



Learning English through Drama – A Partnership Project

Rina Rachel Sondhi¹

British School of Orvieto / Scuola Media Luca Signorelli, Orvieto, Italy¹

Abstract

A practical experience in Creating a Partnership with the local Middle school, students were exposed to a variety of Drama workshops to enhance their vocabulary. As a result, they were presented with 8 plays over a period of 8 weeks, with over 5000 key words and sentences in English written by the British school of Orvieto. The students took each play and performed all plays at the local theatre in Orvieto, Italy. A total of 200 students performed. The Project was a huge success. The Partnership was developed through Teacher training sessions. The teachers observed lessons and carried out workshops as part of their teaching and learning process. The Students were exposed to a variety of scripts written for them, around the theme of Sherlock Holmes. They were asked to learn all scripts to ensure a deep understanding of all vocabulary, sentence structures and tenses. The middle school students rehearsed the pronunciation of words through recordings and practice with native mother tongue English speakers. The Plays became a huge part of the school community, students made constant references throughout the 8 weeks. Songs were incorporated throughout the 8 weeks to also enhance the learning of English. The process was extremely successful. The enthusiasm of the whole school community prompted a performance at Teatro Mancinelli, as well as the creation of a film trailer. The Partnership project is an example of excellent practice between The British school of Orvieto and the local Scuola Media in the town. It is an innovative project which needs to be celebrated and shared.

Keywords: School Partnership, Drama, learning English, creative teaching, Theatre, confidence

The Learning English through Drama – A School Partnership Project

Being approached by local teachers and parents, discussing the fact that their children and students do not speak any English, prompted the organization of the Partnership Project.

Preparing a culture of Partnership Projects.

Orvieto is a beautiful city, sitting on the top of a rock controlling the road between Florence and Rome: its population was about 30,000 at the end of the 13th century. Orvieto is considered to be one of the most striking, memorable, and enjoyable hill towns in central Italy. Orvieto sits majestically high above the valley floor on top of a big piece of *tufo* volcanic stone, overlooking cypress-dotted Umbrian plains. It is a delightful, perfectly preserved, and virtually traffic-free world with an amazingly beautiful cathedral and some of Italy's best wine.

Orvieto has an Elementary School on the top of the rock of Orvieto

Scuola elementare – Via S. Rocco, 1 – Orvieto and a Middle School Scuola Media Luca Signorelli – Piazza Marconi – Orvieto, both comprising, of 250 students approximately respectively. The British School of Orvieto is a teacher training centre, as well as a small English Language school and a major Study abroad Conference centre for International University groups.

After an initial Teacher training session with All of the English (Heads of departments) across the region, the local Scuola Media requested the support of the British School of Orvieto staff to help encourage their students to speak English.

Little did they know what they were letting themselves in for. After some careful planning, the focus of the school project was under the theme of “Mysteries.” A few weeks later, Sherlock Holmes became the assigned theme, due to the initiative of the British School of Orvieto’ creative teaching approaches.

Initial Stages

The initial stages of the project saw an excitement of the students involvement after a “Golden ticket” introduction through chocolate and surprises hidden within, to inspire a whole school enthusiasm and general “buzz” about the British School of Orvieto coming in to teach in a creative style. The students’ had been exposed to “text book based” English lessons, so BSO’ Principal Rina Rachel Sondhi (that’s me) decided to “create a buzz” through a completely imaginative and highly energetic style of learning. My general belief about the conversational use of language promoting fluency and engagement through learning a playscript, ensures students to be encouraged to listen, read and repeat their lines



with intonation and expression. Through the constant repetition of the words and phrases, a familiarity with the language is created and in turn develops an understanding with increased fluency. In addition, my personal belief within my own teaching practice across UK schools, schools throughout the UAE, China and Russia over the past 30 years of teaching and training teachers, has led me to see the immediate acquisition of language developed through drama as well as developing a students' confidence, ability to interact effectively, have fun and be able to enunciate their words effectively and learn to project their voices through self-expression, in turn allows them to become clear and confident speakers of the English language. Using drama to teach English also helps students to improve the understanding of a key vocabulary in context. Students' are required not only to read, but to rehearse and act out scenes with a key focus on their individual characters, thus it enables them to remember their lines and recall situations, therefore never forgetting them. This is not the case if the word had been rote learned and memorised for an isolated test. Each week commenced with key vocabulary being introduced through various games in pairs and each week I wrote a new script about Sherlock Holmes in different contexts, significant to the students', for example, The Scuola Media Robbery Act 1 and 2, inspired by the school location and surroundings, or The Treasure on Bolsena island, where I was able to incorporate fun Pirates with repetitive songs. The Capitano del Popolo was inspired by a local story but with a twist on the importance of self-belief. Over the course of the 8 weeks, over 250 students were exposed to 8 plays incorporating over 3000 new words. The energy and enthusiasm of the students' and the quality of the students' acting, intonation and characterisation prompted me to hire out the local Teatro Mancinelli, where the students' performed their plays for an audience of over 600 people from the local community. The project involved Ex pat English and American Volunteers combined with 3 Scuola Media Italian / English teachers and additional parent volunteers from the school. All 250 students were involved either on the stage or back stage through making costumes, designing sets and props or being Front of House greeting parents in English. The Partnership Project was a huge success with happy, confident students' speaking and performing in the English language. The British school of Orvieto will continue the Partnership Projects of learning English through Drama both locally and Internationally.

References

- [1] Bernardi, P. (1992). *Improvisation Starters*. (Cincinnati: Betterway Books)
- [2] Burke, A.F. & O'Sullivan, J. C. (2002). *Stage by Stage: A Handbook for Using Drama in the Second Language Classroom*. (Portsmouth: Heinemann)
- [3] Cassidy, M. (1993). *Acting Games: Improvisations and Exercises*. (Colorado Springs: Meriwether Publishing)
- [4] Dougill, J. (1987). *Drama Activities for Language Learning*. (London: Macmillan)
- [5] Heinig, R. (1988). *Drama for the Classroom Teacher*. 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall)
- [6] Levy, G. (2005). *112 Acting Games*. (Colorado Springs: Meriwether)
- [7] Maley, A., & Duff, A. (2005). *Drama Techniques: A Resource Book of Communication Activities for Language Teachers*. (Cambridge: CUP)
- [8] McCaslin, N. (1996). *Creative Drama in the Classroom and Beyond*. 6th ed. (White Plains: Longman)
- [9] Sondhi, Rina Rachel (2019) *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes: A collection of Short playscripts for Teenagers* (ISBN 9781093981339)
- [10] Sondhi, Rina Rachel (2019) *Mindfulness and Meditation: A Gift of the Present ; A self help guide* (ISBN 9781074738594)
- [11] Spolin, V. (1986). *Theater Games for the Classroom: A Teacher's Handbook*. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press)
- [12] Wessels, C. (1987). *Drama*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press)