

USING PERFORMANCE SKILLS IN THE CLASSROOM AS AN EFFECTIVE WAY OF GAINING AND HOLDING STUDENTS' INTEREST

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Being a teacher means not just be a good specialist in your sphere of knowledge, but also to be a good actor. Good teachers seem to know instinctively how to use performance skills in the classroom to gain and hold students' interest. These seems to be general agreement among teachers that in order to continue raising academic standards we need to constantly examine and explore our methods of teaching. Effective teachers seem aware of the impact that dramatic techniques can have upon students and are always looking for opportunities to incorporate these into their lessons.

The drama skills to win the attention and interest of the students, to convey information effectively to diverse and demanding "audience" might include the use of body language and voice, improvisation and role-playing.

Body language of teachers plays an important role in the process of teaching. Teachers' body language can explore students' intellect, develop the potential of right brain. It has alternative function, accessibility function, feedback function (Zhang, 2005, P.298). To start with we should define what body language is. It is a non-verbal, yet powerful form of communication that every individual denotes via his/her gestures, attitude or facial expressions. We not only respond to spoken words of an individual but also react to that person's body language. This same principle applies to teacher and student relationship in the classroom. In classroom, teacher's body language mainly includes: eyes, physical, appearance, gesture, body language, and distance. Different classroom needs different body language.

All teachers can use appropriate body language to create the desired atmosphere within their classrooms. Teachers can apply it in speaking, listening and even reading in class. For example:

- Exaggerating movements when explaining something to the whole class. This should capture and hold the students' attention and can be used to emphasize important points.
- Responding by smiling and nodding when a student is talking.
- Walking around the room during a discussion so that the whole class feels involved.
- Avoiding "closed" body language (such as folding arms) and physical signals that can distract from the learning process, for example: constantly checking the time or looking at paperwork that has nothing to do with the lesson.

It is important to remember that nonverbal communication is generally thought to be more "honest" than verbal communication; if your body language is positive then students are more likely to trust you.

Another important skill is the use of voice. Teachers need to use their voices appropriately in a variety of situations, such as narrating a story or giving a character a distinctive accent. Effective teachers incorporate variations in vocal pitch and deliberately raise or lower their voice in order to make a point or simply to communicate more effectively. Many teachers injure their voices by trying to compete with the sounds of students in and out of the classroom. We need to learn to pay attention to the signals that our voices send us so that we can take the necessary steps to avoid damaging one of our most important teaching tools.

Role-playing is another effective means of keeping students' attention and interest. Many roles that teachers are able to play and many other situations when adopting a role in the classroom may be of use, for example:

- Narrating a story or playing a character within a story when reading to students will obviously interest them more than a "straight" reading.
- To convey information, to stimulate discussion and to better communicate with students.
- Role-playing can be used to develop empathy and to enliven discussion.

Role-playing allows learners to improve their communication skills such as argumentation, the organization of ideas, group understanding, interpretation and inferring (Zhang, 2010). Role-plays offer multiple opportunities to practice a foreign language than any other teaching activity (Gass and Mackey, 2006). It also strengthens students' confidence to use English as a Foreign Language in contextualized environments (Zhang, 2010; Duxbury and Ling, 2010).

Improvisation is also important for teachers. Good teachers can improvise so well that they always appear to know exactly what they are doing and everything seems to be carefully planned and well thought-out. These teachers will often bring exciting ideas into the classroom in stimulating and original ways; they will use humour to help establish a rapport with their students, as well as to diffuse situations and to deal with difficult moments.

Good classroom improvisation, however, does not mean having to be outrageously funny or wild. It simply means being capable of appearing natural and confident in every situation.

If a teacher will learn to improvise convincingly, he / she will put students at ease and encourage them to take risks, improving his / her classroom "performance" tenfold.

References:

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