

Expression through Drama: Linking Prosody, Embodiment and Emotional Awareness

Riah Werner, May 2016, Sandanona Conference at SIT Graduate Institute

Drama: a composition in verse or prose intended to portray life or character or to **tell a story** usually involving conflicts and **emotions** through **action** and **dialogue** and typically designed for theatrical performance. (Merriam-Webster)

12 Reasons to Use Drama to Teach English (Maley 2005, cited in Zyoud)

1. Drama integrates language skills naturally.
2. Drama integrates verbal and nonverbal ways of communicating, linking the mind and body.
3. Drama uses both cognitive and affective domains, linking thinking and feeling.
4. Drama contextualizes language.
5. Drama uses multi-sensory input for whole person learning.
6. Drama develops self-awareness and confidence.
7. Drama motivates students.
8. Drama is learner-centered.
9. Drama encourages creativity, exploration and risk-taking.
10. Drama creates positive classroom dynamics.
11. Drama is fun.
12. Drama requires very few resources. All you need are people and space.

Prosody: The suprasegmental elements of pronunciation, including rhythm, stress, intonation, tone, pitch, speed and volume. They communicate meaning and intention and are necessary for comprehensibility. Drama's focus on discourse-level meanings is a natural way to practice them.

Embodiment: *Embodied Cognition* allows for deeper conceptual understanding and improved recall by shifting the cognitive load from the brain to the body and building durable neural pathways. *Nonverbal Communication* includes kinesics (gestures and facial expressions), haptics (touch) and proxemics (distance), which vary from culture to culture. Drama allows students to experience both of these.

Emotional Awareness: An element of emotional intelligence, which covers the ways in which we perceive, understand, manage and use emotions. Drama creates a space to name and express emotions. While the six core emotions (joy, sadness, anger, fear, disgust and surprise) are universal, the ways and extent to which we express them are culturally specific.

Integrated Arts: Arts integration is an *approach to teaching* in which students demonstrate *understanding* through an *art form*. Students engage in a *creative process* which *connects* an art form and another subject area and meets *evolving objectives* in both. (Kennedy Center)

Creating a Safe Space: It's important to establish rules to make student-actors feel comfortable taking risks and expressing themselves, without embarrassment.

1. **Everyone participates-** If everyone is in it together, it is easier to relax.
2. **Teach students to be supportive-** Students need to learn how to give each other feedback.
3. **Start with low risk activities-** Starting with easy activities builds confidence and allows for success. Give students the building blocks before you ask them to put everything together.

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The Feelings Song: Start by asking students to show you different feelings, using their face and body. Then discuss what you do when you feel a certain way and build the lyrics to the song.

If you're _____ and you know it, _____.	happy--smile wide
If you're _____ and you know it, _____.	sad--wipe your tears
If you're _____ and you know it, _____ then your face will surely show it.	angry--stomp your feet scared--hide your face
If you're _____ and you know it, _____.	disgusted--wrinkle your nose surprised--say "oh my!"

Emotion Walk: Have students each choose a sentence to practice. Students walk around the room, in whatever direction they wish, repeating their sentence a variety of different ways. When you call out a feeling, students say their sentence using that feeling. When you say "freeze!" they stop where they are.

Voice Exercises: *Vowels:* Say the sounds "ooh, oh, ah, eh, ee" in order, exaggerating the lip shapes and jaw movements. *Pitch:* Count from 1 to 5, increasing the pitch on each number, then count backwards decreasing the pitch. *Volume:* Choose a long vowel sound. Start saying it quietly and slowly get louder. *Speed:* Say a sentence quickly, then again slowly. *Variety:* Choose a short text and say it, focusing on one variable (quiet/loud, slow/fast, high/low). Then choose two and combine them. Then choose three. (Archibald)

Talk and Listen Cards: Short dialogues (4-6 lines), where each actor is given only their own dialogue on a card. They have to actual listen to their partner to know when to speak. (Miccoli)
Good site for dialogues: <http://sixlinescenes.com/>

Scene Work: There are two types of scenes: open and closed. Most scenes are closed, which means the situation, characters and setting have been determined by the author. *Closed scenes* give students practice interpreting and finding intended meanings through the words in the script. *Open scenes* are flexible and are specifically designed to fit a number of different scenarios. They are commonly used as acting practice. Students choose their own characters and scenarios. Sources for open scene scripts: <http://plays.about.com/od/basics/fl/Open-Scenes.htm>
<http://alwilliamsfleck.wix.com/esldrama#!videos/c1vg6>

Freeze, Think and Act!: *Freeze Frames* are still images/tableaus created to illustrate a scene through body positions. Beginning students can choose a scene from a story and create a tableau to illustrate it. By assigning different sections to different groups of students, you can collaboratively tell the whole story. *Thought Tracking* is verbally expressing a character's inner thoughts and feelings. Students choose a scene from a story and act it out. When the teacher says "freeze!" they stop in place, and the teacher asks an actor or an audience member to describe what the character is thinking. (Kam Lay Khuan)