THE CONTRIBUTION OF DRAMA AS AN ALTERNATIVE TEACHING APPROACH TO REFUGEE STUDENTS

Kyriaki Chatzikonstantinou
Faculty of Education, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Greece)

Abstract

Differentiation is nowadays a rule in contemporary education, as it is generally accepted that today's classrooms are mixed ability classrooms and present heterogeneity in the interests and the characteristics of the children, their abilities and skills. Consequently, there is an urgent need for differentiating the educational process in order to respect the evolutionary stage and the needs of all students, as well as encourage active participation of them and academic achievement. The school provides the foundations for the educational process and for this reason the trainees must follow some basic principles that will form the basis for a successful project. Learning is a creative process that is constantly being built and the goal of education must be to seek a pedagogical act that helps students broaden their spiritual horizons, develop important skills such as critical thinking and, through experimentation and active participation, lead them to a joyful conquest and experience of knowledge. This study aimed at exploring the use of differentiated pedagogical techniques, focusing on drama techniques, for teaching Greek vocabulary in refugee students who learn Greek as a foreign language.

Keywords: Drama techniques, refugee students, vocabulary, differentiation, education.

1. Introduction

There are many examples of the role that arts have traditionally played in the education, particularly in teaching foreign languages (Giebert, 2014, p. 138). Research has shown that arts in education encourage the conflation of the content of teaching as well as the active participation of the students as they respond to a variety of learning styles. It is also generally accepted that arts support social development of children, as through them the first find their voices and use them without fear, providing opportunities to boost self-confidence (Rachel & Jonathan, 2006). In addition, arts play a fundamental role in teaching and learning, providing students with challenges and opportunities to explore their own questions and take responsibilities (Goldberg, 1997).

One of these forms of art is also drama, which has positive effects on teaching different subjects especially in preschool age where learning fields are varied and student becomes a multi-message receiver (Winston & Tandy, 2001). The benefits of using drama as an alternative teaching method vary from the socio-emotional and mental development of the children to the enrichment of the vocabulary in the process of learning a foreign language (Rubin & Merrion, 1996). Research has shown that drama can help students broaden their spiritual horizons, develop important skills such as critical thinking and through experimentation and active participation, lead them to a joyful conquest and experience of knowledge (Dickinson & Neelands). At the same time, drama enhances the self-confidence of children and help in socialization, teamwork and co-operation and finally it is a source of pleasure, joy and satisfaction (Rachel & Jonathan, 2006).

2. Purpose and theory

2.1. Purpose of study

The purpose of this study was to explore the use of drama as an interdisciplinary approach, in order to teach Greek as a foreign language to refugee students and also to evaluate a series of courses using drama techniques. The study aimed at exploring the use of differentiated pedagogical techniques, focusing on drama techniques for teaching Greek vocabulary in refugee students attending their first year of primary school in Greece. In the process of learning a foreign language, vocabulary is one of the most important and basic elements, as the conquest of it gives the speaker the opportunity to have a

conversation but the insufficient vocabulary knowledge can often cause problems in both written and oral communication (Saville-Troike, 2012, p.10). Therefore, it is important for teachers to support students in the process of learning new vocabulary in a variety of ways, diversifying teaching and adapting the program to the respective conditions (Wizel, 2018). It is also important to have high expectations for all children without discriminating about their potentials and offer them a range of different and equally important learning perspectives (Rubin, 1996).

2.2. Theoretical background

Lev Vygotsky was a psychologist who is best known for his sociocultural theory of Development, according to which a person's cognitive development is largely influenced by their surrounding culture (McLeod, 2007). Vygotsky believed that cognitive development is not a direct result of activity but it is indirect, as other people, who are more knowledgeable and skilled must interact with the learner to facilitate the learning process and then, cognitive development may occur. He believed that language plays two critical roles in cognitive development. It is the main means by which adults transmit information to children and becomes a very powerful tool of intellectual adaptation. According to Vygotsky, educators can progressively advance the learning process by giving students tasks that they cannot do easily on their own and providing them with the guidance they need to accomplish these tasks that are included students' zone of proximal development (McLeod, 2007). As the psychologist explains "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978). It is therefore important for teachers to be able to identify children's zone of proximal development, so that they can offer them experiences that fall into it and thus achieve the best possible result (Leat & Nichols, 1997).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design and participants

The most appropriate method for the service of the purpose above was considered to be the case study, as this method provides data taking into account the complexity of social conditions and is a research strategy that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2013). Participants were 25 mixed-ability students, aged 6-12, including male and female and were all refugees who have Persian as their native language. The Greek writing and oral proficiency of most students was at the intermediate and low levels.

The preparation was divided into two parts. In the first own 8 course plans were developed and evaluated, only 4 of which were based on drama techniques and the rest were based on traditional education methods. Each course aimed at learning new Greek vocabulary related to some general topics such as the animals, the weather, school. The second part included two educational seminars for teachers who were involved in the research, during which they became familiar with the drama techniques and their use in education.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

The data collection was based on the development and the implementation of the courses which were evaluated by non-participant observation as well as by the use of interviews conducted at the beginning and at the end of each course, so as to identify the number of new gained words.

4. Results

The analysis of the results was made by counting and comparing the data from the interviews and recording the frequency and quality of the participation of the children during the courses. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the courses, student's answers were analyzed before and after them and their comparison was made as follows:

1. Vocabulary comprehension (new gained knowledge).
    a) Conceptual understanding.
    b) Ability to recall the new words.
2. Active participation and interaction of the individual with the group.

The following tables illustrate the result of the comparisons for the conceptual understanding and construction of new vocabulary. The results showed (Table 1 and Table 2) that when teaching is based on drama techniques, students have better chances to learn new vocabulary than when it is based on typical forms of education.

Table 1. New vocabulary gained by courses using traditional pedagogical methods.

Teaching in the traditional way	Vocabulary knowledge before the courses (words)	Vocabulary knowledge after the courses (words)	New gained knowledge (words)
Course 1: My school	5	9	4
Course 2: Objects	4	7	3
Course 3: Farm Animals	6	14	8
Course 4: The weather	6	15	9
Total new gained knowledge (words)			**24**

Table 2. New vocabulary gained by courses using drama techniques.

Teaching using drama techniques	Vocabulary knowledge before the courses (words)	Vocabulary knowledge after the courses (words)	New gained knowledge (words)
Course 1: Halloween	4	12	8
Course 2: Food	3	14	11
Course 3: Jungle Animals	7	31	24
Course 4: Space	6	25	19
Total new gained knowledge (words)			**52**

Similarly, from the comparison of the figures bellow (Table 3 and Table 4) it is clear that the total time of children's active participation during each course is much longer when this is based on drama techniques. Based on the analysis of the observation and the interviews collected during the research, was noted an increase in the ability of students to recall new vocabulary without much support from the teacher, in the implementation of this vocabulary and in the ability to use it in written and oral language. Furthermore, an increase was also noticed in the teamwork and the cooperation of the students since drama gave them much more opportunities to work together.

Table 3. Time of children's participation in courses using traditional pedagogical methods.

Teaching in the traditional way	Time of children's participation
Course 1: My school	11 min
Course 2: Objects	8 min
Course 3: Halloween	5 min
Course 4: The weather	7 min

Table 4. Time of children's participation in courses using drama techniques.

Teaching using drama techniques	Time of children's participation
Course 1: My school	18 min
Course 2: Objects	25 min
Course 3: Halloween	20 min
Course 4: The weather	26 min

5. Discussion

The analysis of the data reinforces the encouraging results already mentioned, in relation to teaching new vocabulary, since it seems that the use of drama techniques not only enhances the demystification and recall of the new vocabulary, but also the exploitation of this new knowledge in different circumstances as well as the active participation of the students during the course. It is clear that drama can create memorable and practice-oriented learning experiences that improve learners' language-competence and personal development. Therefore, the results highlight the importance of differentiating teaching so that each student has the opportunity and the means to enrich his vocabulary to the maximum extent.

However, in order the learners to benefit from these techniques, their teachers need to be familiar and comfortable with drama at school. Usually teachers don't feel confident to use a method they have not been trained in (Gaudart, 1990). Thus, it is necessary to strengthen the teachers, through formal and informal training, to enhance and enrich their teaching practices with drama techniques. Also, creating an online platform that will allow teachers to communicate, share and exchange material as well as examples of good practices would be a useful tool. Such a platform would offer opportunities for teachers to share material and exchange ideas, which will help them, use their time more effectively.

References

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2013). *Research methods in education.* Routledge.
Dickinson, R. & Neelands, J. (2006). Improve your primary school through drama. London: David Fulton Publishers.
Gaudart, H. (1990). Using drama techniques in language teaching. *In* Sarinee, A. (Ed.). *Language Teaching Methodology for the Nineties. Anthology Series 24.* Singapore: Regional Language Centre, 230-249.
Giebert, S. (2014). Drama and theatre in teaching foreign languages for professional purposes. *Langues de spicialiti et professionnalisation.* Vol. XXXIII N° 1, 138-150.
Goldberg, M. (1997). *Arts and learning: An integrated approach to teaching and learning in multicultural and multilingual settings.* New York: Longman.
Leat, D., & Nichols, A. (1997). Scaffolding children's thinking-doing Vygotsky in the classroom with National Curriculum assessment. British Educational Research Association Annual Conference. University of York.
McLeod, S. A. (2007). Vygotsky - Simply Psychology. Retrieved from https://www.simplypsychology.org/vygotsky.html.
Rubin, E.J. & Merrion, M. (1996). *Creative drama and music methods: Introductory activities for children.* USA: Linnet Professional.
Saville-Troike, M. (2012). Introducing second language acquisition. Cambridge University Press.
Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes,* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
Winston, J. & Tandy, M. (2001). *Beginning Drama 4-11* (2nd ed.). London: David Fulton Publishers.
Wizel, M. (2018). Preparing educational hackers. In Y. Weinberger & Z. Libman (Eds.), Contemporary pedagogies in teacher education and development. Retrieved from IntechOpen https://www.intechopen.com/books/contemporary-pedagogies-in-teacher-education-anddevelopment/preparing-educational-hackers.