

7 Drama as a multisensory approach to include SEN learners in an EFL classroom

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Objectives

The objective of this chapter is to introduce drama and structuring drama work as a multisensory approach that integrates more than only linguistic intelligence (Gardner, 1999), which is not the strength of SEN learners, namely dyslexic learners. Structured drama is a special type of method or holistic planning of teaching the EFL subject content in a meaningful context. As this is a complex method the aim of this chapter is to briefly introduce the theoretical background of drama in EFL as well as to introduce one structured drama lesson to demonstrate some of the possibilities of structuring EFL content in a way that is suitable for SEN children incorporating psychomotoric, affective, and cognitive aims; various learning strategies as well as various intelligences.

SEN learners need to acquire English as a foreign language in situated, experiential and holistic learning, which might, however, be a challenge for the language teachers, therefore, a complete drama structure based on a simplified reader is an integral part of the chapter to demonstrate structuring drama work and give the target audience, i.e. teachers of English as a foreign language, a model lesson with practical teaching tips, which can be used for their own creative work in EFL

Think and do:

Before learning the facts from the chapter try to summarise your own knowledge of drama in EFL on a poster.

Work as the whole group. Put the word “**DRAMA**” in the middle of the poster. Then write any associations that come in your heads.

1. Terminology and literature review

Drama came into being in 1924 at the university in Evanston (Illinois) almost at the same time as the project method (Machková, 2012), a project usually uses only the content of a subject, however, drama works with the interpersonal relationships and human interaction. The main drama activity is in the world of „as if“, i.e. the world of fiction and imagination, using various techniques and conventions originally created for actors’ training. As there are many techniques and conventions, each student can find some that suit him or her and their way of learning as everyone is different and everyone is good at something else (Armstrong, 2011). Drama as well as project teaching requests friendly atmosphere in the classroom; structured drama is a kind of project incorporating drama techniques, where the necessary condition of a successful implementation of the method is the social climate of the classroom and the feeling of safety and no threat to the learner (Kratochvílová, 2009), which is crucial for making SEN children successful.

Drama in ELT is a quite recent phenomenon as Almond (2005) suggests on page 9 where he states that in the 1980s drama specialists still felt that drama needed to be demystified and was almost impossible to define due to intangibility and immeasurability while today most teachers know what drama is and recognise its value in ELT. The methods and conventions of drama in education are based upon the holistic, experiential, and cooperative learning and are based primarily on the humanistic and constructivist conception of education. It is a complex teaching

method that is highly pedocentric and where the pupil/student is in the centre of the learning/teaching process. The pupil is viewed as an individual with his/her own needs, interests, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. The centre of interest is taking care of the teaching/learning process, its quality in the relation of every individual child, his/her possibilities. It is a process where the child is an active co-creator of the learning situation/process (see Marušák, Králová, & Rodriguezová, 2008).

The aim of the lesson for an EFL teacher is generally to work with the language developing all four language skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing); Alan Maley and Alan Duff state that the main reason why to use drama in an EFL classroom is the fact that it integrates skills in a natural way and that listening is a key feature of it, furthermore, what is important for SEN learners, is the focus on bringing together body and mind in integrating verbal and non-verbal communication, integrating both the cognitive and affective domains, thus restoring the importance of feeling as well as thinking (Goleman, 1995), by contextualising the language, we bring the classroom interaction to life through focus on meaning with the emphasis on whole-person learning and multi-sensory inputs, which helps learners and offers them unequalled opportunities for catering their differences (Maley & Duff, 2007). Bearing in mind that SEN learners often face failure in the EFL classroom, the main benefit in using drama techniques in the EFL classroom seem to be the focus on building the learners' confidence, improving their spontaneity and fluency in real life situations and not focusing so much on accuracy and mistakes either in oral production or in writing. Thus providing them with the possibilities to succeed and not to succumb to helplessness due to their frequent failures.

Fleming in his book *Starting Drama Teaching* speaks of two main aims when teaching drama "**to develop personal qualities**" and "**to develop appreciation of the cultural heritage**", which at first sight might suggest very different orientations – the first implying **the emphasis on active participation** in making drama, the second suggesting a **study of texts of different sorts** (Fleming, 2011), which is what we seek for when working with SEN learners trying to involve them as fully as possible, trying to develop their awareness of their strength and weaknesses and to develop their metacognitive and compensatory skills when working with a topic or text in the context of the EFL classroom. Fleming, besides the two main aims mentioned above, lists more aims which can be considered as very helpful for SEN children and their well-being in an EFL classroom:

- to provide future artists and audiences;
- to help pupils think;
- to develop personal qualities;
- to develop imagination and creativity;
- to provide insight into human situations;
- to improve teaching other subjects;
- to educate the emotions;
- to develop confidence;
- to provide entertainment and relaxation;
- to develop appreciation of the cultural heritage;
- to develop understanding of how drama works as a genre (Fleming, 2011)

Neelands and Good (2008) provided teachers with a very useful handbook of available forms in theatre and drama, which they divided into 4 parts:

- a) **Context-Building Action** (circle of life, circular drama, collective character, collective drawing, defining space, diaries, letters, journal, messages, games, guided tour, making maps/diagrams, objects of character, role-on-the-wall, simulations, soundtracking, still image, the ripple, unfinished materials);
- b) **Narrative Action** (a day in the life, critical events, hot-seating, interviews/interrogations, mantle of the expert, meetings, noises off, overheard conversations, reportage, tag role, teacher-in-role, telephone/radio conversations, time line);

- c) **Poetic action** (action narration, alter-ego, analogy, behind the scene, caption-making, ceremony, come on down!, cross-cutting, documentary, flashback, folk-forms, forum-theatre, gestus, masks, metamorphosis, mimed activity, montage, play within a play, prepared roles, re-enactment, revue, ritual, role-reversal, shape-shifting, small-group play-making, soundscape, TV Times);
- d) **Reflective Action** (choral speak, gestalt, giving witness, group sculpture, If I was you..., marking the moment, moment of truth, narration, space between, spectrum of difference, taking sides, this way/that way, thought-tracking, voices in the head, walls have ears).

Defining the terms

- **drama in EFL** is a complex method using drama techniques and conventions; it is a whole-person approach to language teaching and it requires us to look at communication holistically.
- **drama techniques** are activities, many of which are based on techniques used by actors in their training. Through them, students are given opportunities to use their own personality in creating the material on which part of the language class is based.
- **language learning strategies** are the processes and actions consciously deployed by language learners to help them to learn a language more effectively.
- **constructivist approach** believes that learning occurs when the learners are actively involved in the learning process and create their knowledge in the process.
- **holistic learning** is a type of learning that focuses on the whole picture and not only the splinters or puzzle pieces within a topic, thus, it is easier for majority of SEN children who tend to need to see the whole picture first.
- **situated learning** is experiential learning in a meaningful situation
- **multisensory approach** – using as many senses as possible to improve the learning process of SEN learners
- **social aspects of SEN** describe the feelings and challenges that the child with special educational needs faces

2. Australia – multisensory structured drama approach (Teaching language and content using drama techniques and conventions)

I decided to demonstrate structured drama approach on using a simplified reader (Australia and New Zealand by Christine Lindop, Oxford Bookworms, level 3). The project of this structured drama is based on situated learning, which uses experiential learning in a meaningful context where the rule is that our learning is led by the harmony between our experiences and the experiences of the others in the classroom (Krátká, 2011). The experience becomes educationally significant when the learners identify themselves with the characters, and on the basis of their reflection in the role of the character as well as their own reflection the learners gain new social and emotional experiences (Silberman, 2007).

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Time needed: 2 to 8 sessions depending how deep we want to get into the topic and what the students want to research.

Age group: 6th grade and older

Educational area: Humans and their world; Humans and communication; Cross-curricular links;

Outputs according to the Educational Framework of Reference:

- The pupil recognizes the main information, past and contemporary, of Australia as the continent, its inhabitants, riches and poverties;
- The pupil uses texts, encyclopaedias, the Internet as their sources of information for understanding the topic;
- Using the selected texts the pupil compares and evaluates the way of life of the Australian past inhabitants (both: first the Aborigines, then the convicts coming from England) and the contemporary inhabitants and their way of life.

EFL aims:

- Eliciting what the pupils know about the topic – vocabulary specific to the topic;
- asking questions in present simple about the topic – practicing questions and eliciting what the pupils are interested in regarding the target topic;
- practicing all the four language skills;
- practicing present simple tense for present situations and past simple for past situations;
- cross-curricular links: learning geographical vocabulary and learning about the map of Australia.

Drama aims:

- Individual and group work in a given situation;
- practice the skill of cooperation in groups of different sizes (pairs, small groups, the whole class as a group);
- practice the presentational skills in small groups;
- use the found out information in creative work (TPR map, role of the Aboriginal tribes, roles of the British convicts);

Sources of information:

- Simplified reader: Lindop, C. (2008). *Australia and New Zealand, Oxford Bookworms, level 3*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Encyclopaedias, dictionaries, the Internet.

The methods and conventions: Soundtrack, Circular drama, Defining space, Teacher-in-role, Meetings in roles, Narration, Note-taking dictation, Text reconstruction, Lying game, Memory game, Find your pair

The structure of the Lesson:

1. Tune in

First we need to tune students into the topic and learn what the pupils already know (the K-W-L approach – the table can be downloaded from the teaching resources on www.oup.com/elt/gradedreaders)

The teacher asks the students to close their eyes, listen carefully and shout any association that the sounds bring upon their mind. Then the teacher plays the Spirit of Uluru on youtube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YdZQytU_nS0), waits for the students to shout the associations and writes them on the board in one colour (eliciting what the group knows about the topic)

2. “Want to learn” – the mirror circle (elicitation)

Then the teacher asks the pupils what they want to learn about the topic and writes on the board “*I want to learn about...*”

The pupils have some time to think and prepare one sentence each about what they want to learn.

Then they form a circle and the teacher tells them that they are his/her mirror and he/she is thinking about what he/she wants to learn. The teacher goes around the circle and the pupils say what they want to learn, e.g. “*I want to learn about the Aborigines/outback/life in Australia/map of Australia/Sydney/...*”

Then the teacher asks the pupils to go to the board and write, in different colour, what they want to learn about (they can form interest group that will look information up together).

3. TPR map of Australia

The teacher asks the pupils to create the map of Australia in the classroom using their bodies. The teacher says, “*the north is at the whiteboard, the south is opposite, the west is...*” pointing to

the sides of the classroom. "Please, if you said you were Sydney, go to the place of the classroom where you think Sydney is, I am Uluru and I am in the middle of the classroom" and the teacher goes to the middle of the classroom positioning himself/herself as Uluru saying, "I am Uluru, and I am in the middle of the classroom", then waits for the pupils to go somewhere and to declare what place they are.

4. Checking the map

Then the teacher projects the map of Australia on the whiteboard so that the pupils can check if they were right and maybe change the position if they were wrong (<https://elt.oup.com/feature/global/maps/?cc=cz&sellLanguage=cs>)

Or the students can work with the map in their reader (appendix 1):

5. After checking the map we will find out something about **the beginnings of the continent and the original inhabitants**, i.e. presenting the students with the picture of the Aborigines from the reader and asking the students what they know about the original inhabitants of Australia. After eliciting what the students know, the teacher will use the text in the reader for a **note-taking dictation** (the students have to write only notes and later they will be working in groups of 3 or 4 to reconstruct the text together). After having reconstructed the text they will check it on the whiteboard, the dyslexic learners will get a copy of the text not to have to look up at the board and down at their writing as that is difficult for them, they can get extra time to check and rewrite the text at home (find the text in Appendix 2).

The lying game

The teacher chooses the activities done by the Aborigines in the *Dreamtime* (e.g. 1) *travelled to different parts of their land*; 2) *they ate plants and fruits*; 3) *they built houses made from branches and leaves*; 4) *They painted their bodies and sang, danced*), the teacher and the students decide how to mime each of the sentences and then the teacher divides the classroom into **As** and **Bs**. **As** have to mime the activity, **Bs** come to **As** asking "What are you doing?" and **As** have to lie (i.e. they have to say one of the 3 activities they are not doing at the moment) and **Bs** start to do the activity **As** said; then **As** go to another **B** asking "What are you doing?" (the teacher lets them swap the roles several times to practice the sentences).

6. Teacher-in-role

The teacher divides the class into groups of 4 to represent different tribes of Aborigines, then the teacher comes in the role of the main chief of all the tribes in Australia saying:

My fellow Aborigines, this is how we were living here in the Dreamtime, travelling to different parts of the land, eating plants and fruits, building houses from branches and leaves, painting our bodies, singing and dancing, HOWEVER, this year: 1788, there are 11 ships approaching our land with many British immigrants who will change our lives forever. Each tribe, please, discuss the possibilities what we can do with the bloody British, then we will have a meeting at our sacred place, Uluru and we will together decide what we will do.

Before the meeting the teacher projects the picture of Uluru on the whiteboard/wall (appendix 4):

Then the meeting starts and the tribes (groups of students suggest what to do with the immigrants, e.g. welcome them, send them back home, etc.)

After the meeting and the discussion has finished the teacher tells the students what happened and how the British changed the life in Australia, demonstrating the situation of Aborigines on how many lived in Tasmania (letting them guess the numbers):

In 1804 (4000-6000 Aborigines)

In 1831 (190 Aborigines)

In 1876 (0 Aborigines)

7. Possible extension – similar activities about the British convicts who had to do a lot of work when changing Australia (using the same games and techniques)

8. Memorising in groups and circular TPR activity:

Learning more about Australia today (geography) – using the map (http://fdslive.oup.com/www.oup.com/elt/general_content/global/map_posters_worksheets/AustraliaandNewZealandMapPoster.pdf) – dividing the class into 7 groups. Each group has to memorise one text from the map of Australia, i.e. 1) the Great Barrier Reef, 2) the outback, 3) Uluru, 4) Perth, 5) Sydney, 6) Adelaide, 7) Canberra. They have 3 minutes and then they have to present their text in the circle (Each student has a sentence or two). Then the teacher gives them numbers. Number 1 start in the circle, says his/her sentence, then number 2 goes in the circle, until the end of the text. This activity is very good for ending a lesson and opening the next one, as the students can look at the text again before starting the circle in the next lesson and thus re-read and revise the whole text.

9. Finding your pair

The teacher distributes cut out sentences with the facts about Australia. Each student has only half of the sentence and they have to find the other half, i.e. their partner (see appendix 2); **follow up:** writing. The teacher distributes a new table (see appendix 3) with only halves of the sentences. Dyslexic learners can only paste the second halves of the sentences in the lesson and can copy the second halves at home to be provided more time for their writing practice.

10. Possible extension:

- a) Life in the outback (a day in the life of people living in the outback)
- b) School in Australia (school of the air – practicing teaching using IT (skype, mp3s, emails, etc.)
- c) Flying doctors (using transmitters for listening and making notes about the problem/patient)
- d) The riches of Australia (planning the crops, prices, sales, economic growth)
- e) The current situation of the Aborigines
- f) More readymade teaching resources can be found on: www.oup.com/elt/gradedreaders

Conclusions

The objective of the chapter was to introduce drama as a multisensory, project method using acting techniques and conventions to create “as if” worlds and situations, which make foreign language learning more meaningful. After a brief introduction of drama and project method, drama in EFL, what drama can offer to SEN learners, and a list of techniques and conventions suggested by two of the big names in drama in EFL, Jonothan Neelands and Tony Good, I presented a structured drama project using some of the techniques from their list, planned in such a way that all 4 language skills were developed within the project and also that the project fulfilled the conditions of multisensory (learning through more senses), and holistic and situated learning (learning in a complex situation via own experience to understand the topic) with the focus on fluency and friendly atmosphere in the classroom to give all learners at their time (when the activity was easy for them-it suited their intelligence/strength) the feeling of success.

I have chosen the topical theme of immigrants, however, from a bit different point of view as, in this case, the unwanted immigrants are the British in 1788, which the students appreciated and laughed at.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: The map of Australia from the simplified reader (p 2)

Appendix 2: The picture of the Aborigines

Appendix 3: The text of the note-taking dictation

Appendix 4: The picture of Uluru

Appendix 5: halved sentences (to cut out)

Appendix 6: halves of the sentences for writing exercise

Appendix 1: map of Australia from the simplified reader (p 2)



Appendix 2:

The Aborigines



The text of the note-taking dictation

The ABORIGINES

- T reading; Ss listening:
- The 300,000 Aborigines who lived in Australia until 1788 belonged to more than 300 different groups and each group had its own land and language. They travelled to different parts of their land during the year to find food and water; they ate plants and fruits and caught animals and fish. They did not own many things, and their only buildings were houses made from branches and leaves. This way of life did not damage or destroy the land where they lived.
- **At special times Aborigines came together in big groups.** They painted their bodies and sang, danced, and made music. They believed that a long ago the world was made by animals, plants, and humans together. This time was called “**Dreamtime**“, and there were many songs. Stories, and pictures about it.

Appendix 3:



Appendix 2: halved sentences (to cut out)

Australia is big:	7,686,848 kilometres.
Only 5 countries in the world are larger than Australia:	Russia, Canada, the United States, China and Brazil.
Western part of Australia:	is four times as big as Texas, or eleven times as big as Great Britain.
Australia is low and flat:	only 5% of the land is above 600 metres.
The highest mountain is	Mount Kosciuszko, at 2,228 metres.
Australia is hot and dry	two thirds of the country is desert.
From May to October the north is often sunny and dry for weeks	and it is a popular place for winter holidays in the sun.
December is	in the summer.
June is	in winter.
Tasmania is cooler and wetter than the rest	of Australia, with high mountains, thick forests, and some of the world's trees.

Appendix 3: halves of the sentences for writing exercise

Australia is big:	
Only 5 countries in the world are larger than Australia:	
Western part of Australia:	
Australia is low and flat:	
The highest mountain is	
Australia is hot and dry	
From May to October the north is often sunny and dry for weeks	
December is	
June is	
Tasmania is cooler and wetter than the rest	