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Presentation: Creating emotional awareness through drama in the second language acquisition

Abstract

Drama as a teaching medium seems to be a solution for working with students not only on linguistic progress but also on developing their emotional potential. It helps to develop students' emotional and social competences which are extremely important in second language acquisition. This article focuses on using drama as a medium of working with children in a bilingual nursery in Poland. It describes the project based on the action research taken in Poland.

Keywords

drama; emotional development; kindergarden

The term *emotional intelligence* is a fairly known one in educational parlance and links to the ideas of Daniel Goleman, who argues the importance of developing pupils' emotional intelligence. Goleman considers that anger, sadness, fear and other negative emotions can have damaging effects on our well-being and therefore our lives, and can also have a negative impact on a child's ability to learn. Students learn best when they are in a state of rational and emotional balance, or what Goleman refers to as *flow*.

We know that body and mind are linked physically, cognitively and emotionally and teachers need to recognise and support the integrated development of all three areas within their teaching and to seek safe and positive ways of doing so. Thinking and acting cognitively but without reference to emotion can have negative consequences, as can reacting and acting emotionally without applying rational thought. Emotional intelligence enables students to make good decisions and act in positive ways, with reference to their own well-being and the well-being of others. This is a very important life skill (Corrie, 2003).

Developing emotional intelligence helps students to know, understand and manage their emotions through reflecting on them and linking them consciously and rationally to their actions. In drama, the actions may be *pretend* but nonetheless the decisions and consequences of decisions played out draw on and have resonance within the real world of the child. Emotional intelligence is personal but it is gained partly with reference to understanding the impact and effect of one's own emotions on others and taking some responsibility for that.

Drama offers a stimulating and rich opportunity to discuss and understand our own emotions, attitudes and beliefs through observing, empathizing with, feeling and exploring the emotions of characters both portrayed and interacted within a role. When a student is playing a character of their own creation within a class drama, they have to consider how to react and act as another person. To do this successfully they will need to draw on what they know and have actually experienced emotionally. They will need to link real and imagined emotional experiences in order to develop a plausible character. Although the student will develop the character through working in the role, they will be consciously or unconsciously feeling and responding as themselves within the drama and this may support the development of their emotional intelligence as it will be a teacher and class mediated experience. When students are devising drama there is opportunity for trying out a range of ways of reacting as a character and discussing with other people which is the most constructive. Characters' actions and the consequences of actions can be considered rationally and emotionally with others, acted, re-enacted and reflected on individually and together with their peers, and with the teacher as a mediator. Drama also gives the opportunity for the modeling of constructive interactions and relationships – modeling caring relationships and conflict resolution strategies for example. Observing or enacting characters who are behaving with emotional intelligence can give students fresh ways of acting and talking in emotionally charged situations, of observing and trying out what the positive impact might be on them and on others if they respond in different ways. Conversely, considering why emotionally unhealthy characters are behaving as they do and replaying scenes in which we can see how the outcomes could be different for that character also informs us emotionally. A good drama lesson can be a safe forum within which participants can be guided and managed to become increasingly aware of emotions, it can be a help to recognize and name them and can enact and rehearse, taking control of

them competently and intelligently. This may be done in the role but the feeling through engagement with the role is real and the learning is transferable (Gałązka, 2011).

Participants are not held personally responsible, once outside the drama, for the actions and feelings of the characters they create and portray within the drama. Emotional competence has a *feel-good* factor, which is intrinsically motivating.

Drama supports personal and emotional development

Drama involves a significant focus on reading non-verbal messages and portraying and communicating them through gesture, eye-contact, movement, positioning and so on. The non-verbal and verbal messages are juxtaposed for greater clarity of meaning. Verbal types of behavior are also better recognized and developed as drama relies on and develops active listening and response. It supports the understanding of sub-text and the meanings lying behind spoken and written words which is extremely important in a language teaching. As a teaching method, it includes elements of play and therapy. Its basis, as said before, is creative activity realized mainly by spontaneous improvisation of children in a role. The sense of drama is to create a situation in which students could identify themselves with other people or even things, play a role of some character, and take on a different personality. During role-play, students usually work in pairs or groups. This teaches them in making decisions together, listening to each other, assessing their own suggestions, and those of their friends. They learn from themselves and others, which becomes a basis for building trust and self-confidence. Students work in groups on solving a problem and thanks to this they become more relaxed and less self-conscious about possible language mistakes they make. The role of the teacher is to create such working conditions that the pupils have a chance for development, which is the authentic form of learning. Proper use of drama in teaching facilitates social, emotional and creative development of the student, makes learning easier, allows the teacher to obtain interesting results in realization of educational and formative aims. Thanks to improvisation which is the basic strategy, the teacher and pupils »in roles« create imaginative »initial situations containing a problem, a conflict and step-by-step they move towards the solution of this conflict, developing their emotional intelligence. The effectiveness of this strategy is based on the sense of security, which is created thanks to the presence of the teacher, who can influence their expression and communication (Gałązka, 2012).

An empirical example

Creative, emotional and social abilities and the skill of using them are a significant factor of a child's development at a younger kindergarten and school age, determining to a high degree his or her further functioning in adult life.

In Tarnowskie Gory, Poland, the *Pre-schooler's European Language Academy* project was realised by Centrum Edukacyjne FUTURE in the *Future Language Kindergarten*. The aim of the project was to work out a complex training module taking into account the age and potential of 5 to 6-year-olds and their parents. Innovation is the introduction of bilingual pre-school education, everyday contact with the language and a drama-based method of work. The mother tongue of children was Polish and the second one English.

Kindergarten's mission is to support a child in their individual development, to treat them as a partner and to show the direction in which the development can and should go. To reach

an optimum level of development, all the educative activity of the teachers is focused on using creative activating methods in work with all children. The main method used is drama. As a teaching method, it includes elements of play and therapy (working with emotions). Its basis, as said before, is creative activity realized mainly by spontaneous improvisation of pupils in a role. The sense of drama is to create a situation in which pupils could identify themselves with other people or even things, play a role of some character, and take on a different personality. During role-play, children usually work in pairs or groups. This teaches them to make decisions together, listen to each other, assess their own suggestions, and those of their friends. They learn for themselves, and with others, which becomes a basis for building trust and self-confidence. Children work in groups on solving a problem and thanks to that they become more relaxed and less self-conscious about any possible language mistakes they make. The role of the teacher is to create such working conditions that the pupils have a chance for development, which is the authentic form of learning. The proper use of drama in teaching facilitates social, emotional and creative development of the children, makes learning easier, allows the teacher to obtain interesting results in realization of educational and formative aims. Thanks to improvisation, which is the basic strategy, the teacher and pupils »in roles« create imaginative »initial situations« containing a problem, a conflict and step-by-step they move towards the solution of this dramatic tension developing their emotional intelligence. The effectiveness of this strategy is based on the sense of security, which is created thanks to the presence of the teacher, who can influence their expression and communication. This is obviously a simplified description. In reality, the truth is reached and knowledge gained in a multi-aspect way, emotionally and intellectually engaging the class participants, using different strategies and techniques of drama. Except for classes aiming at increasing the language capacity of children, the pre-school education program realized by the kindergarten also includes the curriculum, which remains in accordance with the established priority, which is the content and language integrated learning (Gałązka, 2012).

Method

The research was carried out by the method of a pedagogical experiment with pretest and posttest. Two diagnostic tools were applied before and after experimental drama project which became the basis for estimating the changes in the children's functioning and their linguistic progress. These were:

1. *The open question* concerning understanding emotions was asked individually during a brief conversation with the child. The children's replies were noted down. Each child was asked about the causes, expression, experiences and behavior as well as facial expressions associated with experiencing emotions such as: joy, sadness, anger, fear, jealousy, shame, guilt, compassion. In determining the facial expression associated with experiencing different emotions, the children had to indicate »the face« corresponding to the emotions selected from the set of the proposed »faces«. The recorded answers given by the children were then assessed by competent psychologist.
2. *Interpersonal Awareness Test* is a test constructed at Mellon University. It consists of two parts. The first one contains 11 stories, telling the general situations that may cheer, scare, upset or angry a child. The second part of the test contains 12 stories depicting the child

tested in the behavior that results in another child's joy, fear, sadness or anger. Before listening to the stories the children are shown the drawings of faces representing the four emotional states and every child is helped to identify each of them correctly. Each story in the first part is accompanied by the child's drawing of an empty, devoid of facial details face, performing the activity described. The tested child is asked to complete the face with a selected image showing most fully the feelings of the child from the story. The face drawings are presented in a random order, and the examined identifies the appropriate emotional state with the presented image

3. *Drama workshops* were based on the stories which are used in Interpersonal Awareness Test, and plenty different drama strategies and conventions were used. The most frequently used were:

- *Active storytelling* which was sometimes combined with physical theatre. The teacher was telling a story and children were becoming physically anything they hear in the story. It was done individually, in pairs and small groups. It helped children to make a storyline memorable and encouraged speedy responses and every child could contribute.
- *Physical Theatre* – it involved using the body (or several children's bodies) to represent and portray not just people in a drama but objects, scenery,
- *Role on the Wall*. This involved drawing an outline of a character (either full body or head and shoulders) and writing information about the character in and around the outline. The information was categorised, e.g. what we know/think we know/want to know about the character? Or, for example, what the character says, does and feels. »Role on the Wall« is done collectively and referred back to and maybe added to at different points in the drama. It helped to support and encourage justification of opinions and viewpoints about characters and evaluate character's behavior
- *Teacher as a narrator and teacher as a storyteller*. The teacher was acting as a narrator or storyteller for parts of the drama for various purposes. This may be as an introduction to set the scene. The teacher narrated during the drama to gather and feedback the ideas that were generated in role by the children. to move the plot forward in time. The main purpose of that was to model how drama can be told as a narrative, to stimulate anticipation about what might happen and to make children aware that their ideas were listened to.
- *Teacher in role*. This was potentially the most important strategy that drama teachers had at their disposal. The teacher was a co-participant in the drama and took on a role (or several roles), interacting with the children in role. It helped to give or gather information in the drama as an active and interactive co-participant. It allowed also the teacher to focus, facilitate and enable children working in role, from a position within the drama to model committed working in role

Besides such strategies were also often used working in role, visualisation, still image, small group playmaking, slow motion, sensory journey and speaking objects and some other.

- *Language progress* was measured according to CEF. All children started their linguistic education at the beginner's level

The selected research findings

The classes conducted for the children in the form of expressive drama have shown that working on the understanding emotions, resulted in deepening the interpersonal skills among the children. Significant improvement of inter- personal relationships in the group was observed and a visible deepening of understanding the emotion of compassion – co-feeling shown. Increase in the comprehension of the essence of empathy (compassion, co-feeling) in the behaviour of children was reflected in the quality of the interpersonal relationships observed in the group of the children involved in the experiment.

The change, which was visible in a very particular way, is the quality of the children's understanding of the essence of the emotion of »compassion« – in the comparison of the results of the initial and final examination of the children. The results allowing to make a comparison of the children's understanding of the essence of the emotion »compassion« in the initial and final test highlight a very important change which occurred after drama activities. Compassion was the emotion known the least to the children of all emotions.

Linguistic progress

Additionally, the linguistic progress of the children was measured. Children made significant progress in English. They fully understood all instructions given in English (60% increase among 6 years old and 40% increase among 5 years old) and they were able to communicate with simple sentences (such topics as food, colours, animals, family, festivals, holidays, toys, hobbies, emotions, physical appearance, numbers, likes and dislikes etc.).

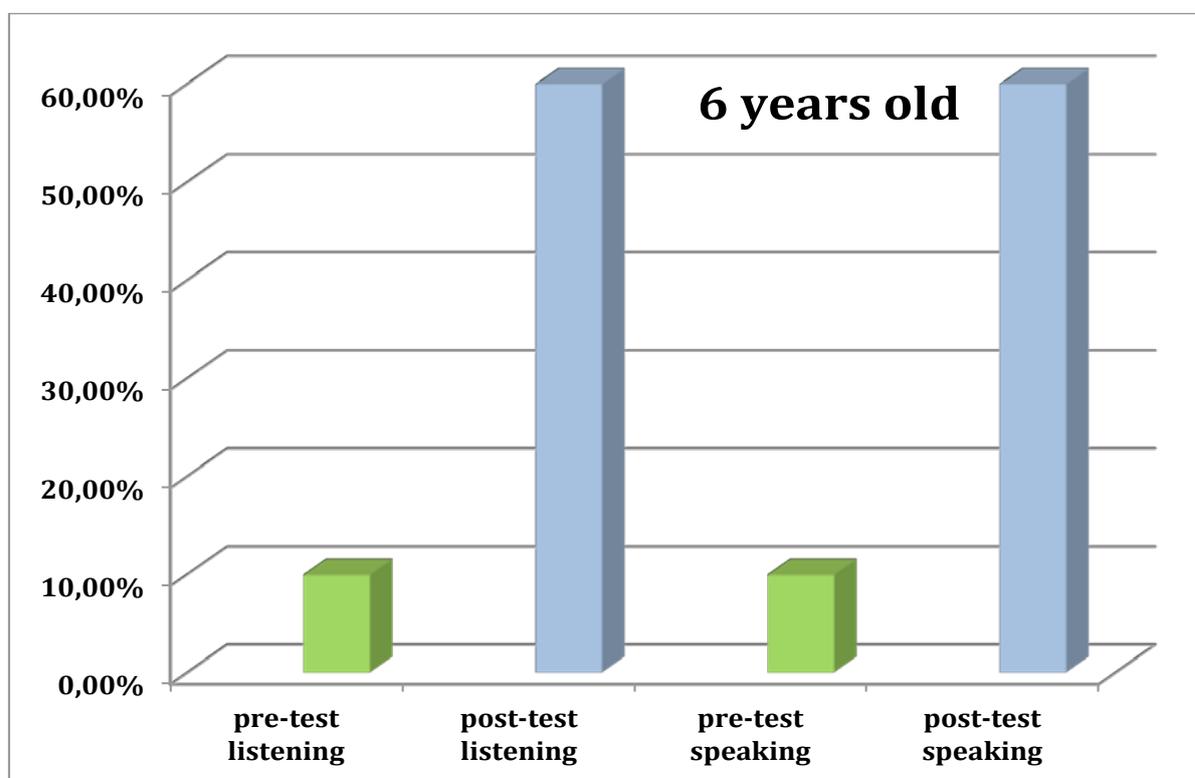


Figure 1. Progress made in a group of 6 years old

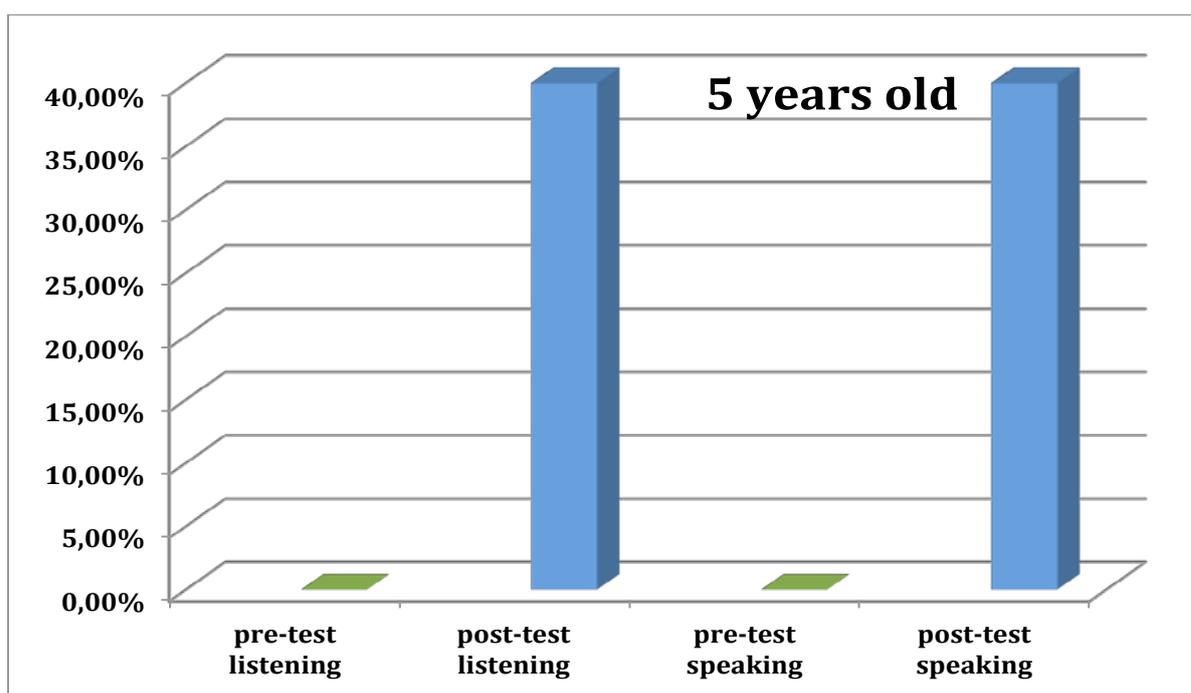


Figure 2. Progress made in a group of 5 year's old

An example of teacher's observation

»Tomek – he was five when we started the project. He could not make a proper contact with his peers, frequently manifested aggressive reactions during classes. He often showed prejudice towards other participants and made malicious comments about the others. Tomek exhibited a tendency for anxiety and neurosis. His inclination for withdrawal was noticeable. He did not understand the emotion compassion and in his behaviour was no empathy at all. I found him very difficult to work with. During the project it was nice to observe how Tomek's behaviour was changing. Step by step he was getting more involved in drama activities and he started to cooperate with other children. His performance in tests applied also confirmed that his understanding of emotions especially compassion increased and his behaviour got more empathetic. As for his linguistic progress he turned out to be one of the best students. He did not know English at all when we started a project. After 12 months he fully understood all instructions given and he was able to conduct conversation with simple sentences. (May I have some more...; I would like to get, The wolf is unhappy, Marry is sad etc) What was really outstanding was the fact that Tomek learnt to listen other children as at the beginning he used to interrupt all the time when somebody else was speaking«.

Conclusion

The undertaken project illustrated how drama can be used in working with young children on emotional development. Drama allows treating each child very individually and provides tasks within fictional contexts which are cognitively and affectively challenging for each individual student. Drama can be an effective medium of reducing the developmental asynchrony among children who suffer from inability of social and emotional behaviour. Drama used in a

foreign language teaching is extremely effective, not purely because of the linguistic progress students can make, but also because it develops emotional and social competences needed in a foreign language context.

After a 12-month drama project a significant change was noted both in language skills development and behaviour. Children visibly changed their behaviour. Their level of empathetic skills increased enormously. They understood much better the meaning of emotions especially »compassion« The drama tasks specially devised for them allowed them to use their emotional and cognitive potential They learnt how to express the emotions and how to be more co-operative and empathetic in a group.

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