**What is Drama in ELT?**Most ELT teachers nowadays advocate some elements of a ‘Communicative Approach’ and therefore recognise and appreciate the value of Drama in ELT. Drama can be defined as activity involving people in a social context and there is no doubt that effective communication in social situations involves other forms of communication that go beyond language competence and includes the use of gesture, body posture, intonation and other prosodic features. However the inclusion of drama based activities is not so evident in current ELT course books, resource books, supplementary materials and teacher training courses. Teachers clearly need practical step by step guidance on how to incorporate drama more comprehensively and cohesively into their teaching.

**Why Use Drama?**Drama is an active approach to learning where participants identify with roles and situations to be able to engage with, explore and understand the world they live in. This goes beyond language, as social interaction involves communication on multiple levels that cross cultural and language boundaries. By being part of a drama ensemble and participating in a fictitious context, the class is experiencing a shared moment of intensity that involves emotions, facial expressions, gesture, movement and a heightened awareness of others, that would not necessarily be experienced outside the drama environment. Students are thus freed from the constraints of precision of language, that may be required in the conventional language classroom, and are equipped with many other tools with which to communicate meaning.

Humans are physical, mental and psychological beings. When encouraging our students to learn another language we need to recognise and satisfy their ‘whole person’ needs and abilities. In other words we need to address physical, mental and psychological as well as purely linguistic needs. Typically language learning is confined to the mental world of problem-solving, rule application and artificial contexts. Drama is a way of unlocking the ‘whole-person’ and developing physical, creative, imaginative and emotional responses to learning contexts.

Essentially drama liberates the student from the confines of the conventional classroom environment and structure and gives the student the opportunity to draw on their own experiences and imagination, in creating the material on which part of the language class is based. These activities draw on the natural ability of every person to imitate, mimic and express him or herself physically. They are dramatic because they arouse interest by drawing on the unpredictable emotional power generated when emotional memory is triggered by a stimulus and when a person is brought together with others.

As an ensemble the class can learn and discover together, all the while feeling part of something larger than themselves and experiencing the support of the group. By being part of this safe environment students are able to take risks, build on the strengths of others and grow in confidence, making decisions and taking actions on behalf of the group. The Drama context also allows participants to be distanced or liberated from themselves to speak and behave in role, allowing their character to voice truths and opinions that the individual may not express in daily life.

Drama takes as its starting point ‘life’ not language and by so reversing the learning process, that is, by beginning with meaning and then moving to language later we are able to draw on the full range of a learners’ multiple intelligences and exploit learning as a ‘whole-person’ approach. The Drama environment builds on the personalities, energy and ideas of the participants, so is alive and always changing and evolving. Because of this no two Drama lessons are the same, and the level of the work is determined by the nature of the group. One Drama idea or plan is therefore very versatile and can be used and adapted for multiple levels and ages.

**The advantages of using drama.**

One of the main aims of using drama in a language course is to provide an active, stimulating, fun and creative environment in which to develop the student’s language learning potential. Students are encouraged to explore English through their imagination and creativity and to express this through language, and other forms of communication, that may include: movement, action, dance, and role-play.

These activities aim to develop:  
· Confidence, motivation, trust and participation  
· Oral and written communication skills  
· Awareness of interpersonal and sociocultural communication skills  
· Accuracy and fluency of expression  
· Rhythm and pronunciation  
· Linguistic intelligence  
· Social interactive skills

**The methodology / Principles of drama**  
Language in ELT course books is typically presented without the need for learners to be actively engaged. In other words traditional classroom activities have only a surface reality and fail to appeal to, and draw on the learners’ emotional reactions and direct experience. There is a need for learners to empathize with and to be emotionally involved in the creation of language. Drama incorporates the following principles:  
· Interactive Learning: The concept of interactive learning necessarily entails a lot of pair and group work in the classroom, as well as genuine language input from the “real world” for meaningful communication.  
· Learner-centered Learning: This kind of instruction involves the giving over of “power” in the language learning process to the learners themselves. It also strives to allow for personal creativity and input from the students, as well as taking into account their learning needs and objectives.  
· Cooperative Learning: This concept stresses the “ensemble” like nature of the classroom and emphasizes cooperation. Students share information and help, and achieve their learning goals as a group.  
· Whole language approach:. The philosophy of whole language is based on the concept that students need to experience language as an integrated whole. It focuses on the need for an integrated approach to language instruction within a context that is meaningful to students.

**What are the problems?**

There are many problems that can emerge for the teacher inexperienced in using drama activities in the classroom. Teachers who work in a traditional environment and follow a very structured syllabus are often afraid to experiment with more student centred activities. These fears are usually based around the apprehension that the class will become noisy, unfocused and the teacher will lose control. The reality is in fact the opposite: a learner-centred class where students are working collaboratively in groups, if carefully organized and well set up, is easily managed and apart from monitoring then groups the teacher is free. This contrasts with the teacher centred class where the teacher has to monitor an motivate 20 –30 individuals continuously without a minute’s respite. There are however **problems** that arise in drama based classrooms.  These include:

* Learners use L1 persistently
* Learners don’t participate
* Learners make lots of errors
* Dominant / shy students
* Learners get confused and do not know what to do
* Noise
* Chaos

These problems may occur in many learner-centred communicative activities and can be remedied by the following **solutions**:

1)Explain the rationale. Tell your students why you are doing these activities. If the aim is to develop oral fluency then explain to your learners that it is important for them to try to speak in English and not their L1. Only by practicing speaking in English will their oral fluency improve. This explanation of the rationale can be reinforced in many activities by having a penalty for L1 use. One way is to nominate a student as a language policeman who reports infringements of the rule.

2)Prepare students thoroughly. Prior to any communicative activity learners need to have sufficient controlled practice of the language they need to perform the tasks. This will include relevant lexis, language structures and pronunciation practise. Many weaker students are reluctant to participate in freer activities because they feel under prepared and lacking in confidence.

3)Give clear instructions. Communicative activities are often complex to set up. You need to have clear instructions and stage the instructions carefully. This typically involves the following stages:

1. Introduce the topic / aim of the activity
2. Show any relevant materials
3. Give clear instructions
4. Check instructions by asking checking questions
5. Briefly demonstrate the activity with a student / or get students to do an example / model.
6. Put students into relevant pairs / groups
7. Monitor students and help them as necessary.

4)Allow plenty of preparation time. Students need time to prepare both their ideas and rehearse the language before they can perform a complex communicative task. Indeed the more time they have to prepare the better they will perform the task. A lack of preparation time will produce a poor quality performance and this leads to feelings of frustration and disappointment. The opposite of what we are aiming to achieve. Students also need time to think. In a communicative / drama language class some of the most productive work is processed during periods of complete silence. Language teachers are often afraid of silence, as they believe silence means incomprehension. Teachers should avoid filling silence with their own voice but instead exploit the silence as necessary learner thinking time.

5)Prepare the formation of groups careful. The composition of groups is important. Learners should have a variety of focus and interact with as many different learners as possible. You need to consider balancing strong / weak learners, as well as considering personalities, gender etc. If you do not plan groups carefully it is likely that the strong learners will dominate and the weaker learners soon lose motivation and interest.

6)Feedback. After every communicative / drama task there should be a feedback stage where the learners reflect on their performance. The focus should be on how effectively they performed the activity in terms of their communicative competence. It should not be a stage where the teacher focuses on errors or language accuracy as the aim of drama based activities is to develop fluency. It is of course an opportunity to highlight effective language use and introduce language that could have improved the effectiveness of the communication. The feedback stage should also be an opportunity to praise the learners on their performance and highlight the progress and development they are making in their communicative competence. The lesson should end on a high note with students leaving the class with a smile of accomplishment on their faces and the ringing of loud applause in their ears.

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