The benefits of using drama in the school

I would like to share with all of you the benefits of using drama as a tool for teaching English in the school. I have been teaching drama for 4 years in a trilingual school located in Spain and I have also visited a school in London in order to see how kids do drama in England.

The main aspect to understand this article and the subject itself is to change our point of view about drama. Doing drama in the school is not just memorizing and acting plays, is much more, it is an incredible experience for kids and for teachers with plenty of benefits for our pupils.

To start with, I will explain how we do it in my school. We have 2 hours devoted to drama in the schedule, both in primary and in secondary. We use the theatre of the school as our drama room because it gives us more space than any ordinary room and kids love going there, they feel really motivated. Being in a trilingual school, teaching this subject is a marvelous idea to continue teaching English due to the fact that the center of drama is communication, all kinds of communication.

Teaching drama is a very useful way to interact and know our students better, in a more relaxed atmosphere. This subject provides our kids with the chance of exploring and expressing their thoughts, and dreams. A student can become anything, explore a new role or guess the ending of a tale.

Thanks to it, it is a brilliant opportunity to work emotions with our students. We can link emotions with faces, situations and give them the chance to express themselves. Nowadays working emotions in the school is as important as learning contents and we have to enhance it.

It is also a very rich subject for our students because it stimulates their creativity. Sometimes, we do not realize how important it is for our students to develop their imagination and creativity in the school, especially among students in primary. We, teachers, in our everyday life, live too focused on completing books and following the syllabus. However, drama gives us an incredible option for developing the imagination of our students.

Our methodology is game based learning. Kids do different games in order to practice the vocabulary and structures they are working in English or in science. So, it is used as a cross curricular subject that reinforces all those aspects that we see our students need to improve in the target language.

They also carry out different activities such as role playing, shorts pantomimes, storytelling...
A good example of role-playing is that they can develop their own ideas as well as skills of cooperation when interacting with classmates in any situation. Of course, it is not the same to teach drama in 2nd grade or in 6th grade. Obviously the youngest students need more guidance of the teacher. On the other hand, sixth graders are able to interact in any situation by themselves using English.

The role of drama teacher is crucial in order to develop a lesson correctly and to take the most of our students. Teaching drama it is not just playing. The teacher has to plan and link the contents they are working on in other subjects with the games and activities prepared.

Moreover, he/she as to graduate the English level depending on the age of the students. It is fundamental to create a good atmosphere in the lesson and to encourage all the students to participate. The teacher has to be able to orchestrate the action by giving instructions and guiding students as needed. Not an easy job!

All the activities have to be planned by the teacher before involving the students in the dramatic playing. This tends to give the teacher great control while allowing the students creative input.

Some benefits that we can find in those students who have participated in drama lessons are the following: kids have a better fluency when speaking in public, they develop their listening and speaking skills all the time as the whole lesson happens using the target language.

They also have a more positive and confident self image of them. At the beginning, the shy students feel reluctant about taking part, however; little by little they become shameless and enjoy the lessons.

When they take part in a game, pantomime or roll playing kids are able to develop their self control and discipline. They also learn how to work in groups, to cooperate, and are aware of the importance of everybody when acting. This is, they share responsibilities and realize that all of them are crucial when acting the play. This is why drama helps students to develop tolerance and empathy. Pupils learn that mistakes are part of the learning process and everybody can make them.

For the youngest students drama is really beneficial due to the fact that they are all the time moving and therefore, developing kinesthetic abilities, so important in young ages.

Below I mention some tasks I carry out with my second graders.

- Mirroring.
- Analyze and imitate physical movement.
- Express moods and concepts through movement.
- Create emotion faces.
- Participate in very simple narrative pantomime.
- Analyze and imitate sounds.
- Create original statue performances.
  - Improvise group scenes and dialogue.
  - Interact within dramatizations.
  - Analyze their own and peers’ dramatizations and put forth constructive ideas for improving both.
  - Predict plot resolution of tales.
  - Memorize scripts.
  - Improvise dialogue with the help of the teacher.
  - ACT/role-play.
- Assume roles and interact in improvisations.
- Imagine and describe characters.
- Use variations in movement and voice for different characters.
  - Use role-play to place self into the context of other subjects.
- Use variations in movement and voice for different characters.
• Play games using the vocabulary we are working on the different English lessons.
• Participate in very simple narrative pantomime.

At the end of the course, they perform a play in front of their parents, this is a very good way to introduce students to the routine of memorization and rehearsal. The play is an opportunity for everyone to participate and feel important in the group. They also decorate the stage and create the background for the play.

Thanks to all the activities they do in the lessons they develop many competences such as the artistic competence, linguistic competence and social competence.

I encourage you to introduce drama in your English classes even though you do not have the chance to have it as a subject in your school. You can use some ideas from drama to motivate your students and you will see how fast they improve! Drama promotes active learning and builds their confidence in using the target language as they tend to relax and start having fun in English.

To finish with the article I would like to remind you this Chinese proverb:

"Tell me and I will forget.
Show me and I will remember.
Involve me and I will understand."