



# 01 Learning English Through Drama

## Introduction

English language has become one of the most popular foreign languages in the world. Yet to some, the phrase “learning English” has always been a concern particularly within the Chinese community. Indeed, the process of learning English can be long and tedious and many a time, such learning process falls short of fulfilling its goals. Even after years of learning English, the learners do not gain the confidence of using the language in and outside the classroom. Their output in the language is limited to producing run-of-the-mill answers and isolated sentences. Since real communication involves the association of ideas, emotions, appropriateness, fluency, accuracy and adaptability, conventional ways of teaching English have culminated to frustration in foreign language acquisition so that English teaching is encouraged to be carried out in an unmonitored social environment.

## The Situation of Macao

Due to the increase in the influx of foreign investments, English language is seen to be imperative in today’s Macao. Parents nowadays are not just concerned with what English courses their children can take during their spare time but also with how much they can get out of their English tutorials. Although English centers are seen everywhere, whether these can provide effective courses to enrich a child’s language-learning skill is another matter. Worse still, as Macao’s economy booms with increased employment opportunities coupled with the mounting inflation in real estate, children are recompensed with material rewards in place of the invested time for guidance and support from both parents. I often hear parents offering monetary reward to children if they get high grades in English. Not only does this instill in children a distorted value for knowledge, but also affects their perception on parental affirmation with good performance.

Here in Macao, although one may find that English teaching can take in many forms, the most effective way of learning English, however, is perhaps through drama. As Wilga Rivers (Speaking in many tongues: essays in foreign-language teaching, Cambridge University Press. 1983) states, “the drama approach enables learners to use what they are learning with pragmatic intent, something that is most difficult to learn through explanation.” This is because drama gives a touch of reality where characters within a play are brought to life. Indeed, drama provides cultural and language enrichment as it can reveal insights into the target culture and present language contexts that make items memorable by placing them in a realistic social and physical context.

## Benefits of Drama

The values and uses of drama are enormous. I see drama as meeting the diverse needs of young children in Macao, particularly when they are the only child in the family. This is because in drama, children are introduced with intelligent responses that not only help keep their own sense of being and uniqueness but also of others. I also see drama as helping children overcome their resistance to learning a new language. This is because by allowing reading and the adding of some characterization to a drama text, children become personally and fully involved in the learning process, in a context in which it is possible for them to feel less self-conscious and more empowered to express themselves through the multiple voices of the differing characters.

The effectiveness of learning English through dramatic activities owes much to the fact that learning becomes an enjoyable experience as children’s own experience of life is linked to the language-learning skills thus acquired. In addition, because children are required to use their language resources when placed within the realm of different scenarios in drama, their capacities to accept new challenges and to explore their farthest limits are enhanced. This opportunity in language operation equips children with skills necessary for facing their immediate world better as competent language users.

## Conclusion

Whilst it is the belief that English language acquisition should not be overlooked, it is also the belief that to confiscate the psychological barrier and to effectively acquire the English language skills, the teaching of this language should be carried out to children at a young age and should be delivered in an expressive way so that children will find it interesting. As President of English for Specific Purposes Development and Promotion Association of Macao, I am excited to see the response of mainstream schools embrace drama as a tool for foreign language acquisition in their curriculum. After all, lifelong success is shaped by how equipped children are in facing the real world.

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