

## DRAMA TECHNIQUES IN THE CLASSROOM

These are some of Peter Dyer's quotes that illustrate the reason for improvisation and creation in class and that best convey what all the course was about:

- Teaching a second language has to do with ability and confidence.
- it is fabulous to create. Let us incorporate it to our classes.
- Improvisation is a matter of creating and accepting.
- You don't have to be clever just enjoy! There are no mistakes, everything is valid.
- it is OK to go into another world and create.
- We need to encourage imagination.
- Let us incorporate art to our teaching!
- Use your words to create.
- The most important thing is your heart, your soul!! We are communicators.
- There are not mistakes. Everything is valid.
- Let us use words to create.
- Let us incorporate art to our teaching.

### Games and activities

#### ***GIVING A GIFT***

The students work in pairs. The idea is that one of them invents a gift to give to the other. This student creates the contextualization for the present and offers the gift to the other that accepts it and continues creating. It is really this other student who creates the gift and the conversation goes on. Then, the other way around and again and again. Finally the two students share with the class the best of their presents. It is a cooperative game of accepting and creating.

#### ***THE CRAZY PRESENT CONTINUOUS***

The class makes a circle and one student goes into it miming an activity. The rest ask: "What are you doing?" The student must answer fast something that has really nothing to do with what it looks. Example: A person picking up things from the ground – it looks as if he/she

were picking flowers- . When being asked he/she answers: “I am collecting dead mosquitoes from the ground” or “ I am picking up bananas to make a delicious cake for my birthday”.

### ***THE INTERRUPTING GAME***

Before asking the students it is important to demonstrate first. It will be done in pairs. First, you ask the students to write in a piece of paper something they could talk about for one minute. Then you ask them to exchange these papers and to start talking in groups of two. One starts and the other always interrupts by saying: “tell me about...” based on anything that was mentioned. This goes on and on. Once it is finished the other student will do the same.

Example: I really love art.. every time I travel I spend lots of time visiting museums. My favorite museum is the Prado. Excuse me, tell me about the Prado. Oh! It is a wonderful museum and I always go there on Saturdays when I devote some time to myself. Oh! Tell me about yourself. Well, as you know I am a teacher and I work in el Escorial. Oh! Tell me about El Escorial....

- another activity to continue with is to ask students to mention some of the words they remember of their conversations such as :

elephants

cinema

shoes

Then, based on these words and in pairs they need to build up a dialogue and in that order.

### ***THE FORTUNATELY/UNFORTUNATELY GAME***

It means building up a dialogue between two people : one is the optimist and the other the pessimist and always starting with fortunately and unfortunately – always objecting and based on what the other has mentioned previously-

A: The other day I went to the cinema and I hadn’t booked the tickets but fortunately I could buy two, one for me and another for my boyfriend who loves going to see science fiction films

B: Yes, but **unfortunately** the film you saw is not very good. At least that is what they say about it.

A: Yes, it is true but **fortunately** we just wanted to see something easy-going and not very deep and just enjoy some time together

B: Yes, but **unfortunately** the cinema is rather expensive and you could have just watched the film on your computer

A: Yes, but **fortunately** we decided to go to Madrid and see it in original version and enjoy the Christmas decorations in the streets

B.: Yes, but **unfortunately**, the streets are too busy at this time of the year and it is even difficult to walk in the city centre

### ***THE YES BUT DIALOGUE***

Again a dialogue always using " yes but".

A: I am going to travel to the US.

B: **Yes but**, be careful you don't get robbed.

A: **Yes but** I am not travelling alone and I have bought myself one of these bags to hide your money and wear.

B: **Yes but** professional thieves are very skilled and you need to really be careful.

A: **Yes but** I have read which places I shouldn't go to...

We can also use this in creative writing.

### ***THE YES AND ..... DIALOGUE***

You should use either the past tense or the future.

A: Last month I had a conversation with the Dalai Lama.

B: **Yes and**....I heard he is going to come to El Escorial.

A: **Yes and** we could bring him to the school so that we all have the opportunity to talk to him.

B: **Yes and**.... the students could even prepare an interview for him and we could even give it a punctuation as a special project.

A: **Yes and**.....

You can't possibly make questions.

### ***A CREATIVE DIALOGUE FOLLOWING THE ALPHABET ORDER***

This one is nicer for writing and it is nicer in groups of two.

### ***THE FORGETFUL STORY TELLER***

The teacher starts with a famous story and pretends he has forgotten about it and asks for help from his/her students. Any student says something that the teacher will have to incorporate to the story

There was once a little Red Riding Hood that always took nice food to her gramma on the other side of the forest where there were lots of dangerous animals like .....sorry I have just forgotten which.....LIZARDS....Oh yes.. lizards and specially a big one. There was a day when our little child was given a beautiful basket to take to her gramma with.....sorry I don't remember what was in it..... MEAT BALLS..oh yes, that is right...because that was the favorite meal of her gramma and while she was crossing the forest this big lizard talked to her and.....

The story teller must not control the story. It is a matter of accepting what others tell you. The teacher pretends he has forgotten the story and the students help him remember (Eva, can you help me remember?) It is collaborative. As teachers we have to pretend we don't remember and exaggerate.. "Yes, that is right.....sorry, I keep on forgetting about it"

Try not to look at the student directly in the eye and when you receive the answer, pretend it is a great contribution.

Students can do it in groups later, with a maximum of five.

### ***BUILDING UP A STORY***

The teacher divides the class in groups of three and gives the students a title for their story. One of the students starts the story and the others shout words at him so that the one narrating incorporates them. If the narrator forgets about the title the others remind him of it.

The students will be happy to have their words used.

### ***THE CONTRADICTION GAME***

There is a storyteller - who can be changed from time to time- He/she starts with a sentence:

A: Last month Gramma flew her new helicopter to Cairo.

B: (Then another goes on saying) Did you say Cairo?

A: Well, actually it was not Cairo, it was close to Cairo, you are right.

It goes on like this: one sentence-one contradiction.

The story teller becomes a comedian and who is telling the story? Everybody.

### ***THE LINGUSITIC EXPERT***

Groups of four people plus the “linguistic expert. Everybody gives a syllable and thus builds up a word that does not exist. The linguistic expert gets the word and explains what it is and gives an example. Everything is obviously made up.

### ***THE FROZEN MOMENT***

The students are going to be working in groups of two. We are going to represent a person and a gesture. One of the students is going to become a gesture. The other is going to talk to the first student and create a situation. This one is not meant to ask “What are you doing?” The person miming doesn’t have to freeze when the other approaches. The other approaches and talks to him/her. The person miming only makes the gesture not sound.

### ***THE SCULPTURE***

You ask students to give you small slips of paper with one abstract name on it. You as a teacher collect them and start the game.

Students should be in groups of three. They stand on a line. First, the sculptor facing the lump of clay (second student) and behind him- at its back – the model (third student).

Each model is given a different abstract noun to represent with gestures and body. The sculptor converts the lump into that shape. When it is finished, the lump is asked what he/she thinks he/she is representing. Then the model is asked what he/she was representing

Later on, the teacher asks the lumps of clay to remember what they were representing. They are asked to look at the other lumps. Now everybody goes away and only the lumps of clay go back and start a story with those feelings or abstract nouns. They start a small improvisation.

### ***GESTURING ABSTRACT NAMES***

The students are going to work in groups of three. First the teacher collects slips of paper with abstract names. Then the first person collects one paper and illustrates it. The second – doesn’t collect a paper-and stands next to the first one adding to the situation they are both creating in silence. Then, the third one. Example: POVERTY.

A beggar/then a person giving money/then a policeman

There is no talking: everybody is frozen.

Finally as a teacher, you ask the very last person what he/she thought the word was, then the second and finally the first. You could also ask the audience what they think.

You can do this with just the three students acting and everybody else looking.

### ***WHO/WHAT/WHERE?***

A chair on stage and one student is going to sit there. Before sitting they have to think WHO they are since they are going to show the audience.

The teacher then asks "Who is sitting on the chair?" the student answers: A woman is sitting at a concert... Then another student..etc

Later, they think where the chair is.

After, what the person is doing on the chair.

The teacher might even ask: "How are you feeling today?"

This is "meating" your character with ideas.

You can even use the chair with the Present Perfect and ask: Where have you been?

### ***BUILDING UP A DIALOGUE***

First you create a dialogue with your students and you write it on the blackboard.

Then two people do it. Then, they go back to the audience and these two students are advised or told by some others around some information that will surely help them act. These other people tell them who they are, how they are feeling etc...

Now the two people go back to the stage again and they roleplay the text they have on the blackboard. But they have to stick to it. What the advisers told the characters will definitely help them perform.

Again, this is "putting meat" into the way they speak.

### ***THE FREEZE TASK***

A person comes out and should move around and then at some point needs to freeze in a pose. Another comes in and joins the other. A third person comes in and touches the first one and replaces that person. The two talk. Somebody again joins and continues with the whole conversation.

Then the teacher says "freeze" when the pair does or says something interesting. Wonderful!!!

The students have to know that they don't have to be funny. They just have to do a situation.

### ***THE THAT'S NOT RIGHT STORY***

This should be done with no more than ten students.

Everybody comes out and stays on a line. The first person starts with the beginning of the story by saying a sentence that he/she acts. The next starts by saying "that's not right" and repeats and adds something. You always have to remember what was said before. The person that starts, continues or finishes the story must always come ahead – as if on a stage-. The last ones must try to finish the story and the last one finally does.

The sentences must be short. Because the sentences are repeated all the time you do not forget.

### ***PASSING A FACE***

Everybody stands in a circle. One chooses the person to send a gesture to. That person will have to cover his/her face with a hand first and making a sound he puts his head back and then forward and throws the face to somebody. The person who receives it throws the head back and receives it. Then it continues. That new person chooses a new "victim" and makes sure the person chosen knows and it goes on and on. It is really nice. You always send a face with a sound.

### ***A PHOTO ACTIVITY***

Somebody chooses a family photo he/she has always known all his/her life. It is not necessary to force anybody bring the photograph. That person starts talking about the photo... the memories it brings out...what was happening then in his/her life, how he/she was feeling.

It is a matter of looking at a picture and exploring it.

The rest of the students ask questions.

If somebody prefers talking about a photo of something he/she likes it is OK.

### ***"I WONDER....."***

Working with an object that obviously belongs to an imaginary person and trying to find out his/her complete biography.

You get an object (a bag) and you start guessing " I wonder who it belongs to....." The next person answers that indirect question and makes another" I wonder if he/she plays football.." It is possible to use the future or the past.

At a certain point we can recall this life and even write about this person.

### ***THE BIG BAG IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROOM***

The teacher brings in an imaginary bag – big- into the middle of the room. This bag is supposed to be tied. One of the students is invited to get an object out of it. That student makes noises or gestures or can even talk so that the others figure out what this object is.

The rest find out what the object is and say things about owner of the object – inventing things... . Once this student has finished he/she leaves the object on the table so that

everybody sees it. Then he/she ties the bag. After, a second person gets an object and the rest try to figure out what the object is and something of the biography of that person connected to the object. "She must collect stamps" "He likes animals" When it is finished he/she leaves the object again on the table.

At a certain point, you, as a teacher, make the students recall the biographies by pointing at the different objects.

### ***PERFORMING A PICTURE***

You give the students who are going to work in pairs a picture of some character. You may give them information about the characters- "meat" and they perform it in front of the class.

You can choose to give all of them the very same picture and each pair will give a different version of it.

### ***PHOTOGRAPHS***

The class is divided in two big groups: actors and audience.

The teacher tells the actors who they are and when they know they pose for a picture in front of the audience in groups of two. The audience asks them questions like: "Why do you look so miserable?" or "Why are you crying?" or "Who are you demonstrating against?"

### ***A PROFESSION WITH YOUR NAME***

You ask everybody to think of a profession they could perform by using the initials of their names and surnames. Ex: Rosa Ferrer : I am a Rose Finder

Then everybody tells the group what they do for a living explaining the profession. Then the rest of the students ask him/her anything connected to that: When did you find out your vocation? After this, everybody might write a report on this student's life.

### ***THE WHO THE WHY THE WHERE***

There is a bench with three people. One comes after the other and they sit and react. They have to think first **who** they are and **why** they are sitting there and where they are. They create the illusion and theatre takes place. The rest of the class watches. We all talk about it later with the actors



Different ways of stimuli for our students to do improvisation: Cartoons, quotations, pictures, scenarios, texts

Cut **cartoons** into slips. The teacher provides the students with vocabulary. Each student has a picture- this encourages them to use present simple or present continuous- and needs to go to the other students about their picture. They can't possibly show the picture. The others also tell him/her about their picture. Bit by bit the students put the story in their place.

Then the teacher tells the students to act their stories and when doing so, they place the card or comic strip on the table. All the students will look and decide if the order is correct. This is good if some of the cartoons are a bit ambiguous.

When the students have higher level, the teacher can do it by putting the cards on the floor and by getting one and he/she might tell the students to start the story from that point and then ask them what HAS HAPPENED or HAD HAPPENED. There are wonderful pictures on the internet to download by Penny Ur.

**Linking quotations:** Each student gets two slips of paper and should write two quotations – not necessarily connected-Then all the quotations go to the “pot”. The students will be working in pairs. Each two of them get their two slips and they need to improvise a story with those two quotations. The first and the last sentences should be the ones given. The teacher only gives five minutes to create the story. Then they perform.

The teacher can ask the students to write about the story.

Another way to stimulate a conversation is by giving them **a text**. Everybody will have a different text.

The students will always have on mind **WHO** they are, **WHERE** the action takes place and **WHY** it is happening **WHAT** is their relationship they have. IT IS LIKE GIVING COLOUR TO THE WORDS. Finally the teacher asks the audience what they think the story is about and maybe talk to the actors.

**Murder scene:** the students work in pairs and you as a teacher might give the pair a bag with objects (with maybe a murder weapon) and two slips of paper with the two roles: Murder and Victim.

**A picture:** The students work in groups of two again. All of them get the very same picture but they have to invent the whole situation. Before performing the picture, they will have to ask themselves what they can see, what has happened, what is going to happen. They will have to finish in the position of the people in the picture. They can also speak the thoughts of the characters.

### Recommended bibliography

- *Lessons from the learner*, Sheelagh Deller. Excellent book!!!!
- *Improvisation starters*, Philip Bernardi. Excellent book!!!!
- *Gramática de la Fantasía*, Gianni Rodari.
- *Grammar Practice Activities*, Penny Ur.
- *English through Art*, Peter Grundy. Not wonderful but some good ideas