

## LIVING DRAMA AND LEARNING ENGLISH: WHY AND HOW TO STEP ONTO THE STAGE<sup>1</sup>

Living Drama e Aprendizagem de Inglês: Por que e como entrar em cena

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### Abstract

*This paper discusses the use of drama activities in Teaching English as Foreign Language (TEFL) in an undergraduate Language course, at the Catholic University of São Paulo. Educational Psychology, Theatre and Teaching English as a foreign language are three areas of knowledge supporting this proposal which is part of the results from a research project entitled Living Drama in the Classroom: an experience towards Significant Learning. Five stages will be mentioned: sensitization, improvisation, preparation, dramatization, and evaluation. Positive change was observed in students' attitude towards their own learning process and their English Language improvement.*

**Keywords:** *Teaching English as a Foreign Language; Theatre activities; Significant Learning; Drama and Education*

### Resumo

*Este artigo discute a implementação de atividades teatrais como uma proposta didática no curso de graduação em Letras: Inglês da PUC-SP. Psicologia da Educação, Teatro e Ensino de Inglês como língua estrangeira são três áreas do conhecimento que sustentam a proposta que é parte dos resultados do projeto de pesquisa: Living Drama in the Classroom: uma experiência de abertura à Aprendizagem Significativa. Cinco fases serão apontadas: sensibilização, improvisação, preparação, dramatização e avaliação. Mudanças positivas frente à atitude dos alunos em relação ao próprio processo de aprendizagem, assim como em relação ao aprimoramento da língua inglesa, foram observados.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Ensino-aprendizagem de Inglês como língua estrangeira; atividades teatrais; Aprendizagem Significativa; Teatro e Educação.*

*“The subject of drama is an exploration of the ways that human beings think, feel and communicate, and it teaches us to understand ourselves, and other people, much better.”*

Bruce Burton

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## 1. Backstage

A great deal of effort on the part of educators and teachers has been devoted to investigating and understanding the teaching-learning process of a foreign language – especially the English language – as well as to searching for appropriate pedagogical proposals for its teaching. Generally speaking, such proposals aim at facilitating the attitudinal, linguistic and interaction development of students who are seen as the centre of the language learning process.

As students are intellectually and emotionally immersed in the learning process, a mode of teaching which favours the overcoming of emotional barriers is desirable. So, whenever I am asked about my experience as a teacher of English and as a researcher, I cannot help thinking that these facets of our profession are closely related. If we wish to change and improve our teaching, we should face our classroom situation as a research context. That seems to be a feasible way to change our teaching practice for better.

As an educator, the affective component in the teaching-learning process has always drawn my attention, and the questions I have consistently asked myself are: Are my students really willing to learn? Do schools promote such willingness? Are the students interested in what I've been teaching them? How meaningful is my subject-matter to them? Am I able to promote willingness to learn English or to learn any other subject? In other words: is what I have been teaching significant to them? How do I behave in classroom situations where many students seem absolutely demotivated, despondent and lost, to the point of not knowing why they are there? And most importantly: am I really helping them *change*, as far as motivation and willingness to learn are concerned?

## 2. Main objective

The main aim of this paper is to discuss a pedagogical proposal for teaching English as a foreign language which results from a research project entitled *Living Drama in the Classroom: an experience towards Significant Learning* (Duarte, 2001). The proposal has been implemented in various English Language learning contexts, such as undergraduate courses in English language, secondary public schools (Duarte, 2003) and private English language courses.

The Living Drama project is based on an interdisciplinary approach which involves three areas of study: Educational Psychology, Drama and Education, and Teaching English as a Foreign Language. These three fields of study are closely intertwined, as they complement and merge into one another, supported by a holistic concept of the learner. In the project proposed, one of the most important elements in the learning context is positive change towards learning English. In other words, it aims at the learner's development as a whole: feelings and intellect so that at the end of the process of learning a language through drama, they might be more open to the experience of learning and more

self-confident. It seems that if the students are more self-confident and more open to the experience of learning they tend to be better language learners.

In the next section – Spotlights on stage - I am going to present the theoretical framework for the three areas I have mentioned. However, I should stress that the guiding principle that will link such areas is the facilitation of positive change towards learning the English language.

### 3. Spotlights on stage: Educational Psychology

The theoretical background chosen in this area is within a movement called Humanism. It is a philosophical movement that emphasizes the personal worth of the individual and the centrality of human values. Humanism rests on the complex philosophical foundations of existentialism, and highlights the creative, spontaneous and active nature of human beings. This approach is seen as very optimistic in the sense that it focuses on the noble human capacity to overcome hardship and despair.

The Person-Centered Approach (PCA), which is the basic theoretical framework for my studies, derived from Humanism, and has its origins especially in the theories of Carl Rogers. Although Rogers was quite experienced as a teacher and as an educator, the constructs underpinning his learning theories were generated as an attempt to extend to the classroom situation the hypotheses formulated in the psychotherapy context. In other words, his concepts were transposed and applied to education. Despite the striking differences between the two contexts, i.e. the person centred approach and psychotherapy, Rogers' propositions could be of great help to educators in dealing with negative affect in the learning of a foreign language.

Rogers (1969) states that the *affective component* in a classroom situation is crucial, as it may improve the quality of relationships among people in a learning situation. It may arouse more motivation and, therefore, contribute to *Significant Learning*.

In defining Significant Learning, Rogers points out four elements of the process:

1. It involves the person as a whole: feelings and intellect;
2. It is self-initiated – it means that even if the stimulus comes from outside, the feeling of achievement comes from within the individual;
3. It is pervasive – it means that it alters attitudes, behaviors, and may even lead to change in the students' personality. In other words, it promotes *change*;
4. It is evaluated by the learner, in other words, he knows if an experience is leading to learning.

Another important construct in this theory - which is, in fact, one of the principles of Significant Learning, is *Potentiality Towards Learning*, which is relevant to this discussion. It states that just as plants have an innate tendency to grow from a seed towards their full potential, the same is true to people. Rogers calls it 'actualizing tendency'. For human beings, however, that means more than just growth and survival; rather, it is the creative fulfillment of personality or satisfaction of physical and psychological needs. In other words, Rogers calls this drive towards life actualizing tendency. This strong drive continues throughout life as we move towards the fulfillment of all that is possible for us to achieve and become within our lifetime.–When this tendency is transposed to education it is seen as *Potentiality Towards Learning*.

We perform certain actions because they have an intrinsic value to us. These are known as self-determined actions. We become more interested in performing a behavior if it is self-determined. For example, a student is more likely to study hard for an English course, and to put his best foot forward in learning English because it has intrinsic value to him, rather than attend it because of his parents' wish or decision. In other words the stimulus may come from the outside but the willingness to learn and the feeling of achievement comes from the inside

When individuals engage in activities that are meaningful to them, they may become what Rogers called *Fully Functioning Persons*. They become self-actualized, which means that they can be more open to experience and more confident towards learning. In that sense, individuals are more likely to trust feelings derived from their experiences and more prone to lead lives full of meaning, challenge and fulfillment. These can be seen as essential ingredients in achieving Significant Learning.

Another construct related to Significant Learning, which is very relevant to the pedagogical proposal I have been developing, [and to this discussion], is resistance towards learning. Learning involves change, but it is not easy to change. It demands another outlook on school life and on personal life. Thus, moving from language 1 to language 2 involves risk-taking, which might at times be threatening to the learner's self- image; therefore resistance to learning is likely to occur. So, when a learning situation becomes somehow threatening to the student, he sometimes tends to avoid it and, in some cases, he may end up by giving up learning the language. Consequently, it is the teacher's role to convey warmth and empathy towards the learner in order to build a relationship of trust. Empathy, Genuineness and Acceptance are the three attitudes a teacher should have so as to promote an environment which is conducive to learning. Although the proposal I am presenting here involves the implementation of such attitudes, their discussion is beyond the scope of this paper.

#### **4. Teaching English as a Foreign Language**

Foreign language teaching specialists such as Arnold (2005), Krashen (1985) Oxford (2005), Andrés (2005) have considered the influence of Humanistic approaches on English language teaching

methodologies, mainly because of the emphasis given to the learner's world: his needs, thoughts, feelings, emotions involved in the learning process. According to Arnold:

*"...These are aspects (thoughts, feelings and emotions) of the learning process that are often unjustly neglected, yet they are vitally important if we want to understand human learning in its totality."* (Arnold: 2005:30-45)

Rogers' ideas and contributions to promoting motivation and improving interpersonal relationship among people in a learning situation can also be considered as especially relevant to the atmosphere which Rogers proposes in the classroom situation, by taking into account students' needs and wants. In that respect, Arnold & Brown (2005:1) point out the impact of Humanistic approaches on English Language Teaching (ELT), and emphasize the importance "of a wide spectrum of affect-related factors which influence language learning".

Andrés (2005) recommends:

*"...it is essential to acknowledge the uniqueness of each student and to protect his or her rights and feelings in order to develop the five key components of self – esteem: a sense of security, a sense of identity, a sense of belonging, a sense of purpose, and a sense of personal competence."* (Andrés, 2005:88)

This holistic perspective in the teaching/learning process, which emphasizes encouragement and positive regard towards the students, might strengthen students' willingness to risk in the foreign language class. Consequently, a more favourable attitude towards both the target language and their own learning process is likely to occur. Moskowitz (1978), in her book *Caring and Sharing in the Foreign Language Classroom*, presents and discusses a range of student-centered interactive activities. The most important element in all of them is the friendly atmosphere of acceptance involving learners who tend to feel free and more at ease to participate in the activities proposed.

Shumin (2002) also considers factors that influence either success or failure in the process of learning a foreign language, especially regarding the development of oral skills. He states that learning a foreign language is a complex task which can easily generate anxiety, frustration and insecurity:

*"...Speaking a foreign language in public, especially in front of native speakers, is often anxiety-provoking. Sometimes, extreme anxiety occurs when English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners become tongue-tied or lost for words in an unexpected situation, which often leads to discouragement and general sense of failure."*(Shumin, 2002:206)

Stevick (1976) in his book *Memory, Meaning and Methods: some psychological perspectives on language learning*, points out the importance of the Humanistic approach to English language teaching, mainly as a response to what he called *alienations*: “They were alienations of learners from materials, from themselves, from the class and from the teacher” (Stevick, 1976:37). In other words, the author considers the feasibility of applying the humanistic approach to ELT field to avoid or minimize the learner’s negative attitude towards the learning process

As regards theories of language and of language teaching, a teacher is likely to draw on concepts that are pertinent to his learners’ communicative needs and that take into account the people involved in communication, as well as their socio-discursive context. Such a theoretical framework seems to be in line with the *Person-Centered Approach*, as the object of language teaching, i.e. the English language, is geared to the L2 user.

Moskowitz (2005) presents key findings of research that she carried out, which gives evidence supporting the use of humanistic activity in second language and teaching and methodology. In her own words:

*“Research has confirmed that these activities have a positive effect on students’ attitudes toward the target language, themselves and their classmates”.* (Moskowitz 2005:191)

In that sense, I believe that there is a convergence of ideas between language teaching-learning approaches, geared to fulfilling learners’ communication needs and wishes, and Rogers’ *Person-Centered Approach*, as the notion of *internalizing* contents and that of openness to experience are also emphasized.

In discussing the building of more favourable environments for the learning of English as a foreign language, Willis (1996) states that the learner needs opportunities for freely expressing ideas and feelings in a non-threatening atmosphere of acceptance.

*“Free use involves a far broader range of language and gives learners richer opportunities for acquiring. They (the students) need chances to say what they think and feel and experiment in a supportive atmosphere with using language they have heard or seen without feeling threatened...They (the students) need chances to test the hypotheses they have formed about the way language works, to try things out, to see if they are understood.”* (Willis, 1996:7)

Such an atmosphere, which is more conducive to learning, may be promoted by a teacher-facilitator so that the learner may progress without the pressure of judgment or evaluation- a crucial condition for learning- especially when building and developing oral skills in the foreign language. This issue is extensively discussed by Krashen (1985) in what he calls Natural Approach: a model based on a set of hypotheses among which the concept of *affective filter*, resulting in a proposal for classroom practice.

According to Krashen (1985), “mental blockage” against learning occurs as a result of negative feelings that function as a *filter*, which impedes learning: the lower the filter, the greater the chances that the learner will comprehend *input*. Therefore, a favourable atmosphere should be promoted in the classroom so that the affective filter can be lowered and learners can become less defensive towards learning the foreign language.

Appel (1995) also supports those concepts in his book *Diary of a Language Teacher*, by highlighting the importance of the teacher’s facilitating attitudes, as discussed by Rogers:

*“One basic assumption of humanistic education is that learning is facilitated not so much through teaching skills but rather through certain attitudinal qualities that exist in the personal relationship between the teacher and the students (Rogers,1990)...and they make a difference to learning...the most frequently mentioned of these attitudes are: empathic understanding, valuing realness...” (Appel, 1995:45 apud Willis, 1996)*

A range of methodological approaches was developed so that anxiety and tension could be lowered in the class, namely: Suggestopaedia, The Silent Way, Total Physical Response, Self Directed Learning, Communicative, among others. In all of them, the students’ backgrounds, priorities, abilities are taken into consideration. Therefore, our teaching curricula should include activities that might encourage learners to apply individual ways of approaching learning tasks.

Oxford (2005) in *Anxiety in Language Learning* discusses language and its implications for the classroom situation. She states that whenever anxiety is low, the learner is more open to the experience of learning. The author mentions studies and research on this topic, suggesting that anxiety can be harmful or helpful and she correlates aspects of anxiety, such as: self-esteem; tolerance of ambiguity; risk-taking; competitiveness; social and test anxiety, among others, to language learning. They are closely linked to the affective component previously mentioned. When discussing classroom implications of those studies, the author offers suggestions for diminishing language anxiety. The premises of the pedagogical proposal based on the Living Drama project are clearly in conformity with those suggestions.

## 5. Drama and Education

Drama, as a form of art, values and emphasizes experience. It is experience that might promote self- discovery, and reflection on people's intellectual, physical and emotional capacities and limitations. Constantin Stanislavski (1994), the founder of the Moscow Art Company, points out that the actor's experience is crucial in building up the character and so, what he sought was to prepare actors to dramatize external aspects of life and their inner repercussions with convincing psychological truthfulness. For him,

*“Each person evolves an external characterization out of himself, from others, takes it from real or ‘imaginary’ life, according to his intuition, his observation of himself and others. He draws it from his own experience of life or that of his friends, from pictures, engravings, drawings, books, stories, novels, or from some simple incident- it makes no difference. The only proviso is that while he is making this external research he must not lose his inner self.”* (Stanislavski, 1994:9)

The truthfulness of drama is based on the constant search of the actor's inner aspects which emerge from the lived experience. This way, the emphasis is given to the inner preparation of the role based on creative internal state. For Stanislavski (1989), it is very dangerous to perform a role when the actor is far from the real experience, far from his real self. In his own words:

*“Most actors before each performance put on costumes and make-up so that their external appearance will approximate that of the character they are to play. But they forget the most important part, which is the inner preparation. Why do they devote such particular attention to their external appearance?”* Stanislavski, 1989:265)

Viola Spolin, an American drama teacher and author, developed theater games that focus on creativity, adapting and focusing to unlock the individual's capacity for creative self-expression. Spolin wrote texts on improvisation, of which the most famous was *Improvisation for the Theater* (1963). The author's premises underlying the creation of her *Theatre Game File* are closely related to ideas on learning that have been discussed so far. She mentions that experiencing is getting into the environment in a way that involves the person at all levels: intellectual, physical and intuitive. In the author's view, the most vital and most valuable one to the learning situation is the intuitive element because it leads to spontaneity, so humans are free to learn and to act when they are 'close' to

themselves. In her own words: ‘Through spontaneity we are re-formed into ourselves...it is the moment of personal freedom when we are faced with a reality and see it, explore it and act accordingly (Spolin: 1963:4)

Koudela (1990) points out that the difference between ‘drama’ and ‘theatre games’ is in the spontaneity that must be preserved in drama activities. For the author, a student who knows a classic text by heart, for the sake of a beautiful production, without any work on educational values, will not be driven towards a spontaneous action. (Koudela: 1990:25)

Among various ELT scholars supporting the use of Drama in English language teaching is Charlyn Wessels, who reviews the importance of *genuine communication* in the teaching-learning process. For him, “Drama is doing. Drama is being. Drama is such a normal thing. It is something we engage in daily when facing different situations” (Wessels: 1987:7). The author adds that through drama activities, emotions and interpersonal relationships can be transformed: “our emotions are involved. Depending on the subject, a conversation could evoke the whole spectrum of feelings from violent anger to tenderest love in speakers.” (op.cit, p.11).

Other contributions to the use of drama in foreign language teaching- learning were made by ELT authors Maley & Duff (1998), who designed and proposed drama activities for English language classes. They point out that drama techniques can be highly motivating and enable teachers to keep students engaged most of the time, interested in doing something together, taking risk in the language and trying new ways of combining words. The authors also emphasize the relevance of affect in the learning process and believe that drama activities can bring to the classroom situation the combination of different feelings conveyed through intonation patterns appropriate to that feeling. In their words:

*“Moreover, what we say will be coloured not only by our feelings but by the mood and disposition of others. Drama techniques have the singular merit of directly engaging students’ feelings and, as a result, often making them aware of the need to be able to express them appropriately.”* (Maley & Duff, 1998: 11)

As can be seen, interpersonal relationships are prioritized in drama games, mainly when we notice that group members support and encourage each others’ action and participation in the experience. In that sense, Telles (1991:17) views that as free participation which “implies absence of harmful competition and judgmental attitudes, as well as respect for each group member’s capacity for participation”.

The group’s participation and action are carried out through communication, which is the aim English language learners seek to attain, and that is also the aim of theatre activities. Therefore,

communicative competence is sought by both areas: drama and language teaching, and because of such a shared aim, the teacher's role can be seen as similar to that of the director of a drama workshop:

*“The role of a teacher-director of a drama workshop resembles the one in the Counseling-Learning Approach... the teacher is a catalyser, consultant, advisor, a model for learning”.* (Telles, 1991:60).

Telles (1991), discussing on the role of drama as a facilitator for verbal communication in the classroom, highlights psychological factors that can be useful in optimizing communication in the foreign language: self-esteem, motivation, empathy, spontaneity and sensitiveness to rejection. Such factors, as previously mentioned, are thoroughly discussed by Rogers (1969) while stressing the importance of affect in relationships. It becomes clear, then, how English Language Teaching, Educational Psychology and Drama are closely related. Thus, it may be safe to say that the theatre/drama activities proposed in the Living Drama project can be seen as a contribution to the teaching-learning of a foreign language.

For the reasons mentioned above, the activities developed in each class are adaptations of drama techniques traditionally used to foster actors' performance improvement. According to Guida (1996), such “techniques are designed to free the body, develop imagination and emotional expression, as well as strengthen the ability to improvise with language” in *Creating Theater in the ESL Classroom*. Material for drama-based lessons can be drawn from newspapers, magazines, songs, poems, e-mails, or any stories of human interest. These activities usually create an emotional involvement because students put themselves in the place of, and have to think like, characters who must deal with issues which affect us all such as: love and hate, betrayal, death, birth, happiness and madness. These are examples of some of the issues of drama.

## **6. Building up the scene: How does the pedagogical proposal work?**

In my specific situation as a teacher and teacher educator, drama promotes, and at the same time, becomes a context through which students can not only improve their English Language but also feel comfortable and engage in exploring their interaction skills in the foreign language. It may become a facilitating element in a classroom situation and it is through theatrical activities that students have the opportunity of “exploring ways in which human beings think feel and communicate” (Burton, 1999:8). It somehow tends to promote better understanding of ourselves as well as of other people. Also, drama in the classroom may develop creativity, responsibility and good relationships among classmates. In other words, students learn and develop language skills and knowledge, as well

as become more competent in building up good interpersonal relationships in the classroom, which enables them to reflect on various social roles in a genuine integration of reasoning and feelings.

The English language learning situation I will describe is the subject called *Drama Workshop* which is one of a group of compulsory subjects implemented in the 2006 university curricula at the Catholic University of São Paulo-Brazil. The curriculum may differ from that of many other traditional language and literature undergraduate programmes and students taking this subject are freshmen who intend to become either teachers or translators.

Our 150- minute sessions, as previously mentioned, take place once a week for one term (18 weeks), usually with around 20 students in each of the 2 groups I teach. In all, the process includes the following 5 stages:

### **I. Sensitisation**

This consists of a corporal and /or vocal warm-up exercise, including awareness-raising activities, concentration and group interaction. I consider them as *starters* for what I call *group strengthening*. In the classroom, students voice their own feelings, moods, fears, expectations, and such activities help prepare learners to work together in harmony. Examples of these activities are: the human machine, the ball game, the mirror, the magical circle, among others. These 15- minute *starters* are introduced in almost every meeting and are generally adaptations of various drama activities used in drama workshops, which are specially designed for the development of actors.

### **II. Improvisation**

This is an exercise generated from thought-provoking texts which can be a narrative, a poem, a film, a song or a story told by the students themselves. In fact, the texts are meant to be discussion triggers, so in all of them, the vital element is *conflict*. We generally have four or five improvisation exercises each semester. I adapted the drama structure as proposed by Spolin (1963) and created the [www.livingdrama](http://www.livingdrama) which means: The first W, *Where*, means the place or the places where the story takes place. The second W, *What*, stands for conflict, the plot, and the third W, *Who*, stands for the characters involved in the play. In all improvisations and dramatizations, this structure is maintained along with the focus- the energy- to solve the conflict. I offer them hints for improvisation and dramatization:

1. Believe it / 2. Set the scene / 3. Stick to your point / 4. Be determined / 5. Trust / 6. Keep the focus / 7. Listen attentively / 8. Visualize the scene / 9. Act accordingly – perform / 10. Be yourself all the time / 11. Be connected / 12. Enjoy yourself.

### III. Choice and Preparation

At this point, students decide which improvisation situation they will choose from the various previous situations they have been through. They create and write the story, its characters, and the sketch, and make all the necessary staging decisions to dramatize it. The structure of all sketches must have some elements which are listed on a worksheet named *The structure of your sketch* (see appendix 1). The elements of the sketch to be developed are *Title, Super Objective, Characters, Cast, Story, Scenes* and *Lines*. A fair amount of work is done at home and we exchange e-mails very frequently. I correct their written production and a good deal of language teaching takes place during this phase. Rehearsals, which also take place during preparation, lend themselves to work on spoken English by having students concentrate on pronunciation, rhythm and intonation. I encourage peer cooperation, which seems to work.

To support students' drama and language practice, I usually use the *Who are you?* Activity, in which the students talk to me about themselves in the role of the character they have been building. Then, they move onto the next stage.

### IV. Dramatisation or Performance

This task sets out to make the students' work go "public". I schedule two performances every semester, the first of which is considered an *open rehearsal* and is attended by classmates, drama monitors, and teachers who are enthusiastic about their work. For the second stage, students and faculty, as well as the students' families and friends, are invited and the performance takes place at one of the Catholic University theatres. It is generally videotaped by the Catholic University TV Studio and by myself. The week after the performance, we meet and discuss the experience and the process as a whole. It is generally our last meeting.

### 7. Assessing the Drama Workshops

The objectives of Living Drama are presented and discussed with the students. I make sure that the students understand they can get to know one another and interact with colleagues as a team; that they realize the importance of individual work for the whole task; that they become aware of their emotional, physical and linguistic strengths and weaknesses; that they are having the chance to experience another way of communicating. In short, they are offered a range of opportunities to use and experience language in a lively, creative and meaningful way through dramatization.

As I generally have two, and sometimes, three groups with 25 students each, I have been able to notice that the groups and the individuals tend to grow in all senses: the quality of relationships among students tends to change as they become more supportive and cooperative.

Students change gradually though within a short time as a positive change in attitude towards learning English can be noticed from one week to another. The writing of sketches is done in groups and I follow up their work, suggesting how they might develop each scene, how they can build a character and how to take hold of the character. To guide them on how to organize the construction of the final sketch, I give them the ‘*The structure of your sketch*’ sheet, which I have already mentioned. They fill in the parts according to their choices. Group work is very important at this stage. They make use of several Internet resources (the Net, yahoo groups, msn and email) during the week to interact with one another to construct scenes and the sketch as a whole.

On the day of the final performance, the students are totally involved in and by the experience. They rehearse almost every day, including weekends and I take part in as many rehearsals as possible. The general feeling in the class is similar to that of a little acting company. In this respect, I would agree with Guida (1996) when she says:

*“I am always moved by the students’ generosity toward each other. If a costume, prop, or set piece is important to one scene, but the actors cannot supply it, another student will invariably offer help. It becomes a group effort, and everyone works for the success of the presentation as a whole”.* (Guida, 1996)

As we read students’ reports at the end of semester right after their final presentation, we immediately go back to the thought of **change** which is the central element that links the three areas of study presented at the beginning of this paper. We are able to identify transformations in students’ attitudes towards their learning process.

Some of their reports illustrate this point. Natália, for instance, mentions that at the end of the process, she was able to understand how the experience has transformed her feelings. “At first I was tortured by the idea of being on stage... but now I feel the really meaning of the experience... I learned English and we became a ‘real’ group”. Another student, Camila, points out that fear has been transformed into an experience of having overcome difficulties: “We were having the same fears, the same ‘nightmares’, the same adrenaline... and suddenly every thing changed. We were beyond our limits.”

The activities seem to have had some impact on the students’ learning process and Otávio mentions the importance of having written, directed and acted in a sketch that was based on their own

experiences: “Our sketch was based on our personal experiences...We had to write, act, and direct... everything in English. There was a huge improvement in pronunciation and grammar.” Another student, Cristiane gives us an idea of how students behave when they are involved with their own improvement: “I worked hard... on the way to school, on trains, at home, everywhere. It is something I will carry for my whole life.” Victoria mentions how important it was to feel that the English language became part of their lives: “We brought English to our lives...we learned how to work in groups and worried about our colleagues. We developed self confidence, creativity, and imagination, among other things.” Students also mention the relevance of the good relationships in the classroom situation, and Rafael gives an example of this idea: “I learned it is possible to do a big work in groups and how to support each other. I can say it changed my life.”

On the other hand, we should consider the enormous effort on the students’ part to overcome their resistance to learning, and consequently, move to positive change: greater integration with classmates, greater engagement in the activities and a feeling of ownership towards the English language.

When talking about their expectations about the course at the beginning of the semester, some of the students mention how difficult they think it will be to be engaged in theatre activities. One of them said:

*“This subject is not only challenging, but also threatening...I will have to expose myself to the classroom and I am shy and afraid to do so. But at the same time, I believe it will be an opportunity to overcome my resistance, my fears, my insecurity and anxiety”.*

And the majority of the students, who have never experienced these techniques before, seem to learn how to work together and experience a sense of achievement for having been able to create their own parts in a meaningful way. In the student’s own words, at the end of the term: “...For me this experience was of self-discovery... I mean in the sense of letting my own essence come out.”

Thus, drama, as a central element in this proposal, has proved to be one of the main facilitating resources in the classroom. It is through theatrical activities such as drama activities that students may have the opportunity to develop creativity, responsibility and quality interaction among people in the classroom. Thus, students may learn and develop not only the language content but also - and most importantly- become more competent in building interpersonal relationships. Therefore, the very nature of *Living Drama* described here is to provide students with an opportunity to reflect on situations that might promote self-disclosure and confidence to learners as foreign language users.

The limits and possibilities in dealing with the *alter-ego* in English become increasingly clearer as the course develops, and continuous re-elaboration of the process of mutual recognition and students' life stories are thus ensured. The exercise of attentively listening to the other person, "to stand in someone else's shoes", as it were, affords a real accomplishment, not only better understanding of one's colleagues, but also self-awareness and engagement in learning. And these outcomes are intrinsically linked to the three areas of study I have discussed previously.

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**APPENDIX 1:**  
**The Structure of your sketch**

**CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF SÃO PAULO**  
**FACULDADE DE FILOSOFIA, COMUNICAÇÃO, LETRAS E ARTES**

**LETRAS: INGLÊS**

**OFICINA DE JOGOS**

**PARTS OF YOUR SKETCH:**

**TITLE:**

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**SUPER OBJECTIVE:**

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**CHARACTERS:**

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**CAST:**

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