

Dramatic dialogues – Teacher’s notes

Dramatic dialogues are simply a form of drill. Drilling can be an extremely effective method of improving oral ability in children and adults. The constant repetition allows learners to store whole phrases in short term memory relatively quickly. This then allows the opportunity for more natural less guided practice, and then free practice.

But learners will only put up with simple drilling for so long – maybe 3 minutes. The trick here is to make the drill more fun by making it a dialogue they can do with their partner. Making the characters in the dialogue “fun characters”, for example, instead of just having a dialogue between Peter and Mary, why not make it between James Bond and Mr Bean. The dialogue can be identical. But as soon as the learners read the names they laugh. Getting learners to react in such a way before you have even started is worth its weight in gold, in my experience.

The other benefit of using a dialogue is that it allows you to get away with far more repetition. Repetition is necessary for learners to take in new structures. This can be done by simply changing roles and/ or partners. Particularly with younger learners, children have a short boredom threshold. The secret is *not* to keep changing activities. If the language focus changes too often, they won’t take it in. The secret is to modify the activity slightly so that it appears to be a different activity, by in fact keeps the same Language focus. Yes, it’s called cheating. But it works.

As with all drilling however, it is essential to bear in mind 2 points:

1: Drilling must be done at a very brisk pace.

2: Drilling is not an end in itself – it is a *means* to an end. That end is learners being able to use the target structures naturally in freer practice. Once the learners are confident in getting their mouths round the target language, once they can remember it (i.e. it has gone into short term memory) then they can immediately (i.e. in the same lesson) move on to some kind of controlled practice, and then, again in the same lesson, some freer practice.

Here are the typical stages I go through when using **Dramatic dialogues**.

Stages

1. Make sure the students already understand the basic grammar point.
2. Pre-teach any new vocabulary in the dialogue. It can be a good opportunity to add a little new vocabulary.
3. Students read in pairs. 2 minutes
4. Students swap roles and repeat. 2 mins
5. Students swap *partners* and repeat.* 3 mins
6. Demonstrate the idea of how to act. 1 min
7. Students repeat, but acting. With original or new partners. 2 mins
8. Students do the gapped version orally in pairs, **NOT writing!** 2 mins
This allows you to do use it again and again as a 5-minute filler.
9. students do skeleton version orally in pairs, **NOT writing!** 2 mins
10. Students act out the dialogue with the work sheet covered! 2 mins
*They can to some extent invent here. This can become semi-free practice
– provided they use the target language*
11. select a group to act out in front of the class, with or without script. 2 mins

20 minutes approx

How to write Dramatic dialogues

1. Think of a topic (e.g. school, sports)
2. What structures/vocabulary would you like them to be able to say/use?
3. Things they will want to say about themselves. E.g.

*I go to Colegio Belen. I am in 1C. I wear/ don't wear a school uniform. I start/finish school **at** ... o'clock. My favourite **subject** is I study*

4. Questions to elicit the information in "a". E.g. ,

Where do you go to school? Do you wear a school uniform? What time do you start/finish school? Do you like school? What is your favourite subject? Do you study English?

5. Put the language into a simple two person dialogue.
6. Keep it simple and very repetitive.
7. Can you think of two funny characters?

Darth Vader: Where do you go to school?
James Bond: I go to the English School.
Darth Vader: Do you wear a school uniform?
James Bond: Yes I do.
Darth Vader: What time do you start school?

8. You can add other language as revision, e.g,

*How are you? What's your name? How old are you?
Can you*

9. Write a gapped version.

Darth Vader: W_____ do you go to school?
James Bond: I _____ to the English School.
Darth Vader: _____ a school uniform?
James Bond: Yes I do.
Darth Vader: W_____ do you start school?

10. Write a skeletal version with only key words..