



DRAMA ACTIVITIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' ORAL SKILLS IN ENGLISH

Actividades teatrales para el desarrollo de las habilidades orales de los estudiantes en inglés

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KEYWORDS

*Theatre
Oral skills
Primary Education
English as a foreign language
Cooperative learning*

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to apply drama tasks (Gerard Finger, 2000) in the English classroom, which will add dynamism to the classroom, for the development of students' oral competences. The aim is to work with drama in the Primary Education classroom through a series of tasks to improve oral communication, teamwork skills and to foster students' self-esteem and confidence when producing oral language. This project addresses pupils in the sixth level of Primary Education. Theatre is a very versatile tool that provides many resources and learning, helping to improve aspects such as corporal and oral expression and cooperative work.

PALABRAS CLAVE

*Teatro
Comunicación oral Educación
Primaria
Inglés como Lengua Extranjera
Aprendizaje cooperativo*

RESUMEN

Este trabajo pretende aplicar tareas de dramatización (Gerard Finger, 2000) en el aula de inglés, que aporten dinamismo al aula, para el desarrollo de las competencias orales de los alumnos. El objetivo es trabajar con el teatro en el aula de Educación Primaria a través de una serie de tareas para mejorar la comunicación oral, la capacidad de trabajo en equipo y fomentar la autoestima y la confianza de los alumnos a la hora de producir lenguaje oral. Este proyecto se dirige a los alumnos de sexto nivel de Educación Primaria. El teatro es una herramienta muy versátil que proporciona muchos recursos y aprendizajes, ayudando a mejorar aspectos como la expresión corporal y oral y el trabajo cooperativo.

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1. Introduction

This project, during the academic year, focuses on working with theatre and its different typologies, using this resource in an endless number of situations that make students work on different competences that are immersed in their oral competence.

There are different strategies for working with theatre in the Primary Education classroom (Blanco Martínez, 2016), but always with the clear objective of using the strategy of learning by doing, that is, encouraging experimentation and practice. Thus, theatre in the classroom is a working resource that brings benefits to pupils in their personal and educational development.

Theatre as a learning strategy in the classroom (Gil Bartolomé, 2018) has multiple advantages, as it allows the development of different forms of expression, communication, favours interpersonal interaction, and helps to integrate elements of life in society such as respect, listening, memory, critical sense, among others. The use of theatre in the classroom contributes to the integral development of children and young people, creating a fundamental basis for their free expression.

Theatre has benefits for children in terms of the different dimensions of their lives, such as: the affective dimension, the personal dimension, work and development among equals, that is, cooperative work and communication. Theatre brings multiple benefits for pupils in the classroom. In doing so, he reflects that theatre helps to develop self-esteem and empathy, facilitates socialisation among pupils, favours cooperative work (Kagan, 1989) among participants and helps to enhance pupils' personal knowledge and to express what they feel and develop their critical sense.

Theatre can also be used to work on different subjects (Woolland, 1993), in addition to foreign languages, such as Spanish Language and Literature or Social Sciences, to name but a few, through plays from other eras that help us to understand how life was lived in the past. Theatre also provides different ways of stimulating creativity and imagination, encourages corporal and oral expression (Nuñez Delgado, 2001), works on aspects of communication such as oratory or the transmission of ideas for improvement and introduces theatrical readings as a source of pleasure and information.

All these are advantages that theatre (Pavis, 2002) brings to the teaching process. With this proposal it is possible to define a resource that can be used at all levels of primary education in any language subject.

2. Objectives

2.1. General objective

The aim of this work is the inclusion of drama to improve the oral competence (Kempe and Holroyd, 2004) in English of pupils in the sixth grade of Primary Education.

2.2. Specific objectives

The project has the following specific objectives:

1. To describe the development of oral skills in learning English as a foreign language.
2. To analyse whether pupils become more autonomous and show more confidence (Heathfield, 2005) and security when dramatising.
3. To assess whether pupils show an aptitude for developing co-operative work with peers.
4. To gather information about the benefits of working with drama (Goodwin, 2006) in the classroom.
5. To promote oral communication in the classroom of the third year of Primary Education.
6. To use a play to reflect the learning acquired about oral communication, both verbal and non-verbal.
7. To develop evaluation elements in accordance with the work carried out in which the knowledge acquired before and after the development of the project is reflected.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

A total of 18 students in the sixth year of Primary Education, 9 boys and 9 girls, aged between 12 and 13, took part in this experience. The research teacher who carried out and analysed the didactic proposal has a degree in Primary Education and a specialisation in foreign languages.

3.2. Data collection instruments

In order to collect information, recordings were made of pupils performing a play at the beginning and end of the course. The plays that have been included in this project are the following:

1. Hansel and Gretel (initial assessment - September).

The characters played by the pupils in this play are as follows: Hansel, Gretel, Mother, Father, The Old Lady, Birdy, Rabbits, Johann, Wilhelm, Diane, Maureen.

2. Romeo and Juliet (final evaluation - June).

The characters played by the pupils in this play are as follows: Friar Laurence, Romeo, Juliet Capulet, Nurse, Lady Capulet, Lord Capulet, Prince Escalus, Count Paris, Tybalt, Benvolio, Mercutio, Peter, Samson, Gregory, Friar John, Lady Montague, Lord Montague, Lady Montague.

In addition to evaluating the development of these tasks with an evaluation rubric, the teacher has used a reflective teaching diary, of a longitudinal nature. The audiovisual recordings have been key to the reconstruction of what happened during the class sessions, faithfully reproducing everything that took place during them. On the other hand, the teacher's reflective diary detailed the tasks carried out, how the students responded to them, and the autonomy (Luelmo del Castillo, 2020) and cooperative learning skills shown by the students. Through this diary, the teacher questions the practical sessions and the learning that the students have had, and their ability to cope with the execution of the drama tasks.

During the school year, the resource of theatre has been worked on through different dramatic tasks and with different authors such as William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Christopher Marlowe, T. S. Eliot or Oscar Wilde, among others, although they have not been included in this study to obtain evaluation results. During the school year, the following tasks have been worked on:

- Dramatisation of poems and songs.
- Dramatisation of stories.
- Dramatisation of films.
- Dramatisation of plays.

For these drama tasks, the pupils worked in cooperative groups of 3 to 5 pupils per group and for the performance of the plays at the beginning and at the end of the course, the pupils all worked cooperatively.

3.3. Categories of analysis

The analysis was structured in analytical categories to be observed during the development and evaluation of the tasks, which made it possible to obtain information in line with the research objectives. Thus, in order to evaluate the learning of individual students in the play performed at the beginning and end of the course, a grade estimation scale was applied, whose analytical categories can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. Analytical categories for analysis

NAME OF THE PUPIL:			
ITEMS	(A) VERY SUCCESSFUL	(B) ACHIEVED	(C) NOT ACHIEVED
Fluency and rhythm of speech			
Intonation			
Pronunciation			
Voice projection			
Body language			
Self-esteem and confidence in speaking			
Ability to work cooperatively			
Remarks:			

Source: Own elaboration.

4. Results

The assessment of the pupils was carried out by comparing the results obtained by the pupils when they performed the play at the beginning of the course (pre assessment) with the results obtained in the play performed at the end of the course (post assessment).

In order to show the results, some tables have been applied in which the results obtained by the students for each analytical category can be seen, both in the initial evaluation carried out at the beginning of the course and in the final evaluation carried out at the end of the course. On the one hand, we speak of the results that students

achieve in terms of the development of oral competence, and, on the other hand, of the development of some of their social and emotional skills.

4.1. Development of oral competence

With regard to the evaluation of the development of oral skills (Safont and Campoy, 2002), it has been observed that students show a greater development of their oral competence at the end of the course.

Thus, the results of this study show very positive results, as they demonstrate that the inclusion of drama in the English classroom is enriching for the promotion and development of oral competence (Kempe and Holroyd, 2004) in Primary School learners. The results show that by learning to perform drama activities in the English classroom, students can improve their oral expression (Safont and Campoy, 2002) and all the skills related to it. By way of exemplification, a table is shown below, following the evaluation rubric shown in the methodology section, which presents the results obtained by the students in the play they performed at the beginning of the school year, and, on the other hand, the results achieved by the students at the end of the school year.

Firstly, the analytical category which refers to fluency and rate of speech. As table 2 shows, although at the beginning of the year there are two pupils with the highest scores for this item, all the participating pupils perform well in the post-test assessment for the item of fluency and rate of speech. Thus, at the end of the course, 15 of the learners have the highest score, with a score of "A" for this item, and 3 learners have a score of "B".

Table 2. Results on fluency and rate of speech in the pre-test and post-test analysis.

FLUENCY AND RHYTHM OF SPEECH	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
PRE-TEST	B	C	B	A	B	B	C	A	B	B	B	B	C	C	B	B	B	B
POST-TEST	A	B	A	A	A	A	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	B	A	A	A	A

Source: Own elaboration.

As for the analytical category of intonation, as shown in table 3, all participants show good results at the end of the year and in the initial assessment there are already two learners who show the highest score. At the end of the course, three learners show the average score "B" which means that they are making progress, and the rest of the learners show the maximum score "A". Thus, at the end of the year, students are intoning better and there is a better match between English speech patterns and the use of rising intonation, falling intonation or a combination of both.

Table 3. Results on intonation in the pre-test and post-test analysis.

INTONATION	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
PRE-TEST	B	B	B	C	C	A	B	C	C	B	B	A	B	C	B	B	B	B
POST-TEST	A	A	A	B	A	A	A	B	A	A	A	A	A	B	A	A	A	A

Source: Own elaboration.

As far as pronunciation is concerned, again, all students, as table 4 shows, perform satisfactorily at the end of the year. Two pupils have an intermediate score of B indicating that they are making progress, and the rest have the maximum score. Many of the students who achieve the maximum 'A-score' at the end of the year had a low 'C-score' at the beginning of the year.

This shows how there are students who have perceived a very noticeable improvement at the end of the course in all categories compared to the beginning of the course. Thus, in the interactions that take place at the end of the course, students pronounce words more clearly and clearly.

Table 4. Results on pronunciation in pre-test and post-test analysis.

PRONUNCIATION	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
PRE-TEST	C	C	B	B	B	B	B	B	A	C	C	B	B	B	B	B	C	C
POST-TEST	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	B

Source: Own elaboration.

As for voice projection, table 5 shows that learners again show an improvement at the end of the year. In this case, all learners, except student 9, obtain the maximum score “A score” at the end of the course, so it is understood that the students project their voice appropriately at the end of the course. Thus, we find exchanges in which learners project their voice clearly and loudly so that communicative exchanges are accessible.

Table 5. Results on voice projection in pre-test and post-test analysis.

VOICE PROJECTION	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
PRE-TEST	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	C	B	B	B	C	B	B	B	B	C
POST-TEST	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A

Source: Own elaboration.

In terms of body language, the analysis of the interactions at the end of the course leads us to see that the participating pupils show, as shown in table 6, better results at the end of the course. At the beginning of the course, student 1 already showed the highest score for this item, but at the end of the course, all students, except 2 students with an average score of “B”, show better results for this item. Therefore, students have a better control of body language at the end of the year.

Table 6. Results on body language in pre-test and post-test analysis.

BODY LANGUAGE	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
PRE-TEST	A	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	C	B	B	B	C	C	B	B	B
POST-TEST	A	A	A	A	B	A	A	A	A	A	B	A	A	A	A	A	A

Source: Own elaboration.

4.2. Development of self-esteem and confidence in speaking and co-operative learning skills

The assessment of students’ self-esteem and confidence in speaking shows, as illustrated in table 7, that students show greater autonomy (Díaz, Quiroga & Buadas, 2014) and self-confidence when interacting in English at the end of the academic year.

Table 7 shows that all students obtain the highest score on this item at the end of the year and that, as a result, they are less shy when interacting and show a higher level of security and confidence when speaking.

Table 7. Results on self-esteem and confidence in speaking in the pre-test and post-test analysis.

SELF-ESTEEM AND CONFIDENCE IN SPEAKING	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
PRE-TEST	B	B	B	B	B	C	A	C	B	B	C	C	A	B	B	B	B	B
POST-TEST	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A

Source: Own elaboration.

Also, students show greater competence in working cooperatively with their peers, as reflected in the evaluation in table 8. Therefore, during the application of the drama activities during the course, affective bonds have been created between students and they have learned to work in groups. At the end of the year, only 2 pupils obtained an average score in terms of their ability to work cooperatively, and these were two pupils who had great difficulty at the beginning of the year in working with their classmates.

Table 8. Results on cooperative learning ability in the pre-test and post-test analysis.

CO-OPERATIVE LEARNING SKILLS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
PRE-TEST	C	B	B	B	C	B	B	B	C	B	B	A	B	B	B	B	B	C
POST-TEST	B	A	A	A	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A

Source: Own elaboration.

On the other hand, regarding pupils' satisfaction with the activities carried out, it was observed that all the participants expressed a good opinion, both work they had done at the beginning and end of the course, and of the activities carried out during the course.

Moreover, it was found that the worst evaluations coincided with the play that the students performed at the beginning of the course, since after analysing the recordings, it was found that the students were shy when producing oral language, did not show confidence and security when speaking, and did not have much experience in group work. However, after working with the pupils on drama tasks throughout the course, we have managed to get them to be able to perform this type of task and to improve in all the areas mentioned above.

5. Discussion

In the light of the results shown in the previous section, it is understood that pupils in the sixth year of Primary Education have improved their performance in the English classroom in the sense that they are more prepared to carry out a drama task (Chalmers, 2014) and develop their oral skills in the foreign language.

Also, students have improved some of their social and emotional skills and are better able to work in groups at the end of the course. Therefore, when we analyse the theatrical performances that the group of students performs at the beginning and end of the year, we can see that the inclusion of this type of activities in the classroom has great advantages for the students. Following the evaluation rubric, we find that the 18 students taking part in this study show better results in all the parameters analysed in the rubric designed to evaluate oral competence (see table 1) than at the beginning of the course. Firstly, as regards the analytical category of fluency and rate of speech, as table 2 in the previous section shows, the students show greater fluency in speaking at the end of the course. By performing role-play tasks during the course, learners can speak more fluently at the end of the course and at a more appropriate rate. On the other hand, the pace of speech is also more appropriate and this leads to more fluent and more rhythmic speech at the end of the course.

As for intonation, as shown in table 3 in the results section, students intonate better at the end of the course because during the course they have had the opportunity to practise intonation in the drama tasks they have performed. Thus, it is noticeable in the interactions when students intonate with an ascending contour and when they intonate with a descending contour or a combination of both. All this makes their oral production more appropriate intonation according to the dramatisation tasks being worked on, and it is easier to deduce what the students want to project.

On the other hand, if we talk about pronunciation in oral interactions, the learners show, as shown in table 4, better pronunciation at the end of the course after having practised pronunciation in the drama tasks throughout the course. At the beginning of the course, the recordings show that the students' pronunciation is less clear and

precise, but at the end of the course, they improve in this respect and present words whose pronunciation is clearer and more forceful. This, as well as all the other elements, leads to a higher quality of oral production and a substantial improvement in this area.

As far as voice projection is concerned, the exchanges in the post-test evaluation show, as can be seen in Table 5, that students have learned during the course to project their voice clearly, and that they have improved a lot in this aspect. This category of analysis is linked to all the previous ones and shows how students who pronounce and intonate better, project their voice more clearly, so that they are heard and understood more easily than at the beginning of the course.

As far as body language is concerned, table 6 showed that learners also improved in this aspect and that at the beginning of the course we found that in communicative exchanges learners hardly took body language into account. This meant that students did not pay attention to key elements for oral interaction such as gaze, gestures, or facial expression, among others. However, the development of the drama tasks during the course has meant that the students have worked a lot on these aspects in the communicative exchanges and that they have reached the end of the course with an improvement in all these elements. These results are supported by the following argument about the relationship between drama and non-verbal language:

In drama, as in our daily lives, we communicate through body language at the same time as we use the spoken word. In addition to the more formal uses of non-verbal language in drama- such as mime, masks, sign language- we also use props and costume (however simple, perhaps a letter and a cloak), sets (a bench, perhaps to stand in for a gangway to a ship setting off for the New World), and perhaps lighting and music. They are all part of what might be defined as non-verbal sign system; using them effectively is part of the language of drama. (Woolland, 2010, p. 4).

Similarly, regarding self-esteem and confidence in speaking, the recordings show exchanges at the beginning of the course in which pupils are shy and absent when interacting and show little confidence and assurance in speaking. The drama tasks are very useful in this respect because they make students not only project their voice, but also their ability to express themselves in front of an audience and this results in working on many emotional aspects such as the level of confidence and assurance in public speaking, and in students, as shown in table 7, showing very encouraging results. This is probably one of the greatest benefits of this proposal: that the students have gained confidence (Heathfield, 2005) and security in producing the foreign language in the English class.

Finally, we talked about the learners' ability to work cooperatively at the beginning and end of the course. In this respect, at the beginning of the year, we were faced with exchanges in which disputes arose between some pupils because they did not respect their classmates, interrupted them or showed outright rejection of their proposals. In this respect, the work of the drama activities (Wolland, 2010) has also helped the pupils to learn to communicate with their classmates and to address each other. When the first play was performed at the beginning of the school year, it was noticeable that the pupils were not used to performing group tasks and that difficulties arose easily among them. Thus, some pupils were disrespectful of other pupils' opinions, shouted because they wanted to impose their views or disturb their classmates whenever they could. However, the work on this cooperative work competence throughout the course has meant that we have found students who are more prepared to develop cooperative group work and that, except in the case of two students who need to continue working on this a little more, we have found students who are willing to work with their classmates and to carry out common work with them.

Finally, as we included in the previous section, the students are satisfied at the end of the course and have a positive perception of the activities that have been carried out in the classroom. In this way, the results of this project are doubly satisfactory because not only have the pupils improved their oral skills in the foreign language, but they have also been able to improve their language skills (Mata Anaya, Núñez Delgado and Rienda Polo, 2015) in the foreign language.

The students' ability to work cooperatively has been improved and, in addition, they are more motivated and satisfied with the results achieved in the English classroom.

6. Conclusions

This proposal can serve as a guide to initiate the introduction of the resource of drama in the classroom for students of all educational levels.

As we have seen, the proposal consists of applying the tool of drama in the classroom from the beginning of the school year, that is, different dramatisation tasks to work on the English language in the foreign language classroom. From our point of view, this is beneficial for pupils at any educational stage because this project has shown that the integration of drama in the educational environment manages to promote the development of oral skills in pupils in the English class, among other things.

Thus, the inclusion of this educational resource has led to:

- Demonstrate that oral expression or communication is related to drama activities.

- To indicate that the relationship between oral communication and drama is established to bridge the gap between the classroom and the outside world.
- To deduce that drama activities are an effective tool to encourage and foster speaking skills (Grugeon, Dawes, Smith, & Hubbard, 2000).
- To develop pupils' oral competence in English to a satisfactory level.

Increased self-esteem, self-confidence and self-assurance of the students in the English classroom.

- A significant increase in communication and interaction between students, which has led to a clear improvement in their competence to develop cooperative learning.
- Active participation of students in all the proposed activities.
- A very positive assessment of the learning developed by the pupils, who perceive the theatre as something that improves and facilitates their teaching-learning process.
- Use of new instruments which allow students to work on their oral skills in a different way in the subject studied.
- Generation of cooperative knowledge among students thanks to the use of drama tasks.
- Acquisition of new learning habits, skills and abilities in the English classroom.
- Generation in students of a more active attitude in their teaching-learning process that may favour the improvement of academic results.
- Increased student interest and knowledge in the English classroom.

For all these reasons, after carrying out this intervention proposal, it can be deduced that Primary School students, in this case, sixth grade students, can improve their oral competence if it is worked on through fun and motivating activities. In particular, in this study, the resource of drama (Farmer, 2011) has been used to encourage pupils to improve their oral skills and after the results obtained, which have been presented in the previous section, it is concluded that drama tasks are an effective didactic tool for working on oral skills and social and emotional skills in Primary School pupils.

In addition, after carrying out this work, the following conclusions were reached:

- Theatre stimulates reality, develops self-expression and allows experimentation with language.
- Theatre activities can help teachers to overcome some of the difficulties of teaching mixed-ability classes.
- Theatre gives pupils the opportunity to explore their own creativity through exercises in voice, movement, improvisation, mime.

Theatre activities help pupils to become more confident and self-assured in their use of foreign languages by allowing them to experience the language at work.

With drama, non-verbal communication skills are greatly improved.

- Theatre activities are a useful way of encouraging interaction, cooperation and trust between pupils.
- Fantasy and imagination are the two most important values of drama activities.
- Theatre activities improve pupils' concentration, memorisation and improvisation skills.

Finally, it is concluded that it is necessary to implement this educational resource from lower grades so that when students reach higher grades they already know how to perform tasks of this type in the classroom and have extensive experience and training in this field and can make the most of this educational resource that this work has shown to be so useful in the classroom.

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