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Stage by stage—A Handbook for Using Drama in the Second Language Classroom

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Stage by stage—A Handbook for Using Drama in the Second Language Classroom

Ann F. Burke & Julie C. O’Sullivan (2002)

Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann

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“Fun is serious business” for authors Ann F. Burke and Julie C. O’Sullivan announces Katharine Tegen. It has been for me all through my career: I am always after “more” fun. So I opened the book and found it was not all that common on the market.

Stage by stage does exactly what the title promises: it leads the teacher who wants to introduce drama through the various steps that can/must be taken to venture in this field, the ultimate step being the goal is to get a class to produce and perform a play. “Drama is simply a good way to get students to use language; it is fun,” claim the authors (p. xiii). They expand further on: “[D]rama is a way of infusing energy into combining dialogue and action” (p. xiv). Dialogue can be invented or interpreted and action can be a very powerful tool in getting students to use language” (p. xviii).

Whenever drama and role-play are used habitually, students' motivation and fluency increase. The arguments used in favour of drama and role-play in the language classroom are the same arguments used in favour of role-play in other contexts. When students, during these activities are motivated and relaxed, they use language for real purposes, they are more confident, they approach sensitive topics and remember the language better. Additionally, role-play and drama help students to improve their pronunciation and intonation, vocabulary, structures, body language even.

What more can a language teacher hope to do? But one doesn't throw oneself and one's class into drama without proper preparation. And it is these different phases of preparation that the book describes.

The first chapter is devoted to "fluency and the role of drama in language classes". The authors discuss the ways in which to promote fluency among their students: they must be enthusiastic, flexible, they must create a supportive atmosphere, they must set students a goal and let them have as much opportunity as possible to speak. There are numerous techniques described (repeating sentences, expressing themselves in a more expressive way, correcting pronunciation by repeating sentences, etc.), giving the weakest a chance to talk, making contact with the real world (role-play, etc.). O'Sullivan propose a number of activities at different levels, warming-up activities so to speak, and drama. The examples are a bit of a let down as many of these activities are simply well-known exercises like songs and jazz chants. [-1-]

The second chapter deals with "developing fluency and getting students on their feet" and discusses the ways in which to work on various parts of acting, using their voices, faces and bodies. Several categories of activities are described: relaxation, voice, pronunciation, facial expression, gesture, posture, movement, mime and drama.

Chapter 3 is called "Texts: Finding and modifying a published script or writing an original script" and discusses the ways in which to find for particular classes and discusses them: appeal, suitability, length, roles (number and importance), etc. Then the authors indicate sources for plays and where to find them. They go on to discuss the ways in which to modify a script and finally how to write one's own texts. A number of exercises follow to illustrate this point.

The last chapter, "Page to stage" takes the class from the reading of the text to its performance.

The book ends with appendixes: one for theatre terms, one for six scripts, written by the authors, and one for exercises organised in categories.

So, this is a very useful and concrete manual for the teachers aspiring to introduce drama in the language classroom. All the problems inherent to this activity are dealt with in detail. And Burke and Sullivan's clear and practical approach is running to the classroom and starting in that direction immediately.

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— psychological, therefore the singularity is aware of the extraordinary conflict.
Stage by stage: A handbook for using drama in the second language classroom, vector form
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