

## DRAMATISING A PIECE OF LITERATURE

### Social Drama – Experiential Learning Applied on *What Has Happened to Lulu?* by Charles Causley

<b>School:</b>	<i>Colegiul Tehnic "Traian Vuia" Oradea</i>	<b>Level:</b>	B1 according to CEFR levels – independent user, intermediate
<b>Teacher:</b>	<i>Curpaş Florentina Anca</i>	<b>Piece of literature</b>	The ballad <i>What Has Happened to Lulu?</i> by Charles Causley
<b>Date:</b>  <b>Time of the day:</b>	  12.10 a.m.-1 p.m.	<b>Lesson type:</b>	Speaking Integrating drama activities with language practice
<b>Activity length :</b>	50 minutes	<b>Previous work:</b>	Problems teenagers face – <i>Cat's in the Cradle</i> by Harry Chapin
<b>Participants in the activity:</b>	9 <sup>th</sup> graders	<b>Drama Technique applied:</b>	Story tableaux (human sculptures) Freeze-think-speak

**Information about the class:** The group is made of 28 teenagers, studying two hours and one hour a week respectively, according to the national English language curriculum. They have been studying the *CLICK ON 2 and CLICK ON 3 Student's Book*, Express Publishing, by Virginia Evans, Neil O'Sullivan coursebook for five months and we have worked Units 1-5. For this activity I decided to make a demonstration of the steps to integrate drama activities with language practice in the framework of experiential learning in the English classes, and assess the impact this teaching method has on the linguistic improvement and personal growth of my students.

In the previous class I taught vocabulary related to issues of a teenager's life in the family based on Harry Chapin's song, *Cat's in the Cradle*

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7OqwKfgLaeA>).

Today's activity includes dramatisation activities sequenced according to the experiential learning phases outlined by Koenderman (2000): exposure, participation, internalisation and dissemination. The activities will explicitly cover only the exposure, participation and partly the internalisation phases, while the dissemination phase will take another class to be completed.

**Main aim:** By the end of the lesson, the learners will have practiced language related to childhood and parents vs teenagers relationship.

**Personal aim:** To reduce teacher language in whole class activities and provide learners with more interaction

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**Subsidiary aims/Specific competences:**

- To enhance the learners' receptive and productive language competences through a whole-person engagement in the assigned learning tasks.
- To improve the dynamics of the group and make a difference in the personal, social and moral values growth of the students.

<b>Anticipated difficulties with the tasks:</b>	<b>Solutions:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ss find it difficult to involve themselves actively in the speaking tasks</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To help them out with appropriate eliciting questions</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Learners may have more difficulty with the target language than anticipated</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Spend more time on the controlled practice and clarification stage</li></ul>

**Materials and aids:**

- Pictures for story reconstruction.
- Whiteboard, flipchart.
- Realia: a flashlight, a round china money-box, a baseballcap, a crumpled sheet of paper, two bottles of wine, a picture of a lion, one pocket mirror, a jack knife, a rag doll, a raincoat, a box of matches.
- Worksheet with the poem and some follow-up questions.

**Methods and techniques:** *communicative approach* – dialogue, pair work, group work; *audio-lingual technique*: lockstep activities, question and answer drill, illustration, reading comprehension; discovery techniques; *grammar-translation method*: explanation; *drama techniques*: dramatising a piece of literature - freeze-think-speak (thought tracking); *experiential learning*.

## **Bibliography:**

- **Koenderman, M.** (2000), Monitor training manual. Unpublished document. Sherbrooke, QC: English Language Summer School, Universite de Sherbrooke.
- **Knutson, Sonja** *Experiential Learning in Second-Language Classrooms*, TESL Canada Journal, Volume 20, Issue 2, 2003, 52-64.
- **Littlewood, William**, (1981) *Communicative Language Teaching. An Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- **Maley, Alan & Duff, Alan - Penny Ur** (ed.), (1983), *Drama Techniques in Language Learning*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- **Kohonen, Vijo & Jaatinen, Ritta & Kaikkonen, Pauli & Lehtovaara, Jorma**, (1992), *Experiential Learning in Foreign Language Education*.
- **Kohonen, V.**, (2004), *Autonomy, Awareness and Community – Towards a New Paradigm in FL Education*. Paper given at the APPI conference in Portugal (May 2004), published in Conference Proceedings.

## **Procedure**

### **Ice breaker – *Big Wind Blows***

T gathers the group into a circle and gives each person a piece of paper and instructs everyone to stand on their piece of paper. T starts in the middle of the circle and has to make learners move off their spots, so she can get out of being in the middle. The person in the middle must say something that is true about his/her own life and everyone who shares the same thought/feeling/hobby/plan etc. must leave their spot and find another vacated spot to stand on. Ss may not return to their own spot, in that turn.

The person in the middle must fill in with something related to the subject that is applicable to his/her life.

The Big Wind Blows for anyone who likes ... – sth about yourself

The Big Wind Blows for anyone who wants to.... – sth to do in the future

The Big Wind Blows for anyone who is afraid of ....

The Big Wind Blows for anyone who gets angry when ...

The Big Wind Blows for anyone who battles a weight problem.

The Big Wind Blows for anyone who has acne.

The Big Wind Blows for anyone who has ever used drugs.

The relevance of the subject matter and the language level of my students were the main criterion when I chose the ballad *What Has Happened to Lulu?* by the contemporary Cornish poet Charles Causley.

I built the lessons on the principle that language learning is facilitated when students cooperatively work on a task that is challenging and provides opportunities for student ownership of what is produced, in an environment that sustains motivation to contribute with input in the English language. I planned the activities so that Ss could contribute with their own ideas and take more initiative in creating the characters and situations. I anticipated the problems they might have in producing the language to do the tasks, but I had the readiness to help as necessary.

A major objective in designing this experiment is to observe the experiential phases and to incorporate their specific learning goals. The discussions will be conducted in English, though I will allow them to revert to the Romanian language when they want to say something they find touchy or do not find the words. I will sometimes try to have

them reconstruct the messages in English, or some of their peers rephrase the idea in their own words.

### ***THE EXPOSURE PHASE*** ,

1. Ss get familiarised with some vocabulary items that might impede the understanding of the poem. T takes out of a plastic bag a handful of objects and tells the Ss to call their names: *a flashlight, a round china money-box, a baseball cap, a crumpled sheet of paper, two bottles of wine, a picture of a lion, one pocket mirror, a jack knife, a compass, a worn out rag doll, a raincoat, a box of matches*. T places them all on the teacher's desk, then asks the students to make groups of four. Each student is given a worksheet with the poem and some follow-up questions.

First, Ss have to read the poem **individually**. Then, **in groups** they have to decide what are the objects they spot in any of the stanzas, or might be connected in any way with the plot of the poem.

Ss have 4 minutes to complete the task.

## Worksheet

## Follow-up questions

### What Has Happened To Lulu?

What has happened to Lulu, mother?  
What has happened to Lu?  
There's nothing in her bed but an old  
rag-doll  
And by its side a shoe.

Why is her window wide, mother,  
The curtain flapping free,  
And only a circle on the dusty shelf  
Where her money-box used to be?

Why do you turn your head, mother,  
And why do tear drops fall?  
And why do you crumple that note on  
the fire  
And say it is nothing at all?

I woke to voices late last night,  
I heard an engine roar.  
Why do you tell me the things I heard  
Were a dream and nothing more?

I heard somebody cry, mother,  
In anger or in pain,  
But now I ask you why, mother,  
You say it was a gust of rain.

Why do you wander about as though  
You don't know what to do?  
What has happened to Lulu, mother?  
What has happened to Lu?

Charles Causley

### *Now please answer the questions:*

1. Who is Lulu and what has happened to her?
2. What made Lulu leave the house? How did she do that?
3. What did Lulu take with her?
4. Who cried? For what reason, do you think?
5. How does her mother feel?
6. Who is speaking in the poem?
7. Do we find the answer in the end?

By setting this task, I aimed at **activating the students' previous knowledge and past experiences**. Each student (provided he/she understands the language of the poem, the clues that allow to read between the lines message), brings background information, experience, and culture to each activity.

T asks for feedback, the groups should be able to identify the objects explicitly mentioned in the poem: *the rag doll, the crumpled sheet, the money box*. Some Ss might also mention the flashlight, the raincoat. Even if not each and every student in the classroom will understand thoroughly the words in each line, but they read for the gist and also for details. Sharing knowledge through collaborative learning techniques will stimulate everybody to engage with the text.

T elicits answers to the follow up questions. Ss engage in a conversation about the voice of the narrator, the reasons why Lulu had to leave the house.

Ss let their English build ideas, even if some of them might be just short chunks, or not well-rounded. Some other students might ask sensible questions that make others plod further through the story. T makes them **pool into their own experiences** with authoritative parents, or maybe they realised how angry they were with some issues that their family members didn't take time to understand. Reflection on past experiences with their parents should make them forget about mistakes they could make when using English. They should find the rationale to be fully involved with Lulu's case, and the goal of the exposure phase should thus be achieved.

**Teaching vocabulary with visuals** - T produces the flashcard with the lion and asked what connection they could find with Lulu running away. T reads out the line *I heard an engine roar* and pulls out of the plastic bag a pencil sketch with a car door open in the middle of the road, at night. Ss relate the word "car/engine" with "lion". So, a car engine makes noises like a lion. *An engine roars, The car was angry.*

2. The next step in building on past experiences and enriching their learning is to have Ss involved in reconstructing the whole story using the **picture reconstruction** technique. Standing at the front of the classroom T shows them

pencil sketches representing different parts of the poem. Ss have to come up with the most plausible narrative version. They ordered the pictures as follows:

- a. Lulu has an argument with her mother.
- b. Lulu cries in her room.
- c. Lulu runs away out of the window, the rag doll on her bed.
- d. The car is waiting for her in the dark.
- e. Mother burns a sheet of paper over the cooker.

That was the moment for me to usher in the ***PARTICIPATION PHASE*** in which Ss have the chance to fill the gap between their current ability and their potential with peers and me as a facilitator. The approach is cooperative and holistic and includes freeze pictures, miming, visuals

**a.** Turning the poem into **story tableaux (human sculptures)**. Each group creates one freeze picture of the five scene in the poem that they visualised above, using some of the objects provided as props. Objects transmit values, intentions, frustrations and other various connotations.

**Possible scenarios T suggests** if Ss are at a loss at some point.

In the first scene, a student (mother) can hold a bottle of wine to give Lulu real reasons to leave home.

One Lulu student uses the flashlight to suggest that it was midnight,

Another Lulu student might put on the raincoat to give reasons to the younger daughter that the cry was just “a gust of rain”.

A secret lover is waiting for Lulu, and because the legal age to drive in the U.K. is 17, he could have been a rich teenager as well. Lulu’s family might have had financial problems.

Ss’ imagination is stimulated by reflecting on the poem’s content and maybe consciously connecting it with some of their own families’ concerns.

**b. Turning the poem into a drama.**

**Ss work in groups and T provides prompting questions for possible dialogues.**

What characters are needed? What happens? Lulu has come up late, they say – why? Students **role play** the argument with the parent. Others might



choose to include the younger sister/brother. Some decided that it could be the (step)father as well.

The learner-learner interaction seemed to place the students in “a zone of proximal development”. According to the the neo-Vygotskian perspective on cognitive development, Ss are thus placed at the convergence of a teacher, a learning community, learning activities and materials that generated propitious level of challenge that generated development through negotiation of skills. The learning climate generated in the classroom was a useful frame of reference for understanding the social, psychological, and moral dynamics of effective school learning.

### **3. Feedback**

T invites two groups to act out their roles and asks the rest of the class to give peer feedback according to some criteria which I wrote down before the class. The assessment is based on:

- 1) engagement with performance
- 2) character recognition
- 3) character believability
- 4) ease of identifying location
- 5) props, use of classroom resources
- 6) value added aspects e.g. moral, social/cultural information.

Regarding the nature of the communication skills that Ss might employ, T expects they will exhale a feeling of inclusion and ownership of what they are doing. Their focus is not on the explicit grammar rules, word order or agreement, even though T interferes and echoes their saying, or asks for peer correction. Ss are not concentrated on formulaic discourse. On the contrary, their performance language is transactional, they are eager to get things done in their group. They could use phrases like: *Give it to me,... Don't you dare... What did you say? Let's start again, or I'll be....(the mother)... and you'll be..(the younger sister/Lulu)..*

#### 4. Home assignment

T reads the crumpled note that Ss used for the last dramatised scene and asks the Ss to write the note that Lulu might have left before leaving home, which can be for many of them a highly therapeutic activity that made students realise that anger is a deep feeling that might have been building for years even in a teenager like Lulu (with whom they might understandably relate).

You can read below three of the notes that my students wrote to motivate why Lulu left home.

You know what? I'm sick of your unknown problems and I'm tired trying to spend time with you treating me as if I were a little kid. Tom & I are moving together. Make sure you won't try to find me, 'cuz you know I won't be there.

\* I'm a grownup now, even if I don't have lots of money, ~~but~~ I will handle it. So don't worry 'bout me. Make sure you worry about your own problems.

P.S. Keep that old rag-doll for your unborn ~~new~~ daughter.

Not anymore yours,  
Lulu

My LIFE has been a nightmareish bull-shit in this  
house of yours. But sun is rising up tomorrow  
morning <sup>in my backyard</sup>. Make sure you keep clouds and rain away!  
~~from my backyard!~~

Don't be surprised! You should have expected  
this, if only you would had paid more  
attention this situation could had been  
avoided. I am sick and tired of all the conflict  
& and madness in this house, and your drinking  
problem did not help one bit.

I suggest you don't waste any of your  
precious time ~~to~~ looking for me and focus  
on helping yourself.

Such a shame, things would have been so  
different if dad would still be alive.

Lulu

The notes the students produced reflect many of the attitudes, themes and ideas in the poem. They toyed with their imagination and were pretty good at putting themselves in Lulu's shoes, and like any teen, they concluded parents are to blame for their dissatisfaction with life. One of them portrayed Lulu as an orphan, which rendered the note realistic and dramatic. Concerning the accuracy of their writing, one of the thorniest issue of the experiential learning is the issue of preparing students for passing English language proficiency exams. Preparation for exams that offer certification for furthering their professional or academic careers requires learners to pay attention to competences on all four language skills, writing included. Reflection

and personal experience alone and self-evaluation are not enough when trying to reach a certain level of standardized English skills. Experiential learning can boast, though, on encouraging employability skills like teamwork, interpersonal communication, leadership, and oral proficiency.

The writing task partially managed to bridge the goals of *INTERNALISATION*, which I did in the next class, and which was actually the debriefing exercise that I usually initiate after this kind of activities. What I did was to ask questions and wait for students to find their own answers and support them. I told them to imagine that after two months Lulu decided it's time to return home. She misses her family, she is outside the front door and about to ring the doorbell.

- *How do you think she feels? Why?*
- *Who do you think will answer the door? How would you react if you were the mother/sister/(step)father?*
- *Imagine Lulu is expecting a baby. What would you do if you were her mother?*
- *Only if Lulu hadn't left home. What if she had known how to manage her anger at the right time?*

In groups of three, students had to improvise the scene that provided the solution for Lulu in one of the above situations. They had to thought-track the characters, to think how each of them felt and imagine the body movements associated with the feelings. They imagined how Lulu changed and how she would treat her family differently.

They acted as if they were redeeming a person, shaping for her a new personality. Even though she had left her childhood behind too early, she learnt to show respect for the authority of parenthood the hard way. The teens realised the parents want to control them, but behind this desire that demands obedience, there is love. The imaginary pregnancy of Lulu suggested to my students that in romance "there is peril to be found". They seemed to understand why mother does not give an answer to the younger daughter, she is confused. Their parents could also feel confused and helpless when tragedy struck their children.

Despite the pressure of the responsibility they had to resolve a family conflict, even if an imagined one, made them feel successful language learners. There

was a palpable connection between reflecting successfully upon a social interaction problem and a positive self-concept as English learners.

The importance of **DISSEMINATION/TRANSFER** should never be underestimated, since this last phase of experiential methodology aims at linking classroom learning with real world. In drama activities language tasks are functional, so I asked them to think of forms of anger that is “acting out” and forms of anger that is “deep down hidden”. The latter one is self-destructive, the former one is more easily addressed because it is visible. I asked them to provide examples of situations in real life when they could get angry and hurt others or themselves. They reminded times when a friend was unfair in a game and they got angry with him, or other time they felt frustrated because teachers did not respect their hard work and gave them poor marks, or extreme competitiveness could be destructive. I asked them to write some anger adjectives on the whiteboard. They came up with: *furious, mad, upset, painful, hurt, distressed, miserable, enraged, resentful, hateful hot, choleric, irritable*. Students concluded that some of them have things in their lives that make them very feel like this and they cannot move on with a happy life. Then I asked them to think of words that they associate with balance and calm, and think of people in their lives that they are pleased to be around with because they are happy with their life. They came up with words like *harmony, peace, rest, green field with flowers, quiet*, and named some relatives and some teachers as well.

Their task for the next class was to jot down in English an occasion when they expressed their anger in an appropriate manner towards something or someone (family member, friends, coaches, teachers, passengers in the street, shop assistants etc.) who hurt them starting that day till our next English class. That was for students to map out a positive path of dealing with anger and raise awareness about how many negative feelings we can avoid if we don't get easily angered when things don't go they want them to.

## WORKSHEET

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