

Classroom as a Theatre Space – Effective Communication through Theatre

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 11

Special Issue: 5

Month: March

Year: 2024

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

Received: 28.01.2024

Accepted: 15.02.2024

Published: 01.03.2024

Citation:

Mohanapriya, M.
“Classroom as a Theatre
Space – Effective
Communication through
Theatre.” *Shanlax
International Journal
of Arts Science and
Humanities*, vol. 11,
no. S5, 2024, pp. 141–43.

DOI:

[https://doi.org/10.34293/
sijash.v11iS5-Mar.7679](https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v11iS5-Mar.7679)

M. Mohanapriya

*Assistant Professor, Department of English – Shift I, Shri Shankarlal Sundarbai
Shasun Jain College for Women, Chennai*

Theatre as a pedagogical tool has been widely used in today’s context to teach language, literature, body language and empathy. Theatre is an inevitable part of an individual as human beings are constantly taking up different roles and performing them to the best of their ability both in the personal and professional contexts. This paper focusses on enhancing Communication Skills through Theatre in the classroom. Theatre can be used to enhance the Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing skills of the students. Employing theatrical aspects in the classroom would not only instill interest in the students but would also bring them close to the lessons contextually. The teacher plays the role of a facilitator here and later becomes part of the audience while the students take up the centre stage (classroom). The entire rehearsal process right from discussing, tinkering the script, rehearsing and finally performing the same in front of other classmates would add to the enhancement of the students’ communication skills and overall understanding of the given lesson. This paper aims to focus individually on developing each Communicative Skill by employing different aspects of theatre both within and outside the classroom setting. The author has employed theatre skills in the classroom for teaching General English Syllabus to UG students of various streams. The experience of the author along with students’ communication progress would be discussed in detail in this paper.

Keywords: Communication Skills, Classroom, Theatre, Teacher- Student Interaction, Performance

Introduction

Teaching communication through theatre, body language through theatre, language through theatre are some of the phrases that one comes across while talking about Theatre as a Pedagogical Tool. However, exposure to Theatre in the classroom goes beyond this stage and instills a sense of confidence in the students by opening them up to various situations and characters. The teacher standing away from the students on a pedestal while teaching might at times distance the students from the text as well as the teacher. While employing theatre skills in the classroom, this gap between the teacher and the student is bridged, leading to a better path of understanding the lessons. Firstly, using theatre in the classroom enhances students’ communication skills.

Using the classroom as a theatrical space for students to perform might not be an agreeable idea to people who see the theatrical stage as a separate space to only perform and to be watched by the spectators. This paper asserts that each classroom in itself becomes

a theatrical space and a stage (even in the absence of a pedestal) as the students perform in front of their own classmates who eventually become the audience to the performance.

“I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space while someone else is watching him and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged”

(Chris Morash and Shaun Richards, 81)

In the above context, the classroom space can become a stage where students can perform and witness plays. Geraldine Brain Siks, an advocate of drama in education, opines that drama can stimulate students’ imagination and language abilities and encourage them towards personal development and discovery. Drama can also be used as a teaching tool which can in turn enable the students to explore facts and concepts in other subject areas (in this context, the other genres).

This paper throws light on how each communicative skill is enhanced during this process and how students relate more with the text while they receive it performatively.

Listening and Reading Skills– When the script/text is read by the students during rehearsal, the other students listen to it and enhance their listening skill – the teacher intervenes when students go wrong with the pronunciation. Reading is also integrated in this process. Students sit in a circle and read their lines dramatically and this in turn enhances their pronunciation and reading skill. Reading the text aloud is the key exercise here as it enhances articulation, tone, intonation and right pausing while reading the text.

Speaking and Writing Skills are indirectly enhanced during the rehearsal process as the interaction among the students was in English which contributed to them speaking with each other without hesitation nor fear. Tinkering the script while reading it aloud to suit the stage performance or converting a short story to a play text or a poem to a play text enabled the students to improve their writing ability as they had to convert the text into dialogues and stage directions.

Apart from play texts, texts from other genres can also be performed in the class. This paper discusses the researcher’s experience of teaching a poem and a short story through performances done by students at the Undergraduate Level. The poem and short story was converted into play scripts and then performed which enabled the students to comprehend the lessons in a better manner.

Performing a Poem

Many prescribed poems were read out in class by the students which were later done as role plays and this process gave rise to a new interpretation of the poem. For example, the poem “Stopping by the woods on a Snowy Evening” was initially read aloud in the class by the teacher, which was later taken up by a group of students, who worked on converting the poem into a play text. This process of reading the text, discussing and converting the same into a script took around 3 days. The lines were assigned and the characters involved were the poet, the horses, and of course the woods. The students rehearsed for a week and the play was performed in the classroom in front of their classmates.

The performance captured the attention of the other students as they witnessed a holistic picture of the poem wherein the horse and the woods along with the lake and the narrator came alive during the performance. Had it been taught as a poem, only the narrator’s voice and his role would have come alive. However, while enacted as a play, all the minor aspects also came to the forefront and this gave the students a better understanding of the poem.

Performing a Short Story

Karim, a short story by Anushka Ravishankar from the General English syllabus was also taught in a similar manner. The gist of the story was narrated by the teacher in the class. When asked for

volunteers, a few students volunteered and the rehearsals begun. The first few days of the rehearsal process involved reading the short story aloud and converting it into a play script. The scripting involved discussions among the students while the teacher intervened whenever the students required guidance. The characters from the story were culled out and dialogues were assigned to them. The play script evolved gradually with details of stage directions, characters and dialogues. The next stage involved assigning characters to the students and the practice begun.

The story is a narrative from a small girl who lives in a Hindu family with her mother and father. She has a neighbour and friend whose name is Karim (a small boy from an Islamic family). The story begins with the girl informing the readers that a lot of things have changed recently – her father looks gloomy, her mother doesn't talk properly and their family friend Harish Uncle doesn't come home anymore. She then talks about her friend Karim and asks her Mom about the difference between a Mosque and a Temple. The story slowly shifts towards the Hindu-Muslim riots happening in their locale and the girl gets to know this when her parents were talking about Harish Uncle being the reason for Karim's condition.

The enactment by the students brought out the hidden significance of the story which otherwise would not have been explicit in a story like Karim. The properties used by the students like the bird's nest, the log used to dig out the garden etc. suddenly carried huge significance in the performance; however when read as a short story, these details in the story were only fleeting details with very less focus and interpretation. Apart from the narrator (the little girl), the performance brought to life characters such as the mother, father, Karim, Harish Uncle, the common people who all together added up to the various interpretations of the short story. The performance of the short story also took the lesson closer to the students who were the audience of the play, as they were able to now look at the short story with more empathy.

Conclusion

Thus, from the above illustrations, the researcher asserts that performing a text in the classroom space after rehearsing it for a few days, not only enhances the Communication Skills of the students, but also enables the students to get closer to the text and understand the same from within the text.

Moreover, theatre can be used to localise the classroom atmosphere and the given text as this will in turn enhance students' understanding of the delivered content. This attempt to localise any lesson in the syllabus by making the students perform the text will bring the students closer to the given text as the context gets internalised during the process. The text here is no more objective nor alien to the students as they relate themselves to it while performing it. Thus, theatre activities in the classroom not only enhances the Communication Skills of the students but also bring the text closer to the students as they not only receive the lessons textually but also performatively.

References

1. Byron, Ken. *Drama in the English Classroom*. Methuen Publishing, 1986.
2. Frost, Robert. "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." Poetry Foundation, 1923, www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42891/stopping-by-woods-on-a-snowy-evening.
3. Jackson, Anthony, and Chris Vine. *Learning through Theatre : The Changing Face of Theatre in Education*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013.
4. Lawton, John Brooks. *Playing with with Poetry: Lessons Utilizing Creative Drama Techniques to Teach Poetry to Senior High School Students*. July 1990, digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1096&context=rtds.
5. Morash, Chris, and Shaun Richards. *Mapping Irish Theatre : Theories of Space and Place*. Cambridge University Press, 2013.
6. Ravishankar, Anushka. *Storyteller*. Penguin Books India, 2011.