

Notes to David Fisher's presentation at ELT Ireland

First of all, many thanks to the organisers for giving me this opportunity. In the event I misjudged the time a bit and did not cover some of the material as calmly as I had wanted to, or some of it even at all. I hope to put this right with these basic notes. I will also post a short video recap of the presentation at www.patreon.com/thebeartheatre (the free section).

For the last 24 years I have operated an educational theatre that focuses on teaching English to foreign students. Thus my focus as a teacher-trainer is the overlap between the world of stage performance and the world of classroom teaching.

Activity 1

The audience got to choose my virtual background. There were three options and people wrote a number into the chat to vote for the background they preferred.

Activity 2

Another activity involved writing numbers into the chat. I wrote 1 and invited anybody to write 2 and then anybody else to write 3, etc. If more than two of same number appeared, we went back to 1 and started again.

Activity 3 Imaginary presents – an improvisation game.

5 people were spotlighted for this activity. I started by passing an imaginary (mimed) present into my camera. I said ,Hello, _____. I have a present for you. The first volunteer (sorry, I can't remember who it was) reached into their camera, pretended to take the present to themselves and explained what the present was ,Oh thank you! It is e.g. A scarf.' I continued by explaining why I had given her a scarf. She then ,handed' a present across to another spotlighted participant. The improvisation is important. The person receiving the present says (makes up) what it is, while the person giving the present says why they gave that present.

A Discussion – How are actors or comics similar/ different to teachers?

I also asked people to guess what are the three main areas that I would highlight as being areas where teachers could usefully take lessons from the world of theatre?

Participants discussed in breakout rooms for 5 minutes, then returned to the main session and wrote some thoughts into the chat box.

The three areas I pointed out were

Presentation Skills – In person to person teaching I use activities that help people to speak slowly and clearly. In online teaching I like people to think about how close they sit to the screen, do the students get to see your hands, do you have a good enough microphone to be able to sit back, or are you happier being close. There are no right answers, but it is worth thinking about.

Having Fun – Teaching and learning should be fun. I would go further and say that having fun at some level is essential to good teaching. Theatre and drama games can be a very effective way to have fun and to do it in easy-to-control doses.

A wider thought here is that the teacher is responsible for the energy and atmosphere in the room (or in the zoom session).

The Dramaturgy of a Lesson – I talked a bit more about this and would like it to be the main take-away. I often insert short games into my sessions as a way of preparing people for the next activity. The counting in the chat game was a good game to get people focussed, working together and writing into the chat box. This was a good way to prepare for the coming discussion where people would talk together then write their ideas into the chat.

I wanted this whole session to be a positive session as a way to start the conference well. The presents game played into that.

Generally, just as a theatre show has a flow – sometimes quieter, sometimes high energy – that if managed well leaves people absored and not looking at the time, so a lesson can have that same engaging flow of energy.

Using OBS

There was no time to introduce OBS properly, just enough time to mention how useful it can be. My session was run through OBS, meaning that the backgrounds could change easily, pictures and videos could be inserted into the screen I was talking from without the need to share screen (which can be clunky). It is a good tool for teachers to become familiar with.

Hotseating – Teacher in Role

This technique works well in online teaching, even without the fancy extras I added in my session. Students are told that they are going to meet a guest. They have a little time then to brainstorm their knowledge, expectations and questions. In this case I played Sherlock Holmes and answered questions as if I was Holmes. It is a great way to find a new voice in the classroom. Students can also prepare to ,be' chracters that they know well.

I am sorry that I got the timing wrong in my session and answered the questions as Sherlock very quickly. Normally it would have been better to slow down and invite people to ask the questions themselves through the microphones.

In terms of our work at The Bear Educational Theatre we will be showcasing our online shows and workshops with a lot of free sessions in the period March 10-19.

Also there is a growing amount of material (some free) at [Patreon.com/thebeartheatre](https://patreon.com/thebeartheatre) This includes videos, articles and more tips for using drama in online teaching.

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