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# English Through Drama: Rationale and Description of Materials Developed in an ESL Drama Project in Israel

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English Through Drama:  
Rationale and Description of Materials  
Developed in an ESL Drama Project in Israel

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Master of Arts in Teaching degree at the  
School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont

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This project by Enid Kumin is accepted in its present form.

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To Gillian Elsner, Eugene Burger, and Richard Hiller who are equally responsible for whatever noteworthy results have come of the Israel project. I thank them for their unfailing diligence, energy, and inspiration and for the constancy of their partnership.

This paper examines the rationale and design of a series of skits which three others and I wrote and presented in Israel during the course of an "English-through-drama" program which we conducted in the public school system. The paper presents one skit, used for fourth - sixth grades, as an example of the work we produced and as a basis for clarifying the way our teaching assumptions and objectives were reflected in our materials. The skits are of interest because of the way in which they integrate various drama techniques to meet both affective and linguistic needs in the classroom, especially those connected with teacher-student relationships and communicative competence. A description of our working procedure is included in the hope that others will consider producing more skits of similar design. Also included is a discussion of who best might write and present these new materials and ideas for follow-up activities for the classroom teacher.

ERIC Descriptors:

Dramatics	368	Linguistic Performance	311
SN Activities in the Creation, Preparation and Production of Plays		RT Communicative Competence (Languages)	
Dramatic Play	113	Teaching Methods	14,274
RT Class Activities		UF Instructional Methods	
Creative Dramatics		Presentation Methods	
English (Second Language)		Teaching Techniques	
	2906	RT Course Organization	
SN English as a foreign or non-native language (i.e. English for non-English speakers)		Classroom Techniques	
UF EFL		Dramatic Play	
ESL		Second Language Learning	3824
TESL		RT Communicative Competence	
TESOL		English (Second Language)	
RT Curriculum			
Second Language Instruction			
Second Language Learning			
Learning	2126		
NT Second Language Learning			
RT Learning Activities			
Learning Experience			
Learning Motivation			

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## Introduction: The Challenge of Teaching Communicative Competence in the ESL Classroom

Who learns languages successfully and why? It seems that a key element in the successful mastery of an L<sub>2</sub> is an understanding of what it means to communicate in another language. Those individuals who grasp this important concept come to their knowledge in a variety of ways, including travel, a childhood spent in a bilingual household or among speakers of other languages, and classroom instruction. Those who gain their understanding in the classroom represent a triumph for the foreign language instructor. The challenge of bringing language alive in the classroom has often proven one of the most difficult for the foreign language teacher, and the ESL instructor is no exception.

Bringing English alive in the classroom, of course, poses different problems depending on whether the classroom is located in an English-speaking country or abroad. In an English-speaking country the student will have opportunities to practice his English outside the classroom. He will hear English on radio, television, and in the street. The pieces of the puzzle will begin to fall into place; he will have some idea of what he knows and what he still needs to learn. The student in a non-English-speaking country, on the other hand, must somehow put everything together for himself with limited exposure to Eng-

lish. Without travel and without access to transplanted English-speakers and/or tourists, the closest he will come to hearing English in its natural context will be in the classroom. It is especially important, therefore, for the English classroom abroad to simulate English-speaking society as closely as possible.

Drama is one means that many ESL teachers have found useful in creating an English-speaking environment in the classroom. A quick glance at literature in the field reveals a wealth of ESL classroom activities derived from drama techniques. These activities include, among others, improvisation activities, role-play, drama games, variously-structured dialogues, and play-reading, writing, and production. Each activity has its merits and limitations. Improvisation, for example, gives students the chance to exercise their imagination together with their newly acquired command of vocabulary and syntax. It does not, however, present a model of what a native English-speaker might say in the same circumstances, which structured dialogue or play-reading would supply. A persistent question is whether integrating several drama-related activities would yield another classroom technique which would offer the combined advantages of the individual activities.

Results of a project which three other teachers and I initiated in Israel indicate that investigating new ways to teach English through drama can lead to very exciting results, with special significance for the teaching of communicative competence in the EFL classroom. Communicative competence refers to

an individual's ability to use language to express himself accurately, completely, with correct syntax, and in a culturally appropriate manner. The project before-mentioned involved developing a series of skits which incorporated a variety of dramatic techniques. It was begun in response to an expressed desire on the part of a group of EFL teachers in Israel for some novel activity which would spark students' interest in English. Our original objective was focused on creating a stimulating, memorable English-speaking environment; however, the most interesting applications for the materials and ideas generated by this project lie in the area of helping students beyond grammar rules, dialogues, and pronunciation drills to a command of conversational English.

Drama, then, is a source of as yet unexplored potential for teaching communicative competence. A valuable line of experiment involves combining several dramatic techniques often found in the ESL classroom into the framework of one dramatic presentation. An experiment of this type, conducted in Israel, produced a series of skits which intrigued students at the same time that it contributed greatly to their ability to use what they had learned in class to communicate in English. It is my hope that a description and analysis of one of the skits that grew out of the Israel project will convince other ESL instructors, particularly those abroad with intermediate or less advanced students, of the workability of these materials and of the value of generating more of their own.

In this paper I will first state some general assumptions about teaching and learning shared by those working on the



Israel project; then describe the organization of the project with special attention to the format used in making classroom presentations; thereafter, I will note the way in which the assumptions and objectives of the project were incorporated into the skits. I will next add the unabridged script of one of the skits which will serve as a point of reference for the subsequent sections. These sections will discuss the pattern we adopted for writing the skits, follow-up activities for the classroom teacher, and finally, comments on who might be best able to start writing and producing new materials along the same lines.

Some Tenets of Teaching and Learning  
Underlying the Israel Project

Teaching techniques are tools which can be used very differently depending on the teaching philosophy of the instructor who employs them. My enthusiasm for the skits we produced in Israel is linked to some attitudes I have about teaching and learning, and about the roles of students and teachers in the classroom. These attitudes, which I share with the other three teachers who worked on the Israel project, are an important factor in the design of the skits, our enthusiasm for using them, the organization of our classroom presentation, and I like to think, of their warm reception.

First, I believe that getting students to master material should not be the only objective of classroom instruction. It should certainly not be the chief objective in all but special cases. Putting emphasis on mastery of material often has the entirely opposite effect: the student may be angered, frustrated, or bored and therefore lose interest in the subject matter being taught. What is more crucial is that education contribute to the student's mental and emotional well-being. For classroom procedure to embody this principle, it is essential that the teacher choose activities which will not only be engaging in an amusing and/or thought-provoking way, but which will also ask the students to share something of themselves and to

support each other.

My second belief is linked to the first, and that is that reducing the student to a passive role should be avoided at all costs. By passive role I refer to the minimum of real intellectual involvement required of a student who merely waits for the teacher to present him with the next exercise. Passivity is a true demon of the classroom. It diminishes the quality of students' learning, and in general produces a terrible apathy which is destructive to the character of the class as a whole and to the student as an individual. The most promising antidote to passivity in the classroom is to alter the classroom structure dramatically. Pivotal to this reformation of the classroom is the transformation of the teacher from director to facilitator.

The traditional role of teacher as director establishes hierarchies of power and knowledge which have no place in the classroom. It is too often the case that an adversary relationship develops between student and teacher. The key to this classroom struggle lies in the inflexibility of the roles created for each party. The teacher must know everything; the student has no knowledge. Such expectations are patently absurd. They put the teacher in an untenable position and reduce the student to a one-dimensional character whose worth rises or falls according to how well he absorbs the material presented in class. Instead, teachers should have the freedom to admit their limitations to their students without losing face. Students should have the right to respect for the opinions, knowledge, experience, and abilities which they bring with them to their

studies, or in other words, for their integrity as individuals. Teachers and students, then, are more appropriately viewed as joint participants in a learning process in which the former is better qualified to serve as guide in a given area. This guiding role is basically the role a teacher chooses when he sheds the cloak of director for that of facilitator.

I am suggesting that a variety of other objectives in the language classroom be elevated rather than that mastery of subject matter be disregarded. Chief among my linguistic concerns for my students is that they work towards communicative competence. The dominance of communicative competence in my thinking about the language classroom reflects my belief that communication is the ultimate purpose of language. Native speakers of a language have assimilated the myriad of rules which govern their mother tongue so that they are rarely conscious of the linguistic structure of the language. For the native speaker, the structure of his language is subordinate to the message he has to convey. The fact that other languages can serve as more than intellectual exercise may be news even to many students who have sat through language classes for several years. It is a fact which not only can be taught, it should be taught; the notion that students will naturally come to realize that language is a tool for communication is misconceived.

Finally, because the security of the teacher with his materials, and his own enjoyment of class proceedings can affect the quality of what goes on in the classroom, it is advisable that the teacher rely upon techniques with which he is comfortable. It would seem wise, for example, for a teacher caught

by social issues to resort to newspapers and magazines. A teacher fond of plays or film would be well-advised to incorporate that interest into his teaching. Of course a teacher who thinks that a particular technique might suit him, though he has no prior related experience, should have the courage of his convictions. Basically, the teacher should follow his intuition in choosing techniques for his classroom: whatever feels right probably will prove appropriate and productive.

Briefly, then, the basis of my affection for drama as a technique for the language classroom is rooted in a series of assumptions about teaching and learning. I advocate relegating the mastery of material to its proper place on a par with, but not above, other classroom objectives. Rather than emphasize mastery of material, I would strive for a classroom in which the emotional and intellectual well-being of the student are given equal consideration. I would urge the teacher above all else, to avoid the role of director, a role which alots the student no responsibility for learning going on in the classroom and which condemns the teacher and student to adversary roles. Chief among my linguistic goals is that my students work toward attaining communicative competence. I have found drama to be an indispensable aid in creating a classroom which is in harmony with these ideals. Its principal benefit has been as a source of techniques, as a supplier of which it has proven consistently invaluable.

## Description of Project and Presentation of Skits

A brief description of the Israel project skits will be helpful at this juncture.

Our team of four consisted of two men and two women. Only one of us had any formal dramatic training, although all of us had participated in amateur theatricals. What was most important was that we felt comfortable in front of a classroom of students. We were not assigned to any one classroom or school, although most of our skits were originally prepared with the school population of a particular town in mind. In the aforementioned town we visited the same classes several times with different skits. In other towns, where we presented our skits through the assistance of the regional office of the Ministry of Education, we made only one visit per class to perform (although we might visit several times before we performed to observe the daily work routine and class dynamics).

Our class presentation was divided into four parts:

I. Introduction; II. Skit Presentation; III. Review and "Re-enactment;" and IV. Question-Answer Period. Class time would be used as follows. We entered the class and wrote vocabulary words on the blackboard before being introduced briefly by the teacher. We wore ordinary street clothes, used no stage make-up, brought few, if any, props. Once introduced, we ran through the vocabulary on the board, first asking if anyone knew

the word, then pantomiming or explaining in English. If absolutely necessary we gave the translation, but this was rarely required. When the vocabulary was clear we launched our skit. Upon finishing the skit, we reviewed vocabulary. Some of these vocabulary words were designated for re-enactment. After the class correctly identified such a word, a volunteer was invited to act the part of the character specified or help re-enact a related scene.

Volunteers were found with little trouble. When we needed volunteers, one of the actors, usually the narrator, simply asked the student audience if someone would volunteer to be "x". Predictably at least one student was showman enough to want to try. That student would join us at the front of the room for the duration of his role, then return to his seat.

Student participation was an important element of the skits. Students participated as a class, and as individuals. There were numerous opportunities for group participation in scenes where the entire classroom became the stage. In these scenes the students became, for example, a crowd in the street, or as in the case of the restaurant scene in one skit, "Yosi Goes to New York," customers to be attended. Individual participation was also provided for and encouraged. Such roles as that of Yosi's Father, played by a volunteer, gave students the chance to play characters using dialogue which had already been modeled. Yosi's Father, for example, came center stage immediately after Yosi's Mother, and said and did approximately the same thing. Other opportunities for individual participation came at the end of the skit when students played characters and

re-enacted scenes as part of the review of vocabulary.

The review of vocabulary at the end of the skit was handled according to the following pattern. We would proceed down the vocabulary list asking if the class knew the word we were pointing to. This list included words that were key to a scene or vignette from the skit. Such a word, for an elementary level class, might be the word "waiter," which was in fact a word used in "Yosi." After the students had correctly defined "waiter" we would ask someone to volunteer to be a waiter. One of the actors/teachers would play the role of customer opposite the student's waiter, and together they would re-enact (with many elaborations) a scene which had just been performed in the skit between these same two characters. We always included a sufficient number of "key" words so that by the end of our vocabulary review students had re-enacted (with help) most of the scenes in the skit.

The question and answer period at the end of the skit was an optional activity which was or was not added depending on time. (When we did allow a question and answer session, it was almost invariably used by students to get personal information about us, understandable given circumstances where we were strangers and a novelty.

The skits generally lasted 20 minutes. With introduction and closing activities the entire presentation took about 45 minutes or one class period.



\_ Notes on Project Teaching Assumptions and  
Their Incorporation into the Skits

An example of the Israel project skits is reproduced in this paper. Some observations about this skit and the response of the student audience to its presentation illustrate specific ways in which the skits reveal the teaching philosophy which determined their construction.

For one thing, we tried to make the skits a genuinely interesting activity. Often material in easy English is woefully slow-moving. What we lacked in subtle dialogue we made up in action and humor. Above all else we tried to work action and humor into our plot-lines. Additionally, although we had characters react as English-speakers would, we were careful to include enough material identifiable to any Israeli child. Yosi, for example, was their age, had the same number of brothers and sisters they had, watched a program very popular in Israel, and did what any boy his age might when directed by his parents to do something he did not want to do.

Students were frequently called upon to participate. Throughout the play lie a plethora of opportunities for the children to be interesting characters. Within the play itself they get to be customers in a restaurant on a ship and decoys in a police line-up. After the play they get to try out almost all the roles they have just seen sketched out before them.

Participating in the plays seemed to be immediately rewarding for the children. They got to speak English, they were understood, they communicated. And they understood an entire class conducted in English. We found that the connection of dialogue to action seemed to have very positive effects on the childrens' ability to retain English. Some weeks after presenting a skit we would still be pursued by small children in the streets who would recognize us and proceed to do an excerpt of the presentation they had seen in class.

The children never seemed to think of us as teachers with whom they had an adversary relationship. Certainly we had a great advantage in this respect because we came in from the outside. I would argue, however, that much of the cooperation we got from the children came about less because of our novelty than because the drama was a cooperative venture.

An impelling reason for teachers to search for integrative techniques such as the Israel skits is because of the pedagogical rewards inherent in leading a class which reflects their personal philosophy of teaching. The complex array of objectives and assumptions which every language teacher has for the classroom are not easily met. The teacher must skillfully balance an arsenal of techniques, each of which bring the classroom a little closer to resembling a preconceived ideal. Particularly valuable are those activities which serve an integrative function, that is, which serve to tie together either structural elements of the target language or a number of the teaching assumptions and objectives of the instructor.

Much of my satisfaction in working on the Israel project

stems from having developed materials which closely reflect my assumptions about teaching and learning. These skits, for example, foster, a cooperative atmosphere between student and teacher by reducing the difference in status between them. The knowledgeable adult is transformed from teacher to a character in a play; the student is released from his daily identity and attitudes and given the opportunity to try other alternatives. The fabricated world of the drama, in freeing both learner and instructor from their customary roles, defuses the mistrust which so frequently marks the classroom.

The enjoyable nature of the activity combined with the reasonably demanding level of dialogue result in an instructive activity in a non-threatening learning environment. The goal here is to give students not only a good experience with language, but more importantly, to give them a good experience with learning. The project skits promote this objective particularly effectively. The fact that the students participate draws them into the activity more completely; the fact that the play is structured for them relieves them of the burden of creativity and places it with those presenting the play; and, the fact that the activity takes an entire class period makes the small world of the drama that much more secure against the daily routine.

Central to the teaching of communicative competence in the EFL classroom is the model of spoken English provided by the teacher. Skits in the Israel project pattern incorporate this principle on a grand scale. They provide an example of extended

English usage among different native speakers, in a context which will support the introduction of a wide range of subject matter. Especially helpful is the fact that these skits give students a chance to use English which has been modeled for them just a few moments before, yet do so in such a way that the student is most aware, not of the effort of getting out an English sentence, but of his success in communicating effectively in English. The combination of relatively natural context and language modeling make these skits an ideal tool for teaching communicative competence in the EFL classroom.

A casual study of one of the Israel project skits, "Yosi Goes to New York," reveals a number of elements which parallel the teaching philosophy of those of us who worked on the project. 1.) The skits are intended to be genuinely interesting to teacher and student. 2.) Student participation is strongly emphasized. 3.) Communicative competence is encouraged by providing an extended model of spoken English, part of which model the students then reproduce. 4.) There is a pervading view of language learning as a cooperative venture between teacher and student. Examining a sample Israel project creation like "Yosi" makes manifest the way in which the writers' teaching tenets are woven into the fabric of the skits.

An Example of Project Materials: "Yosi Goes to New York"

The following is the unabridged script of one of the pieces which we prepared for elementary grades four - six, that is, the earliest stages of English language study in Israeli schools.

"Yosi Goes to New York"

N (Narrator)	D (Demonstrator)	c (Motorcyclist)
M (Yosi's Mother)	C (Captain)	SES
Y (Yosi)	T (Thief)	(Sound Effects Specialist)
F (Yosi's Father)	P (Policeman)	
V (Volunteer)	m (Mayor)	

Distribution of roles:

Actor 1: N, M  
Actor 2: Y  
Actor 3: D, F, T  
Actor 4: C, P, SES, m, c

Props:

1 medal  
1 large ticket

N: Yosi is eleven years old. He has eight brothers and sisters. Yosi likes to watch "Starsky and Hutch."

(Yosi is watching television intently. Chews gum.)

M: Yosi, go to bed.

Y: No, I want to watch "Starsky and Hutch."

M: Go to bed.

Y: No. I want to watch television.

M: (Turns television off.) Yosi, turn the television off.

Y: (Turns it on.) No. Turn the television on.

M: Yosi.... (Turns it off.) Off.

Y: (Needless to say, turns it on.) On.

N: I need help. I need a volunteer.

(To volunteer:) You are Yosi's father. Tell Yosi: "Turn the television off."

—V: Turn the television off!

Y: No! I want to watch "Starsky and Hutch."

N: (Prompts volunteer again.)

V: Turn the television off.

Y: No, I want the television on.

V: No, off.

Y: On.

N: (Prompt: "Go to bed, Yosi!")

V: Yosi, go to bed!

Y: No!

(Narrator thanks volunteer, sends him back to his seat.)

F: Yosi, you are going to bed!

Y: I am not going to bed.

F: Yosi...!

(Yosi reluctantly goes off to bed.)

N: So Yosi is going to bed. But he is angry. Yosi is very angry. Angry...

D: Angry. I am angry. (The demonstrator first sits down quietly at a desk or table in front of the room. As his agitation increases, he starts throwing things around, pounding the chalkboard.... In short he throws a regular temper tantrum. When finished, he stalks, sulking, off the "set," and says:) I am very angry.

N: Yosi is very angry. He decides to run away.

(Yosi, sent to bed, goes through the motions of climbing out his window. He leaps, as from a window to the ground, and then begins tiptoeing across the front of the classroom, always looking behind him. While Yosi is going through these steps we hear the narrator describing what is going on.)

N: Yosi is opening his window. Now he is climbing out of his window. He is jumping to the ground. Yosi is running away from home.

(Yosi sneaks around narrator and comes back to center "stage," where he stands in the characteristic "thumbing" pose of the hitch-hiker.)

N: Yosi is hitch-hiking to Haifa.

c: (The motorcyclist guns his bike at one side of the room, puts it in gear and screeches to a halt next to Yosi.)  
Are you going to Haifa?

Y: Yes, I'm going to Haifa.

c: Well, get on.

(Yosi clmbers on behind the motorcyclist, who again revs his engines and speeds off.)

N: So Yosi goes to Haifa. In Haifa he hides on a big ship.

OPTIONAL INTERLUDE: Depending on time limitations, we sometimes sang "Michael, Row Your Boat A-shore" at this point, and taught the children to sing the chorus.

N: Yosi hides on a big ship. He is hiding.

(Yosi, meanwhile, is trying to find something to hide behind, eventually hunches himself behind a desk at the front of the room.)

D: Yosi is hiding. (The demonstrator proceeds to try to hide behind a desk, a student, another student's books, and even behind the narrator. Whenever the demonstrator finds a potential hiding place, the narrator repeats "He is hiding.")

N: Yosi is hiding on the ship. Suddenly, there is a big storm.

(Sound effects specialist simulates wind, rain, and thunder and lightning directly above the quavering Yosi's head.)

N: Yosi feels very sick.

Y: (groans) Oh, I feel sick.

C: (strutting) I am the Captain. I am the Captain of this ship. I hear a noise. What is it? (He finds Yosi and drags him out by the shirt-collar.) Aha!

Y: Oh, hello.

C: (imperious) Are you hiding on my ship? Do you have a ticket? Did you pay money to get on my ship?

Y: No, I don't have a ticket. I don't have any money.

C: You don't have a ticket? You don't have any money? Then you're going to work on the ship. You're going to be a

waiter in the restaurant.

(Yosi and the Captain go off. A pompous gentleman comes over and seats himself before the class as if he has just found a choice table at a restaurant. He will be Yosi's first customer.)

Y: (approaching customer with place setting) Here is a knife, spoon, fork, and a napkin. What do you want to eat, sir?

c: What do you have?

Y: We have fish, steak, chicken, and vegetable soup.

c: Ok. I want fish with carrots and potatoes.

Y: (goes off as if to check with the kitchen staff, returns) I'm sorry. We don't have any fish today.

c: No fish? Ok. I want steak with corn and peas.

Y: (checks with the kitchen, returns) I'm sorry. We don't have any more steak.

c: You don't have steak? I'm getting angry. Do you have any chicken today?

Y: Yes, I think we have chicken. (Moves away momentarily, comes back shaking his head.) No, we don't have chicken.

c: You don't have fish, you don't have steak, you don't have chicken.... What do you have?

Y: We have vegetable soup. Very good vegetable soup.

c: Vegetable soup? Humph. I don't want vegetable soup. (disgusted) All right, give me vegetable soup.

Y: Do you want a large bowl, or a small bowl?

c: I want a large bowl.

Y: Just one minute, please.

(Yosi goes out to kitchen again. Comes back precariously balancing bowl of soup.)

Y: Here you are. (Stumbles forward, spilling soup all over customer!) Oh no! I'm so sorry. Let me help you. (Starts wiping customer's face and clothing with napkin.)

c: (Pushes Yosi away, nearly knocks over table as he gets up from his chair.) This is a terrible restaurant. Look at my clothes. There is soup all over my new suit. I am very angry. I am going to tell the Captain about this. (Marches



off muttering to himself.)

N: (Asks question to the classroom audience:) Do you know what you want to eat?

(At this juncture, the classroom becomes a restaurant, and the four actors and actresses take orders from the kids and pretend to bring them trays heaped high with food. This activity goes on until the narrator senses that the students will shortly lose interest. When this happens, the sound effects specialist supplies the noise of a loud ship's horn. Others call out: "New York! New York!")

N: The Captain speaks to Yosi.

C: Yosi, you're a very bad waiter. You spill soup all over people. You spilled soup all over that man's suit. I don't want you to work as a waiter on my ship any more. You're fired. Go. Get off my ship. (Points off-stage.) Bye.

Y: (sadly) Good-bye. I'm leaving. (Yosi, with his head hanging, walks slowly away.)

N: So Yosi arrives in New York. While he is walking in New York, he sees a thief.

(While narrator talks, thief quietly moves next to one of the kids in the audience and "borrows" a book, pencil case, lunch, or other small object.)

Y: Stop, thief!

(The thief starts racing desparately around the classroom trying to elude capture. Yosi races after the thief, but takes care not to catch him.)

Y: Help! Police!

(A policeman joins the chase, and together he and Yosi track down the thief.)

P: (Hand-cuffs prisoner, prepares to lead him away.)  
Now I've got you. Come with me.

P: Now we need four volunteers.

(The policeman places the four kids he has chosen in a line-up with the thief. The thief is at the far end. The policeman then stands behind the first student, points down at his/her head and asks Yosi, who has been waiting patiently:)

P: Is this the thief? (Looks to class for reaction, then to Yosi.)

Y: It doesn't look like the thief.

(He takes another good, hard look, and begins rolling down thief's pantlegs, replacing his glasses, rearranging his hair - basically he foils all the thief's attempts to mask his identity.)

Y: Wait a minute. It is the thief. It's the thief! (to Policeman:) This is the thief!

P: You're the thief! I'm taking you to jail. (He suits action to word.)

N: Now the Mayor is coming to talk to Yosi.

m: Hello. I'm the Mayor. I'm the boss of this city. I want to thank you. You helped us catch the thief.  
(Clears throat, continues with much fanfare.) As Mayor of the City of New York, I am happy to give you a medal (shows medal and pins it on Yosi) and a ticket to go home (shows ticket and gives it to Yosi).

Y: Oh, thank you. Thank you. I'm so happy. I have a medal and a ticket for the airplane. Now I can go home.

-end-

The following is the vocabulary list for "Yosi Goes to New York." After the skit, volunteers were asked to act as, or to demonstrate, the starred items.

ship

thief\*

storm

medal

hiding\*

captain\*

angry\*

mayor

waiter\*

## The Writing Process

Although we really had no formula to follow when we first began writing plays, a few key guidelines seem to have evolved over the course of the time we worked together. We had a few basic rules to begin with. One was that there should be as few props as possible. Most objects could be indicated by acting as if they were there. We had to remain mobile and flexible. Another rule was that four teachers/actors was the maximum we wanted to inject suddenly into any classroom. We thought that more than four would cause too much chaos, strain space limitations, and possibly overwhelm students.

We always relied heavily on classroom teachers to give us some idea of the level and sophistication of their classes. We would talk to teachers several days before going into their classrooms if possible. If we were working with a class level that we had not worked with previously we looked back at our own experience at that grade level to get some intuition about the students' attitudes and interests. We did not, however, depend solely on what we remembered, but also observed a few classes to check our assumptions.

We also talked to classroom teachers about the things they had been working on in class, to learn what kinds of vocabulary, grammatical constructions, and situations had been introduced

recently and which of the same they would like to see reinforced. We were fortunate in that textbooks were standardized so that we were able to familiarize ourselves with the materials in use and the previous and future training in English that students had just completed and simply put it in a new context: the restaurant on the ship where Yosi was a waiter is an example of this technique. Classroom material often gave us ideas for themes.

Selecting a theme was terrifically important. We realized, for example, that by elaborating, the language in the Yosi skit could be made complicated enough so that a very advanced level of English would be necessary to understand it. But teen-age students would have been insulted by Yosi because they would have thought we were making fun of them. For adolescents, realistic themes seemed to be attractive: themes that dealt with handling daily situations or conflicts in the adult world, and themes dealing with adult emotions/personal relationships worked well. Things that adults thought glamorous also provided good material to work with. For example, one skit which we wrote for ninth to tenth grade, involved two old friends, a doctor and an actress, who decide to switch work for a few days. Both glamor and the realities of adult life become issues as the two actresses go about their daily business.

We felt that one of our more significant innovations was to structure student participation the way we did, giving them a model to follow. We found that the best way to provide a model was either to find a situation where the same lines could be re-

peated twice in a row by different persons (as in the case of Yosi's mother yelling at him, played by one of us, followed by Yosi's father yelling at him, played by one of the students), or to model a segment which could then be turned into an activity involving the entire class (like the scene where the customer orders food from Yosi and later the entire room becomes a restaurant and all the children get to order food). Another method of modeling we used was to ask students to give us their own version of an excerpt from the play. (For example, we would ask students to show us what it meant to be "angry," or to be a waiter on a ship.)

The older the students and the more advanced their English, the greater the responsibility we gave them for controlling their roles. Their parts also became considerably longer so that they in essence had roles which were as major as any played by the four teachers/actors. With one of the most advanced classes we ran a court trial in which the students fleshed out the cast. There was, in fact, no modeling at all, because these students were quite capable of getting a character description and taking on the attributes of that individual. The element of structuring came in only in that we worked out the structure of the play first and wrote character descriptions accordingly. But because the plot of the play developed according to how characters responded to each other, the outcome was always as much a mystery to us as it was to the students until the action wended its way towards a conclusion.

With less advanced English students at any age level, how-

ever, we felt that the modeling element in the play performed the very important function of introducing and reinforcing the right speech patterns from the beginning. From listening to us they got guides to correct pronunciation and intonation, as well as a model of how two native English-speakers would interact in the same circumstances outside the classroom. Very quietly, without fanfare, students were learning rules of non-verbal communication in English. They were also learning the kinds of phrases that were appropriate for the particular situation, much along the lines encouraged by the notional-functional approach to teaching language.

Turning the classroom into a theater by, for example, pretending the aisles were the streets of New York City and then having a chase scene through them was exciting and ensured that everyone felt included in the action. It seemed a good general rule of thumb that we should make use of the entire classroom as much as possible. In the Yosi play we did this twice, with the restaurant scene and the chase scene. Changing the physical location of action in the room immediately picked up the pace or lent a new twist to hold students' interest. It was a good way of keeping the momentum of the play flowing.

Although materials for the Israel project were originally produced with only vaguely-drawn guidelines, a more considered approach quickly evolved as the elements most strongly linked with the success of the skits became apparent. Our visits to classrooms and talks with classroom teachers significantly influenced the skits we produced. In search of promising ideas

and in the interest of balancing the teachers' input with input from the students' perspective, we also re-examined our own past experiences in language classrooms. Once we had visited teachers and re-lived our own experiences as students our greatest concerns in writing the skits were selecting a sufficiently versatile theme of suitable sophistication and providing for appropriately structured student participation.

## Follow-up Ideas for the Classroom Teacher

The Israel project focused on producing and presenting skits. We unfortunately lacked the time to work out a complete curriculum, centering around the skits and complete with preliminary and follow-up activities. I have speculated as to what might be appropriate or possible follow-up activities at greater length and list some suggestions below.

1. Invariably the scripts carefully incorporate certain grammar forms. "Yosi," for instance, frequently uses the present and present continuous. Students could be given a copy of part of the play script and asked to look for examples of, let's say, present continuous. For students who had recently been introduced to this aspect of present tense, the activity would serve to reinforce their grasp of the grammatical form and its use in context.

2. The teacher could use the examples of a given grammatical construction which the students pick out as the basis for substitution drills. Both substitution and repetition drills can also be found in the "Yosi" skit. The restaurant scene intertwines the two. Similar drills can be created using variations on the restaurant scene. A scene in a clothing store, for example, would provide circumstances for drills like the restaurant drill, but with vocabulary and expressions for apparel instead of for food.



3. The issue of intonation and its effect on meaning could be raised by looking at a specific instance in "Yosi." A good choice for this purpose occurs when Yosi finds the thief in the police line-up. "It's the thief. It is the thief. This is the thief." This would be a good time to give different pairs of students the same lines and ask them to come up with a situation for those lines, which they would then act out. The varying significance of the lines in different contexts should impress on students the influence of intonation.

4. In the course of most skits a few gestures are made which are culture-bound, and which should be pointed out to the class. Some gestures are made which are more universal, and these can be discussed as well. In "Yosi" at least four gestures are worth mentioning. These occur when a) Yosi hitch-hikes (thumbs a ride): b) Yosi gets sea-sick on the ship (holds stomach); c) the Captain announces that he is the captain (possible gestures: points vigorously to self with thumb, fingers curled; struts, shoulders back, hands draped around suit lapels); d) the Mayor congratulates Yosi on catching the thief (exchanges handshake).

5. The teacher can extract major scenes from the play and ask students to write dialogues for other people having a similar sort of encounter. Looking at the opening scene of Yosi, where the parents ask Yosi to turn off television and he refuses, gets punished, and leaves angrily, the teacher might ask the students to write dialogue for a scene in which Yosi is asked to give a toy back to a younger sibling, he refuses, incurs parental displeasure, and once again leaves angrily. Such

exercises would assist students from a notional-functional perspective. They would develop a repertoire of responses for a certain kind of verbal exchange and/or emotion.

6. The situations which are found in "Yosi" can serve as a springboard for units on related topics and situations. Units could be planned around a) restaurants/ entertainment/ eating; b) activity at a police station/ detective stories/ the work of police, firemen, paramedics; and c) family and family situations/ special occasions/ family activities (arguments, rites of passage, personal relations).

7. Last, but not least, is the possibility of lifting characters from the skits and fleshing out their identities through which they take on life-like proportions for the class. Subsequent activities can be planned in which students take on the identities of these characters, thus reaping the benefits that come of stepping out of themselves in the language class, benefits which can be both linguistic and psychological. A teacher working in this fashion might develop a unit based on things that Yosi does with friends after school.

The thought that strikes one, glancing at the Yosi skit, is that here is an activity which is rife with material to expand into follow-up units. The suggestions which are noted here are, I am sure, just the beginning of ways in which an experienced English teacher could synthesize skits and subsequent exercises into an English program of particular excellence.

## Setting Up

This project, and the presentation of skits, was first conducted by a group of three others and myself, who operated as a unit under the auspices of the Israel Ministry of Education. We were loosely attached to the school system of one town, but basically we came into schools from the outside. We had the advantage, in dealing with students, of being strangers and, in their eyes, of being actors rather than teachers. Can the materials we used be adapted for presentation by the classroom teacher? Should the same format always be used since it has been tried and shown to work?

Certainly if the monies were available, it would be possible to organize a group of four teachers, actors, or a combination of the two, who would work full-time on writing and producing skits for a school district or a region. Materials development of this nature is extremely demanding of both time and energy. Any individuals attempting to create new materials of this ilk and work full-time doing something else would be hard-pressed. An alternative solution might be for teachers/actors to write the materials together at a slower pace. Classes of approximately the same grade and level of English might be held together in an auditorium for the performance.

A better solution would involve older students in an advanced English class who would either write and perform skits

for less advanced classes or merely perform the skits after they were written by native English-speakers. The writing and production of the skit by an advanced English class could be carried out in the guise of a drama course which was stated from the outset to include writing and acting as well as play-reading and analysis. The class, having prepared a skit, would perform first in the school where they met, and later for the other schools in the area, or even for the community-at-large.

Although video-taping might seem to be a way of reaching more classes with skit materials, the nature of video runs counter to some of the major reasons for using drama in the first place. Student participation is key to the effectiveness of the skits. Video, therefore, is a last resort. If filmed rather than presented live, the linguistic benefits of the skits would be diminished considerably and the affective benefits reduced to a minimal level.

Clearly, the methods of writing and presenting the skits which have the greatest chance of success are either for a group of four teachers/actors to work full-time at preparing and performing material or for an advanced ESL class to be formed with the intent of producing skits for less advanced students. In both cases, skits would first be presented in local schools, then possibly in surrounding school systems. Conceivably, since the skits are really good experimental theater, a presentation might be made for the community-at-large. Video-taping the skits is discourage since it subverts the original linguistic and affective purposes with which they were devised, which are closely related to the nature of live dramatic presentation.

## Conclusion

In the course of this paper I have attempted to explain and defend a technique for teaching English as a Second Language, particularly in the classroom in non-English-speaking countries abroad. The technique is integrative and tends to both linguistic and affective elements of pedagogy. The major thrust of the technique is to clarify the concept of communicative competence to English students abroad who are rarely exposed to native English-speakers outside the classroom. The nature of the skits, that is, their content, manner of organization, and most essential characteristics are explained through reference to an illustrative skit which is included here in its entirety.

Preparing materials does pose a problem for the classroom teacher: a great deal of time and energy is involved in the creating and polishing of one skit. A group of teachers assigned to regular classes could prepare materials in their off-hours. A better system, however, would be to establish an English-through-drama group whose sole purpose would be to write and perform skits in a "neighborhood" of school systems. Another very intriguing concept, one which I am eager to see tried and which would also result in the preparation of new materials, would be to offer a seminar for advanced English students, based on drama, with special attention paid to the writing and performance of skits for less advanced English students.

The outstanding pedagogical qualities of these skits stem from their interweaving of a variety of drama techniques which are often used separately, with limited objectives, in the ESL classroom. The skits are written with a regard for the natural flow of dialogue and events which are the hallmarks of true theater, as much as they are written for their advantages as a tool for teaching English. In fact, I would argue, this naturalness is a major contributor to their success. In addition to being fine pedagogical aids, these skits incorporate principles of really good experimental theater. I would therefore urge those English instructors who have used drama in the class before or who are increasingly drawn to make the attempt, to experiment in the classroom with longer dramatic presentations which integrate drama techniques usually used in isolation, and I offer this discussion of one such experiment by way of precedent, example, and encouragement.