



## TEACHING DRAMA: THE “WHY” AND “HOW” OF IT

Dr.R.CHAKKARAVARTHY

Associate Professor of English, G T N Arts College, Dindigul, India



Dr.R.CHAKKARAVARTHY

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### ABSTRACT

Teaching Drama is an important aspect of the curriculum. It is much desired as it takes care of both the linguistic and emotional needs of the taught. Teaching drama ought to be done in the right way differentiating it from teaching fiction. The right methods of teaching and the right persons executing it would make the endeavour profitable and meaningful. Roger Burford Mason’s *Keep on Running* is used as an example to illustrate the “why” and “how” of teaching drama.

**KEY WORDS:** Teaching- Drama- Novel- theatre- enact- teacher- student- atmosphere- language- emotions.

### DRAMA AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF TEACHING

Education is not a commodity. Education is a social relationship. Teaching drama in the curriculum needs to be viewed seriously for many reasons. The plays prescribed for both language classes and English major classes are to be exploited well to get full utilization. Drama is primarily to be seen as “theatre” and not as “text”. Drama is to impart conversational skills and life styles, not just themes and plots. The language of the play and especially the idiom of the characters are to be captured to enliven it.

The present paper intends to dwell in detail about why drama should form an integral part of teaching language and how should it be taught to make any piece of drama meaningful and profitable. Starting from reading aloud and role plays, various techniques regarding teaching drama would be discussed in the paper. Roger Burford Mason’s *Keep on Running*, a one act play prescribed for Madurai

Kamaraj University 3<sup>rd</sup> semester Part II English students would be exploited to illustrate the techniques proffered in the paper.

Teaching drama and teaching fiction are often confused and as a result, both are taught in the same way with stress on plot, themes, and symbols and so on. Characters are also analysed only from the story point of view. Visualisation based on one’s imaginative capabilities is the key to understanding and appreciating a work of fiction. But for drama, not much is left to the audience (not readers!). The dramatist has imagined every possible, minute detail for actors and stage. He offers his work on a platter for the audience to consume. The author expects his/her story and characters to come alive on the stage.

#### Teaching Drama- Why?

Drama needs to be taught mainly for the following reasons:

- I. To develop interpersonal communication
- II. To express emotion
- III. To master the art of conversation
- IV. To learn the idiom of the target language
- V. To know the cultural background of the play
- VI. To learn the appropriate body language
- VII. To acquire the right pronunciation
- VIII. To train in voice modulation
- IX. To learn stress and intonation patterns
- X. To learn behavioural skills
- XI. To acquaint with action/ proper reaction

When drama is taught in the class, the text needs to be exploited in such a way that all the above objectives are fulfilled.

#### Teaching Drama- How?

The teaching of drama starts with setting the right mood and ambience for the play. An encouraging introduction may be conjured up by the teacher to create the right atmosphere like mystery, suspense, humour or melancholy.

The next item would be ensuring the availability of text with all the students. Only then following the dialogue would be possible in an evolving English class room in the sub-urban and rural areas.

There needs to be movement when a play is learnt. Students need to be moving in the space available in the classroom. If everybody, both the teacher and the students comfortably sit and read out the play, it would never come alive!

The paramount importance lies in choosing the right persons to play out the characters. Much care needs to be taken while presenting a play under class room situation. Presenting a play with proper set and characters in the proper outfits would not be possible and so much of the dramatization got to be done with more emphasis on reading out. Choosing the right students and the choice of the teacher are of paramount importance. How can a lady dramatise Antony's oration in *Julius Caesar*? Would it become of a lady to dispose Rome with "Let Rome in Tiber melt" or for a gentleman to drool out "Husband, I come" for Cleopatra? In most of our classrooms we find men and women teachers swapping roles for the sake of the time table and work load with no

thought of the play intended to be taught. Teachers can select the right students to render out these roles but in the rural colleges, most of the literature students find it difficult to read out even prose lessons. So they can be expected only to render supporting roles and hence the onus of playing the protagonist is often on the teacher.

The teacher should see to it that she/he plays an important role that fits his/her age, voice and demeanor. For example, if it is *King Lear*, the elderly teacher can be Lear. If it is *Hamlet*, he can be either Polonius or Claudius. By playing an important character, he/she can have a control over the rendering of the other characters. Selecting the right students to play out the characters would make the play interesting.

The teacher should not stop the students for correcting the way they read/enact. He can, of course, do that once in a while when things go awry. The uninterrupted flow would add up to the fun as it is pivotal for learning. Students would learn from their mistakes and correct themselves as things evolve. Anyhow, the teacher must have absolute control of the proceedings and keep in mind that the aim is to educate and not just whiling off the time!

#### Roger Burford- Mason's *Keep on Running*

Roger Burford- Mason's *Keep on Running* has Jackie wells as the protagonist of the play. She is a student in form 5 B. She is an athlete and as she is not good at studies, she is more particular in making athletics her career. She faces problems from her family and friends as she is not 'normal' like others. Even her boy friend Kevin is upset about her as she spends more time in practice. She has a face full of dilemma and anxiety. A girl who plays out this character in the class should be of athletic build-never plump or very tall or short and should not be bespectacled. She should have a normal voice, neither shrill nor gruff. Her reading/delivering the dialogues should have conviction in it.

The class teacher (a lady here) can play the role of Miss Bell, Jackie's class teacher. She encourages Jackie and appreciates her conviction. As this is an elderly character, the teacher would fit in well here.

As the play is about students, the class room plays the major role as the central locale; this play is well suited to be exploited in the class room.

The role of Jackie's friends can be played out by any of the many students in the class. As the play needs class room atmosphere, it need not be contrived as it is naturally there. The theme is also well suited for the college fresher's as they are also about the same age group and many are at the cross roads of choosing their careers.

By exploiting *Keep on Running*, we could kill two birds with one stone – motivate students to be choice/career oriented and teach them the many skills that we have listed above as the play is full of emotions and about relationships too.

#### The use of theatre in the classroom

The use of theatre in the classroom is very much needed to teach subjects and to develop personal skills in students. Teaching drama covers a wide area of techniques incorporating physical movement, vocal action, and mental concentration which are lacking in traditional classrooms..It is encouraging that many teachers use skits to teach concepts and language. Students also evince great interest in skits, both in developing and performing them. Students need assistance and encouragement to better their performance and hence expect the teachers to help them. But it is unfortunate that many teachers lack the resources to offer the students the help they require and hence it becomes imperative on the part of the teachers to train themselves in the art of drama before embarking on teaching the same.

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