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Drama in ESL classrooms to improve writing skills.

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Introduction

Along this current paper, different views of using a drama-based teaching approach in English Second Language classrooms are presented. Based on my personal experience, I believe this is an interesting topic to develop since as a second language learner, I have faced several issues to write in a language that is not my mother tongue. I could not find motivation when writing due to the fact that the topics and pieces of writing required were distant from my reality. Nonetheless, I hold that writing can be more stimulating if teachers implement techniques that include creativity to enhance students' writing skills.

Theoretical Framework

Theories of learning

Children can learn if teachers provide them with appropriate learning opportunities. Learning demands acquiring and modifying knowledge, strategies, skills, beliefs and behaviours. On one hand, empiricism emphasizes experience and perception as the base of knowledge.

On the other hand, constructivism allows students take an active role in their learning process and not just passively accept the knowledge of the teacher. According to Driscoll (2000), students' logical and cognitive growth are based on the constructivism learning theory, which emphasize learners' experiences or connections with the adjoining atmosphere in their education. This theory argues that people have meaningful learning based on their experiences. According to Vygotsky, experience is fundamental for education since it guides the development of the genuine concepts which are learned as a result of schooling together with the 'everyday' concepts learned by the child.

Learners set their own goals and motivations. Moreover, students learn better by interacting among them and creating a powerful knowledge community. The term "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD) is stated by Lev Vygotsky as the difference between the current level of cognition and the potential level of its development. The author believed that a student cannot reach the same level of learning by working alone. The method of ZPD, implies the student's potential development, what the student is capable of learning, and the role of the interaction with others. In order to student achieves learning independence, Vygotsky suggests the scaffolding strategy as a tool, in which learners complete small and manageable steps in order to achieve their goal, by having the teacher as monitor.

CLIL

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), is a student-centred approach which goal is to teach and learn a second language through a subject (teacher's tool). It can be taught through culture, in light of the fact that arts, economy, technology, geography, citizenship, any subject, can be learned by this method or approach. Furthermore, content must be considered reach in language and give diverse opportunities for communication. In terms of cognition and communication, it is significantly challenging for students. Pupils need to evaluate what they know in order to put it into practice.

Motivation

Motivation in the classroom refers to a variety of factors that affect students' learning process. For instance, Jeremy Harmer portrays two different types of motivation: if the motivational agent is external, such as family or peer's attitudes and / or society, what the pupil brings into the class is known as extrinsic motivation. In contrast, the motivation can be intrinsic, which is the kind of motivation that takes place in the classroom as for example teacher's methods of teaching, students' role in the lesson and the perception of their failure or success.

Writing

Writing is one of the productive skills. It helps to improve communicative competence when learning a language. Bachman (1990) splits up language competence into two parts: organization competence, which is the ability to comprehend, write correct sentences and understand them in text, and pragmatic competence defined by Chomsky as the "knowledge of conditions and manner of appropriate use (of the language), in conformity with various purposes". Brown claims that writing is a two-step thinking process. The first step is to figure out the meaning and the second is to transform it into language. Writing is another way to represent what is on mind. According to Jeremy Harmer "being able to write is a vital skill for 'speakers' of a foreign language as much as for everyone using their own first language." (Harmer, 2004, pág. 3)

Grammar

"Grammar is a system of meaningful structures and patterns that are governed by particular pragmatic constraints" (Larsen-Freeman, 2008). To teach, specially to learn, grammar is a highly challenging process. As Constance Weaver points out, "grammatical concepts must often be taught and retaught, to individuals as well as to

groups or classes, and students may long afterwards continue to need guidance in actually applying what they have, in some sense or to some degree, already learned” (Teaching Grammar and Usage, 1996, p. 17).

Syntax

Syntax is conceived as “the body of rules that speakers of the language follow when they combine words into sentences” (Baker, 1995, p. 3). Syntactic rules compose one of the various systems of fluent English speakers’ knowledge. Moreover, speakers should know rules of other kinds, as for example morphological rules, which regulate the formation of words, and the interpretation of sentences and words: the semantic rules.

Drama and techniques in ESL classrooms

From Ancient Times, drama has been implemented to represent fertility rites, religious worships, criticize and expose societies’ issues and traditions. The word “drama” comes from a Greek word meaning “action”. It requires performers and audience, as is reported in the book “Drama: An Introduction”, is the “representation of carefully selected actions by living people on a stage in front of an audience “ (Watson, 1983, p. 3).

Analysis

As Bruning and Horn (2000) mention, students can have negative ideas and feelings about writing due to their bad previous experiences which possibly make writing skills been acquired hard and late. Consequently, learners feel no motivation at all. Therefore, implementing drama in the classroom seems to be a good idea.

In the context of teaching and learning, drama is a powerful tool that helps students to develop, and create, social bounds and imagination. Implies actions and helps to improve memory and cognitive skills. What is more, “drama activities encourage learners to explore topics of identity, as students can literally experience ‘walking in somebody else’s shoes’ when they take on fictional identities” (Carbajal, 2018).

According to Russo, professor at Franklin Institute UAH, drama is a tool that “can be considered as essential in the learning process of a foreign language” as well as provides teachers and students with psychological benefits. Russo does a distinction between Drama and Theatre. She highlights ‘drama’ as the process of an activity while ‘theatre’ is focused on the product, so as a result of it, it is more interested in the performance, which takes more time and care whereas drama is an everyday activity.

Furthermore, drama carries lots of other advantages into the classroom, as for example; provide students the opportunities to communicate their thought and feelings, motivates learners to extend their use of language, to ask, refuse and greet in role. Moreover, helps to a better development of their literacy. Literacy can be defined as “the ability of identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts” (UNESCO, 2018). Additionally, the implementation of this method in the classroom is especially beneficial for kinesthetics students.

As Joe Winston points out in his book ‘Drama and English at the heart of the Curriculum: Primary and Middle Years’, drama is “skilful, a craft, and can be learned”.

Conversely, drama is usually reduced to nonsense scripts or short dialogues in English lessons, as well as to memorization or just as warm-up or speaking activities.

The English instructor Judith Gray Royka, affirms that teachers are reluctant because they do not know how to carry on the related activities, time constrains and the fear of feeling and looking ridiculous. Mainly, many teachers feel they cannot approach drama activities since they are not trained actors. Often, traditional teachers feel more comfortable following the coursebook or curriculum than implementing drama activities that sometimes end up focusing on “drama” rather than on the language. In addition, as

Royka exposes, “evaluating a lesson that incorporates drama techniques can be another trigger that sets teachers off using them”.

Nevertheless, drama is more than to what is actually reduced to, or teachers’ fears or dissatisfactions. Drama is a useful tool for teaching and improving pupils’ learning and practice in writing skills.

Many researchers suggest that drama improves students’ writing skills and their attitudes towards writing. Considering that this sort of writing involves several steps, as pre-writing, drafting, reviewing and organizing (Linda J. Dorn, 2001), learners can perform many activities of the writing process alongside creative drama’s pathway. “Creative drama techniques suggest linking ways for supporting writing process. Arts, music and kinesthetics processes that used in creative drama activities provide students rich experiences in the pre-writing activities. The more efficient these processes are, the more qualified the writings will be” (Ataman, 2001, as cited in Erdogan,2013). In other words, the use of second language grammar and syntax will improve.

Conclusion

According to the points raised throughout this paper, the thesis statement could be proved in view of the fact that implementing teaching techniques which comprises creativity and requires active participation from students, tends to motivate pupils. Motivated students can highly improve their writing skills which means an improvement of their syntax and grammar in general. As Dorn exposes, writing involves drafting, pre-writing, reviewing and organizing. Writing is not just a task to be carry out by just one student, but by many of them working together on cooperative learning as Vygotsky suggests. Therefore, to request students to think and write while creating and developing their imagination and expressing their feelings, will be extremely beneficial not just for them, but also for the teacher too, since is a two-ways learning. In spite of teachers who do not feel comfortable or secure enough to implement it, there is no strong reason to avoid the implementation of drama in the classroom when teaching a second language learner.

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