

Act to Learn: Kinaesthetic Method in English Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at the possibilities of applied dramatic techniques, as an alternative learning method, in teaching English language to lower primary level students who belongs to Malayalam medium (Malayalam is their mother tongue also). For this, the authors' first-hand experience in employing dramatic techniques for teaching English language is foregrounded in this study. Some of the major dramatic techniques elaborated here are role play, instant skit performance, sentence puzzles, story puzzles and use of physical objects in learning. Employing techniques that make use of physical actions in learning is termed as kinaesthetic learning. This study examines the idea of 'act to learn' based on the theories kinaesthetic learning.

This article explores the use of dramatic techniques in teaching English. This study is mainly based on the authors' firsthand experience from an unofficial English tutorial to young students from a rural village, Pady in Kasaragod district, Kerala. The classes were arranged by a local initiative in a village club, named Cheguvera, for school students from the village during their summer vacation period.

There were about twenty students of classes one to eight. As the students belonged to different age groups and all of them were undergoing Malayalam medium schooling, it was very difficult to design a specific teaching method. As a result, the communication of language structures, grammar and speaking modes to a multiform student community schooled only in Malayalam medium stood as a serious impediment in our endeavour. Every

student had severe problem in communicating a single sentence properly in English. Thus, along with the regular tutorial method on language structures, certain kinaesthetic learning methods were used to make the class more effective and interactive.

In our case, certain practically applicable dramatic methods in classroom were employed. We were concerned about the liveliness and affordability of such an act as we were not provided with a larger space where we could use technical gadgets of theatre techniques. Nevertheless, techniques like movements, verbal exchanges, role plays and small skits etc. were effectively used. The primary goal of this paper is to unfold the effective method English language teaching through theatrical practices. Because there has been no proper attempt so far to expose the

multifaceted interdisciplinary relations between language teaching and dramatic techniques. The experience and methods accumulated in actor training or in larger sense, in applied drama can be implemented in language teaching too.

Some of the practical dramatic methods we used during the tutorial are:

1. Role Play

Either singularly or with someone else roles were assigned, which helped them to practice skills and behaviours. Students were assigned with certain roles and were asked to communicate as the given character. They were given roles individually or as paired groups of teacher-student, police officer and complainant, customer care officer and customer, doctor and patient etc. The students were asked to develop a conversation in their respective roles. This method helped to develop their communicative skills as well as their creative abilities like acting, reacting to questions and thinking in accordance with the new situation. After each section, corrections and clarifications needed for each communicative situation was given. Students could use and nurture their own creative potential and language capacity without any stress and embarrassment.

2. Instant Skit Performance

The students were equally and carefully divided into two groups and each group was assigned to develop a plot and perform a skit within fifteen minutes. The participation of every member in the skit with dialogue

was a necessary rule for each group. The limited time availed to students effectively ended up in the creation of vague plots without any written dialogues which resulted in spontaneous performance. As a result, each communication in the stage became more instant and lively prompting students to communicate in their own. For instance, a group performed a skit based on the road accidents in Kerala and the necessity of taking the wounded immediately to the hospital. Students easily adapted themselves as different characters in the scene. For instance, two guys immediately fell on the ground and started crying in pain. Seeing them crying, a few others rushed to the scene as rescuers; one guy acted as if he was calling the police station; another guy called ambulance. Suddenly, certain students took the role of police officers and ambulance group.

Even though the students were speaking in broken and faulty English, they could gain some confidence in speaking English without any inhibition. We also found that as a group, members of the group motivated each other to communicate according to the situations. While the first group was performing, the second group was assigned to find out the communication mistakes in the performing group. After each performance, the student along with us, discussed the mistakes and clarification in the use of language.

3. Sentence Puzzles and Story Puzzles

In this method, students were divided into groups according to their class. Students

from one to four were divided into one group and five to eight into another group. For each group of students, a set of cards were given. Each card contained a word or phrase and the students were asked to form sentences placing the cards in proper order. For the younger group, a number of simple English sentences were given in the set of cards and were asked to arrange them into meaningful sentences. For the older group, familiar English stories like "The Goose with the Golden Eggs," "The Lion and the Mouse," "The Hare and the Tortoise" etc. were shuffled into the cards as words. The students as group were informed only the title and the first sentence of the story and were asked to arrange the cards into a complete story. This helped students to understand the basic structure of English language formation. With trial and errors, they could succeed in arranging the sentences and stories into the proper order.

4. Physical Objects and Learning

The students were asked to move around the surrounding or were given certain physical objects to observe. For instance, certain plants, flowers, and artefacts like figurine, chair, clock etc. were given to students. They were asked to describe what they saw, touched and experienced. It seemed that learning from physical touch helped the students to memorize the corrections very easily.

The physical touch is an extremely important factor in actors' training. Such training classes ensure physical contact between performer's body with materials in

the stage, and other performers. Directors are so sure about the intense communication possibilities and comprehension possibilities in this method of direct physical contact. Theatre practitioners like Stanislavsky and Grotowski asked their actors to touch the wound of a person or the actor's own wounds as part of the theatre training.

Kinesthetic Learning: Theoretical perspectives of learning through drama

Kinesthetic learning means the art of learning by means of body actions that involves one's body position, weight, or movement of the muscles, tendons, and joints. Kinesthetic intelligence is always discussed in accordance with tactile abilities of an individual. Tactile abilities include the faculty of doing physical actions. Howard Gardner in his work *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* discusses about the idea of Kinesthetic intelligence, that activities (such as dancing and performing surgery) as requiring great kinesthetic intelligence: using the body to create (or do) something (4). That means developing the kinesthetic abilities in the younger ages through class room activities would develop the child's kinesthetic intelligence which may help him in future to perform jobs that require high physical actions. Margaret H'Doubler wrote about kinesthetic learning during the 1940s, defining kinesthetic learning as the human body's ability to express itself through movement and dance. So, in short kinesthetic learning can be considered as the two-way development of a child; one

towards tactile abilities and the second towards abilities of expression.

Galeet BenZion postulates that kinesthetic and tactile learning are separate learning styles, with different characteristics. She defined kinesthetic learning as the process that results in new knowledge (or understanding) with the involvement of the learner's body movement. This movement is performed to establish new (or extending existing) knowledge. Kinesthetic learning at its best is established when the learner uses language (their own words) in order to define, explain, resolve and sort out how his or her body's movement reflects the concept explored (BenZion 10).

Depending upon one's memory ability kinesthetic learners may respond differently. These differences categorize learners mainly as whole body learners, hands-on learners, doodlers, students learning through emotional experiences. Generally, the learning and the memory is temporary or short term. For a long-term memory, varying practices can be employed depending on the learning style. Some good practices are mind mapping, story mapping, webbing, drawing etc. that suits more for a doodler. For the hands-on learner, role play, clay, building and math manipulative can be used. The whole body learner can learn better through role-playing, body mapping, puzzles and use of computer technology which allows for certain movement while learning. Students can be engaged in group activities and activities which involve bodily movement such as dance, drama, sports can be used to nurture their learning.

Kinaesthetic method is effectively used in the methods of dramatics. In theatre what happens is, through bodily actions the performer develops a kinesthetic relationship with the audience. This relationship can be effectively implemented in the classrooms for developing a teacher-student relation, as well as student-student relation. This article argues that social science instructors, especially language instructors, at all levels must exercise kinesthetic learning as their pedagogical tool. The standard model of teaching at different levels of education primarily relies on lecturing. The argument here is that students benefit from alternative instruction styles incorporated into their everyday classes. The kinesthetic activities that are mentioned above require minor additional work from the instructor rather it allows the students to engage themselves completely and freely with the given material and with each other. Furthermore, these simple methods of kinesthetic learning reemphasize the relevance of physical classrooms and thus counter the recent trend toward MOOCs (massive open online courses) in education. By making use of students and teachers body, interactions with physical objects to learn and close participation with nature recreate the space of the so called traditional classroom to an organic space of theatrical action and reaction and respective learning.

Act to learn

The pedagogy of acting in education, especially in English communicative skills, focuses mainly on the development of

physicality and cognitive skills. Balme points out that:

...acting pedagogy can also be found in non-professional contexts, especially in the area of applied theatre, where the aim is less to achieve professional-level virtuosity than to foster integrative and consciousness-widening skills. In this context acting can be seen as an empowering and participatory activity, which emphasizes interpersonal interaction. Acting's combination of physicality and cognitive abilities, especially role-playing, make it a crucial element of many kinds of group-building activities (Balme, 2008, 27-28).

Reading a story and acting story are entirely different methods in term of the cognitive possibilities. Acting a story makes it clear that the story is properly stored in the learner's memory.

Theatre theoreticians approach this method of using acting pedagogy for the development of actor's personality and other soft skill from varying perspectives. Constantin Stanislavsky emphasized the importance of creativity, imagination, communication, affective cognition, emotional memory, concentration, and relaxation etc. as the key skills developed during acting training that uses kinesthetic learning process. Vsevolod Meyerhold's biomechanical system, that stresses the physical control, rhythmic awareness, responsiveness to the partners and the audience and teamwork, is also can be used

in a class room of kinesthetic learning. Jacques Coupeau concentrated on simplicity, spontaneity, sincerity, naturalness, playfulness and overcoming different inhibitions. Mihail Chekhov stresses the importance of imagination, concentration, higher ego, the creation of atmospheres, radiation, style and the "four brothers": feelings of ease, feelings of the whole, of form and of beauty. Bertolt Brecht favoured observation, recognition, curiosity, teamwork and interactivity, empathy and critical attitude. Joan Littlewood pointed out the relevance of the development of teamwork, communication, flexibility, imagination, openness, trust and the overcoming of inhibitions. Lee Strasberg, similarly to Stanislavsky, emphasized the importance of relaxation, concentration, emotional memory and awareness, and the overcoming of inhibitions (Gabriella 667-669).

In short, the method of using dramatics or kinesthetic learning in English language class room is so powerful. Learning a language also implies, thinking, dreaming, imagining and reacting in that language itself than mere possession of vocabulary and grammatical structure. The learning of one's first language becomes complete due the use of kinesthetic learning unknowingly in the childhood. A child use to act up on whatever things he comes across in his/her life. Imitating the mother's and other people's actions and ways of uttering are in a way a kind of

kinesthetic interaction. So, using the same methodology in learning the second language become more accurate.

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