

# Lights Up! Action! English!

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At the English Language Institute, international students in the elective drama class have presented a showcase of their talent in public performances that have been developed from classroom role-plays. This has been highly motivating for students, both those in the class and those who are in the audience.

To turn classroom role-plays into creative performances the public can enjoy, I do the following:

## Preparation Stage

- Divide the class into small groups of 4-5. If the class size is large, you can make do with groups of 6 to 7.
- Make up slips of paper for each of the following categories and put them in paper bags: *situation, place, time, and weather*. I have each group select one card from each category. For example, the *Situation Cards* might say: *late for a train at the station or in a foreign country where you don't speak the language*. Examples of *Place*: beach, airplane, and train station. *Time*: afternoon, sunrise, moonlight. *Weather*: windy, rainy, etc. (Maley & Duff, 1982).
- Give groups the instructions to write a dialog (script) together using the information on the selected slips. I allow students plenty of time to write - we usually take 2-3 classes to complete them. They can also create their own theme for the scene: *funny, serious, didactic, etc.* Theme selection helps increase the group's creativity.
- Next, distribute a simple handout to each group that contains a sample dialog and basic stage movements, such as DSL or USR. (See Appendix A). Bernal (2007) testifies that this activity encourages students to learn new gestures, such as "shrug, nod, and bow." They also learn to use imperative language, such as "Move downstage right" or "Try following her."

## Rehearsal Stage

- Once the script is written, give students time to rehearse -usually two to three class periods. I listen in and observe each group, making suggestions for better fluency or stage movements. As I see it, my job is to help *guide* the scenes into becoming more realistic. I try to praise often, criticize little. By writing and acting out the scene together, the students imitate communicative situations in a real-world context.
- Next, edit a copy of each group's script and return it in the next class. Students do a few run-throughs of their scenes implementing the changes. They have ample time to practice, but I make a deadline when lines must be "memorized" because it is important to keep students on task. They love this and are happy to get rid of the script, even if the scene is not perfect yet.

## Performance

- When the scenes are in good shape, I hold "performances" in class, much like dress rehearsals. I hand out a peer-review form (see Appendix B) on which the class votes anonymously for the best scenes. The top two or three scenes are chosen for public performance. Students often refuse to perform, but they still feel honored to be chosen.
- After two or three scenes are selected, we announce the place and time for the public performance. (Obviously, there will be no ticket sales to worry about.) You can invite students, friends, and teachers to attend. At the ELI, this venue is our end-of-term party.
- In the public performance, non-acting students can perform other tasks: props, art design, lights, sound, computer graphics, or serve as extras in a crowd scene. It is

important give each student a task. I also appoint a student director to help prompt for lines, watch scenes, and take notes.

- On the night of performances, I meet with students for warm-up activities and a run-through of each scene before the audience arrives. Group unity and confidence are important before they go on. Then ... lights up! Action! English!

## References

- Bernal, P. (2007). Acting out: Using drama with English learners. *English Journal*, 96 (3), 26-28.
- Maley, A. & Duff, A. (1982). *Drama techniques in language learning: A resource book of communication activities for language teachers*. Cambridge University Press.

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## Appendix A: Scenes for Script Writing

Actors: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Scene:

Character roles:

Place:

Time:

Weather:

U= Up

S= Stage

R or L= Right or Left

\*The directions for movement are given from the actor's point of view, looking out at the audience.

### STAGE DIRECTIONS

USR	USC	USL
SR	CENTER STAGE	SL
DSR	DSC	DSL

Use character names and stage directions (in parentheses) while writing your script.

## Appendix B: Peer Review Form

For each scene, rate the categories 1-5 (1= lowest; 5= highest)

### 1. SCENE: COMPANY FIRING

Acting	1	2	3	4	5
Script writing	1	2	3	4	5
Believability	1	2	3	4	5
Props	1	2	3	4	5
Theme	1	2	3	4	5

### 2. SCENE: FOREIGN COUNTRY

Acting	1	2	3	4	5
Script writing	1	2	3	4	5
Believability	1	2	3	4	5
Props	1	2	3	4	5
Theme	1	2	3	4	5

### 3. SCENE: BANK ROBBERY

Acting	1	2	3	4	5
Script writing	1	2	3	4	5
Believability	1	2	3	4	5
Props	1	2	3	4	5
Theme	1	2	3	4	5

4. Based on your scores, write the number of the scenes you would like to see performed at the End of Term party.

Vote for two: \_\_\_\_\_