



Clowning and improvisation in the ESL classroom: Observations and suggestions

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Abstract

This thesis examines how clowning and improvisation can help students in the ESL classroom. Clowning and improvisation was taught in a 6th grade ESL classroom and its effectiveness discussed. This thesis discusses the basics of clowning and why it is helpful when helping students feel at ease with speaking English. I also describe how it can be used and suggest drama-related games that are helpful.

The conclusion is that drama-related games help students have fun while learning a new language and exploring the use of the language in an everyday setting. Drama-related games are an important addition to the ESL classroom as they enrich and lighten the atmosphere and students learn whilst playing.

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1. Introduction:

“.....creativity is as important in education as literacy and we should treat it with the same status” Ken Robinson (Robinson, 2006)

When I was 23 years old I went to study Acting and Musical Theatre at *Guildford School of Acting* in Guildford, Surrey, England. I believed I had very good knowledge of English and was very much able to express myself in the language. I had always gotten high grades in English throughout college (*Menntaskóli*) and at the auditions for the school I had performed monologues and I was complemented for very good pronunciation. I still had problems when I moved and had to express myself in everyday situations. I found improvisation classes helped me understand the use of English and I wished that my English teachers had been more inspired by Communicative Language Teaching.

I believe it is very rewarding to students to learn English in realistic situations and through drama we can achieve exactly this. With the right approach it can become a very successful teaching method. My intent is to explain a method in which I believe will be successful when combining drama and English in the classroom.

When teaching a new language to students, give them the tools they need to use the language in everyday situations as clearly stated in the National Curriculum. In order to do so, it is not enough to teach only with grammar rules and glossary lists. While these things can be extremely helpful when learning a new language, teachers need more tools. Students need to get practice in using the target language and feel comfortable doing so in front of their peers. This is where improvisation games and clowning come to great use. Through play, students will develop imagination and intuition and find it easier to project themselves into unfamiliar situations (Spolin, 1986).

1.1 Why clowning and improvisation in English class?

I was introduced to improvisation and clowning when I was learning acting in England, using a language I had often heard and thought I was quite advanced in. I was thrown in the deep end and it was a very rewarding learning experience, yet terrifying at the same time, which I intend to carry forth to my students as an English teacher in the future. With this thesis I have also set up a teaching plan, which is meant to be comprehensible for teachers with no theatrical background. The most effective language classroom is often when students don't feel like they are being taught, but that they are exploring a new world through games and the learning is a big reward they reap without being too aware of the process until afterward.

This I believe is possible with the help of the wonderful tolerance and acceptance of clowning and the playfulness of improvisation.

2. Literature Review

The basic rules of clowning (as written on hand-out by Halldóra Geirharðsdóttir)

1. One should always wait three seconds before reacting to anything when in clown character.
2. When anything unexpected occurs you look at what happened, count to three and then react.
3. You must keep your eyes wide open at all times and pay attention to what is going on around you, by doing so it is easier to react to situations.
Every action can then be met with a reaction, which intensifies the first.
4. Do not move unless you are looking into the eyes of an audience member, unless you are helping another clown get what they want.
5. If you make a mistake you must repeat it three times and then continue. Something great can come out of the repetition.
6. Always look at the one who is speaking, whether it is an audience member or another actor. Even turn your body toward the person.
7. When the audience laughs at you, you must count to three and then say “thank you”.
8. Clowns like mistakes and being laughed at, it is a gift.

When a clown is born the actor sits down, looks for his/her voice, takes three deep breaths and fills their lungs, then the clown is born with a big scream and the clown says their name.

When you put that red nose on you have opened up a new world in which you have abandoned rules and restrictions which sometimes hold you back in “reality” – everything is fair game now.

These rules of clowning can certainly be used in the language classroom. It is a wonderful thing for students to learn that making mistakes is not only all right, but also highly appreciated. When learning to speak as children we don't speak perfectly right away, we explore and slowly figure out how to build a correct sentence and by the time we reach secondary school we know how to speak properly. By the time children learn English in the Icelandic school system they are in 4th grade (or younger, depending on the school). By that time they may have gained too much awareness of others to be able to play around and make

mistakes when exploring a new language. Clowning helps you embrace a new character where you can play around and make mistakes and explore language without feeling like you are making a fool out of yourself.

When clowns are released from the confines of ‘acting’, like a normal grown-up they become omnipotent beings that express and evoke deep emotions (Simon, 2009). We each inhabit our own personality and so when we explore our inner clown we find a character, which is our own special clown, and nobody has a clown like that. We may heighten traits in our personality which we are especially proud of, or we may explore those in our new character that are quite opposite to who we are in our everyday life. One might for example not like dancing and then one’s clown may be someone who can’t stop dancing.

Using drama to teach English results in real communication involving ideas, emotions, feelings appropriateness and adaptability; in short an opportunity to use language in operation which is absent in a conventional language class. Such activities add to the teacher’s repertoire of pedagogic strategies giving them a wider option of learner-centered activities to choose from for classroom teaching, thereby augmenting their efficiency in teaching English. (Chauhan, 2004)

Chauhan (2004) makes a convincing case for using drama in ESL classrooms. He writes that drama activities provide opportunities for authentic communication and can build learners’ confidence for speaking English outside the classroom. He recommends teachers add this skill to their portfolio of teaching practices, detailing three sample activities. He writes about the nature of language itself, allowing that it involves emotions, feelings, appropriateness of situation, and most importantly adaptability. The traditional ESL strategies do little to address the flexibility of everyday language. He reasons that English language learners can, even after years of classroom learning, fail to master the nuance of colloquial English. He covers the most common reasons why teachers are skeptical of using drama in the classroom and recommends starting small with “one-off” activities for inexperienced teachers.

Roykja (2002) agrees with Chauhan about teachers’ fears about using drama in the classroom. Roykja published her 2002 article in response to teaching drama workshops to ESL/EFL teachers. It covers the most prevalent fears and concerns that teachers have when it comes to integrating drama into the classroom. Teachers reported feeling inadequate to teach drama. Because they had no experience, they reported a fear of looking foolish. Many teachers felt that this type of activity did not lend itself to serious learning and was merely play. Time constraints and covering the syllabus were mentioned as well. Royka offers practical

solutions, advice, and evidence to back it up. She states that fear is the factor that most hinders the use of drama to reach the aims of communicative language teaching. Motivation can be a factor not only for students, but for teachers as well.

Cameron Culham (2002) delves into the underpinnings of all language as nonverbal. The author also identifies nonverbal language as a recurring point of miscommunication for his classes of intercultural students. He allows that for the purposes of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), nonverbal communication is key. Culham identifies common problems for DIESL, Drama Instruction for English as a Second Language, as mainly pertaining to his varied cultural classes and teaching adult learners. He identifies negative and traditional attitudes of students and peers as common problems. Culham also writes that often DIESL is not seen as valid learning. He remarks that students who are not familiar with the student-driven classroom have more problems becoming adjusted. Culham also notes several key benefits of using drama in the ESL classroom as it fits well with both the theories of Total Physical Response (TPR) and CLT. It releases the stress normally associated with the language learning classroom. He lists a confidence increase as one of the key benefits, and increased motivation for reading and writing tasks. He references many known studies in the field and addresses the underpinnings of language learning by referencing outside the field.

Stern (1980) starts from the assumption that drama works, and goes on to use empirical data, quantitative and qualitative research to assess how and why. She specifically cites self-esteem and necessarily emotional and bodily components involved in CLT. Her study uses questionnaires to both students and teachers. It thoroughly examines drama techniques in L2 and ESL classes from the psychological perspective. The study reveals a dramatic increase in self-esteem and an increase in motivation and spontaneity. Additionally, students report a loss of fear of rejection.

Gaudart (1990) reports on a long-term study conducted in Malaysia involving over 300 teachers. The class sizes and abilities, as well as the teachers' experience and qualifications, are extremely varied. The study reports definite increases in motivation and ease of holding the attention of students. The study reports that some teachers find it too difficult and cites teacher motivation as key. The study however does not address proficiency. We can assume a positive correlation between proficiency and motivation, but Gaudart does not address this.

Therefore there is ample evidence that using drama in the Foreign Language classroom can significantly increase confidence, self-esteem and motivation (Chauhan, 2004), (Dodson, 2002), (Culham, 2002), (Hayes, 1984), (Stern, 1980), (Gaudart, 1990). Drama for foreign

language instruction defines language as fluid, dynamic, spontaneous, and adds two layers previously unaddressed in language teaching: non-verbal communication and emotional inflection. Drama activities, while providing a kinesthetic learning process, allow teachers to accomplish the goals of CLT (Culham, 2002) (Stern, 1980) (Chauhan, 2004). In addition to increased motivation, increased self-esteem and accomplishing the aims of CLT, drama in the language classroom provides rare opportunities for students to negotiate their own meaning of language (Dodson, 2002). Students also report a loss of fear of rejection (Stern, 1980).

3. Does clowning and improvisation help when teaching English?

Drama in the classroom has shown an increase in self-confidence and a loss of fear of rejection. Clowning and improvisation are basic skills in acting, which help actors build characters and explore authentic feelings and situations. The main focus of using games in class is to help students learn and have fun. And when teachers manage to incorporate learning and playing at the same time it must lead to a successful lesson.

Clowning helps students find a different character within themselves, which we could call their English speaking *self*. This can help students by allowing them to make mistakes they would usually not allow themselves to make. When playing improvisation games in a different language, students can easily get wrapped up in the game. In such games the words come from a subconscious level, which they might usually censor.

The goal is not to get students to any performance level with the exercises I describe. Rather, the goal is to help them explore what is special and fun about them and discover new things that build their social ‘toolbox’. A person may feel very witty and smart in a social situation in their own language and then they may feel like they have lost this ability when having to express themselves with new words and social rules. The exercises we learn when playing with the clown can help students find this witty character—or a new character that has other great attributes and which a person can use to build confidence in new social situations. We may also have a student who is extremely shy and doesn’t like fooling around in a ‘normal’ situation. This person may discover something absolutely different about themselves when introduced to their inner clown.

My experience with the students I worked with is that they opened up and were willing to play with the language much more when in their clown or in an improvisation game, than when we were sitting and chatting as ‘themselves’.

4. Method

4.1 Teaching at Hofstaðaskóli

The teaching took place at Hofstaðaskóli in Garðabær on May 25th, May 30th and June 1st 2012. A teacher helped me book the classrooms and selected the students from the 6th grade. I wanted to work with sixth grade students because they have had 2 years of English and therefore have a basic knowledge of the language. I didn't choose older students because I felt that this might be more challenging to the younger students. I chose students who were neither above nor below average in their grades. None of the students had any apparent special needs. The parents signed their permission to allow the students to be filmed during the lessons, for my own personal use whilst working on my thesis.

4.2 Space and Time

I spent three lessons with the students at Hofstaðaskóli. The first lesson was 40 minutes long and in a classroom where there isn't much space and they attend other subjects. For the next two lessons a bigger room was found, and permission was received to let the lessons overlap into recess. This made a tremendous difference. As soon as we were in a less cluttered room with a lot of space, the students were freer to move around. Also, being in a room where they didn't have 'normal' class helped them get 'lost' in playing and enjoying the process. Hence, they had no problem with spending recess with me.

4.3 Getting to know them

As soon as I walked into the room I started speaking English. Some of them knew my face and knew I was Icelandic and tried to speak Icelandic to me but this stopped a few minutes into the class (with one exception). I started the class by introducing myself and explaining why I was there teaching them. We sat down in a circle and introduced ourselves and I asked them to tell me four things about themselves, one of the things being fictional. This is an important ice-breaker, they need to know that it is all right to create stories and it is also important for them to feel they can be foolish in front of me and that I am willing to play as well. Two of the boys in the class seemed uncomfortable and kept interrupting with anecdotes about the other students. It was difficult to tackle since my first rule in the class was that we should trust each other and nobody should feel like they would be laughed at. I knew they were interrupting because they were uncomfortable themselves. I will return to

these boys later in the thesis with suggestions on how to help them benefit from this teaching method. They will be called Matti and Kalli.

4.4 Warm-up

With little time to spare I gave them a very quick warm-up. We walked around the room and I asked them to let different body parts 'lead' the way. Next, I called out words, which described a weather condition like: warm, cold, windy, earthquake, icy etc. And they acted out how their bodies would react to this, when having a stroll around the room. Then suddenly I called out that everyone was feeling very sleepy, and slowly they would melt down to the floor and lie on their backs. I asked them to listen to the sounds around them, the children playing outside, the teachers talking as they walked past our room, my voice, their breath etc. This gave them good focus for our next exercise.

4.5 The Lessons

When creating lesson plans for these lessons I wanted to build the lessons so that the students would not feel as if they were being thrown into the 'deep end' by a complete stranger right away. The first lesson is thought of as a class where students get to know me and I get to know them and everyone gets a feeling they can trust one another in the exercises which will follow. After introduction to the basic rules of clowning and improvisation they will then play improvisation games, both as clowns and not. The final lesson will include a recap of the other games and doing their own versions of different fairy tales, or stories everyone is familiar with where they can play with the characters as they wish.

Lesson One

I did not get into the rules of clowning too deeply as I was only going to be there for three lessons, but they did get the basic rules. I bought a clown nose for each student, which I told them they were allowed to keep but they had to take good care of it, as it was their special clown nose. I asked the students to think about the four things they told me about themselves in the beginning and to imagine what it would be like to be the exact opposite kind of person.

I told them they were supposed to give birth to their clown by bowing their head down and then looking up very suddenly with a big sound and big open eyes. Sometimes it helps to change your voice so I demonstrated a few ways to do so. I placed a chair in a circle where we were all sitting on the floor. I demonstrated by starting off with giving birth to a clown

myself. I did as I had asked them to do and told them a few things about my clown. They interviewed my clown for a couple of minutes and then my clown fell asleep.

They were a little scared of going up first (after me) so I put my arm in the middle of the circle and said that the last person to touch my hand should be next. The boy with the bad attitude was the last one; he gave no effort into the race so I have a feeling he wanted to be next. I reminded everyone not to judge each other and led the new clown into becoming his own clown. The other students and I asked him simple questions like what his favorite food is, favorite sport, where he lives, what his favorite color is, etc. His favorite food was clock and he lived in clown-world. When I sensed he didn't want to talk anymore I let him fall asleep again. This was a big step for this student as he was trying to hide his fear of acting (or me, I'm not sure) by being foolish. But he did well and I made sure to complement him on that.

The next clown was a boy who had been very shy when we were introducing each other. His clown lived inside his mom, yet he was 326 years old. His favorite thing to do was to eat shoes. His favorite food was tomatoes; the student told me he hated tomatoes when he was telling me four things about himself, so he played with opposites. His favorite instrument was the cowbell. When this student finished all the others wanted to go up, so this was promising, they were having fun. They listened to each other, they were very inventive, and even came up with extreme things, which expanded their vocabulary.

We did not have time for all the clowns to be introduced so I asked them to keep their noses so we could carry on in the next lesson.

Lesson Two

This lesson was at a better venue with more space, no classroom-tables, no chalkboard and more light.

At the start of the lesson we reviewed what we did in the last class. I asked them to tell me how we did the clowns and I gave them big compliments and boosted their confidence a bit.

I did the same warm-up as in the first class, but I added one exercise. In this game they had to try to count to ten without interrupting each other whilst lying on their backs with their eyes closed. Only one person at a time was allowed to say a number, and if they interrupted each other they had to go back to the beginning. This helped them concentrate and focus on the

teamwork. It didn't take many attempts for them to make it to ten. They felt very proud and that they had accomplished something tremendous once the exercise was finished.

We carried on with letting everyone explore his or her clown after warm up. Their ideas were amazing. One girl made her clown a big Broadway star, which starred in a fantastic play and had three kids. One of the clowns was an out of work janitor who did clowning to make himself happy and one was 'negative-nine' years old.

Next up we did some improvisation games. The first game was 'Hitch-Hiker'. We used four chairs to build the interior of a car. One player started driving the car, and another player became a hitchhiker, hitching a ride. The hitchhiker character has a particular character tick or particular emotion, which the driver and other passengers take over. Other hitchhikers join in, each with their own characteristics or emotions, taken over by the driver and the passengers in the car as the hiker joins. When the car is full, one of the players leaves the car to make room for the new guest. They enjoyed this game very much and one student even brought in a hitchhiker who was a clown. He entered the 'car' with a nose for each passenger and they all became clowns immediately.

At the end of the class we sat down and talked about what we did. We discussed how they liked the improvisation game and they all wanted to do more of that. They all agreed it was easier to speak English when pretending to be someone else. Some of them said they were scared of improvisation but liked the clown better.

They seemed more inventive and open during this class, they were better at listening to each other and the environment was much better. I am not sure whether it was because of the new space or the fact that the 'troublemaker' (Matti) from the first class wasn't in this class. It is highly important to create a good work-environment when using drama in the classroom.

When one only has three lessons to work with the students it can become difficult when one student refuses to participate and keeps interrupting when others want to be sincere. If I had had more time with them I would have spent more time getting to know them by playing ice-breaker games and I would have taken more time with introducing them to the clown.

Lesson Three

This was one of the last days of school so there were some activities that made this lesson a little shorter for some of the students. One class was going to an ice-cream shop and another was watching a film. Since my little class was made up of students from three different

classes and it was so close to the final days of the school year, I was aware that there might be some conflicts.

We warmed up by playing a game of ‘1, 2, 3, 4 Cheese-it!’ (which is ‘1, 2, 3, 4, 5 Dimmalimm’ in Icelandic and children are used to playing it, so it was an easy one to explain). It’s a freeze game where one person, ‘K’, stands in one end of the room with his or her back facing the others who are at the other end of the room. ‘K’ begins counting to four and when he says “Cheese-it”, he turns around. While he has been facing his back to the others and counting the others have been moving towards him so when he says “Cheese-it”, they are supposed to freeze. The ones he sees moving are sent back to the where they started.

The purpose of Egyptian Writing (Spolin, 1986) is to sharpen students’ acuteness of observation. I found it is an excellent game, which combines acting out words and enhancing students’ vocabulary. Two players (a ‘magician’ and a ‘reader’) who know the trick cooperate. The reader leaves the room while the group agrees upon a word. The reader is called in and the magician, who has a wand, spells out the word starting sentences with the consonants of the word and tapping a code for the vowels with the wand, all the while pretending to be ‘writing’ in the air. I didn’t have a wand so I used clapping for the vowels. Clapping for the vowels is as follows: one clap is for ‘a’, two for ‘e’, three for ‘i’, four for ‘o’, five for ‘u’. I explained the game by playing out the word ‘chair’. I started off by saying: “carefully observe how I do this”, providing the ‘c’ in *chair*. I made a clear pause after this sentence and then I asked: “Have you got that?” which provided the ‘h’ in *chair*. Again, I made a clear pause, looked the *reader* in the eyes and clapped my hands once, providing the ‘a’ in chair. I made sure he was following and then I clapped my hands three times for ‘i’. Finally, I said “right, you may have the word by now”. Some of the students were confused by the game and I knew this was a little difficult, but I wanted to challenge them. When the first student came in we played out the word ‘dress’ and he got it right away. I was amazed and you could tell how proud the boy was who got it. The next student was supposed to act out the word ‘ball’. He started off by saying “Being the guesser, isn’t it hard?” then he clapped his hands once for ‘a’. Finally he said “Latest soccer game, lame wasn’t it” and the reader got the answer. They may not have been speaking correct English; that was not the main focus. The main focus was getting them to speak. The girl who was the reader had been reluctant to speak English for all the lessons. Everyone else spoke English, which she seemed to understand quite well, but she always answered back in Icelandic. When she pronounced the word ‘ball’ she pronounced it as if it were an Icelandic word even when the *magician*

repeated it to her with the English pronunciation. This girl would have benefited from more of this sort of teaching method. She did come out of her shell a little bit but I could tell she was a long way away from feeling comfortable speaking English in front of others.

The next game we played was based on a game called *Gibberish* (Spolin, 1986). The purpose of the game is to be introduced to the possibilities in nonverbal communication and then free them from the pressure of words. The focus in the original game is to communicate in gibberish. Gibberish is the substitution of shaped sounds for recognizable words. It is a vocal utterance accompanying an action, not the translation of an English phrase or sentence. Since my goal was to free them so they were more comfortable with speaking English I adapted the game into *Gibberish – the TV show*. In that game we set up three chairs, one for a TV-host, one for a foreign guest on the TV-show and the third chair was for the translator. The foreign guest would be from a specific country and speak the language from this country gibberish-style. I refrained from letting their character be from a country where they knew the language. One girl had a Spanish father and one boy had lived in Sweden, so their *foreigner* would not be from those countries. The TV-host would speak English the whole time and the translator would ‘translate’ what the foreigner said to the TV-host and what the TV-host said to the foreigner. So in a way the translator is the one who controls the game.

The first three volunteers happened to include the girl who refused to speak English so I put her in the part of the foreigner. And without my even mentioning the clown-part, she took the clown nose from her pocket and put it on her nose before the game started. The nose is a sort of mask and my instinct is that she felt more comfortable speaking another language (even though it was gibberish) with the nose, than without it. Some kids were more excited than others about playing this game, but they all participated without my forcing them.

The last activity I had them do was their own clown-version of *Little Red Riding Hood*. I chose this fairy tale because it is one that most kids know very well and it has diverse characters (with an obvious urge) to play with. I divided them into groups where I made sure the genders and ability levels were mixed. I gave them five minutes of preparation, since they did not have to create a story line and could go straight into rehearsing how they were going to present it.

The performances showed that the language barrier was almost non-existent at this point. They acted out the play as if English was their first language. They did forget to use their noses but their interpretations were very good anyway. In one group, the girl playing Little Red Riding Hood asked the boy playing the wolf why his nose was so black and wet and his

answer was: “I just had a massive surgery and it didn’t go so well”. The other group seemed to be more ‘wordy’ as they described everything they did as they were doing it. The main point is that they all enjoyed acting in English and gained more confidence when I led them through it with the clowning technique and improvisation games.

After class we had a discussion where I asked them to tell me how they felt about what we had been doing for the last three lessons. They said unanimously that everything we did was fun and some of them said the clowning was especially fun. When I asked: “Did you feel that the clowning made it easier for you to speak English?” They all agreed that it was easier to pretend they were someone else. One girl missed out on the second class so she never got a chance to try being a clown so I offered her a chance to try it out. She didn’t want to so one boy asked if he could introduce his clown to her: His name was *Ding-a-ling*, he was thirteen years old and he spoke with a hint of a southern accent. He loved all the colors in the world, his favorite number was 328 and his favorite movie was *Casablanca*. He liked non-haired dogs and wishes he could have one. Apparently you can get them at ‘Sammy’s Pet Store’, which is downtown. He likes travelling with his other clown friends to this pet store. They put all their unicycles in a small Beetle and then they drive downtown. I asked how many they were and he counted up to three with his fingers and answered: “ten”. He is the smallest so he has to be in the trunk. The others are older than him.

By this point class was finished and I did not have any more time with them.

4.6 What Worked?

The three classes I taught were a success for the most part. My goal was to find out if clowning techniques and improvisation games would help children feel more comfortable when speaking English. It definitely increased their confidence; they were open to trying out new things after only spending 40 minutes with me and almost a whole week passed between the first class and the second.

The space I was in for the last two classes was an excellent space for drama games; it helped to be in a different room than where they learn mathematics or geography. The size of the class was very important. Twelve students is the maximum number of students when teaching drama to this age group and they were never more than twelve in these classes.

4.7 What didn’t work?

When using drama you need space and I realize that this is not always possible within the school system. If I had taught all three lessons in the classroom I was in for the first lesson, I definitely would not have seen such a difference in the students as I did.

As I mentioned when analyzing the second class, I would have liked to have had more time with the students than the 40 minutes given. My goal, however, was to see what I could do with only three 40 minute lessons. I set up with this time frame and in the future I hope I will be able to develop a lesson plan for a whole school year, which combines Drama and English. I also would have liked to have more time with the student who was scared and didn't show up for the two latter classes. I have met this boy before (in my teaching-practice one year ago) and I remember him having had some behavioral issues, which weren't difficult to deal with at the time. He obviously felt uncomfortable with acting and some children need more time than others to get used to the idea. He was used to being funny (in English and Icelandic) at other people's expense and it would have been great to show him a way of finding his comedian without offending others.

When using drama as a tool in language teaching, rule number one should always be to establish trust in the room. If a student doesn't feel like he or she can trust everyone in the room then this student will not acclimate to the method. Or even worse, they might get scared and never want to come back. This is absolutely not good. We want to leave a classroom with everyone at peace with what they were doing, and if not then at least address it in the next lesson. Of course we are all human beings and we cannot get along with everyone we meet and we cannot please everyone. It is still disheartening that Matti did not return to the class. What I would have liked to have been able to do is to spend more time building trust with him. I would have spent a whole lesson playing ice-breaker games, or at least until every person seemed at ease with the new teacher in the room. There are also several 'trust' games you can play with students (after the ice-breaker games).

The class size was ideal, as I said before. If there had been any more than twelve students they would not all have had a chance to try out the methods and it would not have had any educational purpose, other than them learning how to work in a group. This might become confusing for some schools when combining Drama (an art subject where there is never a full class) with English (an academic subject with a full class).

5. Discussion

Why Drama?

Learning can be fun. This was an eye opener for me when I started my studies at University of Iceland. I believe it was Ingvar Sigurgeirsson who started his lecture (the first one I attended) with these words. And of course learning should be fun, difficult, easy, and exciting and sometimes it can get boring. Thus is life, and life is about learning. Games are motivating and engaging and, when used correctly, can help shy students express themselves when they usually would not. “A student who is engrossed in interesting ideas will be apt to have less anxiety than one who is focused mainly on form” (Richard-Amato, 1988).

Kids today are lucky because teachers today are adapting to varied methods, which keep all types of students engaged in their lessons. The most ‘problematic’ students in a regular class are often the ones who shine in drama class. My biggest asset as a teacher in the future will be to keep in mind what I would have liked to have different if I was in my classroom. We cannot put all students into a mold and only have one teaching method for all of them.

Teachers must be able to reach into their toolbox and vary their lessons according to the group of students. We must however keep in mind that drama-related games should not only be used as a fun activity to break up a regular class. Hadfield suggests that “games should be regarded an integral part of the language syllabus, not an amusing activity for Friday afternoon or for the end of the term” (Hadfield, 1990). We must believe that this will help teachers cover all the content and material listed in the curriculum rather than considering this as something which can get in the way of ‘serious’ teaching. Games can be very useful and help develop student’s language learning and provide them the opportunity to practice communication.

Conclusion

Drama-related games are not only fun but they can also help us teach students, and give them an opportunity to explore what they have learned so far in a ‘real life’ situation. With this they can acquire communicative competence as second language users.

Drama-related games in English should be well prepared with the students’ abilities and characteristics in mind. Here I am referring to such attributes as their age, whether they are serious-minded or light-hearted, and whether they are highly motivated to learn or not. One should also keep in mind that there is an enormous difference in using drama-related games early on a Monday morning than on a Wednesday afternoon. Students need to be warmed up and have developed a good level of trust in the classroom before starting any improvisation games.

Teachers should also be prepared to ‘play’ with the students when using drama-related games. Therefore they should be very familiar with the games being played so the rules stay clear. It can help the shyest students to see the teacher being prepared to throw him or herself into a game which is being used in the classroom.

It can help keep students’ focus when alternating between regular lessons and games.

Students can get used to the routine and then start anticipating for the activity that follows.

This may help the teachers keep the students motivated, focused, behaved and anticipate having fun learning English.

“Drama draws upon both cognitive and affective domains, thus restoring the importance of feeling as well as thinking. “ (Duff, 2005)

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