

METHODS FOR TEACHING DRAMA AS LITERATURE AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL



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Abstract:

Drama, having a unique blend of elements, is taught in the classroom as any other literary genre, focusing on reading and analysing its text. This fact leads to overlooking its other distinctive feature, i.e, its performative side. As teachers of literature, we mostly dismiss this aspect for many reasons. Therefore, the teaching objectives of drama may not fully be accomplished. In this regard, this research paper endeavours to highlight the benefits acquired from studying drama both as text and performance as well; in addition to suggesting adequate methods for teaching it in the classroom both as text and performance also. Following a qualitative approach, the findings demonstrate that drama, as a literary genre, should be taught in a particular way. As a text, the learner would develop critical thinking mainly and language competencies as well. As a performance, he would develop critical thinking and importantly, acquire social skills, understand and express emotions and become more extrovert. To act the play, it is advisable to start with a warm up activity which would remove students' stress, then, the following steps might follow: deciding which act or scene to be performed, a reading aloud of the chosen part, a distribution of roles among students, rehearsal stage, and finally, the performance of the play paying attention to details such as movements, facial expressions and costumes. In conclusion, learning drama becomes a rearding experience that connects the learner to his external world in a constructive manner.

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Introduction

Upon closer examination of the nature of learning drama, a diverse array of skills and competencies emerges, distinct from those required in other literary genres. Drama, encompassing both text and performance, presents a unique blend of elements. Textually, it presents various dramatic devices such as dialogues, stage directions, monologues, soliloquies, asides, flashbacks, dramatic conflict, symbolism, and irony among others. Conversely, at the performance level, participants are actively engaged physically. Through the textual analysis of the play, students gain insights into personal, emotional and societal issues. While in its enactment, they cultivate qualities like commitment and cooperation, bolster their confidence, move from introversion to extroversion, and foster their empathy and openness towards others.

In the classroom setting, the teaching process of drama often treats drama texts as any other literary genre, focusing on reading and analyzing the text only. However, this approach may overlook the distinctive features of drama, which is its performative aspect. Relying solely on textual analysis to interpret and understand drama as text may not fully accomplish the learning objectives of drama. While learners derive numerous benefits from studying drama, there remains a need for further research to propose effective approaches and methodologies for its teaching. Thus, this research paper aims to address two key questions: Firstly, what are the skills and benefits acquired through the study of drama, encompassing both textual analysis and performance? Secondly, what are the most suitable methods and strategies for teaching drama as literature in the classroom setting?.

Thus, a more comprehensive approach to teaching drama is needed, one that incorporates both textual analysis and performance aspects to fully realize the learning potential of the genre.

Introducing and teaching literature in the classroom demands a specific approach, with drama requiring even more attention due to its unique characteristics. Unlike other literary texts, drama should be treated differently. Teachers must carefully address the distinct features of drama and tailor their teaching methods accordingly.

Thereore, this research paper endeavours to discuss the issue of teaching drama as literature in class at the university level. I will highlight the important skills that can be derived from learning drama both as literature and performance. Subsequently, I will suggest practical steps and cues that might widden teachers' perspectives on the subject.

1. Literature Review

Generally, the studies on teaching drama in classrooms have been limited, often focusing predominantly on drama as a form of theater or performance only. Nevertheless, a notable work in teaching drama as text is Deanna Tressin's thesis titled "Teaching Drama in Literature Classes at the Secondary Level" (1968). Tressin highlightes key considerations for teaching drama as literature. Firstly, teachers should establish clear objectives, including developing reading and interpretive skills, familiarizing students with the dramatic tradition, cultivating critical judgment in drama, and deepening understanding of drama as a lens for personal and social insight. Tressin proposes two literary approaches: the historical approach and the new critical approach. He emphasizes the importance of understanding symbols and figures of speech for accurate interpretation, suggesting that the opening scene holds particular significance in introducing setting and characters. Tressin advocates for a less intrusive teaching style, allowing students space to select scenes, interpret them and engage in class discussions comparing interpretations. To foster student interaction with dramatic texts, Tressin recommends assignments focusing on character development, encouraging analytical writing. He provides practical guiding questions to aid students in their writing process (For more details, refer to pages 45-46).

I fully agree with Tressin's assertion that drama should be approached both as literature and as performance. To teach drama as theatre, he proposes several effective techniques. These include oral readings of the play in class, encouraging memorization of key passages, conducting buzz sessions to spark lively discussions, exploring how ideas in drama relate to contemporary issues, facilitating discussions about the play as a whole, and ensuring students are equipped with knowledge about both contemporary playwrights and those from the past. These methods not only engage students in the textual aspects of drama but also encourage them to explore its relevance and impact in the broader context of society.

From a different perspective, some articles approach the teaching of drama with a focus on its theatrical aspects and underscore the benefits

of incorporating such techniques in the learning process. Maley and Duff (2005) and Kobayashi (2012), for instance, advocate for the use of various warm-up activities, referred to as dramatic techniques, to enhance learners' confidence and spontaneity before enacting a particular drama. Kobayashi introduces techniques such as "space ball," "slow motivation tag," and "what am I doing?," while Maley and Duff suggest activities like "handshake," "hand catching," "Mirror Hands," "numbers in your head," "clap around the circle," "beat out that rhythm," and "breathing." These techniques aim to create comfort and creativity essential for effective participation in the theatrical activities.

In his part, Ambedkar (2015) advocates for the lecture method as a valuable approach to teaching drama at the undergraduate level. Through lectures, students are provided with comprehensive knowledge about various forms and styles of drama, such as tragedy, comedy, farce, melodrama, and poetic play, as well as an understanding of dramatic techniques employed by playwrights, including aside, soliloquy, dramatic irony, gestures, stage directions, sound effects and props. Additionally, the lecture method facilitates the introduction of fundamental literary aspects such as plot, characterization, theme, tone, symbol aiming at enhancing the literary competence of learners. Ambedkar emphasizes the importance of providing background information on historical, literary, mythological and theological contexts, as well as the biographical background of the work under study, to aid students in comprehending the text.

Additionally, Ambedkar (2015) emphasizes the crucial role of learner involvement in interpretation, advocating for a diverse range of methods to achieve this goal. These methods include the lecture method, reading method, translation method, drama method, audio-visual method, student-centered method, teacher-centered method, discussion method, and question and answer method. Throughout the interpretive process, the integration of modern technological devices such as movies, tape recorders, television, and radio is highlighted as a means to enrich and supplement the teaching of drama, enhancing students' understanding and engagement with the material.

Göçen et al (2016) emphasize the significance of dramatic activities in fully engaging students' senses during the learning process, including the visual, auditory, kinaesthetic and emotional aspects. They view pedagogical drama as a powerful tool for teaching students how to navigate emotional and social challenges, fostering problem-solving

skills and self-discovery. By involving students in dramatic activities, educators can create immersive learning experiences that address not only cognitive but also emotional and social dimensions, promoting holistic development and enhancing students' ability to cope with various life situations.

In the same context, Clarke (2021) underscores the skills cultivated through drama as theatre, highlighting enhanced communication, confidence, teamwork, and leadership abilities, alongside with improved critical thinking, problem-solving, research proficiency and effective improvisation. In other words, through engagement in theatrical activities, students develop a multifaceted skill set that extends to interpersonal, cognitive, and creative domains, proving invaluable across academic, professional and personal spheres.

Adding to that, in « Exploring the Power of Drama Education in the Classroom » (2023) further skills are underlined such as : enhancing creativity, improving language skills, increasing open mindedness, developing communication skills, understanding and expressing emotions, empathy and perspectives, self-awareness, self-reflection, emotional resilience and regulation¹.

These reviews are a general overview on the mainstream studies on drama teaching in the classroom setting. We note that there is more need for accurate methods in the way how drama should be taught in the class.

2. Skills Obtained from Learning Drama as Literature and as Theatre

2.1. Drama as literature

The dramatic text is treated as a literary text similar to other literary genres. There is a direct interaction between the Learner and the text. In my paper titled « Methods and Techniques for the Teaching of English Literature » (2024) I have highlighted the significant competencies that result from the analysis of a literary text. Such competencies as ; critical thinking, enrichment of culture, openness to the Other, enlargement of linguistic and literary knowledge and the learning of empathy.

When it comes to engaging with drama through reading, it contributes significantly to the learner's imagination. Dialogues, ongoing actions, and detailed stage directions that outline the setting, decor,

¹ Teacher academy.eu/blog/drama-education (2023).

lighting, sound effects, character movements, costumes, and timing all come together to stimulate the learner's imagination. This activation of imagination plays a crucial role in enhancing creativity and problem-solving skills.

2.2. Drama as Performance

2.2.1. Communication: The performance of dramatic text not only teaches confident communication, but also emphasizes the importance of considering pitch and tone to convey meaning and emotions effectively. Furthermore, it underscores the significance of non-verbal communication, including the movement of characters, their gestures, and facial expressions. (Clarke 2021a).

2.2.2. Development of critical thinking and problem solving capabilities: In the context of drama, performers have the chance to reflect on their own work and also observe and assess the work of their peers. Within this setting, they can offer constructive feedback and receive it in return, all within a supportive and positive atmosphere (Clarke 2021b).

2.2.3. Understand and express emotions: The learner will perform different types of emotions. In the process, he acquires the ability to express his own emotions and understand those of others. In addition, he learns to manage performance anxiety and adapt to unexpected situations. Thus, he can cultivate emotional resilience and become able to regulate emotions in a healthy and constructive manner¹.

2.2.4. The Development of social skills: According to psychologist Daniel Goleman, social skills are necessary for success in personal or professional life similar to cognitive skills. Such social skills as active listening, giving and following instructions, apologizing, helping, offering suggestions, empathy, emotional intelligence, negotiation skills to avoid conflicts, knowing how to deal with difficulties, defining objectives and making decisions. They allow to build long-lasting social relationships; help express feelings and opinions; promote teamwork and collaboration; help create a healthy work environment and improve it; and thus facilitate problem-solving².

2.2.5. Transition from introversion to extroversion: This is facilitated through the performance of drama. By participating in a collaborative environment, learners engage in teamwork, fostering interactions with

¹ Teacher academ.eu/blog/drama-education (2023)

² [lseazy.com/glossary/social-skills](https://seazy.com/glossary/social-skills) (2024).

others that encourage them to express their thoughts, provide feedback on others' performances and receive opinions from their peers. This dynamic interaction serves as a catalyst for personal growth and the development of social confidence.

3. How to Teach Drama as Literature and Theatre in the Classroom

3.1. Teaching drama as a literary text :

Introduction

Introducing drama after teaching other literary genres such as the short story, the novel, and poetry is often recommended. This sequential approach allows learners to become acquainted with various literary concepts and devices before delving into the unique characteristics of drama. While the teaching of drama as a text may not differ significantly from other genres, its distinct features demand specific attention and handling to ensure learners grasp its nuances effectively.

3.1.1. Establishment of background knowledge :

In the realm of literature education, establishing background knowledge is essential to equip students with the tools necessary for reading and analyzing literary texts effectively. This principle applies equally to the teaching of drama. In a prior research paper mentioned earlier (2024), I explore the foundational elements required to initiate literary analysis, laying the groundwork for understanding and interpreting various literary works.

In a nutshell, the learner should know that in literary analysis he interprets and not summarizes; he should know what is meant by a literary genre and its features; be familiar with elements of fictions such as : point of view, characters, setting, tone, mood and their different uses which imply particular functions; the different literary devices as figures of speech, irony, symbolism, among others; the consideration of the concept of a literary movement for it sheds its shadows on the text ; and finally a knowledge about literary theories which provide the perspective through which a literary text could be analyzed. (Mega 2024a).

As a text, the teaching of drama does not differ from the teaching of other genres. Nevertheless, its distinguished elements require a particular consideration and treatment.

3.1.2. Starting with a class discussion: To commence the study of a play, it's advisable for students to have read the text prior to class, enabling the teacher to initiate a comprehensive discussion. This discussion typically begins with a broad exploration of the play, where

students are encouraged to share their opinions, preferences and justifications regarding various aspects of the work. Additionally, the teacher may guide the conversation towards identifying the genre of the play, whether it is a tragedy or comedy, with a focus on elements such as the tragic flaw of the hero in the case of a tragedy. Furthermore, attention is directed towards character identification, as well as establishing the time and place in which the events of the play unfold. This initial discussion sets the stage for deeper analysis and understanding of the text. (Mega 2024b).

3.1.3. Text exploration stage: At this stage, employing the formalist approach proves highly beneficial. It is student-centred which permits the learner to directly interact with the text. There is examination of the elements within the play, their utilization, functions and interrelations to convey specific meanings. Within the context of drama, this approach directs attention towards analyzing how these elements work together harmoniously to shape the overall narrative such as characterization, themes, and dramatic effects, dialogue, monologue, soliloquy, dramatic conflict, stage directions, sound effects, props, lighting,... Moreover, it is crucial to analyze various literary devices such as figures of speech, irony, symbolism, foreshadowing, tone, mood, and others in order to unfold the artistic strategies of the playwright.

With beginners, introducing reading activities like extensive and intensive reading can enhance their interaction with the literary text by providing guided analytical questions.

Analysis can be conducted individually or in group settings, with each group assigned a particular element to analyze. The choice between individual or group work depends on factors such as the students' level and number, the allocated academic time for teaching the play, and, importantly, the objectives the teacher aims to accomplish.

3.1.4. Writing stage: Following the discussion and explorations stages, the production stage holds significance as it enables students to express their thoughts and write analytically, drawing upon evidence from the text in the form of quotations or paraphrases. They would employ the findings from the exploration stage. This stage encourages students to articulate their interpretations, analyses and arguments coherently, fostering the development of critical thinking and writing skills essential for literary analysis.

Individual writing assignments are recommended during the production stage. It hones learner's analytical and writing skills and encourages independent thought and creativity. In this regard, the teacher may assign tasks related to character development, dialogue, stage directions, props, or other elements either during class time or as homework, depending on the available time. These assignments provide students with opportunities to delve deeper into specific aspects of the play.

During class sessions, students should read their productions aloud, allowing for peer engagement and discussion. Additionally, if feasible, the teacher can select some productions for correction and provide feedback. This interactive process enables students to receive constructive criticism and guidance on their writing, fostering improvement and refinement of their analytical and expressive abilities.

Absolutely, the feedback provided by the teacher at this stage is invaluable. It allows students to understand their strengths and areas needing improvement, along with strategies to enhance their writing skills further. In other words, through constructive feedback, the teacher can highlight successes, offer guidance on areas for improvement, and suggest techniques to refine their analytical writing. This personalized feedback helps students to grow as writers and critical thinkers, enhancing their understanding and appreciation of the dramatic text.

Certainly, if students encounter difficulty in initiating their writing process, the teacher can offer assistance by providing guiding questions. Such prompts assist students in generating ideas, arranging their thoughts, and starting to draft their responses. By offering guidance in this way, the teacher supports students in overcoming any initial hurdles and encourages them to engage actively in the writing process.

3.2. Teaching drama as performance

Introduction

There are scholars who advocate teaching drama both as literature and as performance as well. Besides picturing the play/action in their heads, students should also have the opportunity to see the play performed. Planned theatre trips are desirable, but classroom enactment benefits the study too. (Tressin 1968: 35).

In fact, incorporating performance into the teaching of drama adds a crucial dimension to the learning experience. While time constraints may necessitate adjustments, students can still engage in performances ranging from enacting a whole play to presenting a single

scene or act. Each level of performance offers unique opportunities for students to embody characters, explore themes, and understand the dynamics of theatrical production. Regardless of the scale, performance enhances comprehension, fosters collaboration, and allows students to immerse themselves fully in the dramatic world of the text.

Starting with a recommendation for students to watch the play before class serves as an initial step towards preparing for performance. This approach allows students to familiarize themselves with the storyline, characters, and overall atmosphere of the play. By viewing the performance beforehand, students gain valuable insights into the interpretation and staging of the play which can inform their own performances and deepen their understanding of the text.

3.2.1. Dramatic techniques

Before enacting the play in the classroom, it's beneficial to incorporate some dramatic techniques as suggested by Kobayashi (2012). These techniques involve simple and spontaneous games designed by the teacher to stimulate learners' spontaneity and enhance their confidence. By engaging in these activities, students can become more comfortable with expressing themselves creatively and physically, laying a solid foundation for their subsequent participation in dramatic performances.

Scholars such as Maley and Duff (2005) and Kobayashi (2012) propose a range of non-verbal activities suitable for drama instruction. It's ultimately the responsibility of the teacher to select and adapt these activities based on factors such as available space, time constraints, and the cultural background of the learners. By carefully considering these factors, teachers can create an engaging and inclusive learning environment that supports students' exploration of non-verbal communication and dramatic expression.

Maley and Duff (2005) suggest other activities as : handshakes, handcatching, mirror hands, numbers in your head, clap around the circle, beat out that rhythm and breathing. While Kobayashi (2012) suggests the following activities : 'space ball', 'slow motion tag' and 'what am I doing activities'.

3.2.1.1. Illustration

To illustrate, 'Beat out that rhythm' activity as suggested by Maley and Duff (2005) :

Aims : to encourage disciplined cooperation by learning to fit in with and respond to others's physical action.

Procedure :

1. Students work in groups of about ten. They should sit in a circle, preferably on the floor.
2. Designate one student to begin beating out a simple but not too fast regular rhythm on the floor (or by clapping hands, clicking fingers, tapping a chair with a pen,...)
3. Once the rhythm is well established, the next student to the right adds in a variation to the main rhythm, then the next student to the right adds another element, and soon, until a composite beat results.
4. If there is more than one group, let each group perform its rhythm for the others.

3.2.2. The enactment of the play

After the session of dramatic techniques, students typically feel more at ease and less stressed about moving on to the enactment of the play. The teacher would then discuss or decide with the students which act or scene they will be acting out. Subsequently, a reading aloud of the chosen act is conducted in class. Following this, roles are distributed among the students, allowing each individual to assume a character within the play. This process sets the stage for the subsequent rehearsals and performances, ensuring that students are actively involved and prepared for their roles.

Indeed, consolidating the steps of dramatic techniques, deciding on which part or whole of the play to enact, reading aloud, and distributing roles into one session is a practical approach to optimize time. Following these initial stages, the teacher can assign students to rehearse their roles at home to further prepare for their performances independently.

In the subsequent session, students perform the play, paying close attention to every detail set by the playwright regarding their movements, facial expressions, and ideally, their costumes. By faithfully adhering to the playwright's directions, students aim to bring the characters and storyline to life authentically. This commitment to accuracy and attention to detail enhances the quality of the performance and enriches the overall theatrical experience for both performers and audience members.

It is notable that the success of the play's enactment hinges on the students' prior analysis of the text. Through their analysis, students gain a deeper understanding of the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of the characters, allowing them to embody these aspects convincingly in their performances. This comprehension enables students to portray characters

authentically and engage the audience emotionally, resulting in a more compelling and impactful theatrical production.

Conclusion

In this research paper, I emphasize the significance of teaching drama comprehensively in the classroom, encompassing both text and performance aspects. Drama stands out as the sole literary genre that allows learners to engage with the text both mentally and physically. This dual engagement helps learners develop additional competencies. Beyond cognitive and literary skills, students gain verbal and non-verbal communication abilities, enhance critical thinking and problem-solving skills, improve social interactions, and become more outgoing.

The main focus of this research is on how to effectively teach drama in the classroom. To achieve this, I have divided the instruction of drama into two parts. The first part deals with teaching drama as a text. Similar to other literary genres, I emphasize the importance of building background knowledge first, followed by class discussions and text exploration. This involves analyzing literary devices, elements of fiction, and dramatic features such as sound effects, props, monologues, and dramatic conflict, concluding with the writing stage.

The second part of the research suggests methods for teaching drama as a performance. I illustrate the importance of beginning with dramatic techniques to enhance learners' spontaneity and confidence. This is followed by the enactment of the play, which includes initiating a discussion about the scene or part to be performed, reading the chosen part aloud, and assigning roles to the learners. Rehearsing the play before class is also recommended. Ultimately, students will perform the scene in class, utilizing all the knowledge they have gained from studying drama as a text.

Indeed, while the techniques involved in teaching drama as literature may be time-consuming, the outcomes are undeniably rewarding. By engaging students in a comprehensive exploration of the text, coupled with practical and performative activities such as dramatic techniques and enactment of the play, teachers can facilitate a deeper understanding and appreciation of the dramatic work. The investment of time and effort in these teaching methods ultimately yields rich outcomes in terms of students' enhanced comprehension, critical thinking skills, and enthusiasm for literature and the performing arts.

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