with the following steps:

- ▶ Deliver separate cards with printed cues to learners;
- ▶ Ask learners to work in pairs or in groups and exchange the information which has been guided.

# Introducing drama activities into speaking practice lessons

## 5. Improvisation for fluency practice and memory reinforcement

- ▶ introduce situations as concrete as possible or picture cues as informative as possible to students so that they can understand or at least imagine in what situations they are placed.
- ▶ invite volunteers to play the parts in the situations or in the pictures. In this drama activity, students are allowed little or normally no time to prepare for the script or what to say.
- ▶ give comments and ask those volunteers to try again or asks others to participate in a different situation.

# Introducing drama activities into speaking practice lessons

## Activity 7: Progressive improvisation

▶ **Purpose:** Fluency practice

▶ **Method:**

- ▶ The teacher introduces the situation (e.g. parents are having breakfast and taking anxiously about their child who has stayed out all night and not returned home).
- ▶ The teacher invites volunteers to take the parts of the parents.
- ▶ After a while, the teacher interrupts to introduce the brother/sister of the missing child who has just woken up. The parents engage him/her in conversation.
- ▶ The teacher indicates that another pupil should join the group, this time taking the part of the missing child.
- ▶ Depending on how things develop, the teacher might introduce other characters (e.g. a policeman looking for a person answering to the child's description).
- ▶ Afterwards, the group discusses what happened and try again or use a different situation.

# Introducing drama activities into speaking practice lessons

## 6. Drama games

There are three major stages in a lesson at which games can be used most effectively, lasting from ten to fifteen minutes.

- ▶ “icebreaker games”: played at the beginning of a lesson as warm-ups or introductory activities (find your partner, what are you doing?..)
- ▶ in-between games: used as part of a lesson, to revise or reinforce previously taught material. Such games will generally be played before the speaking lesson. (feelings..)
- ▶ end-games: end a lesson (if time permits). Such games can help to revise what content is taught during the lesson and to fix it in a relaxed and enjoyable manner. (thank-you)

# Introducing drama activities into speaking practice lessons

## ▶ *Starters / icebreakers*

### Find your partner

- ▶ **Preparation:** Give each learner a folder in which there is a picture.
- ▶ **Method:**
  - ▶ Ask learners to circulate, asking questions until each has found a “partner” - a picture of someone or something that can be matched with their picture.
  - ▶ Remind them not to say what they have in the folders, but through descriptions and questions they should lead each other to the right partnership.

# Introducing drama activities into speaking practice lessons

## ▶ *In-between games*

### Feelings

- ▶ **Aim:** Help learners practise structures relating to emotions.
- ▶ **Preparation:** Prepare cards – four for each learner – with a feeling written on each card; for example, *love, hate greed, envy, jealousy, grief, happiness, surprise, fear, etc.*
- ▶ **Method:** This game is played in pairs. Each learner gets four cards and has to mime the feelings written on the cards. The partners have to guess what the feelings are.

# Introducing drama activities into speaking practice lessons

## ▶ *End-games*

### Thank you

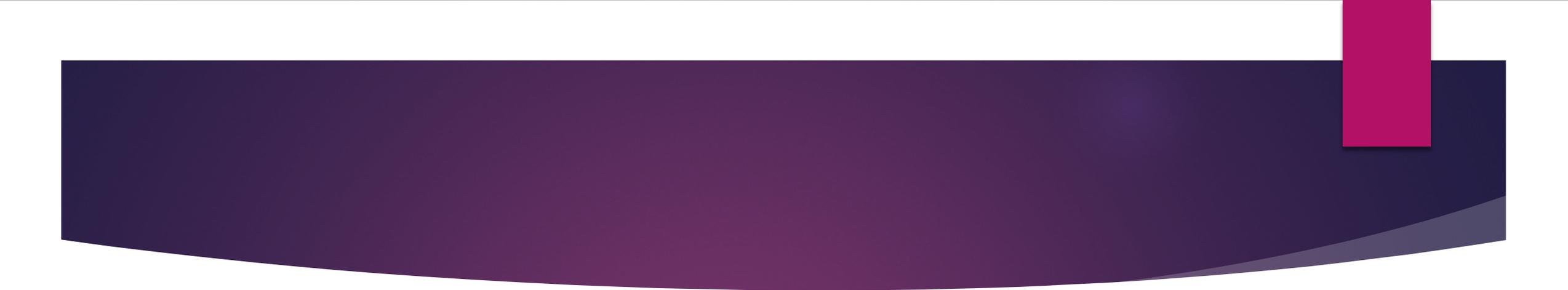
- ▶ **Method:** List a number of situations on the board, and ask the learners how they would say 'thank you' in each of these situations. The class can decide whether they agree with the way in which individual learners respond. Here are some suggestions:
  - ▶ *You have been given a present which you had once given to a friend of the person from whom you now receive it.*
  - ▶ *An elderly person gave up his/her seat to you on the bus upon seeing that you felt ill.*

# Pedagogical implications

- ▶ Teachers should appear as confident as possible in front of students when they are performing in a drama activity, even when they are not really used to the technique.
- ▶ Due to the complexity of some drama activities, it is essential that teachers have firm knowledge of the activities, in other words, they need to understand those activities adequately and precisely. Specifically, it is a must for teachers to prepare the materials and techniques carefully before implementing any drama activity.
- ▶ Teachers are advised to work out the suitable warm-up exercises to stimulate the students' intensive attention besides giving clear instructions to the students.
- ▶ It is not always a good idea to organise drama activities. This implies that drama activities should be utilised depending on the theme of each unit in the course book, on the language items presented in each unit, and also on the time allowance for each speaking lesson.

# Suggestions to overcome teachers' reluctance to use drama activities in speaking practice lessons

- ▶ Many teachers feel that they cannot approach drama activities without being a trained actor: **choose activities ranging from simple to complicated ones such as a few drama games or some role-plays and step by step carry them out in their own style of teaching.**
- ▶ Not few teachers say that they are unprepared for "performing" in front of a group and would not want to risk looking and feeling silly in front of a class of students: **set up a close relationship between the teacher and students and establish a comfortable and free thought-sharing environment.**
- ▶ Most teachers are often frustrated with the materials needed for some drama games and the time it takes to understand a game and be able to organise it well: **acquire a basic knowledge of communication activities such as a warm-up activity or some drama techniques to make the course book more communicative and alive for the students.**



**THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!**