The Role of Drama Technique in Teaching and Learning Process

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Abstract

This paper looked at the role of drama technique in teaching and learning process. Drama is one of the contemporary methods that have been used in education to serve multiple dimensions such as the students' arts education, the students' social and emotional development, support of the teaching of other cognitive subjects like Language, History, Mathematics. Drama in teaching utilizes dramatic techniques that support and strengthen learning in the classroom. The use of drama method of instruction in teaching has a lot of advantages. Some of these advantages include: Self-confidence: they learn to trust their ideas and abilities as individuals and Critical Thinking and Problem Solving. Students working through this process learn how to communicate their thoughts and look at things from a different perspective and formulate their decisions; Imagination and Creative Thinking: Through decision making and creative exploration, students are given the chance to play with imaginative ideas; Cooperation and Collaboration: Working in groups with other peers allows students to collaboratively discuss, rehearse and

combine creative ideas with peers at various levels and most importantly, drama is fun and makes learning active and hands on. Similarly, drama changes people's perspectives about life.

Introduction

Drama is defined as a platform which improves individuals' learning by providing a fictional environment in which they can bring their past experiences, feeling, and their body into action through playing roles (Hatch, 4). Drama supremely involves the students' imaginations. It forces students to think actively, logically and emotionally about human situations, problems and challenges that they encounter in unfolding scenarios (Miccoli, 8). Drama involves doing something as it is real. It provides a presentation and interpretation of a physical or mental activity and is a way to transform pupils' mental and physical potentials into creative acts (Allwrite, 7). Experiences, intellectual background and knowledge gained through education and dreams are all basis for drama (Barasa, 5). The drama method provides a cooperative learning environment in which students can employ scientific principles in their daily life (Babbie, 10). In drama, students are assigned various roles such as the character they were assigned. They talk and think in the way the related character talks and thinks. In this way, students improve their language and communication skills (Hatch, 8). Drama in educational settings makes pupils active participants in the learning process (Goodwin 3). It also reinforces pupil motivation due to its joyful character (Odeo, 6).

Since students animate the roles in their preferred way, they are not timid, leading to an increase in their self-confidence. During role playing, the students try different solutions and exclude those that do not work in the relevant situation, and employ useful ones that are further improved upon. This process eventually improves their problem-solving skills (Edmiston, 4). However, drama as an educational method allows students to reflect, discuss, make connections with real life, and look at the events from different angles (Littlewood, 1). Some scholars like Dickinson, (9) argue that drama reinforces the attainment of cognitive, emotional and technical skills related to analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

Drama is one of the contemporary methods that have been used in education to serve multiple dimensions such as the students' arts education, the students' social

and emotional development, support of the teaching of other cognitive subjects like Language, History, Mathematics (Polonsky, 4). Drama in education refers to the dramatic techniques that support and strengthen learning in the classroom. Some terms like developmental drama, creative dramatics, educational drama, and mantle of the expert have been used to describe different approaches of the engagement of drama in classroom teaching practices (Kembo, 3). It is one of the most effective methods of stimulating the students in what they learn. It is a natural way through which students express freely their understanding of life around them. The method allows for a great deal of involvement and participation by the students physically, emotionally and mentally. In a situation where a lesson or topic is boring, dramatization could effectively help to sustain the students' attention and interest.

The Concept of Drama

The word drama is taken from the Greek word 'dran' which means do or act. Drama in real life involves action, which is one of the most important methods of seeing life (Babbie, 29). According to Combs, drama provides a presentation and interpretation of a physical or mental activity and is a way to transform students' mental and physical potentials into creative acts (3). According to Littlewood (20), drama as an educational method allows students to reflect, discuss, make connections with real life, and look at the events from different angles. In his own view, Barbu asserts that topics in all subject areas can be recognized and dramatized by the students in order to make them clear and easier to understand and make learning a pleasurable venture (12). In other words, the use of drama method of instruction in the teaching and learning, will help in making the students develop interest in the process. This will be very rewarding because it is only when students develop interest in a subject that they will be able to record positive achievement in that subject.

The use of drama method of instruction in teaching has a lot of advantages. Some of these advantages according to Cresswell and Clark include: Self-confidence: when students take risks in class and in performances, they learn to trust their ideas and abilities as individuals; Critical Thinking and Problem Solving (201). Students working through this process learn how to communicate their thoughts and look at things from a different perspective and formulate their decisions;

Imagination and Creative Thinking: Through decision making and creative exploration, students are given the chance to play with imaginative ideas; Cooperation and Collaboration: Working in groups with other peers allows students to collaboratively discuss, rehearse and combine creative ideas with peers at various levels and most importantly, drama is fun and makes learning active and hands on. Similarly, drama changes people's perspectives about life.

According to Feden and Robert, Drama holds up a mirror for individual to examine themselves, deepening understanding of human motivation and behavior. In using the drama method in classroom teaching, some stages are involved which the teacher has to follow (7). These stages or steps as identified by Ahove include: Identify the problem to be dramatized; Prepare the script and identify the inherent values portrayed; Allow students to select their role/character; Discuss with each actor/actress on his/her role; Set the stage for the drama and give enough time; Use guide questions for follow up discussions and Evaluate the actors' performance and the general proceedings for future improvement. With these stages, students are actively involved in the teaching and learning process unlike what obtains in the conventional lecture method (5).

Philip indicated that a drama classroom remains a strong venue for learning to work in role and confirming its value in the practical sense. The teacher's role is defined as: helping students to form their ideas; helping students to test their ideas; helping students to communicate their ideas; and helping them to respond to different real-life situations. Teachers can use these skills for specific learning objectives by stepping into the fictional work of the students through using drama strategies, in particular, teacher in role. Consistently, there are numerous reports of unprecedented improvement in students' writing and speaking skills as a result of the use of drama structures. Calling us to focus on "knowing-in-action" Taylor draws our attention to drama teaching as an artistic process of meaning-making. He proposes that "to ignore reflective practitioner design is to remain ignorant to the kind of artistic processes which are the lifeblood of our work" (27).

Combs, referred to drama in classroom as creative dramatics to distinguish it from theater arts. Drama in classroom is informal and focuses on the process of dramatic enactment for the sake of the learners not an audience (6). According to him

classroom drama is not learning about drama, but learning through drama combs. Kitito, in her research with high school students, found that students using dramatic enactment performed well than children in traditional lecture, discussion or sea works modes (6). Moreover, they experience more instances of high order thinking, more topics-specific emotions, decreased apprehension and lesser-topic irrelevant thought than students in the non-dramatic mode. Cliff is found important in establishing the mode of teaching that teachers employ in their classroom. Through this work, questionnaires are designed to include questions on drama teaching, lecture method, discussion and other approaches.

An ethic of care in drama education does not suggest, however, that there should always be consensus and harmony at all times but rather 'a robust environment in which debate, dissent, generosity and artistic experimentation might be encouraged and valued. A creative learning environment based on trust is a safe and welcome haven for youths'' wild thoughts', the kind of thoughts that are all too often discouraged in classrooms, where there seems to be a fight between wild thoughts and classroom order and between wild thoughts and their adventure with intelligibility. We ask students to hold that thought for another time. We ask what does that have to do with this, or we say "Don't get me off the topic?", or maybe "How did that thought pop into your head, what were you thinking? "We worry about staying in the right place, of ordering thoughts so that they can be easily learned" (Britzman, 12).

As mentioned above, what was quoted from O'Neil's literature and Hoetker is useful for the current study to emphasize the use of drama techniques in Kiswahili classroom (9). What O Neil's literature suggests is taken to justify this study that drama techniques when used provides for learner contentedness, which is the aim of the study, it is from this review that questionnaires are designed to establish how teachers prepare and select a teaching method. Njogu et, al (19) says that to demystify Kiswahili language as a subject, teachers should encourage students to talk so as to get as varied answers to question just awe have varied students. Teachers should struggle to make the subject interesting by encouraging students to learn, act, recite and write their own creative works.

Dramatization: A technique for teaching

There are many reasons in favour of using drama activities and techniques in the language classroom. First of all it is entertaining and fun, and can provide motivation to learn. It can provide varied opportunities for different uses of language and because it engages feelings it can provide rich experience of language for the participants. Maley listed many points supporting the use of drama and these are: It integrates language skills in a natural way. Careful listening is a key feature (5). Spontaneous verbal expression is integral to most of the activities; and many of them require reading and writing, both as part of the input and the output. It integrates verbal and nonverbal aspects of communication, thus bringing together both mind and body, and restoring the balance between physical and intellectual aspects of learning. It draws upon both cognitive and affective domains, thus restoring the importance of feeling as well as thinking. By fully contextualizing the language, it brings the classroom interaction to life through an intensive focus on meaning. The emphasis on whole-person learning and multi-sensory inputs helps learners to capitalize on their strength and to extend their range. In doing so, it offers unequalled opportunities for catering to learner differences, by fostering self-awareness, self-esteem and confidence through which, motivation for learning is developed.

Fleming stated that drama is inevitably learner-centered because it can only operate through active cooperation. It is therefore a social activity and thus embodies much of the theory that has emphasized the social and communal, as opposed to the purely individual, aspects of learning (26). The use of drama techniques and activities in the classroom provides exciting opportunities for foreign language learners to use the language in concrete "situations". Besides, some research studies (Maley and Duff 21, Phillips, 23) suggest that drama activities can promote interesting ways of motivating language learners and teachers. With drama we can play, move, act and learn at the same time (Philips, 23). Also the use of drama activities has clear advantages for language learning regarding motivation, the use of language in context, teaching and learning cross curricular content (Philips, 3).

Dramatic activities according to Maley and Duff, are activities which give the students an opportunity to use his own personality in creating the material in

which part of the language class is to be based (21). Drama activities can provide students with an opportunity to use language to express various emotions, to solve problems, to make decisions, to socialize. Drama activities are also useful in the development of oral communication skills, and reading and writing as well. Drama activities help students to communicate in the foreign language including those with limited vocabulary (Aldavero, 28)

Research indicates that using drama in the classroom as a means of teaching helps students learn academically, socially, and developmentally. "The use of drama as a tool for teaching is not new. Historically, both drama and theatre have long been recognized as potent means of education and indoctrination. The ways they are used today, however, are new, and they differ in a number of respects from the ways they have been used in the past" (McCaslin, 271). It can reach students who otherwise could not be reached, and challenge students who have already grasped the concepts. Drama provides a fun means of learning. It brings the affective back into the classroom, an institute where emotions and learning are categorically divided. Recent brain research proves that emotions are linked with learning. When connection is made to the concept emotionally, it will have a better understanding of it. When we teach using the arts we are linking prior experiences with new stimuli. Teaching using drama brings emotion and learning together.

Most importantly of all, using drama to teach in the elementary classroom gets students involved and gives them the power to have a key role in their education. Jeffrey D. et-al , writes, "Through drama, students became a part of the learning process rather than mere observers or inactive receptacles of the rich experience of learning; in this way, their learning was deeper, more sustained, and infinitely more complex" (189). "Watching children working in drama provides fascinating insights into the richness of their imaginations, the skill with which they negotiate with one another, their present level of critical thinking, and the sophistication of the language they use" (Verriour, 7). Gavin Bolton calls the form of drama used to teach in the classroom, "dramatic Playing." Dramatic playing is characterized by a high degree of spontaneity as teacher and students work to create a fictional world in which they assume roles to explore issues that are of concern to them. Most professionals in the area of drama in education would define drama very correspondingly. They would all agree that drama is the act of participants joining

in an imagined world and taking roles of others. By doing so, students are able to learn through other perspectives and act as one would in the imagined situation. Drama, although not new to humans has had an integral impact on history and those who lived through it. Drama and theatre arts have been around since ancient times.

"Most familiar to us in the Western world is the theatre of ancient Greece, which developed from celebration and dance into a golden age of theatre" (McCaslin, 271). This form of art and its artists were highly respected. "Plato, in The Republic, advocated play as a way of learning. Aristotle urged education in the arts, distinguishing between activities that were means and those that were ends" (McCaslin, 271). Many cultures have found using drama to teach religion to be very successful. "The medieval church taught through the medium of mystery plays and in doing, helped to restore theatre to its proper place as a great art form"(McCaslin, 271). Drama was used to teach, and as a form of entertainment. The ideas of using drama as a medium for teaching are not new ideas. However, the western world has yet to widely accept the use of drama as a teaching medium for the elementary curriculum.

Although drama in education is not a new idea, recent brain and educational research is causing it to grow in popularity. Educators who use drama to teach their students are finding it to be a very successful method and therefore, are spreading the word. Drama is a way of life. It is embedded in each and every person's lives from birth to death. We naturally use drama to learn, explore, and solve problems in new and difficult situations. Drama is a great way to develop these skills. It is quite difficult to process something that has no personal meaning to us when we are learning something new. Perhaps it is put best by saying, "Facts are empty without being linked to context and concepts" (Perry, 1). When we learn something new, we connect it to something we already know. For example, if someone has never seen or experienced the ocean before, but listens to someone describe the ocean and how1 it looks, they will process this by connecting it to their prior experiences. Maybe this person has been to a big lake with waves and a beach where people play in the sand and swim. This person already has a similar experience to that of going to the ocean, so their idea of the ocean is better understood.

The ideas of connecting new information with something we already know have been affirmed by Robert Vogel, who has studied cognitive science as it applies to education, for fifteen years. "According to research, the human brain, when learning, strives to make connections. 'The brain does not learn in isolation,' says Vogel. Lessons have to be taught in a way so that the new knowledge connects to something the student already know, he says". Drama can do that for the brain since it is a way of life. It is a practice we are born with. We know drama, so we can connect it with new ideas learned in school. Also, drama allows the learner to explore their experiences in using their imaginations.

Application of Drama in Shaping Classroom Behaviour

Putting on plays for an audience is not what is meant by using drama in the classroom. The goal is not to teach acting and performance skills. The goal is to teach the core curricular areas using drama. Betty Jane Wagner, an internationally recognized authority on composition instruction and the educational uses of drama, states of the purpose of role play. The role playing is improvisational, not scripted and memorized to present a performance for an audience. The emphasis is on drama as an intentional teaching strategy to enhance learning in a particular curricular area. There are many ways in which drama can be integrated into the elementary classroom. Drama can be a way to teach all subject areas. Language arts, social studies, and science are subject areas, which are very successful in using drama. "It is particularly effective in making a historical event come alive for students," says Wagner

Wagner illustrates:

> A real-life example seems to be the best way to illustrate how drama can be used in the classroom. When I student taught a second-grade class last year, one of the required benchmarks to meet was to teach about Thanksgiving. Instead of telling the students about Thanksgiving, I let them be the teachers. I assigned them each to a12 group, which would cover a specific topic of Thanksgiving. (Mayflower Pilgrims, Native Americans, feast) I told the class that their group was to choose some way to teach the class about their topic. Without influencing their decisions, I noticed that every one of the groups chose to use role play to teach their

> classmates. It was an immediate, unanimous decision made by all groups to use drama to teach the class. This told me that children most definitely love using drama to learn. On the day they were to teach, it was amazing to see the students in role. They really imagined themselves back in time to the first Thanks giving. Students came dressed to look their parts. Many of them did extra research on their own to learn what their Pilgrim role would look and act like. While each group went in front of the room to teach, the class was intensely involved in the learning. Since this experience those second graders are experts on Thanksgiving. This class voluntarily went above and beyond their given requirements to learn (98)

This is just one example of how drama was used as a method of teaching in the elementary classroom. Role-play can be a very powerful teaching tool. This and different aspects of drama can be used to teach all the curriculum areas. Educators must take this into consideration when teaching children.

To really understand how drama has a positive impact on learning, one must first be familiar with how humans learn. The value of using drama in education is supported by research into how people learn. Much recent brain research demonstrates how the arts are able to tap into areas of experience and knowledge which are significant to the development of learning skills. Each person learns best a little differently. Some learn best by visualizing, some by audible and some by kinesthetic. However, not every person falls into one of these categories. In fact, many people would confess that they remember something best by using a combination of all three types of learning. This is why teachers must utilize all methods of teaching in the classroom. Using drama can be of benefit to all types of learning. Studying the brain would provide insight as to how humans learn and what methods would be successful to apply in the classroom. It seems logical that educators would naturally take current brain research into consideration when teaching. However, until only recently there has been technology, which has allowed us to study the brains of living people (Perry, 4). A depiction as to exactly what process the brain goes through when we learn would clarify why drama would help one learn.

Lawson describes this the brain undergoes an electrochemical process in which information is transferred from one neuron to the next. The brain is made up of billions of these nerve cells called neurons. "Neuron connections are flexible, webbed, overlapping, and redundant. Internal and external stimuli collaborate in the formation of pathways and patterns of excited neurons. The more frequently pathways or patterns of neurons are used the stronger the pathways and patterns become" (Lawson, 32). It is important that these pathways and patterns become stronger because as they do it becomes more probable that they will be created again. "Simultaneous excitation of multiple pathways and patterns create growth of new neuron connections, thus increasing the potential of the brain to learn" (Lawson, 32).

This is a simplified description of the physiology of the brain and how it learns. It is important when teaching to connect the new material with student's past experiences because it is this "simultaneous excitation" that helps us learn. Drama is a teaching method, which would allow students to explore the curriculum using several of Gardner's multiple intelligences. Students are fully involved in learning with drama. They are immersed into the subject. Their bodies, minds, and emotions are extremely active when they become engrossed in the drama. A common misconception is that the brain is like a storage unit, which can store and retrieve information at any given time; the brain is an exceptionally complex system of making connections and creating new information. "The human brain is the most complex system on earth, yet it is too often used in schools primarily as a simple device for storage and retrieval of information" (Dickinson, 22).

Teachers who orally lecture students, loading them with facts and figures, and then test them on what they remember, are not teaching with the brain in mind. During drama activities, the student's schema or prior knowledge of the subject is activated to really come to a complete understanding. Essentially, when we learn, we are synthesizing. We are merging our prior knowledge with the fresh information and creating something new in our minds. "Each brain is unique. Genetic and environmental factors influence learning and the connections between cells are created by an individual's unique experiences" (Lawson, 32).

Edmiston asserts that Drama is such a great way of synthesizing because of how involved the participants must be. They must recall their schema prior to the drama and use their new knowledge to create the drama. When the drama is over, there is room for reflection. Reflection is often a step that is overlooked in traditional teaching methods. Students do not just act in drama they also reflect on the meanings of actions as they consider the consequences for different people. Reflection is dialogic when the students evaluate actions from the point of view of a person affected (60). This is a vast section of the brain, which is utilized by participants of drama. During drama, students not only engage their senses, but they also maintain an emotional tie to the topic. Students are encouraged to take on a full body role throughout drama activities, which includes feeling their role's emotion.

Challenges associated with teaching skills

Adams in analyzing the Bullock report says that teachers are still inadequate in schools in giving pupils the ability to learn. This is perhaps especially true in secondary schools. Too few have heeded to Bullock's word that we are all of us leaning towards important theoretical work on the reading process, it is still too little know and too little applied in schools. What this implies is that too many of our pupils leave school unable to make effective communication or even use learning resources in modern and complex methods of information retrieval. Teachers are faced with challenging lifestyle in schools. The media has influence in language. All this is going to demand great reserves of resilience and willingness to adapt, from the teachers. It means that in teacher training institutions teachers have to be trained to be ready to accept and accelerate change rather than to accept the situation in the schools as they find it.

Giffin writes,

> In the field of education there is tension between the growing concern that children meet external, culturally-approved standards, and the growing body of research and theory suggesting that learning is far more complex and individualized than the standard-makers ever thought.

Today's elementary classroom is very much controlled by the state. It is an age of standards and benchmarks. "Brain-based research validates that learning is individually specific. This implies that standardized materials, instruction, and practices may actually diminish or inhibit learning" (Lawson, 32).

The specific curriculum benchmarks and standardized tests provide very little leeway for teachers to deviate from. Since funding for the schools depends on whether the students meet standardized test score requirements, many educators find themselves teaching to the test. This can cause educators to cover a significant amount of information over a short period of time. This will result in students gaining a large quantity of knowledge with very poor quality. This exact phenomenon is proven by a study done by Preston Feden and Robert Vogel (20), who compared textbooks in the United States to those in other countries: According to one study, math textbooks in the United States cover 175 percent more topics, yet German students outperform American students in math achievement? Why? The answer is that the human brain can only absorb so much information at a time. By concentrating more on less information, students are better able to retain and use knowledge. Research on drama in education will inform future and present elementary school teachers the benefits of maintaining a drama integrated classroom. Through looking at these definitions of drama, one can see the impact it could have in the classroom

Conclusion

Use of drama techniques is limited because teachers selected approaches that would enable them to easily complete the syllabus. Those who enjoyed teaching employed drama techniques and teaching using drama techniques was effective since it involved more resources to aid understanding during learning. Activities that involve dramatization, role-plays, debates, discussions, simulations are important in all stages of language teaching and learning. They help students generate ideas, encourage free flow of thought and help students discover both what they want to say and how to communicate both in speech and on paper. It is the responsibility of the teacher to use an appropriate teaching approach if required learning has to be acquired.

Recommendations

In order to enhance student centered learning the study further recommended group learning. This would give members a chance to practice together the skills that they have learned. Group learning is the first step towards use of dramatization. The study recommended that the teacher would need to supervise the activities of the groups. Such activities need to be challenging enough with regard to the student's abilities.

The study recommends a clear revision of the syllabus to make it teachable and manageable for the teachers and students. Teachers are forced to use approaches that make them complete the syllabus in the shortest time possible since they complained that the content is so much for them with regards to available time. It is the responsibility of the education planners to ensure that syllabus coverage is done in consideration with correct approaches for the sake of the learners.

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