

Teaching English through Drama to Japanese University Students

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In Japan, drama in English language education has not been practiced widely except among a few teachers who have an interest. In general, upper secondary school education focuses on grammar, although the latest course of study includes making and performing short plays and the importance of nonverbal communication. At the higher education level, without having had actual experience of using English to communication, students often speak monotone, and moreover, they are not active enough in speaking activities

In this presentation, I will report on (a) how I designed a course called “English through Drama” that I am teaching at a private university in Japan, (b) how the students have encountered and gone through this new learning experience, and (c) how they have developed through the course based on my observation and students’ reports (course evaluation, journals, and interviews). Then I will discuss the potentiality of drama in English education and its implication for future teaching in the presentation.

The class meets once a week for 90 minutes, and consists of 16 students whose majors and English levels vary (lower-intermediate to upper-intermediate). My role as a teacher is a facilitator, who introduces drama activities and topics. I try to direct the lessons in order to make learners aware of the meanings of communication and interaction. I also emphasize the ways we use a target language with different communication channels, and the ways we integrate our knowledge and experiences into acting.

The purpose of this course is to help the students improve English speaking ability as well as inter-personal communication skills and autonomous learning attitude through producing plays in groups. The course goals are set for improving their confidence, fluency, and self-expression with the use of various kinetic behaviors when speaking English in front of others. They are required to produce and perform English plays or related productions mid-term and at the end of semester as projects.

The course, English through Drama, up to the present, has progressively introduced and integrated various drama conventions for improvisation (e.g., still image, mime, duologue, monologue, hot-seating, thought tracking) so that the students learn to become familiar with physical expressions to and expressions of physical movement and

speech. The students have participated in the lessons enthusiastically and cooperatively, and their mid-term projects demonstrated their best speaking abilities in drama performances. The mid-term self-evaluation also reported their positive achievements. I expect to observe their autonomous learning and positive outcomes towards the end of the semester.