DEVELOPING ORAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS THROUGH ROLE PLAY

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INTRODUCTION

This study intends to show foreign language teachers the importance of the use of drama activities in the classroom for the development of students' oral skills in English language. It also provides examples of role plays that were experienced by students from Colégio Bom Jesus (4th, 5th and 6th grades).

Before working with role plays with my students, I selected some books and magazine articles about drama and role playing. All the material selected, in English and Portuguese, was about the importance of the use of drama techniques in the classroom. Besides the theoretical explanations on the content, this material also provided a lot of examples of activities that could be used in class.

Based on the analysis of this material I decided it would be worthwhile to divide this paper into two parts: a theoretical research (Part I) and a field research (Part II).

In the first part I shall describe, theoretically, the importance of drama in the foreign language teaching classroom, emphasizing the use of role playing, that is a very useful drama technique, among many others. The reading and analysis of some texts from authors such as Ladousse, Maley, Livingstone, Bygate and Via were crucial for the writing of the first part of this paper. Also, many ideas presented by Dawson, in his seminar “Building Confidence and Developing Motivation” were indispensable for my reflections on the content.

In the second part of the paper, the field research, I shall describe some role plays I experimented with four groups of fifteen 9 to 11 year-old students that are regularly studying in the 4th, 5th and 6th grades of Elementary school, at Colégio Bom Jesus, a private school in Curitiba, Paraná. All the students stay at school all day long and have approximately one hour and a half of contact with English, divided into five classes during the week; in three of these classes the students follow a coursebook and in the other two they have extra activities related to the content they learn in the book. The use of role playing activities was successfully accepted by these students, improved the quality of the classes and also developed the students’ language skills, specially speaking, that is the ability which is less often practiced in their coursebooks.
Many reasons for the use of drama, theoretically introduced, proved successfully in the field research:

Drama activities are, first of all, a way of motivating the students for the study of a second language due to their "playing" characteristic. During these activities the students can learn by playing life.

Secondly, this kind of activity is at the same time, useful and fun. Teachers can work on the four linguistic skills - reading, writing, listening and speaking, including different grammar and structure items of language and make the students enjoy the process. Enjoyment may guarantee the real learning of language, the learning for its use in real life situations.

Also, drama activities provide opportunities for language practice in a safe environment. In other words, the students can practice language in the classroom before exposing themselves to the real world. This way, they can learn how to deal with the unpredictable nature of language, with the social skills included in communication in different contexts.

Drama activities are a good way to promote socialization and interaction among the learners. Extrovert students can help the shy ones to become more confident and use the language they have practiced without any fear of being judged.

Role playing is one of the large amount of drama activities which can be used as a successful educational technique in the foreign language class because it presents some important characteristics for its teaching: easy organization, flexibility, it can be open-ended, it’s funny, it’s a dress rehearsal for real life, it provides a lot of different experiences, it trains students to deal with some social skills of language and it helps in the memorization of new vocabulary, expressions and grammar.

Making the students speak up in the EFL classroom and outside it is one of the big challenges for language teachers today. Their resistance in speaking usually comes from their fear of making mistakes and from exposing themselves to an audience. Role play can make the students get used to speaking and become, gradually, more confident and, consequently, more competent.
PART I

1 - DRAMA ACTIVITIES IN THE CLASSROOM

In recent years, language teaching has moved towards a “whole person” approach, that could put the learner at the centre of the learning process, involving the creative and intuitive aspects of his personality. Instead of having a teacher-dominated classroom, where the teacher performs firmly at the centre of everything, the communicative approach has led to a decentralized classroom, emphasizing more pair and group work and making the students more active in the proceedings.

Drama activities have a very real role to play in such a process. They demand from the student to portray himself in an imaginary situation and/or another person/other people in this situation. The students may work in a controlled way, set up previously by the teacher or may work relatively freely.

Many reasons make drama activities a rich educational resource to be used in language teaching. However, some teachers are still reluctant in making use of them in class due to their fear of losing control, lack of confidence or students’ resistance.

One of the reasons why drama activities are an important educational aid is that they are playing activities, which develop the students’ interest and motivation to learn a foreign language.

According to Dawson (Curitiba, June 2000) “No matter how hard we work to improve our teaching, our students won’t learn unless they are motivated to learn. Motivation is described by Jeremy Harmer in “The Practice of English Language Teaching” (1993, p. 22) as “some kind of internal drive that encourages somebody to pursue a course of action”.

Since very young, students – specially children and teenagers, make use of their body and voice to “play” life situations. For them, “playing” is a way of learning, of discovering the world and find psychological balance.
According to Lopes (1973, p. 1-7)

"...toda criança, mesmo sozinha, faz uso de seu corpo e voz para
dramatizar. Atividades dramáticas são naturalmente aceitas pelas crianças
porque elas dramatizam por prazer – desde que tenha consciência do mundo a sua
volta e conseguem transformar experiências e sentimentos em palavras e sons."

"...every child, even alone, makes use of her body and voice to dramatize.
Drama activities are naturally accepted by children because they dramatize for
pleasure – since they are aware of the world around them and can change
experiences and feelings into words and sounds."

Drama activities are, for children, fantastic games that can easily be incorporated in
their repertory of imaginary games. They contain all the elements presented by Nick
Dawson in his seminar “Developing Motivation” which will make the students eager
towards learning English:

- Achievement: The students see the learning process as a series of challenging
  but achievable tasks set by the teachers and feel they are working for
  themselves.
- Recognition: The students need to feel that their work is being appreciated and
  valued by others.
- The work itself: The students want to do the task in the most efficient and
  enjoyable way.
- Responsibility: The students feel responsible for the quality of the work they
  produce.
- Advancement and progress: The students should see and feel their own
  progress, in terms of accuracy and fluency.

Also, drama activities are, at the same time, useful and fun. They add variation to a
content and increase motivation by providing incentive for the use of the target language.
During these activities, English is a tool to reach goals which are not directly language
related. They are different from other communicative activities because there are visible rules which guide their action, their roles and students must successfully apply their language skills as well as other paralinguistic skills.

Lewis and Hill (1985, p.18-19) point out that

"...students are unlikely to be very successful at learning anything unless they enjoy the process... and that ... useful and fun is better than either alone; if the task itself is worth doing, and the students are actively involved, the activity is likely to fulfil a criteria on which teachers should constantly keep in mind – it contains two questions compressed into one – Is it useful?"

Nevertheless, drama activities can provide language practice in a safe environment (the classroom) before real situations and train students to deal with the unpredictable nature of language. In real life people misunderstand each other, interrupt, get distracted and communicate not only through words, but also through gestures, facial expressions, non-verbal sounds, etc. These aspects usually shock most of the learners when they are in an English-speaking situation for the first time. This problem can be solved through their preparation during drama activities.

"With the emphasis on the communicative approach to language teaching, greater weight is given nowadays to establishing situations in which students employ language in a meaningful manner. This derives from the basic tenet that language is above all a means of communication, not an abstract body of knowledge to be learnt. Drama activities provide a framework in which students have a real need to communicate" (Dougill, 1987, p.5)

Finally, drama activities provide opportunities for socialization and enable students to transfer to the characters personal difficulties, which can solve problems of shyness or adjustment.

Dramatization may be a form of socialization in the way it develops not only the language as a system but also the use of the social skills involved in communication in
different social contexts. Through drama activities, students can exchange ideas, feel like doing work in common, practice leadership, learn how to listen to and give opinions, criticize objectively and be criticized with judgement. Reproducing life through drama can promote the students’ physical, emotional and social development. It is a good experience to get students’ interest in English and develop their linguistic skills. If the teacher get the student’s interest he will learn; he will learn through experience and through experiencing.

Drama activities need just as much planning as any other activity, if not more. It is necessary that the teacher prepares the class with precision so that the steps to be followed are very clear in his mind. In a role play, for example, it is important to set up the level of knowledge of the students, the time for the activity, the aims to be reached, the language supposed to be practiced, organization (pairs, groups, etc.), previous preparation (space, material, etc.), the procedures and how evaluation will take place. Also, it is crucial that the instructions be understood, otherwise the preparation has been in vain. There are times when a mother-tongue explanation can be helpful, especially if the activity includes concepts and procedures the students have not yet learnt. Moreover, dramatizations are high-risk activities in terms of losing control. So, it is important for the teacher not being over-ambitious and gain confidence before taking more adventure steps. Discipline problems can always happen but, as soon as children know their boundaries and respect the teacher’s authority, they will certainly diminish.

The lack of space in the classroom can become both a physical and a psychological barrier for teachers planning to make regular use of drama activities. In consequence, it is essential to look for a viable alternative, that could be the possibility of booking a hall, dining-room or another empty space available in the school. If this is not possible, the class sitting can be arranged in a horseshoe shape with the teacher at the mouth or in a way there is an area of open space somewhere in the classroom where the students can move about.

In order to deal with the problem of students’ resistance to drama activities, it is necessary for the teacher to tell them the purpose and value of the activity and make the students believe they are relevant to language learning. Moreover, some students are naturally shy or lacking in self-confidence. Making them feel more comfortable to participate depends basically on the teacher’s sensibility to their position and his class management; he should lead by example, performing himself the activity in advance
whenever possible, avoiding putting the students on the spot, making positive comments and not demanding too much of them.
2 - WHY ROLE PLAYING?

Drama in the classroom may basically be divided into three main types: Dramatization, role playing and improvisation.

Among the great amount of drama activities, role playing can be very useful as a tool for teaching a foreign language. "In looking for ways of creating more varied forms of interaction in the classroom, teachers of foreign languages have turned increasingly to the field of simulation and within that field, especially role playing." (Maley 1982, p. 49).

Role playing fits in with two tendencies in contemporary language learning. First, the tendency of turning the activities in the classroom into a rehearsal for the real world. Second, the tendency of promoting an imaginative self-expression of the inner world of each student’s mind. "Roleplaying is only a small part of a comprehensive approach to teaching conversation but it is quite important" (Agelasco, 1991, p.33)

There are many precise and non-precise definitions for role play. For Ladousse "When students assume a role, they play a part in a specific situation. 'Play' means that the role is taken on in a safe environment in which students are as inventive and playful as possible."

This definition, given by Ladousse, demonstrates clearly the kind of activities which aim to develop oral language skills and which were experienced by some groups of students during the field research of this paper.

According to Ladousse (1987, p. 7)

"Role play is one of a whole gamut of communicative techniques which develops fluency in language students, which promotes interaction in the classroom and which increases motivation. Not only is peer learning encouraged by it but also the sharing between teacher and students of the responsibility for the learning process”.

The frequent use of role play techniques in the classes may encourage students to speak and develop their oral skills. Role play provides enthusiasm in the classroom and, as Keith Maurice says in his article "Laugh While Learning Another Language: Techniques that are Functional and Funny" (1988, p. 20) "... without enthusiasm in the classroom, learning becomes just a chore...Combine enthusiasm with involvement and it would seem
to lead to more interesting classes and more effective learning”. In this article he quotes a Chinese proverb that says “Tell me and I forget; teach me and I remember; involve me and I learn” which can exemplify with success the function that the use of role plays have in class development.

Another function of the use of role playing techniques is as facilitator for the linguistic items memorization. Role play activities provide physical and visual reinforcement that increases involvement and helps to fix vocabulary, structure and grammar points in mind.

Also, role play activities may help teachers to overcome some of the difficulties of teaching mixed ability classes. They encourage the students to use all the nonverbal elements which are a natural part of speaking and may allow weaker students to compensate for the lack of language ability by the use of paralinguistic communication, such as body language.

Moreover, role play can be a very useful dress rehearsal for real life, especially for people who are learning English for professional purposes. It fits the desire for realism, since it gives the students the chance to rehearse the typical activities they will presumably perform in real life: greetings, making suggestions, asking for directions, ordering food in a restaurant, etc.

“It enables people not just to acquire a set of phrases but to learn how interaction might take place in a variety of situations” (Ladousse 1987, p. 7-8). Role play activities train students to deal with the unpredictable nature of linguistic communication, including all the social skills required in different situations, through the very wide variety of experiences that can be brought into the classroom through them.

One important characteristic of role playing is that it is a simple and brief technique to organize. Role plays can be very short or open-ended, be used as a follow-up or reinforcement activity for the activities from the coursebook, they are flexible for individual variation, initiative and imagination and provide more fluency than accuracy. It puts the emphasis on practicing the process of communicating rather than on evaluating its product. It is a technique that allows for free flow of imagination, where fantasy becomes more important than reality.
2.1 - ROLE PLAYS AND SPEAKING

Role playing is a classroom activity which gives the student the opportunity to practice the language and the actual roles he may need outside the classroom. In daily life, in our own language, we fulfil a varied number of roles: at home – the role of husband and wife, mother or father, daughter or son; visiting the doctor: the role of patient; going shopping: the role of customer, etc. Most students will not need to fulfil in the foreign language all the roles they fulfil in the mother tongue, unless they intend to live and work in a foreign language environment for a long period of time. As it is impossible to predict what students will want or need to use their knowledge of the language for or which roles they will have to fulfil, the teacher should help them to an understanding of role behaviour and give them extensive practicing in using this knowledge.

"To speak a language is very important. If we just study reading and writing, it may seem useless at times; we may wonder how we can use this language. But to speak a language gives a reason for learning it. A play is all communication" (Via, p.158).

Most of the language students are not used to spoken English in their daily lives and are afraid of speaking due to possible mistakes. Surely, speaking has become one the worst students' language barriers and it is the teacher's role to help them to overcome this problem.

Nowadays, the use of English language in our country can be considered "common place" due to the constant contact people have with it through music, films, advertisement, Computer Science, etc. However, this contact is too little in relation to the opportunities for real oral communication – which can be the first reason for the students' "resistance" in speaking in the classroom.

Role play activities provide an interactive and friendly learning environment, in which the students may feel more comfortable in speaking, developing self-confidence.

Ladousse says (1987, p. 15) that "mistakes indicate certain stages in the acquisition of the language and will disappear gradually as the students become more competent and confident". In most foreign language classrooms, speaking is the skill by which the learner is most frequently judged – by the teacher and by the classmates, which leads to lack of confidence and sometimes, to giving up learning the language.
In his seminar “Building Confidence” (Curitiba, June 2000), Nick Dawson explained that

“Nearly all speakers of foreign languages fail to perform to the best of their ability because they lack confidence and most of us feel more anxious when speaking in a foreign language than when speaking in our own. Our students’ self confidence begins to diminish as we start to judge them by the adult standards which, of course, they cannot achieve”.

It is important to set standards in school in relation to mistakes because they are an integral part of the learning process. If the standard is too low the students cannot make any progress. Consequently, the teachers’ attitudes towards mistakes is essential. Mistakes should be seen as learning opportunities, not failures, because they indicate that learning is taking place.

Mistakes can be corrected by eliciting the correct forms from the students and writing them on the board. The teacher can also predict which will be the most common mistakes according to the students’ level and focus on them in the role-cards. Also, some “remedial” exercises can be provided after the role plays, if necessary.

It is also necessary that teachers be tolerant of a minor intrusion of native language in these activities – which is normal at the beginning of the process. To avoid first language interference, it is important to choose not too difficult or emotionally loaded role play exercises.

A second reason for the resistance of some students in speaking in the classroom is shyness. Certainly, class participation is crucial for the success of a conversation class and drawing out the shy students who lack confidence is a major obstacle teachers face. Usually, the greatest problem of these students is the audience. Some of them speak in class but do not have courage to use language outside class and some simply do not speak at all.

Role plays may provide a “mask” for most of the shy students because they do not feel their own personality is implicated in the conversation. Their speech becomes of one imaginary person and not of their own. According to Via (1985,p.12-15) “Students’ fear of
making mistakes in expression in the target language is relieved while they are out of “self”.

On the other hand, some students may feel psychologically stressed when asked to “be” someone else. Usually, extrovert students convince the inhibited ones that there is no problem in participating and motivate them to the class. A solution, pointed out by Ladousse (1987, p.12) could be the application of task-based role plays (Ex: information transfer exercises within the context of a role play). This way, the shy students would not feel it is a role play and would get used to it.

Ladousse (1987, p.14-15) also suggests the use of role-cards taken from real life, roles which correspond to a real need in the students’ lives and the use of the “character identity sheet” in order to help students’ imagination and develop confidence to speak.

Also, roles can be created to fit not only the linguistic ability, but the personality of each individual student, since the task of the teacher is to improve the students’ performance in the foreign language, not alter their personality.

The type of the role depends on some personal characteristics of the students. There are roles which correspond to a real need in the students’ lives, such as the role of a doctor dealing with patients. Another type of role is the one in which the student plays himself in a situation he may or may not have direct experience; an example could be someone in a job interview. Some roles are easy to play because the students have a lot of indirect experience of them, like a television journalist. Finally, there are fantasy roles, which have nothing to do with real life but fascinate many students, especially young children for the learning of the language.

2.2 - THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

The spontaneous activity of dramatization does not imply, as many people believe, in the dispense of the teacher. On the contrary, it is the teacher that will organize the activity, supporting and respecting the learner in a game environment. The progressive preparation of the activity under the leadership of the teacher will guarantee the self-expression of the student. The teacher’s personality and the knowledge he has about his students are indispensable for a profitable realization of the activity.
In order to create the right environment for dramatization, it is important for the teacher being an enthusiastic, patient and serene person. Also, he should have a sense of discipline and abolish any criticism or prejudice.

The teacher's role in a role play can be as observer/guide or minor player. During the role play preparation by the students, the teacher can move around the classroom, helping with vocabulary, doubts of pronunciation, etc. Once the role play has started, teacher's direction must stop: he should sit somewhere in the classroom and watch the presentation without interferences.

The teacher can also participate in a play by taking a role himself, while observing the students. He should not assume a major role in order to avoid becoming a dominating personality in the role play, but minor roles, which give him the chance to be near the action.

From listening to mistakes, misunderstandings and problems, the teacher can evaluate the effectiveness of his teaching and decide if further work on certain points is necessary. However, making notes in front of the students should be avoided so they do not feel inhibited or afraid of making mistakes.

The teacher is responsible for the organization of preliminary work and for presenting the scenario or the idea clearly, ensuring that each student understands what he has to do. He should act as a stimulator and constructive builder of different types of experiences. He is the instructor that provides the environment in which acquisition of the target language can take place, an atmosphere where students can feel comfortable and where they will be more prone to perform up to their confidence.
PART II

FIELD RESEARCH: ROLE PLAY

The field research – second part of this paper is intended to put in practice and prove some theories presented about role playing in the first part. Also, through the field research, it was possible to measure the acceptance of role playing techniques by the students at different ages and the practicality of using role plays in the classes.

During this field research, some groups of students from 4th, 5th and 6th grades from Colégio Bom Jesus (Curitiba, Paraná), experienced some role plays which were based on their coursebook syllabus and were used mostly to reinforce the content they were learning.

As role plays can cover some aspects of the language (often functions) that are not worked through the coursebook, they can supplement the core material or, depending on the flexibility of the programme, can replace some activities which the teacher feels uncomfortable with. Thus, it is very important to read the coursebook or syllabus closely. Doing this, I could notice that my students had very little speaking practice in their coursebook and that, sometimes, the oral activities from their books were not interesting enough for them because there was not any linking with their daily lives or ages.

In order to develop their motivation to learn English and their oral skills I decided to work with some role plays which were related to the content they had just learnt in the coursebook, so they had already had contact with some vocabulary and structures and could reinforce them during the role plays.

Before setting up each role play, I had to consider some points related to class management and to the kind of students I was going to work with. These points were certainly crucial for the success of role playing in my classes. First of all, it is important to know the “personality” of the students (Are they very active or not? Do they refuse to work in groups? etc) and also consider what happens before and after the lesson. Second, it is advisable to begin role playing exercises with pair work rather than group work and keep the activities short until the students get used to them. Third, be sure that the students understood the situation and what is on the role cards before starting, using the mother tongue when there is not any other solution to help students’ understanding. Also, it is
important to check if the space available for the class fits the requirements of the role play and decide if useful structures are going to be presented before the role play starts or if they can be fed in afterwards as remedial work. Finally, prepare role plays that can be used with different numbers of students and set a strict time limit for each part of the activity.

Some of the role plays experienced by the students are described in this part of the paper and can be used by other language teachers in their classes or help them with ideas to develop their own role plays and encourage students to do the same.

AT THE SUPERMARKET

Level: Elementary (4th grade)
Time: 15 – 20 minutes.
Aim: To get the whole class involved in a fun activity in which they can use a lot of language that they have learnt recently.
Language: Structures and vocabulary related to the content studied previously.
Organization: Groups of three.
Preparation: Xerox of different dollar notes for distribution among the groups;
Empty boxes on the tables to be the “market shelves”;
Empty boxes of different products (potato chips, milk, etc.) placed on the “shelves”;
A toy cash register;
Plastic bags to put the products “bought” at the supermarket.

Warm-up: Setting the scene through questions about the scenario, eliciting from the students what kind of conversation usually happens at the supermarkets during shopping.

Procedure: 1 - Explanation of the following situation: A customer is going to buy some food and drink at the supermarket. A shop assistant is going to help him before he pays the product; he talks to the cashier, pays the products and goes away.
2 - The students were divided into groups of three;
3 - Each student received a role card;
4 – Checking if the students have read the role cards and understood what they had to do;
5 – The groups had 5 minutes to prepare their role plays and choose a name for the “supermarket” to be written on the board during their presentation.
6 – Starting the role plays and observing the groups helping with ideas or language.

Follow-up: Writing of the dialogue presented in the role plays.
Evaluation: The students got very interested in the activity, asking for new vocabulary to be used. They certainly improved their speaking abilities and memorized structures and vocabulary better.

Role-card A: Shop Assistant
You are a shop assistant that works in a big supermarket and helps the customers during the shopping.

Role-card B: Customer
You go shopping in a supermarket near your house and asks the shop assistant the prices of some products you want to buy.

Role-card C: Cashier
You greet the customer, calculate the prices of the products and tell the customer the total amount of his shopping.

HOTEL CHECK-IN

Level: Elementary (4th grade)
Time: 15 minutes
Aim: To develop students’ ability of asking and responding in simple situations.
Language: Structures: Wh questions.
Functions: Introducing yourself.
Organization: Pairs.
Preparation: Distribution of hotel forms for the students and separation of a desk and a chair on two corners of the classroom.

Procedure:
1 - Division of the class into two groups with the same number of students, if possible.
2 - Choice of one person from each group to be the “hotel receptionist”.
3 - Explanation of the following situation:
   All the students, except for the two ones that were chosen, are going to be tourists that are supposed to do their check-in a hotel and are going to be interviewed by the receptionists.
4 - After the students had received their role cards and hotel forms, set up a time of five minutes for individual preparation.
5 - The “receptionists” sat down on the chairs separated for them and the “tourists” form into a line in front of their desks.
6 - The “tourists” were interviewed by the “receptionists” so that the former can fill in the hotel form.

Variation: The teacher can change the students’ roles so more students can practice asking questions.

Evaluation: The students got very interested in the activity and almost did not have problems during the interviews.

Role cards:
Role card A: Pietro
Your name is Pietro. You are from Italy. You live in Rome. You are 12 years-old and you can speak Italian and Spanish.

Role card B: Joana
Your name is Joana. You live in Barcelona. You are Spanish. You are 15 years-old and you speak Spanish and English.
Role card C: Paulo
Your name is Paulo. You are Brazilian. You live in Rio de Janeiro. You are 14 years-old and you can speak Portuguese and English.

Role card D: Midori
Your name is Midori. You are 11 years-old. You are Japanese and live in Tokyo. You speak Japanese and English.

Role card E: Marrie
Your name is Marrie. You are French. You live in Paris and you are 13. You can speak French, Spanish and English.

Role card F: Peter
Your name is Peter. You are from Germany and you are 16. You can speak German and English.

THE PICNIC

Level: Elementary (4th grades)
Time: 30 minutes.
Aim: To provide a real situation for the practice of the language that the students have recently learnt.
Language: Vocabulary: food and drink
   Structures: Simple present – do.
   Functions: Talking about preferences.

Organization: A group of three to 15 students.
Preparation: A date was set up and the students were asked to bring food and drink which names they have learnt in English in order to make a picnic. A nice place (garden), a towel, a picnic basket, plastic glasses and paper napkins were provided for the picnic.
Procedure:
Explanation of the following situation: You are going to participate in a picnic and you can only eat if you tell your friends what you want in English. You should also offer food and drink and ask them about their preferences.

Follow-up:
The students can make a drawing of their picnic and write the names of food and drink or write about their friends’ preferences.

Evaluation:
The students were very excited about the activity. Some of them tried to use Portuguese during the picnic but were immediately reproached by the colleagues. Most of them used the vocabulary and structures correctly.

Variation:
If there is not a nice place or good weather for the picnic, the teacher can do the activity in the classroom or in the playground. The teacher and students can also take pictures of their picnic.

Role cards: none.

AT THE RESTAURANT

Level: Elementary (5th grades)
Time: 10-15 minutes.
Aim: To involve the class in a fun activity in which they can use the language they have learnt recently.
Language: Vocabulary: food and drink
   Structures: Wh questions, some/any, would, can.
   Functions: Ordering food and drink
Organization: groups of four.

Preparation:
1 – A table and three chairs around it should be prepared in order to create the restaurant’s environment.
2 – Decision with the groups about the name of the restaurant to be written on the board.
3 – Menus for the restaurant.

Warm-up: Discussion with the students about the conversation people usually have with the waiter and among themselves in a restaurant.

Procedure:
1 – Explanation of the following situation: Three people go to a restaurant and talk to the waiter about their order. The waiter brings it and while eating, they make comments about the food and/or drink. They ask for the bill, pay it and go away.
2 – Division of the students into groups of four.
3 – After receiving the role cards, the students read them and prepare the role play during five minutes.
4 – Role play presentation.

Role cards:
Role card A: Customer
You are a very polite lady. You like to eat a lot and you like all kinds of food and drink.

Role card B: Customer
You are a very demanding and not very polite person. You ask for details about many dishes from the menu. You complain about the prices.

Role card C: Customer
You are a very nice person. You are in doubt about what eat and drink. Ask the waiter for a suggestion.
Role card D: Waiter
You are a very polite waiter. Greet the customers and makes notes of their order. You should also bring their order to the table and calculate the bill.

Variation: The teacher can ask the students to bring special clothes for the presentation of the role plays.
Evaluation: The students interacted very well and had only a few doubts about vocabulary.

REPORTER FOR ONE DAY

Level: Elementary (5th and 6th grades)
Time: 30 minutes
Aim: To motivate students to speak English and develop their fluency and accuracy.
Language: Simple present – 1st and 3rd person
   Wh- questions.
   Functions – Talking about likes, dislikes and daily routine.

Organization: Groups of three.

Preparation: Choice of people to be interviewed by the students (preferably, English language speakers); Setting up a date for the interviews.

Warm-up: The students can watch a video of an interview in order to have contact with the way people act in a professional interview.

Procedures:
1 – Explanation of the following situation: Your group works for a very important journal in the city and is going to interview a teacher or another worker from your school.
2 – Division of the students in groups of three.
3 – Distribution of the role cards.
4 – Preparation of the role play by the groups.
5 – Role play presentation.

**Role cards:**

Role card A: Reporter
You are going to ask people some questions about their daily routine, likes and dislikes, etc.

Role card B: Translator:
If necessary, you will translate the questions and answers during the interview.

Role card C: Editor
You are going to be responsible for making notes about the people interviewed and edit the final work.

**Follow-up:** The students can take photos of the people interviewed and show them with the text about the person on the cardboard.
CONCLUSION

Through this study, it was possible to observe how important the use of drama activities is, in special role playing, not only for the development of the students’ language skills but also to motivate them for learning English.

Drama activities can be used in the foreign language classroom as opportunities to practice the language in a safe environment before the real world and to put the students in contact with all the verbal and nonverbal aspects of language. Also, they can help in the memorization of new language items and encourage shy students to participate more in the classes.

Developing students’ motivation and confidence to use a foreign language are important aspects of the use of drama activities in the classroom. For the students, they are fun playing activities which are, at the same time, useful for their lives. During these activities, the students have a sense of achievement, are recognized and valued by others, are responsible for their work and want to do it in the most efficient and enjoyable way and can see and feel their progress in terms of accuracy and fluency.

Furthermore, drama techniques put the learner at the centre of the learning process, promoting his socialization and interaction with the others. The students improve their abilities of exchanging ideas, feeling like doing work in common, practicing leadership, learning how to listen to and give opinions, criticizing objectively and being criticized with judgement.

Among many drama activities, role playing techniques can be used successfully in language teaching, specially because of some specific characteristics: flexibility, easy organization, fun, application in mixed-ability groups, dress rehearsal for real life and reinforcement for new vocabulary and expressions.

Role playing develops mainly the student’s oral skills. It emphasizes the process of communicating, develops more fluency than accuracy and promotes enthusiasm in the classroom, which makes the students speak up, one of the biggest challenges for teachers today.

All the theoretical aspects of drama activities and role playing presented in the first part of this paper were proved with success during the field research. The students that took part
in it felt really satisfied and pleased that they had used the language for something concrete and useful. Surely, the frequent application of role play techniques in the classes improved their language skills, especially speaking, as well as motivated them for English learning. Also, these students are interacting better among themselves; they help each other when it is necessary and encourage colleagues to participate.

In short, besides developing the linguistic aspects of language, drama activities also promote a chance for authentic and spontaneous communication. Role playing is an easy and profitable technique for language learning that should be known and used by all the language teachers that wish to improve their teaching and get the students more interested in the classes.
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