

## Drama as a Cross-Curricula teaching method

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### **Abstract**

*Drama, by nature is endowed with pedagogical attributes. Besides the other values, drama is also an instrument of instruction. On the basis of the available literature, dramatic techniques like role-play, impersonation, miming and dramatization are very effective teaching methods. Various scholars have acknowledged the fact that these dramatic techniques are appropriate teaching methods across the curriculum. The practical elements of drama, as well as its close link with human activity do always draw in the learners' attention whenever used to illustrate most academic concepts. Using dramatic techniques breaks the stereo-type monotony associated with the teacher – centered approaches. Therefore, it could be of great benefit if all teacher-trainees were compulsorily introduced to using drama in class as a unit in the "General Teaching Methods".*

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**Key words:** Teaching methods, cross-curricula, dramatization, and role-play

### **Introduction**

The term Drama refers to a performed art. It could also be an idea or concept translated into action by means of performing it before a live audience. The word "drama" originated from the Greek word "dran" which means "to do" or "to perform". This implies that drama could be any human notion given a broader and live dimension by equipping it with words, gestures and body parts so as to concretize a notion into a tangible experience (Meyer, 1994).

Yanni (2002) asserts that Drama unfolds in two academic dimensions. These are Drama as a literary genre and Drama as a theatre art. Drama as a genre of Literature has affinities with prose fiction and poetry. This is the Literature which is always documented in plays to be read as well as performed. Unlike the other forms of Literature, Drama is meant to concretize its themes and messages through live performance. Play texts from which drama performances are contained are often excellent vehicles of persuasion.

Indeed, Meyer (1994) reveals that Henrik Ibsen and Bernard Shaw frequently used the stage to dramatize ideas of social as well as political concern. Henrik Ibsen was a famous Norwegian playwright, theatre director, poet and founder of modernism in theatre while Bernard Shaw was an Irish playwright and a Nobel Prize winner of Literature. The duo frequently used the stage to dramatize ideas and issues of social, moral as well as political concern. These globally recognized playwrights used their plays as a weapon of moral and socio-political reform, and the theatre as a community classroom. Henceforth, we can deduce that it is always easier for one to impose any view to a given group or community through stage performances. This is the more reason why drama should be adopted as a cross-curricula teaching method.

Drama, on the other hand, is often perceived as a theatre art. This entails where an art or even just an idea is transformed into life-like and concrete action. Action in drama is always realized with the participation of actors who translate the ideas contained in the play- text into visible, audible and concrete human events. It is noteworthy

however, that drama performance does not necessarily have to bank on play-texts. Any story, event or scenario relating to human behavior and action can be improvised into theatrical action.

Drama is often conceived as a theatre art where actors translate the story in a given play-text, through stage performance, into action. The theatrical element of Drama is a long time practice in all societies. This observation is consistent with of the findings of Brockett and Hildy (2006) which run thus:

*“Anthropological research has shown that there is, without doubt ‘theatrical elements’ in all societies, past and present, involving all three of the essential elements of theatre: audience, impersonation and language” (p. 74).*

The theatrical dimension of drama is basically for entertainment purposes. However, it also has a deductive value (Brockett & Hildy, 2006). True, drama related activities are as old as humanity. Many communities, including African traditional societies, performed drama of sorts at many occasions. These include during marriage, funeral and naming ceremonies. Such rituals were often intended to educate the young on the cultural values of society. In contemporary societies, Theatre for Development (TFD) is performed to promote educational values and reform a given group of people.

### **Teaching Methods**

The term “Teaching method” is always used to refer to a strategy, or procedure, or technique, or way by which a teacher presents or conducts an instructional activity. In other words, a teaching method is the means a teacher uses to conduct his/her lesson. Examples of teaching methods include lecture, discussion, debate, dictation, question and answer, and dialogue, among others. Teaching methods may vary from one topic to another, from one academic discipline to another, and from one situation to another. Therefore, there is no limit as to which teaching method is most suitable. The question of which teaching method to apply depends on the teacher’s innovation and dynamism because the teaching process is dynamic. Dramatization has also found its way onto the list of teaching methods. Unlike other teaching methods which seem only applicable to specific topics and disciplines, dramatization has demonstrated effectiveness across the curricula. This echoes Meyer’s (1994) assertion that the utilization of dramatization as a presentation method across the curricula enlivens the learning and teaching process. He thus recommended drama as a teaching method in all schools, colleges and adult training centers.

With the above background, it is evident that other than being one of the academic disciplines and a theatre art, drama can also be an instrumental instructional approach. Indeed, in whatever dimension, drama is endowed with pedagogical values. It is actually an effective teaching strategy because of the fascinating element of entertainment that naturally grips attention. In his forward to Carole and Juliana’s “Into The Story” (2004), Prof Alison Prece of Pender Island, British Columbia, observes that drama has long been acknowledged as a compelling medium for learning which draws in all. The core idea in this observation is that drama enjoys that quality of attracting utmost attention. And that could be the very reason why it is becoming a worldwide recognized medium of literacy (Ackroyd, 2000).

## **The rationale and justification**

The basis of recommending drama as a cross-curriculum teaching method is due to its practical nature and relationship with human activity. Considering that all academic disciplines revolve around human activity, they can thus be easily illustrated by performance. By nature, drama revolves around performance. This makes it very appropriate to the role of practically illustrating most concepts across the academia. As if to concur with the above, Carole and Saxton (2004) observed that Drama is a social art with the ability to spontaneously effect and affect. This observation also draws parallels with the assertions of Booth and Barton (2000). The duo maintains that when students use drama to explore themes and concepts, they get an opportunity to draw upon their life experiences. That situation assists learners to perceive incidents from universally integral viewpoints.

Being a social art that relates to all issues of human activity, there is no doubt that drama can pass as cross-curricula teaching strategy. As a matter of fact, all academic disciplines tackle practical ideas and concepts of human perspective. Like all human activity, academic disciplines entail verbal intercourse, and performing this or that experiment. Since drama achieves its full realization through words and actions, it would, thus, match every teacher's teaching technique. This is so because all pedagogic processes are action oriented and exploit verbal intercourse to exact meaning. Often, this verbal intercourse is enhanced by gestures and other symbolic representations. Dramatic approach to pedagogic processes and practice would be very effective. The major reason being that dramatic art is an action related business which uses verbal exchange to express ideas.

Drama is in itself teaching. The prerequisite to have costumes to enhance message is comparable to the use of teaching aids. The situation indicates that there are close links between the teaching process and the theatre industry. Whenever people enter a theatre hall, there is no doubt that most of them leave the hall a relatively transformed folk. This concept paper concurs with on the importance of Drama-in Primary Education. In a classroom situation, the theatrical elements like role-play, improvisation, miming, and dramatization would be highly instrumental in concretizing academic concepts.

More importantly, the physical engagement of learners into learning activities offered through the medium of drama mediates the psychomotor, affective and cognitive domains (Carole & Saxton, 2004). No doubt, engaging in a drama scene implies involving in physical exercise, the rigors of selecting the most appropriate course of action as well as indulging in the process of appreciating values or quality of whatever the drama scene is tackling.

Last but not least, the relevance and utility of using drama as across-curricula teaching method is supported by Gorski (2001). He strongly advocates for active teaching and learning. He argues that an active pedagogy abandons the educational approach that relies solely on the transmission of knowledge from teacher to student through lecture. Undoubtedly, in an active learning environment, students are encouraged to learn by doing, exploring, examining and experiencing. These components of an active pedagogy are commensurate with the dramatic technique of lesson presentation.

### **Dramatic techniques across the curricula**

There are various scholars including Morgan (1987), Carole and Saxton (1987), Dawn (2000) and Vernon and MacAfee (1998) who have testified to the suitability of drama as a teaching strategy in varying academic disciplines.

Dawn (2000) observes that many teachers use drama, mime and role-play during regular class work. He emphatically pointed out that, it is a valuable teaching technique as it provides pupils with boundless opportunities to explore their ideas. The imperative role of drama as a teaching method is not confined to one specific academic field. It is applicable and suitable to any discipline. While commenting on Dorothy and Gavin's (1995) *Drama for Learning*, the Heinemann Drama publisher lauds the universality of drama as a teaching method. He asserts that drama for learning pushes the boundaries of learning. He states that using drama creates an impetus for productive learning across the curriculum, from Language Arts to History, Mathematics, Technology and Science.

These observations concur with the title of this article "Drama as a Cross-Curricula Teaching Method". The Heinemann Drama Publisher as reflected by Carole and Saxton (1987) crystallizes the view that dramatic art is not only relevant to Literary Studies, Language Arts and the Theatre Industry. It can be a teaching method in various subjects as stated above. On the teaching of Language and Literature, Morgan and Saxton (1987) state thus:

*"Drama makes it possible for students to represent their understanding in a variety of ways not available through traditional methodologies"* (p. 102).

They pointed out skills attributed to drama teaching methods as the writing skill, speaking, listening competence, and performance. As a matter of necessity, one has to read and sometimes re-write some of the roles he/she is acting; listen to the other actors in the action of the play in order to respond appropriately; and finally perform out the assigned role as to concretize the idea in the Act. With a full mastery of these skills, we can confidently boast of holistic education.

Vernon and McAfee (1998) have elaborated that the role-play technique, which is a theatrical element, is an effective method of teaching Business Policy and Strategy. They say that it is easier to internalize the duties of different parties in an organization, if learners improvise a drama scene. The scene where they role-play these duties. The play could revolve on the duties of Board of Directors, the executive, consultant and employees. Of course, even the weakest learner would at least master the duties of a post he/she has impersonated. The approach is called multiple role-play technique in teaching. By practice and output, the approach is a replica of drama.

In addition, drama can be used to explore a topic of History in class. Since History hinges on past events and how personalities participated in and precipitated events, dramatization, role-play and impersonation can be very effective in portraying ideas of historical orientation. The basis of our conclusion is that drama and theatre are fun tools that teachers can exploit to reinforce lessons by helping students impersonate historical actors like Napoleon Bonaparte of France, or Adolf Hitler of German, or Patrice Lumumba of Zaire (Democratic Republic of Congo). If the roles, principles, challenges, and experiences of such historical figures would be impersonated and performed in

class, that would facilitate dependable mastery of such topics. The performance of these roles enhances emotional involvement and attachment of the learners.

Considering the close links between History, Literature, Political Science and Religious Education; Technology, Physics, and those sciences taught through experiments, Drama can be used to teach almost all disciplines in arts, social science and science. For instance, we often use dramatization and role play to examine the unit of characterization in the novel and drama genre. Since character traits are always determined from the way one behaves; or conduct oneself; how such character relates with others as well as tracking his/her line of thought on this and that; impersonation and role-play would be appropriate techniques of tackling the unit of characterization.

Drama as a teaching method is not restricted to the Language Arts, Arts and Social Science; it is a cross-curricula technique. Mathematics, practical subjects and science in general can also be presented using the dramatic art. Revelations by Theater Capital (2007) are that they had to conduct a training workshop on using theatre to teach Mathematics, and Science. It is further revealed that as part of the training, a three-hour theatre intervention was conducted for Science and Mathematics high school teachers. The three-hour theatre intervention focused on using theatre techniques to teach a chapter on cells, and factorization. The workshop aimed at guiding teachers on making their classes more interesting and facilitating smooth learning for students. Such a workshop pronounces considerable acknowledgement to the role of drama in the teaching and learning process. Again, the fact that topics like "Cells" and "Factorization" can be taught using drama is a glaring manifestation that dramatic teaching techniques do indeed cut across all disciplines.

### **Drama in lesson delivery**

There are various approaches by which a teacher can use drama to deliver and appealingly present a stimulating and inspiring lesson. As already indicated above, drama as a teaching method can be applied to any discipline. This section focuses on the procedures and dynamics of using the dramatic art as a teaching methodology. For purposes of guidelines, we have sampled a few cases across the curriculum.

The starting point is the teacher's realization that monopolizing the teaching-learning process is often boring and counter-productive. Obanya (1980) discourages the practice where the teacher acts the 'Alpha' and 'Omega' of the lesson delivery. It practically excludes learners from the whole process. He advises that it would be better if the teacher served simply as an initiator instead of a story-teller. Personally, I concur with this view since a teacher is not necessarily the sole source of knowledge. Learners themselves are capable of generating intriguingly bright ideas in the course of their learning. The teacher can, for example, set in motion a situation where learners can perform a number of activities like observing, comparing, performing, and describing as they note what they have observed or felt. Such an environment makes learners physically and emotionally involved in the learning process

On using drama as a teaching method, Dawn (1998) says that teachers only need to familiarize themselves with the theatrical components of drama. These include improvisation, role-play, Mime, impersonation and

dramatization. This helps them to guide the learners on performance. Dawn (1998) further asserts that the drama techniques are among the primary teaching methods. Of course, a teacher needs to know exactly what theatrical components denote. Among these are:

**Improvisation** – This refers to an event in a play where actors themselves choose their own words and actions to bridge the information gap. It is also very effective in creating clarity. Here, the actors improvise words as the story unfolds. This could be very instrumental in exploring motivation and interaction in Social Studies. This method would be appropriate in analyzing the impact of peer pressure.

**Role-play** - This is the practice where a person assumes the role of another person and acts as someone else. Role-play would be effective in illustrating any idea. This is so because role-play unfolds new ideas in a vividly striking manner. Learners would also anxiously be drawn in to such game-like activity. Through this, the learner will then gain insight and understanding into the character him or she is impersonating. For example, one would initiate a role-play involving a retail shop during a Commerce lesson revolving on the Chain of Trade. In class, learners can be guided on developing a role-play on familiar topics relating to their lives. These include shopping in a market, getting ready for a new school term, visiting hospital, a political rally, or any other topic picked from a list of activities common in a particular community. The teacher can call for volunteers for specific roles. Where there is reluctance, then the teacher assigns the roles him or herself. Depending on the subject area and topic, the teacher may assign roles for the doctor/nurse; patients; traditional ruler, Marketing Manager, HRO or Civil Engineer. The role-play method as elaborated above is a multi-dimensional technique of lesson delivery. It cuts across all academic disciplines, be it science, humanities, public health, technology and social science.

**Mime** – This is a dramatic art with which a teacher can enhance ideas in a lesson. Miming, being performing without the use of any audible word can be employed when learners have limited vocabulary. Miming as a theatrical technique can be very productive in the teaching of a second language to non-native speakers. Likewise, even tour guides can exploit this miming technique in conducting non-native language speakers around. The technique, would thus, be an effective method in the travel and tourism colleges).

**Dramatization** - Dramatization is coined from the word drama which is synonymous with putting an idea or event into demonstrable action.

All the other theatrical components like role-play, miming and impersonation hinge on dramatization. So, whether one applies impersonation, role-play or miming, dramatization is the medium. Therefore, whatever these dramatic techniques can achieve in the teaching and learning process, are applicable to dramatization as well (Dawn, 2000).

### ***Drama techniques for teaching history***

The other strategy of using drama as a teaching method is “Workshop” or the “Talk Show” The approach can be used while teaching a topic like “the Negative Aspects of Racial Segregation”

#### ***Procedure of dramatic lesson delivery***

Group your class into three or four groups. At each table, establish a condition that selected members must adhere to. For instance, males at this table should sit on the floor, people with black tops should not speak, people with glasses must face behind, married people must sit with their hands under the table, or those whose shoe size is larger than eight must remain standing.

After about fifteen minutes, ask the participants to write down what they felt about their being discriminated against. With this approach, the animosity that arises from the practice of racial segregation will manifest more vividly. Their feelings could be aired out to the class using the medium of dialogue. Each group should handle a different topic. There should be one playing the role of the talk- show moderator.

#### ***Drama games across the curricula***

Drama games are the alternative ways of dramatization without a play-text. The approach is compatible to any academic field. There is a wide range of drama games a teacher can choose from. These may include:

- (i) Who wears this hat?
- (ii) Pantomime ball toss.
- (iii) Mirrors and statues and many more.

The kind of game will always depend on the teacher’s creativity and topic being handled. Therefore, drama games vary depending on the teacher, topic and situation at the time of lesson delivery. Below is the procedure of using drama games as suggested by Mugumya, A. et al (2011). The “Who wears this hat?” game could be executed as follows:

- To introduce the activity, a teacher must stand in front of the class holding a bag containing many hats, at least, six in number. The hats should be of different shapes or fashions to reflect character roles. Thereafter, pull out each hat, one after the other, hold it up and ask the students, “who wears this hat?” After a consensus on which kind of person wears which hat, the teacher can clarify on the duties, career details and organizations of the selected character roles. Remember the character roles chosen should reflect real life personalities. These could be a toddler, an elderly woman, a police constable, a rock star, a church priest, and a freelance journalist. If there are not enough learners willing to volunteer acting the character roles, the teacher should personally select competent ones.
- The hats could be placed in a middle position where each actor picks his or hers. . Ask the actors to come up the stage, one after another, pick the hat, puts it on, and walks in character to the bench. The second learner does

the same. There should be only two actors in action on the stage, at a time. Learners need to be guided on how to complement their words with gestures. In the course of the conversation, one of them should find reason to leave the stage.

- With the departure of the first actor, a third volunteer walks up, picks his/her hat and joins the abandoned actor to proceed with action. The process should carry on until the last actor leaves the stage after being left alone. Some miming could also be improvised to complement the verbal intercourse. Alternatively, it is also appropriate and more appealing to use different clothing items to match character roles. For instance, a tie, a shawl, a wig or a walking stick. Class members should discuss which clothing item suits which character role. Each pair of actors could use up to six minutes only. These drama games are compatible to lesson delivery on any topic in any academic discipline.

Gorski (2001) re-affirms the above observation that drama is a cross-curricula teaching method. He points out that as part of active learning, students can engage in dramatic learning by conducting experiments about gravity. Gravity is an important topic in Physics. That testifies to the suitability of drama as a cross-curricula teaching method, not only as a language art, literary genre or theatre art.

### **The benefits of dramatic techniques in the learning-teaching process**

Employing any of the dramatic techniques like dramatization, role-play, impersonation, improvisation, and miming in the learning-teaching process is a very resourceful approach. It is of great value to both teachers and learners. The teachers, for instance, only serve as modulator while the learners take more responsibility of their learning. The learner engages with subject content (Kigali Institute of Education, 2011).

The role-play technique as learning and teaching method assists educators as a pinnacle of analyzing the learners' reactions and responses; and it can give direct and immediate feedback (Steinert, 1993). Of course, getting feedback on what one has taught guides the teacher on the way forward. Educational drama which incorporates using dramatic techniques in the instructional process is an important component of the curriculum. It allows learners to express themselves, provide new and practical avenues of assessing themselves. Consequently, dramatic techniques will enhance the learners' communication competence as it also boosts confidence (Gorski, 2001; Meyer, 1994).

More so, the use of drama as a teaching method challenges learners to argue out ideas, figure out or package concepts, suggest solutions to problems without over-reliance on the teachers' dictation. Such active learning experiences are more beneficial than pencil speed and memorization skills. The consistent application of the dramatic techniques of teaching calls for creative thinking which would culminate in the vital life-skill of creativity. (Ackroyd, ed, 2000; Gorski, 2001; Meyer, 1994; Taylor, 2000).

The "workshop" and "Talk-show" option of using Drama as a teaching method provides an opportunity for learners to learn and synthesize information. Likewise, the role-play method provides learners an opportunity to gain



new knowledge. They are, thereby able to appreciate different viewpoints and perspectives based on the roles being played. Similarly, role-play helps them develop and practice new skills like exploring and resolving conflicts (Steinert, 1993). The utilization of drama as a teaching method makes the teaching experiences more convincing and realistic.

During a conference at Indiana University Bloomington which focused on learning how to use drama to teach learners of all age-groups, one of the facilitators observed that: using drama, theater, movement, and other art forms helps them to think about their lives and come to terms with where they are and what they are going to do. (Dorothy & Gavin, 1995). These remarks imply that employing the dramatic techniques in the teaching-learning process assists the teacher in making learners rehearse their life experiences. Of course, that is vital as it makes the whole situation lively and relevant to the learners.

If exploited fully and properly, dramatic techniques especially improvisation, impersonation, play building and dramatization are an infallible source of motivation. The fun touch of drama allows learners considerable relaxation, self-expression, and spontaneously draws them into owning up the whole situation. This teaching method is also an indisputable resource by which the Speaking and Composition skills can be sharpened. In fact, the use of drama as a teaching method fine tunes and enhances all language skills, besides body fitness and debating tactics (Morgan & Saxton, 1987).

## **Conclusion**

There is no individual that can single-handedly execute a meaningful drama scene. Therefore, the dramatic techniques of teaching necessitates team – work among all class members. With an element of team work, class-control becomes easier. More often than not, that situation culminates into higher concentration and productivity. Using drama as a teaching method marks a breakthrough from the stereo-type teacher-centered approaches. More so, it could lead to the highly coveted human traits of tolerance and harmonious co-existence within such a class, and thereafter.

If appropriately exploited the dramatic teaching method saves the teacher the burden of being a lone source of knowledge. The creative skills required of everyone participating in an imaginary scene of drama gradually crystallize into essential life-skills. Thus, drama should be adopted as a cross-curricula teaching method as it opens boundless opportunities for learners well beyond the classroom into full-scale life. Considering the multi-dimensional ways of using drama as a teaching strategy; its applicability to all disciplines across the curricula; its practical nature and the indisputably positive benefits to both learners and the teachers; using drama as a cross-curriculum teaching method should be integrated as one of the units in the “General Teaching Methods” to all teacher-trainees.

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