



Photo courtesy: Sandhya Uday

# Setting the stage for empowerment

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**T**he language teacher always faces a double challenge – to channel the naturally exuberant imaginative energy of the children into activity that is not only enjoyable but also has a language pay-off. They need to develop a repertoire of concrete activities, which appeal to the children; failure to do so will result in chaos or boredom.

Drama-project is one activity that offers ample opportunity to cater to almost all types of learners. It creates situations wherein higher order thinking skills, life skills and emotional skills can be developed along with a command over language. Moreover, it fulfils the major objective of studying literature, i.e., enabling children to be emotionally empowered.

### **Drama: not just 'acting'**

'Dramatization is not merely 'acting' as it is often perceived to be. There are so many other facets of it that do not immediately come to mind,' says Chippy Gangjee (a Bangalore-based artist). Dramatization by its very nature has a few important aspects that are crucial for young people to acquire, especially in these times – teamwork, oratory skills, self-confidence..., and these are merely the tip of the iceberg.

By taking on a role, children can escape from their everyday identity and lose their inhibitions. This is useful for children who are shy about speaking English or don't like joining group activities. Giving them special roles can encourage them to be different characters and abandon their shyness or embarrassment.

### **Process is important!**

Drama is not only about the product (the performance) but also about the process of language learning. It allows children to own the simple and mechanical language they use by invoking the personality they are playing. It infuses confidence in the children and gives them an opportunity to hide behind another character. Dramatizing means that the children become actively involved in the text. This personalization makes language more meaningful and memorable than drilling or mechanical repetition can. It allows children to add emotion or body to the text they have read or listened to.

### **Whole language!**

"Whole language means rich, authentic, developmentally appropriate school experiences," say whole language experts Keneth Goodman, Lois Bridges and Yetu Goodman in their classic work,

*The Whole Language Catalog*. The whole language is as real, relevant, and easy in school as it is outside school. It means reading real literature, not just workbooks and worksheets. It means writing when you need to write because you have a real purpose and something to say. It means problem-solving, answering your own real questions in an environment that encourages you to take the risks necessary to learn. It means supportive teachers who take time to know each pupil, who work collaboratively with their pupils in learning, and who can make every day at school one to be cherished and remembered. In whole language classrooms, there is time for thinking and time for growing. "It means putting tests and textbooks in their proper places since they are no more than tools for professional teachers to use as they serve their pupils," says Goodman. The drama project keeps pace with the 'whole language concept' very well as it includes all four essential basic skills, i.e., reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The best part is its being purposeful regarding every function of language. The students write the script, draft notices, and make posters to put up in the school premises. After the presentation, the entire class/school can write reviews, report, and critique the dramatization, thus making the activity real and relevant.

### **Life-skills woven!**

The three life skills recommended by the CBSE are intricately woven into the process of dramatization. These three life skills – thinking, social, and emotional – can easily be developed and assessed through dramatization. Preparation in dramatization can be beneficial to improve life skills. It gives a platform to build up confidence level, assertiveness, verbal and

non verbal communication, visualization, presentation and organizational skills, etc., to name a few. Drama also beautifully weaves life skills with higher order thinking skills. When the children are involved in the 'characters', they explore the realms of those characters' personalities and analyze the characters themselves. They appreciate, realize, empathize, compare, construct, differentiate, judge and often form their own opinion regarding those characters. In addition to this, the drama project has been proved to be the best tool to impart values and thought-provoking ideas.

This article has come out of my experience with this highly productive activity. I have seen my children grow wonderfully because of the drama project year after year.

