

Let's Talk about Drama!

How Performance-Based Learning fosters authentic and meaningful communication in the EFL classroom

"Reason is not disembodied, as the tradition has largely held, but arises from the nature of our brains, bodies, and bodily experience."
Lakoff & Johnson, 1999

Performance-Based Learning

= an umbrella term for instructional approaches that use embodied action, role-taking, dramatic enactment and performance to facilitate learning.
Shared principles: authentic and meaningful communication, embodied meaning-making, social interaction, experiential learning

"Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience."
Kolb, 1984

Szenisches Lernen

Learning through the enactment and exploration of situations, experiences or texts using dramatic and performative techniques.

Focus: Drama-Based Learning

= a student-centered pedagogical strategy that utilizes a collection of theatrical techniques to facilitate active language use and meaningful communication in the classroom

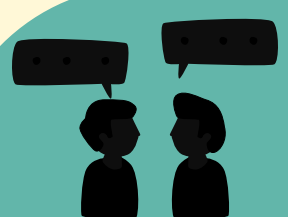
- Integrates verbal language with body movement and emotional engagement
- Allows students to explore linguistic, social, and cultural skills through the portrayal of characters in imagined situations



Embodied Learning

Learning through bodily action, movement and sensory experience, based on the assumption that cognition is grounded in the body.

Effects of Drama-Based Learning



Communicative Competence

- Increased speaking fluency & interaction
- Improved pronunciation, intonation, and expressive voice projection
- Multimodal communication: verbal language + non-verbal cues
- Authentic language use → prepares for real-life discourse
- Pragmatic competence



Affective Development

- Increased motivation: high levels of intrinsic motivation & enjoyment
- Higher self-confidence through the use of role distance
- Empowerment: strengthens self-efficacy
- Positive error culture
- Less foreign language anxiety



Social & Intercultural Development

- Collaborative learning: promotes teamwork, peer support + communicative skills
- Intercultural awareness: enhances understanding of social norms, cultural values, idiomatic expressions
- Empathy development through taking on different perspectives & exploring different social roles



Cognitive Benefits

- Embodied learning: integrates cognition, emotion, and physicality
- Superior memory retention → significantly longer-lasting memorization of vocabulary & content
- Critical thinking & problem solving
- Integrated literacy: boosts reading comprehension & writing skills
- Fosters creativity

Foreign Language Anxiety

= a situation-specific anxiety uniquely associated with the challenges of learning or using a foreign language

3 components: Communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation
→ physical, cognitive, behavioral symptoms

Affective Filter Hypothesis

- Affective variables such as high anxiety act as psychological barrier or "filter"
→ blocks input of a message → message cannot reach the part of the brain responsible for language acquisition
- Goal: "low" filter → safe, low-anxiety environments, where students feel confident and motivated

Fear-Free Learning

= a pedagogical approach

- Goal: minimizing negative emotional barriers or "filters" to create an optimal environment for language acquisition

→ create a supportive environment prioritizing the pleasure of communication over the pressure of perfection

Willingness to Communicate

(WTC) = learner's readiness and intention to actively engage in communication in the target language

- Strongly influenced by self-efficacy & belief in own ability

↑ WTC → ↑ practice → ↑ positive experiences
→ ↑ confident communication

Implementing Drama-Based Learning into the EFL classroom

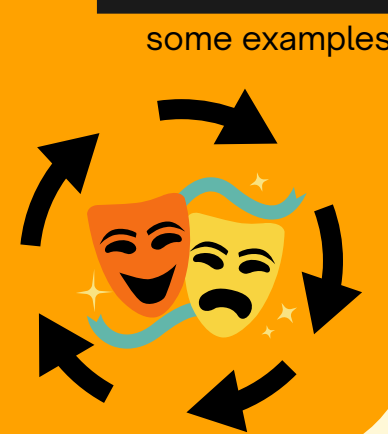
Process Drama

= a learner-centered, process-oriented drama approach in which students and teachers co-construct and explore a fictional situation through improvisation and other drama techniques

- No fixed script
- No external audience or final performance
- Narrative and tension unfold through action, response, interaction and communication
- Built up from a series of episodes or scenic units
- Combines various drama conventions

Possible lesson plan:

1. Starter activities / pre-text
2. Building & entering the dramatic frame
3. Exploration through improvisation
4. Introduction of dramatic tension
5. Reflection



Improvisation

= students spontaneously react to a prompt / situation by creating dialogue and actions without a prepared script

- Reduces pressure to be perfect
- Improves fluency
- Mimics real-life situations
- Ex: "You miss your train..."

Role Play

= students take on roles and act through them in realistic or fictional situations to practice language in context

- Role distance allows students to attribute mistakes to their role → less language anxiety + more willingness to communicate
- Help: rolecards, scaffolding
- Ex: job interview

Teacher in Role

= the teacher takes on a role related to a story or theme and sets up a dramatic situation for students to participate in.

- The teacher can influence, guide and shape the dramatic learning process



Conscience Alley

= a character walks down an alleyway formed by other students who give persuasive arguments to help the character make a decision

- Exploring a dilemma / analyze a decisive moment



Hot Seating

= a student has to embody a character and is then questioned by the others about their background, behaviour, ...

- Exploring a character (real or fictional)
- Ex: Henry VIII, book characters, ...



EXAMPLE

Case File: The Missing Crown Jewels

Scotland Yard needs your help! One of the Crown Jewels has disappeared from the Tower of London. Can your detective team solve the case before tomorrow's royal ceremony?

Communicate, collaborate and think like real detectives!

Teacher in role: The teacher guides the inspection as a Scotland Yard inspector



1. Pre-text(case file): Message from Scotland Yard, picture of the crown jewels, map of London
2. Role adaptation: Students become detective teams → role play
3. Investigation: Students visit different landmark stations, interview witnesses & collect clues → hot seating
4. New Evidence: The teacher introduces an unexpected key → improvisation
5. Solution: Teams identify the suspect and justify their decision → collaborative problem solving
6. Reflection: Students reflect on their communication and language use

Scaffolding Checklist

- ☒ Introduce key vocabulary
- ☒ Activate prior knowledge
- ☒ Provide role cards
- ☒ Offer sentence starters
- ☒ Include visual clues (pictures,...)
- ☒ Positive feedback & feedforward

LET'S KEEP TALKING!

The case isn't closed yet!



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Explore resources & share your ideas

