

Pronunciationforteachers.com/ Teaching Techniques

What do we know about drama for L2 pronunciation?

Drama is an educational approach that borrows from theatre techniques and has been mainly used in L2 learning for improving oral speech. A distinction between drama and theater has been made but both can be used in the L2 classroom (Galante & Thomson, 2017). While drama is seen as a process-oriented approach, theater is product-oriented: in drama tasks, students use language for negotiation, problem-solving, and presenting scenarios, all using non-scripted language (Moody, 2002); in theatrical tasks, language is used in a more controlled way, such as taking roles in scripted role-plays, repeating sentences for showing the intention of the message, and using body language to enhance oral texts (Kao & O'Neill, 1998). Traditionally, the term drama includes theater techniques but it is important to note that both are useful in L2 learning.

What are the benefits of drama in L2 learning?

While drama is not new, research investigating its benefits on L2 learning started gaining attention in the past two decades. Drama has been used in several contexts with language learners from different linguistic backgrounds; for example, it has been employed by EFL learners in Korea, Brazil, and Turkey, as well as ESL learners in the USA, Canada, and Australia. Drama can also be used with international students in higher education contexts to explore real-life scenarios that require student agency to solve problems (Piccardo & Galante, 2018). Past research has consistently shown that drama is beneficial for language learners: it reduces anxiety when speaking a foreign language (Atas, 2005; Sağlamel & Kayaoğlu, 2013) particularly among shy students (Galante, in press) and enhances overall oral communication (Kao, 1997; Coleman, 2005; Stinson & Freebody, 2006). When using drama as an instructional approach for pronunciation, results from a recent study indicate that key aspects such as fluency and comprehensibility (speech that is easy to understand) increased significantly after students took part in an EFL program with infused drama strategies (Galante & Thomson, 2017). One important observation is that drama as an instructional approach can be used in different ways: as a drama club (outside of the L2 classroom), as part of the L2 program, short-term (one week), and long term (4-6 months). Teachers who are willing to use drama in their classrooms have the flexibility to include strategies that best suit the curriculum and students' language proficiency levels. While more research is needed to confirm the benefits of drama, results from past research suggest that even when compared with approaches that offer opportunities to develop oral communication, drama was still found to have stronger benefits for pronunciation (Galante & Thomson, 2017).

Do I need to be an actor to use drama?

No, you don't need to be an actor to use drama in your L2 class. The focus of drama in L2 learning is to use strategies to enhance communication and pronunciation and not to train students to be actors. However, one key characteristic that teachers need is openness to allow students to "run the show" and work in a student-centered manner. Teachers

might also want to model a few drama strategies to help students feel more comfortable when using them. A good sense of humour and providing an environment where students can have fun without fear about making mistakes can also help.

How can we use drama for pronunciation?

Teachers can use drama approaches to enhance pronunciation in several ways:

- *Providing a scenario in which students perform a role-play in front of the class.* For example, if the goal of the lesson is teaching functional language to ask for directions, teachers can provide students with a map of the city and ask them to perform a short role-play. In this case, students take roles (e.g., tourist and local resident) while the audience can confirm in their maps if the directions were given correctly. When the students who are acting the role-play know that the audience will need to understand the directions, they typically have a heightened focus on delivering the message in a comprehensible way. The teacher can allow some time for rehearsal, which decreases anxiety, and help with intonation, word/sentence stress, pronunciation of vowels and consonants, linking, etc.
- *Handing out scripted dialogues or sentences to students and asking them to reflect on how to say them with different intentions and emotions.* For example, if a sentence reads “I’ve been waiting for you for hours. I’m glad you came.” students can be asked to pronounce it as if they were frustrated, patient, upset, or happy. This could be turned into a guessing game and the audience can identify the feeling according to how the message was delivered.
- *Exploring body language to enhance comprehensibility.* For example, if students need to make an academic presentation, teachers can first show a recorded presentation (e.g., TheQUTube, 2013) and ask students to pay attention to facial expressions (e.g., frown, smile, eyes wide open, etc.) and body language used by the presenter. Then, teachers can ask students to think of gestures and facial expressions that can accompany the language being used in their own presentation. It is usually helpful to have students somewhat script their presentation so they can plan which facial expressions and body language to use. For example, if a student is planning to say, “In this presentation, I will explore **two** potential benefits of this new product” they can sign “two” with their hands while also stressing the word “two” by increasing their volume for focus. By using facial expressions and body language, the message can become more comprehensible to the audience.
- *Giving students a real-life problem-solving scenario in which language is used in a spontaneous and natural way.* For example, “You are in a job interview. The interview is going really well until the interviewer asks you if you have any experience in the area. You don’t, but you need to convince the interviewer that your experience as a student has prepared you very well for the position.” After allowing a few minutes to prepare, students can present their scenario in front of an audience, who will judge whether the reasons provided were convincing enough. The teacher can also invite the audience to provide some tips for improvement and focus on fluency, pronunciation, intonation, etc. A few more

minutes is given so students can rehearse and incorporate the suggestions given before presenting it to the audience a second time.

All of these examples using drama require active participation from students and production of oral texts. When using drama, it is important that the classroom environment is stress-free and feedback is given in a constructive way, with support from the audience (e.g., clapping after each presentation). The ideas above serve as examples of how drama can be used in the language classroom and will need to be modified according to the learning goals and proficiency levels. Regardless of the context, drama has a great potential to improve students' pronunciation in an engaging and fun way.

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