TEACHING ENGLISH AND DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION THROUGH DRAMA

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes the development of intercultural communication through drama. Teaching English through dramatic presentation will help students to learn the skills of the language efficiently in Pakistan. English is argued to be the language of power and opportunities in Pakistan but because of unsuccessful and faulty language policy on the part of successive governments, English has not achieved victorious status in Pakistan. The government run schools, having been affected by the poor language policy, produce the students having poor English language skills whereas compared to the students from private English medium institutions have improved language skills. This paper argues that engaging learners in dramatic performance is an effective approach to both intercultural communication development and foreign language learning. This paper, first, briefly discusses the importance of English in Pakistan; second, it discusses the significance of literature in cultivating intercultural awareness. This paper, then, illustrates approaches to develop intercultural communication through drama. Finally, this paper advocates the use of drama to develop intercultural communication and teach English as foreign language in Pakistani context. It is suggested that, in the given situation, drama can serve as an effective approach for foreign language learning in Pakistan.

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Keywords: Intercultural Communication, Drama, English Language, Pakistan.

ENGLISH IN PAKISTAN

English functions as the official language of Pakistan and also the language of armed and civil services. Proficiency in English language is essential for getting significant and highly paid jobs. It is also the language of science and technology, industrial and business sectors (Mansoor, 2004). Quality learning of English language can only be afforded by the affluent class and the majority of people from middle and lower classes cannot afford the costly education of

English language for their children (Rahman, 2001). An empirical study conducted by Schofield & Mamuna (2003) found that the efficient learning of English as a foreign language and the rich socio-economic status (SES) perhaps go hand in hand in Pakistan. The study shows that students attending costly private English medium schools have far better aptitude in English as compared to their counterpart from government English medium schools or vernacular-medium schools.

The dual education system in Pakistan makes effective English language education unreachable to the students of the poor economic background because in the non-elite government English medium schools or vernacular-medium schools teachers are untrained to teach English as foreign language, consequently students from non-elite or vernacular-medium schools have very poor English language skills (Rahman, 2001). The greatest number of students in Public sector universities in Pakistan belongs to poor families. These students lack in English proficiency because the majority of these students have studied in the government run schools (Mansoor, 2004).

This paper introduces use of drama for teaching English as foreign language. It is seen that the students studying in government institutions have very inadequate communication with target language (English), as compared to the students who study in private English medium institutions (Rahman, 2001). The use of drama for teaching English as foreign language may provide students of the public sector institutions with increased interaction in target language; it may also develop learners' intercultural communication with target culture and facilitate foreign language learning.

LITERATURE AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

It is believed that language, literature and culture are interconnected in many ways and culture is a dynamic process which develops through interaction especially through language use (Hall, 2005). Teaching and learning of literature is progressively considered as chunk of cultural studies where "culture is now thought of as hybrid, contested and in constant (re) construction and significantly linguistic in its working" (Hall, 2005:67). Language learning, similarly, is perceived as contribution in a fresh culture. The use of literary text for emerging intercultural communication proficiency is also stressed by scholars pursuing sociocultural approaches of

Vygotsky to second language learning. Language learning is observed as "on going social interaction as opposed to connotations of accumulation and possession of language as a material object" (Hall, 2005:77). Sociocultural methods envisage language learning as socially erected occurrence and emphasize the importance of *participation* rather than *acquisition* (Hall, 2005).

Hall (2005) observes that language learning through literature introduces learners to a new culture and the possibility of exploring new self. Language learning through literature facilitates the understanding of new culture and consequently develops intercultural communication competence in learners. Lantolf (2000:1, cited in Hall 2005:77) contends that cultural artifacts inspire social and conceptual activity. Moreover, in the Vygotskian concept that 'self' is socially arbitrated before it is individually recognized; it is reasoned that communication with a new language and culture initiates construction of a new self. Kramsch (1993:131, cited in Hall 2005:81) argues that literary texts are 'doubled voiced'; linguistic forms in literature produce both enjoyment and learning. Emphasizing the importance of literature in language teaching Lazar (2002) says:

Literature provides wonderful source material for eliciting strong emotional responses from our students. Using literature in the classroom is a fruitful way of involving the learner as a whole person, and provides excellent opportunities for the learners to express their personal opinions, reactions and feelings.

APPROACHES THROUGH DRAMA

Drama is taken to be an all-inclusive and creative method of learning-teaching. It engages students in collaborative interactive and process-oriented activities thus making learning and teaching of language more interesting (Fischl & Kulturpädagogik, 2007).

Byram and Fleming (2002) emphasize on the approaches to develop intercultural communication through drama. These approaches visualize drama teaching as a way of evolving in learners a "sense of their world and human behaviour through a process of active reflection" (Byram and Fleming, 2002:143). It is debated that drama being a form of art functions paradoxically by involving participants emotionally and, at the same time, making the participants able to maintain a distance believing it as a make-believe world. Proper teaching of drama enables learners to observe beyond

surface significances thus this process helps learners explore cultural values–both native and non-native. Language learning is made easy and situational when it is taught through dramatic rehearsal (Parkinson and Thomas, 2000). They further argued that with recurrent delivery of expressions, both formal and informal, students begin to understand workings of the language and the context in which it is used–since language in the drama is never without context. Similarly, Fischl & Kulturpädagogik (2007) discuss that combining dramatic presentation in language teaching brings real life and fictitious situations and characters in the classroom. The use of dramatic activities while teaching language makes students and teachers explore things around themselves and the world. Teaching language through drama, along with the development in language skills, develops students' cognitively, socially, emotionally and physically. Teaching through drama goes deep into students' various brainpowers and different learning methods. It is a multiple mode of learning which involves mind, body, emotions and feelings to develop personal relations to the actual world. This process transforms the conventional teacher-student bond from authoritative teaching methods to shared and interactive exploration. Moreover, Byram and Fleming (2002) argue that dramatic representations make it easier to explore diverse human situations and circumstances which are not possible in the real life. In the factitiously artistic world of drama the study and understanding of foreign cultures is grasped without the risks of the factual world. The "non-realist methods such as slowing down the action, expressing inner feelings and thoughts, replaying scenes" in the drama teaching are used to cultivate understanding of foreign cultures in learners. Furthermore, teaching of drama at textual level promotes an 'affective engagement' with target culture rather than just shallow information of the text. Thus, Dramatic teaching methods aid a new and important flavour into interactive language teaching of its holistic approach. The dramatic activities used in language teaching involve learners all senses in the learning more efficiently and vigorously thus making teaching-learning process more conducive and lastingly result oriented (Fischl and Kulturpädagogik 2007).

CULTURAL AWARENESS AND DRAMATIC ART FORMS

Fleming (2002) describes that use of drama as a method is opposed on the grounds that drama as an art form should not be used as a mean to attain certain end. Abbs (1994)) discusses that learning needs to be inculcated in drama and not through it. He elaborates that drama as an art discipline is based on imaginative understanding and its use in general pedagogy makes it a different field. On the contrary Fleming (2002) argues that this difference is based on 'false dichotomy'; teaching of drama as an art discipline or as a method to teach other subjects is both learning *in* and *through* drama.

Fleming (2002) argues that commonly speaking teaching of drama is normally considered as a substitute for real life experiences. This belief results in pointing dramatic expression at realism; and participation in drama is undertaken to experience what escapes in real life. Fleming further argues if it is thought that like other arts drama also relates to the field of 'unreal', other possibilities can be found. He points out that instead of considering drama as an alternative for real life experiences, it needs to be used for discovering those experiences which we miss in real life. Thus drama teaching, in this approach, is not conducted to achieve certain end but it is pursues to effect the 'end or outcome'.

In this case the end 'learning a foreign language' changes to 'learning a foreign language in a way which focuses on the richness and complexity of human behaviour' or, to put it in another way it is to approach language in its cultural context (Fleming, 2002:148).

Fleming (2002) cites a drama project as a practical effort to use drama for developing intercultural communication and foreign language learning skills. The main purpose of the drama project was to highlight the problems faced by young people when they visit foreign country, specifically focusing on the attitudes to other cultures. The session started by playing warm up games, in the initial game all students and teachers participated; then students were asked to share their experience of cultural exchange. This initial exercise established the theme of the session. Subsequently, Students were asked to prepare tableau in group of four focusing on the problems faced by a visitor in a foreign country. Pupils were asked to select a situation form the given list (based on Furnham and Bochner, 1982). Tableau was a comparatively safe exercise to begin with; students had to focus on just non-verbal behaviour without worrying about speech

and expression. This exercise helped students focus specifically on otherwise general situations experienced in a foreign country. In the next stage of this project each group of students were asked to interview a teacher, playing the role of a visitor to England and sharing his/her experiences of cultural exchanges and problems encountered in the foreign land. Students, through these interviews, were in a better position to distance themselves from their own culture and understand the concept of 'other'. In the final stage of this project students were asked to play the role of visitor and through improvisation create a monologue in which they described why and how they came across social and cultural accidents in the foreign country. This part of the venture was enacted in the form of drama; it had three levels: improvisation narrated in the form of monologue, anticipation of British family with whom visitor had an encounter, and real happening of events between British family and the visitor. It can be safely questioned that whether situations chosen by students were realistic or not. Fleming discusses that it is not of great significance as long as students realized and experienced, through enactment of the situations, how a visitor experiences situations of cultural jolt.

Fleming (2002) echoes his earlier point that drama does not only aim at what we actually experience in life but rather what we miss and are unacquainted. He debates, from this point of view, that 'transformation' and not 'replication' is the important concept in approaches to language teaching through drama. He elaborates that 'transformation' is sought with the process of 'defamiliarization'. The main purpose of this approach is not to reproduce reality but "to destabilize and challenge the normal ways in which the world is seen and experienced" (Fleming, 2002: 154). It is described that in this project students were asked to keep aside what actually was known to them, by doing this they were able to comprehend "alternative perspectives essential to the objective of developing cultural awareness". This approach facilitates "to examine things as they actually are as opposed to how they seem to be" (Fleming, 2002:157).

CONCLUSION

It is seen that students from government-run vernacular-medium or non-elite private English medium institutions do not get a lot of

interaction in English either at school/college or at home. The parents of these students are not very educated and use mother tongue for communication with their children; and teaching standards of English at vernacular-medium and non-elite private English medium institutions are not very good (Rahman, 2001). It is observed that students from government-run institution have problems in dealing with English language courses or subjects taught in English at university level. And in the job competition graduates with poor English language skills are out-performed by efficient English language users. This paper recommends use of drama approach for teaching English at Colleges and Universities in Pakistan. It is argued that cultural understanding develops through language use, and using literature for second or foreign language learning provides first-hand experience with target culture and language. The use of literature brings learners in close contact with the target culture and this process develops intercultural communication (Hall, 2005). It is argued that drama creates a make-believe world for the students and they assume the characters of imaginary people; performing the roles of drama characters, students experience different emotions, go through various situations and by delivering dialogues understand subtleties of language use in real life (Fleming, 2002). As students from government institutions have had very limited interaction with English, the use of drama approach for English language teaching at Colleges and Universities in Pakistan will provide these students with much needed interaction in English language. The use of drama approach will facilitate the understanding of foreign culture and development of intercultural communication. This approach can be exploited to teach students how to interact and behave in different situations. It is generally felt that our students do not get a lot opportunities to use English, this approach can provide our students with opportunities to use English in different contexts and situations and prepare them for the use of English in real life. Teachers of English can devise various situations for students and assign them different roles to play; this can be both fun and learning.

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