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Enhancing Language Learning through Drama

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The primary purpose of teaching language is to enable learners to develop communication skills. This is not fully achievable in a conventional monotonous classroom. Drama gives a platform for the teacher to explore new avenues of activities and enables the learners to participate in them actively. Drama is a natural part of the development of human language and thought. Long before children can even speak, they are able to communicate effectively through dramatic means so when this innate quality in them is developed in them, they turn out to be efficient communicators of English.

Drama activities can be used as a means of reinforcement of language learnt. It helps to extend, retain and reinforce vocabulary and sentence structure through role-play and communication games. As Wilga Rivers (19830 states, 'the drama approach enables learners to use what they are learning with pragmatic intent, something that is most difficult to learn through explanation'. It follows that drama activities make learners experience language in operation and provide motivation to use language embedded in a context and a situation. As Morrow (1981) says, 'To learn it, do it'.

Susan Holden (1981) defines drama as any activity which asks the participant to portray himself in an imaginary situation, or to portray another person in an imaginary situation'. We are referring to drama in the language classroom in an informal situation and not the one that is enacted on the stage in a formal situation.

Educators and researchers in linguistics opine that drama in an English classroom has the following benefits.

- **The learner is able to develop his imagination**

  Fernandez and Coil (1986) stated that drama encourages students to exercise their sensitivity and imagination and thus makes learning more realistic and meaningful.

- **It helps build social awareness in a diverse society**

  Drama helps learners to understand the customs and traditions of ethnicities other than their own. It brings the outside world into the classroom and therefore, learners are given scope in terms of social interaction and cultural

awareness. Due to the cultural and language enrichment provided by drama, learners get insights into the target culture. Presenting language contexts make items memorable by placing them in a realistic social context.

- **Helps learners reinforce the language learnt**

  Grammar can be taught implicitly in the drama classes and when the learner enacts the drama or indulges in role-play, he is able to extend, retain and reinforce vocabulary and sentence structure.

- **Enables independent thinking**

  Drama contextualizes the language in real or imagined situations in and out of the classroom. During drama activities, language is explored, tried out and practiced in meaningful situations. This requires independent thinking on the part of the learner.

- **Promotes Psychological improvement**

  Advocates of the dramatic techniques say that the learners who are taught language through drama become more imaginative, creative and sensitive. When the learners are encouraged to participate, they become actively involved and thus increases their confidence level and boosts their morale. Since they are motivated, they get involved without hesitation. Their concentration also improves.

- **Learners develop better habits of speech**

  Drama improves oral communication. As a form of communication methodology, drama provides the opportunity for the learners to use language meaningfully and appropriately. The learner is made to articulate the words and this enables him to correct his pronunciation, intonation and stress.

- **Learners and teachers can give vent to their tension**

  Drama activities take learners as well as the teachers from the monotony of the usual language classroom. Learners who dread language classrooms become interested when drama activities are used.

- **Introduces learners to the theatre arts**

  When students participate in drama activities, they become involved in an essentially universal experience. They learn the art of acting, the importance of body language, facial expression, eye-contact and other forms of non – verbal

communication.

- **Learners get a taste of literature**

Above all, learners other than major students of English can have a rich experience of reading literature, which they cannot have in other classes. They learn to enjoy literature and this paves the way for improving reading habits.

While teaching a dramatic piece, the teacher can begin by reading it aloud with expression, correct pronunciation and intonation. The learners listen and anticipate what new information they are going to get from the text. The teacher can elicit answers from the learners as she questions them on what she reads. Questions that require critical thinking can also be asked. This enables the learners to express their opinions. Along with the interpretation of the text, the teacher can introduce the language items too. When learners are divided into groups and asked to take turns to enact the play, they become actively involved and try to bring out the best in themselves. As a follow up, the learners are benefited if they are made to write something about the play.

To put it in a nut-shell, teaching of drama centres on language development, personal awareness, group cooperation, sensory awareness and imaginative growth.

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