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All the world's a stage

Educational drama & Drama in education

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Abstract

This chapter frames the focus selected by the organising team of the 2016 International Week at the University College of Teacher Education in Lower Austria: With drama, an area of broad interest was chosen. To set the scene, an introduction was given in order to differentiate the fields of "educational drama" and "drama in education" and to demonstrate ways of implementing drama in teacher education and language learning.

Keywords:	*Schlüsselwörter:*
Drama in education	Drama/Theater als Unterrichtsfach
Educational drama	Dramapädagogik/Theaterpädagogik im Unterricht
Drama in teacher education	Dramapädagogik/Theaterpädagogik in der Ausbildung von Lehrkräften

1 Introduction

In 2016 the International Week at the University College of Teacher Education in Lower Austria was marking the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death with a focus on drama. Thus, the seminar rooms and lecture halls as well as the auditorium of the practice school became "stages" for trainees, lecturers and participants who gave performances and presentations that allowed insight into their worlds and professional lives. The contributions demonstrated effectively how *educational drama* can shape young talents in a way that students are able to give performances of high quality and impressive power, and how *drama in education* programmes constitute indispensable components of teacher education courses in Europe and the USA because *any classroom is a stage*.

2 Educational drama and drama in education

While *drama in education* entails the implementation of drama techniques and activities across the curriculum, such as drama in language teaching and learning, *educational drama* stands for drama as a subject. Thus, *drama in education* denotes inclusion whereas *educational drama* indicates exclusiveness. Both approaches, however, open up countless opportunities for making learning experiences memorable because they are interactive and provide physical, visual and most commonly also aural stimuli.

As early as in the 4th century before Christ, Plato suggested that children should learn in a playful way and be allowed to develop with as few constraints as possible. For children, playfulness is directly linked to taking on different roles and their engagement in "make-belief". This includes ways of experiencing the adult world or any imagined one as if real. Children come to the classroom with a rich repertoire of experience and skill in pretending to be somebody else or even some nonhuman object or an animal. Teachers should make regular use of this ability and nourish it through drama pedagogy to keep its creative potential alive even when the child's mind has already developed to differentiate between the real and the imaginative world.

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In the 1st century, Quintilian stated that actors are exemplars of the art of delivering speech and thus models for learning. Benedictine monks used liturgical, mystery and morality plays as important conveyors in education in the Middle Ages. Through the singing of sacred hymns accompanied by gestures and movements adults and children were taught through drama activities alike.

Drama activities became popular in European schools in the 16th century. Humanist ideals of education promoted the performance of plays in Latin or English as good practice of desired behaviour, also called "proper action". Additionally, acting was considered to improve the students' pronunciation skills at the same time. During the Renaissance drama was introduced as a component of language study. French and German became new subjects in the curriculum and the "enlightened" teachers treated them as living languages supporting the oral aspect of language education by stage performances.

Nowadays acting is considered one of the most effective means of learning. Already in 1911, a Grammar School teacher in Cambridge suggested that

"[t]hought, word and act linked together make an impression such as nothing else can make. In this direction lies the salvation of our schools. We all know how dull a text-book is; a history of English, a manual of grammar, even chemistry books are sometimes dull. But if the teacher uses his book as a suggestion, makes his history a story, sets his pupils to act it, in make-believe, before they know what they are doing, they are practising English composition and English grammar and learning English history." (Rouse quoted in Coggin 1956, p. 232)

In many English speaking countries drama was established as a school subject between the two world wars and *Drama in Education* (DiE) became highly influential in the UK between 1960 and 1980. Additionally, pioneering teachers paved the way for drama across the curriculum, which introduces learners to oral presentation techniques and helps them develop real-life skills such as co-operation, conflict resolution, or dealing with emotions.

Fig. 1: The play-drama continuum

DiE has been considered a key feature of education because play is a natural interest in young children. Play is a prerequisite of drama and if developed continually, it can lead to an active involvement in and understanding of theatre. Whenever children are left playing on their own, *drama play* comes naturally: Children "make-believe", pretend to be other people, animals or objects, real or imagined. They come to school with a creative and imaginative mind and bring with them a rich experience in self-directed play. Therefore, drama activities provide learners with an enjoyable learning environment they are able to relate to from real-life experience.

Educationalists like Plato (quoted in Whitebread 2012) or Spencer (1866) suggest that structured games and organised play create a sense of rules and understanding for society and are thus vital to the development and learning of children. Groos (1919) maintains that play contributes to the growth of intelligence and Vygotsky (1978) considers symbolic play a step towards abstract thinking in that it helps children to comprehend the symbolic representation of objects and events. It constructs knowledge and supports language.

The notion of organisation already mentioned by Plato is underpinned by Piaget (1962) and Lewin (1936). Piaget describes the decline of symbolic play in childhood as a stage in the evolution toward games with rules. He argues that dramatic playing is important in a child's social, creative, cognitive, moral and affective development and Lewin says that "make-believe play" practices social rules and supports their internalisation.

Elias (2007) emphasises the role of feelings in the creation of effective and long-lasting learning and he thus suggests that the educational environment should be constructed regarding the child's emotions. This claim is supported by Aslan (quoted in Gökçen, 2004, p. 49) who argues that *"in a dramatic context, experiences are constructed with the help of emotions and participants of drama cannot easily forget what they have experienced in drama class."*

Educational drama, on the other hand, is the approach which uses drama as a teaching and learning medium (Wessels 1987). It creates *"a dramatic environment where students learn the subject by playing roles*

and using other dramatic techniques while conducting a topic-related investigation" (Sağlam quoted in Gökçen 2014, p. 50). Bolton (1986, p. 36) says that *"learning through drama is contextual"* and it is this contextualisation and the real-life scenario which is created by drama activities that seem so very relevant in the context of language education.

3 Drama in language teacher education

Literary analysis has been the basis for an elective drama module at the University College of Teacher Education in Lower Austria for nearly ten years and the module has become increasingly popular since the implementation of a process-writing approach that includes the transformation of novels or movies into plays. Having analysed plot, setting, characters, themes, symbols, metaphors and the language in literary texts, the trainees develop dialogues, stage directions and all the necessary prerequisites for putting a novel on stage in a collaborative project (Mewald 2015).

"In constructing the plot and working it out with the proper diction, the poet should place the scene, as far as possible, before his eyes. In this way, seeing everything with the utmost vividness, as if he were a spectator of the action, he will discover what is in keeping with it, and be most unlikely to overlook inconsistencies." (Aristotle quoted in Gassner & Quinn, 1969, p. 944)

Once all the preparatory work has been completed, the trainees go about rehearsing and acting out their play. It may seem that at this point the hardest work and most demanding part of the game has been done, but reality proves Katherine Hepburn's quote that "acting is the perfect idiot's profession …[because] Shirley Temple could do it at the age of four" untrue. It takes a lot of preparatory work to make teachers *actors* and a text a *play*.

3.1 Drama activities

In the language course the trainees were made familiar with various drama techniques in order to prepare them for more complex drama activities. One of the main goals was to help students overcome their shyness and inhibitions thus enabling them to use the foreign language creatively and to develop confidence. According to Maley and Duff, four main types of activities were used to get students ready for more advanced drama techniques.

1. non-verbal warming-up
2. non-verbal relaxation activities
3. activities involving language
4. group formation activities (Maley & Duff, 2005, p.6)

As most of the activities mentioned above combine language and movement, they can be regarded as useful for any rehearsal situation. Additionally, a number of games and simulations were employed to make the students aware of each other. When on stage, all actors have to carefully observe what is going on and they have to anticipate what the next steps will be. Games have proved to be an outstanding approach to introduce acting skills and drama techniques. As a matter of fact, playing a game helps the participant to memorise the skill used for the respective game. Sooner or later it will make the talent that is in everyone visible. Activities like the *Freeze-Walk* were used to make the students aware of the physical position of other group members. Careful observation of what is going on around and of the local environment has to be trained intensively before putting a play on stage.

An important part of the course units were dedicated to mime activities. Visual clues were given to the students who had to interpret the respective message. The high degree of visualisation and the kinaesthetic input were highly motivating and an entertaining activity for all participants. Slow motion and speeded up mimes were used as whole-class activities providing room for observation, performance and description.

Working with the voice (Maley & Duff, p. 69) is among the most important techniques that actors and actresses use in their training. Breathing activities, warming up the voice, developing volume, changing the voice, expressing different moods, using intonation for various purposes were given scope thus making students aware of the important role the human voice plays in communication as such. Dramatic reading and

acting out different scenes and short plays were used to train the effective use of the voice as a powerful instrument.

In the language course the second focus was on the general organisation of the play. Each scene was thoroughly rehearsed, discussed, interpreted and amended or adapted if necessary. In the course of the many rehearsals it became clear that there was room for improvement. Some scenes had to be slightly altered as they became more meaningful or straightforward on stage after adding or deleting elements or entire paragraphs. The work with the students was fascinating but also time consuming and intense. The music, the songs had to be selected, the light effects had to be discussed and the stage directions had to be set up. As far as the props and the costumes were concerned, the students had already learned in literary studies how to produce and organize them according to the scenes so that they were available when needed. For quite some time the project was like a big puzzle and the task was to put all the bits and pieces together so that the outcome could be presented to an audience. The overall aim was to reach a level that would allow the performance of the play in the framework of the 2016 International Week.

4 Drama in the EFL classroom

Despite the communicative innovations of the past few decades what is still taught in the EFL classroom is often focused on supposedly predictable outcomes achieved by controlled and structured activities which can be measured in tests and examinations. However, what plays an important role in language teaching is the implementation of activities which evoke affective engagement, such as playfulness, enjoyment and physical movement. Drama activities are not only useful for memorising texts and practising pronunciation; the power of the *"quasi-real language situations"* provided by this teaching tool should not be underestimated (Boudreault, 2010, p.1).

Fig. 2: Drama *only* useful for memorising texts and practicing pronunciation? Photographed by Sabine Wallner

The opportunities opened up through drama activities can affect the learners' motivation as well as their language and life skills. The following is an attempt of summing up the benefits drama in EFL:

1. Imitating through play, make-believe and meaningful interaction, which is the way especially young learners acquire language naturally and sensually
2. Making language learning an active and motivating experience
3. Gaining the confidence and self-esteem needed to use the language spontaneously
4. Experiencing the fulfilling sensations of being part of a group and of personal achievement
5. Using the language for genuine communication and real-life purposes;
6. Initiating authentic needs to speak and interact
7. Acquiring language by focusing on the message and not the form of utterances
8. Making what is learned memorable: through direct experience, through affect and by attending to different learning styles
9. Giving the creation of dialogues a new and more meaningful purpose
10. Stimulating learners' intellect and imagination

11. Bringing the real world into the classroom: using dictionaries, researching, providing cross-curricular content, planning and managing projects
12. Cultivating team work, problem solving, organizational skills, receiving and giving feedback
13. Developing the learners' abilities to empathize with others and to become better communicators
14. Enhancing communication and presentation skills by experiencing that words and body language project subtle messages
15. Catering to 21st century learners' needs to create, display and perform

In view of these facts it is difficult to escape the conclusion that drama not only entails more than just memorising texts and practising pronunciation it also *"has a wider reach than simply making us more fluent in a second language."* (Boudreault, 2010, p. 4)

4.1 Implementing drama in ESL/EFL

Drama activities can range from short tasks, which can be easily employed in the everyday language lesson, to the 'full-blown' project in the shape of a play or a movie: Short term drama tasks are 'instant' drama activities such as drama games and all sorts of dialogues can be enhanced by using cell phones or tablets. Thus, practising, performing, displaying and providing feedback does not only gain zest but allows the shift towards more learner-centredness. Long term drama activities bring drama projects into life which might otherwise be dismissed as too labour intense or time consuming. However, their impact can be so powerful that they are definitely worth the effort. Apart from all the benefits mentioned above, the value of cross-curricular work and the opportunity to incorporate all the learners' skills and talents make the whole endeavour much grander than the sum of its parts.

Through writing a play or a movie, creative and collaborative writing gains authentic purpose. While writing and correcting texts might frequently be bemoaned in language lessons, planning and editing texts for plays or movie scripts can be met with enthusiasm and vigour. Similarly, activities such as practising pronunciation and intonation, rehearsing, giving and receiving feedback ensure genuine value and interest.

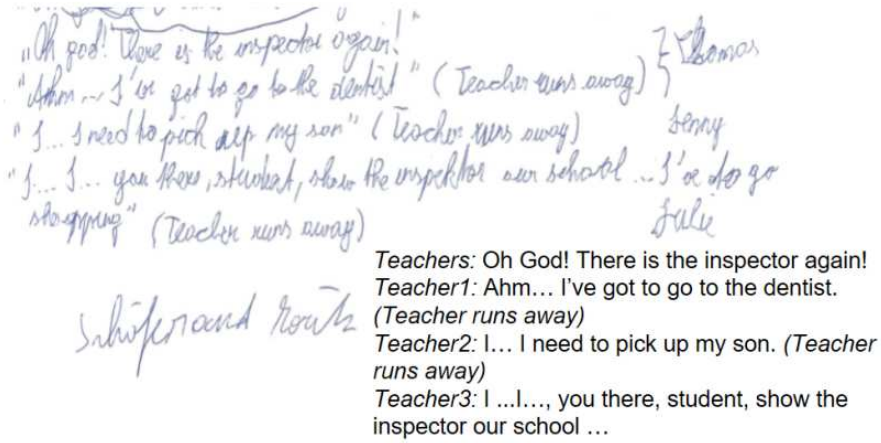

Fig. 3: Writing and editing play scripts

Apart from taking on bigger or smaller acting roles, the complexity of a drama project opens up a variety of options to contribute: designing invitation cards, posters or DVD covers, organising and creating props and costumes, furnishing stages, providing background sounds or assisting and managing the actors. This way all participants can find their places with respect to their affinities, talents and skills, from designer and assistant to Foley artist and puppeteer, from medieval nobleman ore peasant to dedicated detective.

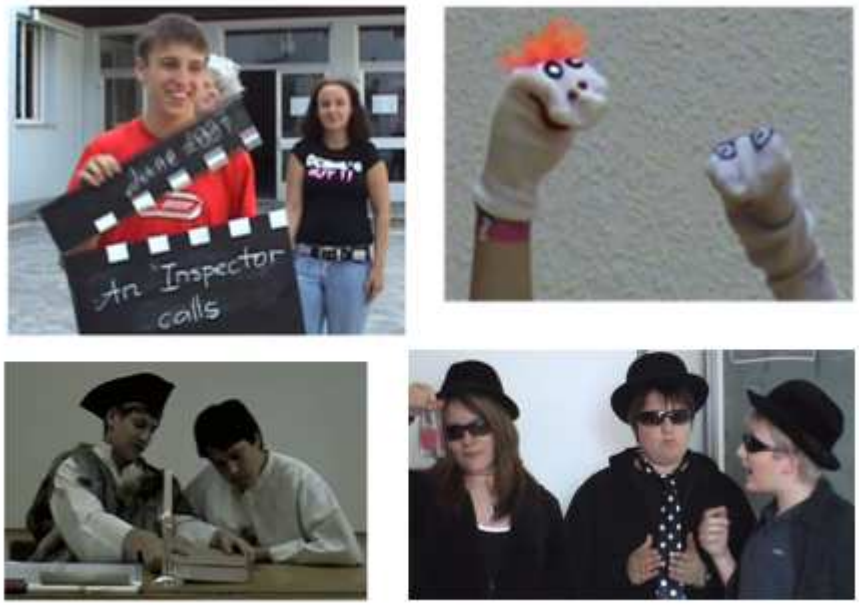

Fig. 4: Learners in action, photographed by Sabine Wallner

Thus, drama has the potential of making learning authentic, entertaining and memorable for all participants, valuing the inclusion of contributors and shaping personalities. *"Drama is all about how we present ourselves. If the student can communicate better, the more likely others will see him/her as he/she wishes to be seen. Therefore, the skills of drama can help the student become the person that he/she wants to be"* (Boudreault, 2010, p. 4). After all, the basic goal of teachers should be to inspire and to help learners to become better selves. Plutarch observed this almost 2000 years ago and he wrote: *"the mind is not a vessel that needs filling but wood that needs igniting"* (Plutarch, trans. Babbitt, 1927, p. 259). No further comment needed!

Fig. 5: Learners in action, photographed by Sabine Wallner

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