

## AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH IN ESP TEACHING

**KOVÁCS Gabriella, Ph.D.,**  
**Sapientia University of Tîrgu Mureş**

*Abstract: This research investigates an alternative approach in teaching English for specific purposes: the use of “drama techniques”. Theatre is a source to which language teachers often turn for fresh ideas and methods. I tried to discover, what kind of interdisciplinary connections make such influences possible. Most language teachers believe that drama techniques can help students become more interested and involved in classroom activities, and integrate the newly acquired knowledge through actively seeking new and creative solutions. A needs analysis was conducted to explore whether these techniques are considered equally helpful in teaching English for specific purposes.*

*Keywords: English for specific purposes, language teaching, drama techniques.*

### **Introduction**

A much debated problem of our education system is that it does not prepare people for life and their future profession. We accumulate theoretical knowledge along our school years and university studies, which we do not know how to use in practice. As a student I often used to ask, and then as a teacher I often faced the following questions: “Why do we have to learn all these?”, “What is the purpose of learning such things?”, “What are we going to use this for?”. As a teacher I had two possibilities: to accept the situation as it is or try to find alternative methods and solutions which might turn the teaching-learning process into a more interesting and fruitful activity.

The main goal of teaching a foreign language should be to enable the learners to “play” better the “role” of themselves before a social audience. Drama techniques can help to attain this goal. Based on the literature regarding drama techniques in language teaching we can state that the source of the ideas, methods and techniques of this field is the theatre. In this research I tried to unfold and follow the path which leads from theatre and drama to language teaching, because it seems that there has been no attempt so far to reveal the complex interdisciplinary connections and relations which make possible to use some of the experience and methods accumulated in the field of actor training and applied drama and theatre in language teaching.

The positive effects and usefulness of drama techniques in language teaching have already been proved and described. Most language teachers are convinced that role-plays and drama techniques can help students become more interested and involved in classroom activities, and integrate the newly acquired knowledge through actively seeking new and creative solutions, addressing different problems, exploring alternatives. In my research I conducted a needs analysis to explore whether these techniques are considered equally helpful in teaching English for specific purposes.

The topic of this research required an interdisciplinary approach. In order to find the connections and relations that link actor training and applied drama and theatre to language

teaching, I appealed to several disciplines (theatre, pedagogy, psychology, sociology, philosophy, linguistics).

### **Theatre and pedagogy – acting pedagogy and personality development**

The influence of theatre upon pedagogy is remarkably manifold and diversified. Different manifestations of this influence can be traced in almost any level or area of education. In the first part of our research we have tried to reveal what new theatrical trends and experimentations and actor training techniques – mainly from the 20<sup>th</sup> and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century - led to the influence of this art form upon pedagogy.

The new tendencies in theatre have had a great impact upon the development of methods used in acting pedagogy. Along the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were more and more attempts which favoured the actor's creativity in the embodiment of the characters. In the actor training of theatres that concentrate on spontaneous community-building, personality-development plays an important role. Stress, discomfort or anxiety, the inhibitions and complexes caused by forced competitive spirit and the pressure to measure up to certain expectations can cause problems not only to actors, but also to other people trying to find their place in other domains and professions. This is one of the reasons why it became possible to use the methods and techniques of personality development from the domain of actor training in other fields of education as well. Balme also stresses that “acting pedagogy can also be found in non-professional contexts, especially in the area of applied theatre, where the aim is less to achieve professional-level virtuosity than to foster integrative and consciousness-widening skills. In this context acting can be seen as an empowering and participatory activity, which emphasizes interpersonal interaction. Acting's combination of physicality and cognitive abilities, especially role-playing, make it a crucial element of many kinds of group-building activities” (Balme, 2008, 27-28).

As several experts have stated, the most effective activity-type of personality development in actor training is improvisation. Personality development includes the development of creativity, self-expression, relaxation, interactivity, spontaneity, playfulness, inventiveness, self-confidence, sincerity, motivation, communicative competence, concentration, self-discipline, empathy, cooperation, team spirit, trust, intelligence, fantasy, sensitivity, problem-solving, overcoming inhibitions, memory and emotional memory, physical awareness etc. I would like to emphasize that the above mentioned qualities and skills can be very useful in other professions as well.

The amount of experience regarding personality development and the related experiments and results, techniques and activities accumulated in the field of actor training in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are remarkable. Consequently certain actor trainers realized that these activities can be used in other domains as well. Experts from other fields – teachers, educators, psychologists, doctors and sociologists – also recognized the potential possibilities which these games, exercises and different activity types can offer. That is why ideas and projects like those from the field of applied drama and theatre came into existence.

## Applied theatre and drama

„The old didactic theatre must be replaced by, let us say, pedagogical.”  
(Augusto Boal)

The new tendencies which appeared in the domain of theatre arts and actor training in the 20<sup>th</sup> century led to the appearance of new theatre forms, the aim of which is personality development, the improvement of the life-quality of different groups, communities or individuals, and the creation of a better world. Actors and non-actors use theatre and drama techniques to generate social, political changes and personality development. Through applied drama and theatre new connections and interdisciplinary cooperation became possible among different domains opening new possibilities for lifelong learning.

The appearance of applied drama and theatre is closely connected to the social and political changes that occurred in the twentieth century and to a new way of thinking and world conception shaped and influenced by wars, political movements, globalization, consumerism, and the endless flow of information in the age of multimedia. Theatre, just like other art forms, tries to react to these problems by flexibly expanding its influence and sphere of action.

A growing interest could be detected regarding a new trend to use theatre techniques for educational or therapeutic purposes. In fact this has not been such a new idea after all. According to Ackroyd the use of theatrical forms to achieve such intentions as to inform, to unify, to instruct or to raise awareness is not new. It is the term of applied drama and theatre which is new. The Ancient Greeks used plays for therapeutic reasons – they intended to cleanse through catharsis (Ackroyd, 2000). Balme mentions that the Jesuits also used theatrical forms for language teaching and propaganda (Balme, 2008, 183). Consequently, it is the term of applied drama and theatre which is new.

A revival of interest in theatrical forms as an educational or therapeutic tool, which led up to the rise of applied drama and theatre, could be observed at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Balme, one of the reasons of this phenomenon was the influence of Freudian psychoanalysis, and another reason was a growing interest in spontaneity and improvisation. Psychiatrist Jacob Levi Moreno organized theatre games for children in Vienna during the First World War, then, turning his attention to adults, organized theatre events based on improvisation under the name of The Theatre of Spontaneity. These attempts to create spontaneous performances helped him to work on the psychodrama concept and method, which he developed mostly in the USA. A growing interest in spontaneity and improvisation could be detected in Neva Boyd and Viola Spolin's work, whose experiments were based on education through games and improvisation. Most forms of applied theatre use improvisational techniques and games, and share Boyd and Spolin's belief that human beings are “innately spontaneous and capable of creative expression” (Balme, 2008, 183-184). Joan Littlewood's ambitious project, *The Fun Palace*, can be considered another antecedent of applied drama and theatre. Nicholson emphasizes the visionary characteristic and novelty of the project, the goal of which was to “afford the therapy of theatre to everyone”. Littlewood hoped that with the help of theatre techniques people of the deprived East End of London – shop and factory workers – could counteract the daily boredom and frustrations of their unsatisfying working lives (Nicholson, 2005, 1.).

According to Sz.Deme, experiential, alternative, independent theatre forms and performances, which aim to change, shake and motivate to action our society, are considered to be closely linked to Artaud and Brecht's ideas and principles. According to them theatre arts should take part in the education of the individual and the community (Sz. Deme, 2010, 21). Performance art can be regarded as another antecedent of applied drama and theatre because of its main aim to involve the spectators into the action, to influence and change them.

Based on the above mentioned examples it can be concluded that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century there could be observed a growing number of trends and experiments which relied on the personality of the spectator-actors, where the spectators did not witness previously chiseled interpretations and explanations, but they encountered problems which made them think or triggered spontaneous reactions. They became partners in the performance, they were offered the possibility to find the truth for themselves and make their own decisions.

Applied drama and theatre is a relatively new, interdisciplinary domain in full development, which tries to meet and respond to the needs of certain social groups. It includes all those theatre forms which focus on personality development or social change attainable with the means of theatre techniques. The intentions – to inform, to cleanse, to instruct or to unify - may of course vary. Different specializations can be observed, with various goals and directions, but the connection with the mainstream theatre is always there.

Different attempts from the field of theatre, pedagogy, psychology, sociology or even politics, with the common goal of improving the quality of life of different groups or individuals, can be listed under the umbrella term *applied drama and theatre*. It is an interdisciplinary domain, where theatre is closely connected with other disciplines like philosophy, psychology, pedagogy, sociology, anthropology etc.

This theatre form does not require traditional theatre buildings or stages, the performers or participants are not necessarily trained, professional actors and the spectators usually belong to a group or community the problems of which are debated and discussed in the play, or are interested in the topic for some other reasons.

Accordingly, theatre and drama techniques can have remarkable educational, community-building and personality-changing effects if they become accessible and tangible to participants and spectators. Applied drama and theatre is a “participatory” theatre form, where spectators play some kind of roles as well, they are in interaction with the performers, and by doing this they become more deeply involved in the topic.

There are several theatre forms which can be included into the category of applied drama and theatre: popular theatre, psychodrama and sociodrama, Augusto Boal's “Theatre of the Oppressed”, theatre for development, prison theatre, community-based theatre, museum theatre, reminiscence theatre, theatre in health education and drama pedagogy.

### **Drama pedagogy – the link between theatre arts and institutional education**

In this part of my study I tried to demonstrate how drama pedagogy connects theatre arts and institutional education. Drama pedagogy is mainly concerned with personality development and the development of communicative competence, and it has two main branches: Theatre in Education (TIE) and Drama in Education (DIE).

TIE was developed as a new theatre form in Great Britain in the 1960s, when due to progressive government policies more funds were directed toward arts and education, and theatre companies started to create new programs for the communities. Some companies chose to work together with schools and plan theatre plays together with the children and teachers. The plays were chosen according to the children's age, interests and the school curriculum. Sz Deme points out that this form of theatre and education can be related to both applied drama and theatre and reform pedagogy, and just like performance art it concentrates on raising questions and it tries to turn the spectators into partners by involving them in the act (Sz. Deme, 2010, 25). The success of TIE lies into the flexible and open arrangement of theatrical and educational elements. The communication and feedback between actors and spectators is essential. Discussions, where all the actors, teachers and spect-actors participate are important moments of these events, because here they have the opportunity to share their feelings, impressions, opinions.

DIE is a method based on pedagogic and psychological principles, and compared to the above mentioned forms of applied drama and theatre it is probably the most process-centered. DIE can make teaching different subjects more efficient. It was developed from the practice of "as if" games and became a personality-centred method, often associated with reform pedagogy, which aims to develop creativity, spontaneity and communicative competence, preparing students to face real-life situations with less difficulty. Playing games is an important part of this method, because – as it was proved by psychology - games play an important role in the development of the personality. Debreczeni points out that in DIE the participants discover the surrounding world, their own inner world, and the world of the society through group activities and intensive communication. From this process they can gain moral sensitivity, emotional balance and stability, creative thinking and self-knowledge (Debreczeni, 1992).

According to Gabnai (1999), personality development is the main goal of drama in education, which is done through different situational games or role-plays. There is no audience, but the presence of peers helps students to develop self-confidence and the ability to work in a team, and prepares them to communicate more easily in real-life situations. These activities can be considered rehearsals, where the participants have to speak and perform different tasks in the middle of attention, practicing through this the readiness and inventiveness necessary in different social roles and situations of everyday life. Drama games can increase the self-knowledge and insight into human nature of people working in and for a community. Dynamic thinking, a focussed and well-planned working method, and clear, coherent, emphatic way of speaking can be developed through them. They can compensate to a certain extent for the passivity generated by the development and spreading of mass media. Drama games offer collective experience, through which the participants can encounter the pleasure of self-expression and recognition and develop their decision-making and problem-solving skills.

The socializing effects of drama in education can bridge the gap between institutional education and real life, because they can help the students to acquire the necessary skills, behaviour and knowledge to improve their performance in different professions, and their ability to perform certain specific roles.

From the point of view of my topic it is important to emphasize that there is a strong connection between drama and the acquirement and use of language and communication skills. Bolton stated that from several viewpoints drama is the language itself, and language in drama activities is the means that helps participants to understand the meaning of things. He speaks about language in its widest sense as the verbal and non-verbal code for understanding and sharing an experience (Bolton, 1993, 86-88).

### **Theories which justify and support the use of drama pedagogy in institutionalized education**

In this part of my research I analysed a few important theories, which in my opinion support and justify the use of drama pedagogy in institutionalized education. These theories are the following: experiential learning (life-long learning based on experience); Csíkszentmihályi's (2001) *flow*-theory (and the connection between the peak experience and the learning process); constructivist pedagogy (and the constructive drama defined by Takács Gábor (2009)); and Goffman's (1999) theory about the presentation of self in everyday life (and the interrelations and connections between playing roles on the stage and in everyday life). One of drama's most important roles in education is that it prepares the participants for real-life situations through experience, experimentation and joyful activity. These theories support the important benefits which drama activities offer: a safe environment where the participants can speak and act free of constraints and inhibitions, can discover their needs, skills and talents, can learn to find and identify the objective truth, they can create their own ideas and images of the world, and develop their senses and reflectiveness.

I find it important to point out the parallelisms between playing roles on the stage and in everyday life, based on Erving Goffman's theory. One of the main ideas of my study is that the experience, methods and techniques of actor training can be adopted and used in education and personality development, because these parallelisms exist between role plays on stage and role plays in real life. If we approach the possibilities offered by drama pedagogy from the point of view of my final goal – using drama techniques in teaching English for specific purposes – it is obvious that these activities can help in the development of speaking skills and the presentation of self in the target language in everyday life situations. It is more difficult to shape in the way we would like others to see us in our performance or influence what others think of us in a target language situation, mostly because of the inhibitions caused by the possible language barriers, by the imperfections of our target language knowledge. I believe that this can be helped by using drama techniques – role plays or simulations – in the language class.

### **The premises and presence of drama techniques in different methods along the history of language teaching**

Role-plays and drama techniques have always been present along the history of language teaching, but they have been used to various extents by means of different methods. Even in the time of the *grammar translation method*, there were language teaching theorists who tried to introduce innovatory techniques. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the *natural approach methods* emphasized the importance of speaking practice as opposed to

grammar and translation exercises, encouraging interaction, contextualization and physical activity.

The main principle of the *direct method* was the use of the target language and the avoidance of the mother tongue, therefore demonstration, the use of gestures and mimics was essential and inevitable. Role-plays, drama, and physical activity gain more importance in the audio-lingual method, where the need for experiencing and discovering the use of language in context grows.

According to Bárdos *humanistic methods* can also be called dramatizing methods. They are based on personality-centred and psychological approaches, where the development of the whole personality of the language learner is taken into consideration. In Asher's method, called *Total Physical Response* (TPR), the students have to respond with action to instructions given in the target language. Asher was aware of the importance of physical activity and emotional factors in the language learning process. The dramatic features in Gattegno's *silent way approach* are the movements, gestures and mimics of the teacher, whose silent performance has to be interpreted by the students in the target language. In Curran's *community language learning* (CLL) method the emotional factors, mutual trust and a relaxed atmosphere are considered important in the learning process. The main principle in Lozanov's *suggestopedia* is the creation of a tension-free atmosphere in which students feel confident and comfortable. Drama, games, music and songs are widely used in this method (Bárdos, 2005).

Games, role-plays, drama techniques, group discussions and simulations became even more popular in the learner-centred *communicative language teaching*. This trend opens the door to learning based on personal experience and discovery in interactive environments created by information-gaps and problem-solving situations.

### **Characteristics and main goals of drama techniques in language teaching**

Alan Maley and Alan Duff define dramatic activities in a language classroom as follows: "They are activities which give the student an opportunity to use his or her own personality in creating the material on which part of the language class is to be based. These activities draw on the natural ability of every person to imitate, mimic and express him- or herself through gesture. They draw too, on the student's imagination and memory, and natural capacity to bring to life parts of his or her past experience that might never otherwise emerge. They are dramatic because they arouse our interest, which they do by drawing on the unpredictable power generated when one person is brought together with others. Each student brings a different life, a different background into the class. We would like students to be able to use this when working with others" (Maley & Duff 1991, 6.). According to them, most traditional textbooks give little attention to the skills we need most when using a language: adaptability, sensitivity to tone, speed of reaction, insight and anticipation, in one word: appropriateness. This neglected emotional content can be put back into language through drama, giving more attention to the real *meaning* of the structures that are being taught.

The main types of language teaching activities - *mime, language games, group discussions, role plays and simulations* - can be gathered under the umbrella term *drama techniques*. Role plays can be considered the most widely spread of these, because to different extents they can be present in all the other types.

Alan Maley defines the concept of role-play in language teaching as follows: “The term “role-play” calls to mind the fable of the blind man trying to describe an elephant; the term takes on different meanings for different people. It certainly seems to encompass an extremely varied collection of activities. These range from highly-controlled guided conversations at one end of the scale, to improvised drama activities at the other; from simple rehearsed dialogue performance, to highly complex simulated scenarios.” (Maley in Porter Ladousse 2009, 3)

According to Porter Ladousse in “role-play” the term *play* means that students can play a part – someone else’s or their own – in a safe environment which ensures ideal conditions for playfulness and inventiveness. Students, just like children playing doctors and patients, unconsciously create their own reality and through this experiment with their knowledge of the real world, they develop their interacting skills with others. In the classroom there are no spectators, and they do not feel threatened by the risks of behaviour and communication which are present in the real world. Thus the activity is more enjoyable, and playing a role in such a relaxed atmosphere can help building up self-confidence. The flexibility of role-plays opens the door to individual ideas, variations and initiatives, and develops creativity, offering direct experience of the unpredictable nature of the target language in use. Ladousse sums up the most important advantages of role-plays emphasizing their benefits and characteristics. A wide range of language structures, functions and vocabulary can be introduced and practiced through role-plays, offering a large variety of experience and training in speaking skills in different situations; in role-plays students are required to develop and use the phatic forms of the target language which are necessary in social relationships; for students who are learning a language to prepare for specific roles in their professional life (e.g. in English for specific purposes), role-plays can function as rehearsals for real life tasks; they provide shy students a kind of mask which helps them overcome their difficulties in participating in conversations; role-plays are entertaining, fun for students; they develop fluency, promote interaction and increase motivation. As humanistic tendencies in education have shown, the learning process can be more efficient in a tension-free atmosphere. The follow up or debriefing is an important part of the activity, where the teacher should insist on evaluation rather than criticism, encouraging positive thinking about the experience (Porter Ladousse, 2009, 5-17).

### **Needs Analysis - Role-plays in Teaching English for Engineering**

A needs analysis was conducted with 106 engineering students and engineers about their language learning needs and habits, their experience and opinion regarding role-plays and the popularity and usefulness of role-plays in learning English for specific purposes (ESP). They were also enquired about the specific situations and roles in which they have to use the target language in their work.

The results of the needs analysis show, that the majority of the respondents think that developing their speaking skills and their professional communication skills is very important. Most of them are aware of the advantages of group work and like to work in a team. A great number of respondents like role-plays in ESP because they think these activities prepare them for better communication in different profession-related situations. The reasons given to support the usefulness of role-plays in ESP confirm the ones from the specialized literature:

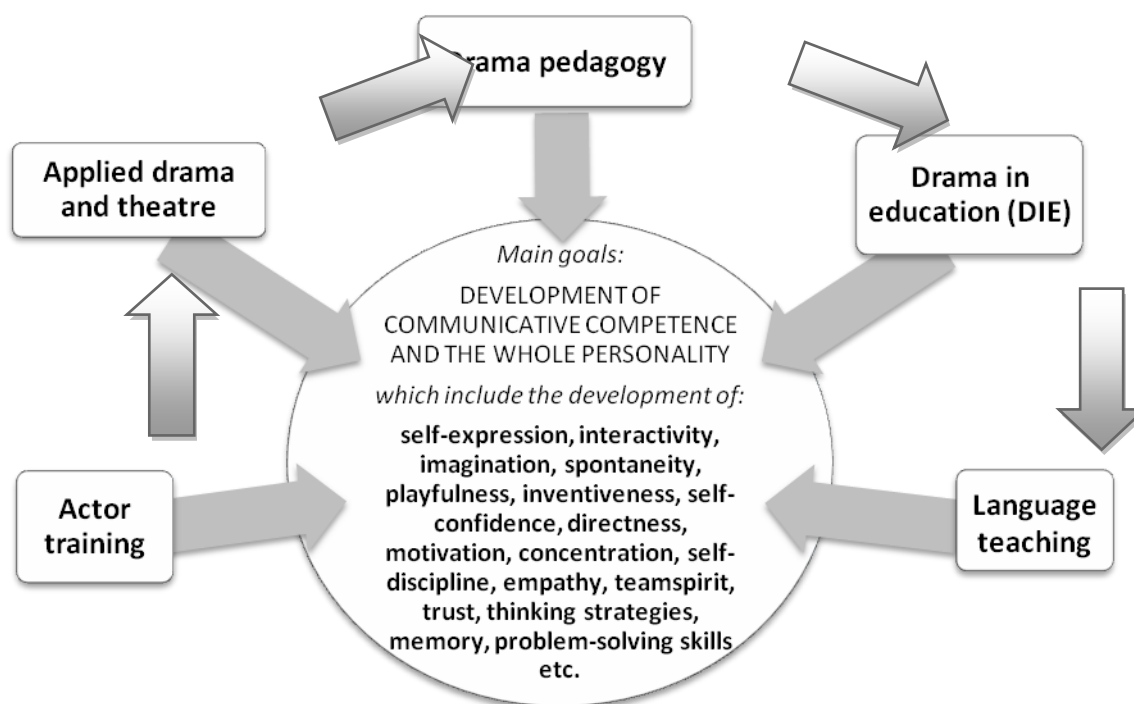
they prepare them for better communication in their profession; their language skills, especially speaking skills can be improved; they learn from their own experience; they get to know better themselves and others; it is easier to learn in a playful, relaxed atmosphere; their power of thinking, self-confidence, problem-solving skills, team spirit and cooperation can be developed. It is important to emphasize that the vast majority of the respondents think that role-plays in ESP are useful, even those who do not like them. Engineering students and engineers have to be prepared to use English within workplace, professional, or academic environments. In ESP the target language is studied to ease the way to enter these environments, or to gain greater communicative efficiency within them.

Designing role-plays might be challenging and time consuming for the teacher, but taking into consideration the needs and the profession-specific communicative situations which our students will encounter in their future jobs, this teaching technique can prove to be successful. Role plays in ESP classes must reflect the problems, situations and tasks which can occur in their professional environment. These activities can reach their purpose only if students enjoy them and participate actively in them. Techniques from the field of drama in education can be of great help in achieving these goals.

## Conclusions

The development of methods and techniques in actor training in the 20th century – due to the fact that they concentrate on the development of the whole personality, communicative competence and team building – have had a great influence upon the development of the methods and activity types of applied drama and theatre. Drama in education and theatre in education create a bridge between the fields of applied drama and theatre and education and this can be justified by theories regarding personality development, game-theories, experiential learning, the *flow*-theory, constructivist pedagogy and Erving Goffman's theory.

Drama techniques have been present for a long time in language teaching because they are regarded as an effective alternative tool in developing communicative competence in the target language and their ability to perform certain roles in the possible “scenes” of everyday life or their future professions. The needs analysis showed that the adult learners who study English for specific purposes are aware of the fact that role plays and simulations help them prepare for their future profession and they like these activities and find them useful. The interdisciplinary connections demonstrated in this research are illustrated by the following diagram:



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