

## ABOUT MOTIVATION

The article investigates the importance of using drama techniques which help teachers to motivate students. The reason of using drama may be that it draws on the entire human resources and makes class activities enjoyable.

Much head-scratching goes on over the «problem» of how to interest students in the language they are supposed to be learning. Many techniques have been tried – some crafty, some crude -to generate interest. Certain teachers believe that the only way is to let their students do what interests them most; often they come away disheartened: «They aren't interested in anything», or «They're never interested in the same thing». Others try abandoning the next-book, but then «The students feel they aren't learning anything».

There can be no neat solution to motivation, but the «problem» can be partly solved by asking, honestly, what those twenty or thirty people are trying to do *together* in the room. Surely, if communication is always on a one-to-thirty basis (i.e. from teacher to students), a great number of other possibilities are being wasted. A question from the teacher to one of the students is of direct interest to only two people in the class, though it may be of indirect interest to more. Drama helps us to keep all thirty people active all the time by making use of the dormant potential in the room. And, far from making the teacher's task harder, it actually relieves him or her of the burden of trying to do the impossible: keep thirty people active at the same intensity and the same time. For, if the class is working in, say, five groups of six, the teacher's attention is split only in five ways and not thirty. The argument that the teacher can still not control what is happening in each group is surely spurious, for in facing the class he or she can control only one person at a time and cannot be aware of what is going on in the heads of the other twenty-nine except by constantly switching attention from one to another and keeping the students alert by cross-fire. Who then is doing *all* the work? The teacher. And what is he or she the teaching?

Drama activities do not allow the teacher to gain a false sense of achievement by dispersing energy in all directions. They oblige him or her instead to stay on the edge of what is going on and not to crack the whip in the centre of the ring. They also help to get rid of the diffidence and boredom that come from being forced so stay passive most of the time. There is no place here for stereotyped responses, set-up discussions, pre-planned arguments or «free conversations» in which everyone speaks and nobody listens, or else nobody speaks and the teacher is left to quench the fire started by his or her own burning questions. In a sense, motivation is not needed when working through drama, because the enjoyment comes from imaginative *personal* involvement, not from the sense of having successfully carried out someone else's instructions.

From the evidence to hand there is little doubt that these techniques are an extremely powerful motivational factor. Earl Stevick recently underlined the learner's need to feel a sense of «belonging» (peer group acceptance) and security, and also to invest something of his own personality and so to enjoy a certain «self esteem»

(*Memory, meaning and method*, Newbury House 1976). The techniques fill precisely these needs.

If drama is motivating – and we believe it is - the reason may be that it draws on the entire human resources of the class and that each technique, in its own way, yields a different, unique, result every time it is practised. Nobody can predict what exactly will be thrown up in the way of ideas during these activities. This is what makes them enjoyable. We have, certainly, tried to predict some of the language that will be needed, but the language is only part of the activity. The other part is a compound of imagination, spontaneous creation and chance discovery, which depends on the students working together. An illustration of this is the apparently tightly-controlled exercise 3.18. The hotel receptionist, which offers little freedom of choice to the student «performing» and yet regularly provides striking and entertaining new ideas, all based on the same stimulus – a single sentence on a slip of paper.

By working together, the students learn to feel their way to creating their own parts and adapting them as they come up against others. The problem of not wanting to speak or, more often, not knowing what to say practically resolved because the activity makes it necessary to talk. One of the more obvious explanations for this is that the students are moving *physically*, as most of us are when we talk, which means that they can change partners and break away from exchanges that might begin to flag if they were kept up too long. Another reason is that they are learning to rely on one another for their ideas and therefore using a considerable amount of language for *discussion*, argument, agreement and disagreement, organization and execution.

It is interesting to listen to what is said at the beginning of most activities. Directive language will dominate for some time, «You'd better ...», I'll (lie on the ground) and you ..., «You begin, all right?» and so on. Once the skeleton of the activity has been built up, the *directive* language will be replaced by that of *discussion*, «Wouldn't it be better if...?», «I thought we were going to...», «That won't work...». This will be mixed in with whatever language may be involved in the sketch itself. In the final stage, we will have the language of *commentary* or *criticism*, as one of the groups tries to explain how it reacted to a sketch – «Oh, we thought you were...», «Weren't you ...?», «Why were you ...?»

This constant interchange is extremely difficult to achieve in a class where the focal point of the activity is often a text or a theme for discussion presented to a captive, seated audience. It is true that the language produced during many of the drama activities passes uncontrolled (by the teacher) and that most of what is said is heard by only two or three people, nevertheless, the whole class is actively engaged nearly all the time. Moreover, the words being «wasted» on two or three pairs of ears are perhaps the most valuable, for every student needs periods in which to practise what he or she knows without restraint, without fear of being wrong. Students need the occasional chance to take risks in the language, to try out new ways of combining words, and of course, to find out where the gaps are in their knowledge. The drama activities give students an opportunity to strike a balance between fluency and accuracy.

## **REFERENCES**

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