Classroom Drama that Fosters Children's Learning

# William Tweedie

Children learn by and through creative play. This is common knowledge. So why do we not provide enough opportunities in the classroom for children to engage in meaningful play activities?

Much has been written about the value of using music, the visual arts and 'role-play' - activities children naturally do on their own in their free (non-school) time where some of the most meaningful learning often takes place.

Teachers are challenged by the negative, disruptive behavior that takes place in their classroom; uncontrolled drama! This challenge is overcome when children are given guided and directed outlets for their natural propensity to learn and learn through play. Plays created and/or written by the ESL/EFL teacher or readily available on the Internet provide an ideal way to accomplish this.

Learning English (or any subject for that matter) for children should not be boring, laborious, or solely textbook based. Teachers must accept that while discipline and respect must be fostered in children's' behavior as part of the learning process, the need for self-expression and outlets for natural energy must be the framework for learning such values.

Teachers must also realize that play acting is a superb means of introducing and reinforcing the material they are expected to cover in the syllabus and that they need not be honed actors themselves to use plays in their efforts to help students learn. The children, after all, will be the actors!

These plays generally provide rich practical, relevant, integrated, meaningful and enriching vehicles for learning. (The PRIME Approach to EFLA, Tweedie 1999)

"One of the findings of a three-year study funded by the Guggenheim museum in 2006, *Teaching Literacy through Art*, showed that including arts education increases fundamental literacy skills in elementary school students. Students involved in these programmes also "scored higher on expression, risk-taking, creativity, imagination and cooperative learning."

Pasted from <<http://teachingenglishgames.com/eslplays.htm>>

Here are a few of the benefits Shelly Ann Vernon cites for using plays in the classroom:

1. language use is **authentic**
2. promotes **fluency**
3. help with **enunciation, projection, and confidence**
4. Improve **understanding** and **retention of language**
5. Through imagination and emotion, encourage **self-expression and motivation**
6. Addresses different **learning styles**
7. Are **suitable for mixed ability groups**

Teachers in the workshop will experience choosing appropriate plays, organizing and preparing for play production and playing roles in short plays or portions of plays. Many of the activities in the workshop are taken from the book **“Fun ESL Plays for Children"** byShelley Ann Vernon available at <http://teachingenglishgames.com/eslplays.htm>