

Extension Activities in the Literature Classroom*

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Introduction

A number of activities can be carried out in the literature classroom. These activities either require students to work on the literary texts or use the literary texts as the basis of classroom activities. For the purpose of this paper, the writer calls the latter activities, extension activities.

These activities are described as extension activities as they require the learner to go beyond the text. Extension activities require the learner to have a sound understanding of the text, and be able to apply his knowledge of the world outside the classroom and his own experiences into the activities. The literary text thus becomes a springboard for classroom activities. As such, in extension activities literary texts can be used as a means of developing the creativity and imagination of the learner.

Extension activities can be carried out at a number of levels; depending on the maturity and English language proficiency level of the learners. These activities can be carried out either as group or individual work. The role of the teacher in these activities will often depend on the learners and their language abilities. These activities often take the form of role play activities, simulations and problem solving activities.

A process model presented by John Byrne (1984) for classroom interaction serves as an excellent basis for this discussion on extension activities in the literature classroom. The model presented by Byrne (shown below):

TEACHER-CONTROLLED			
A	WHOLE CLASS		F
C	A. Exercises Language games 'Personal Questions'	C. Informal Talk Discussion Stories/Jokes Explanation/ Evaluation of activities	L
C			U
U	B. Simulated conversation Questionnaires/ Surveys	D. Problem-solving Interpretation Roleplay/ Simulation Games Projects/ Surveys	E
R			N
A			C
C			Y
Y			
PAIRWORK		GROUPWORK	
LEARNER-DIRECTED			

(Source: Byrne (1984) *Five Approaches to the Classroom*)

reiterates the writer's belief that much can be gained from conducting extension activities in the classroom. The activities that appear in category D in Byrne's interactional model can be considered extension activities. Since these activities are usually carried out in the later stages of language learning, they are appropriate for the literature classroom.

The model also indicates that these activities are more fluency oriented with greater learner participation. There will be minimal teacher control or participation. The teacher would often act as manager, advisor or consultant during extension activities. These activities thus give much opportunity for learners to generate language in the activities and also for learner interaction in the literature classroom.

Below are some extension activities that have been conducted by the writer in his literature classes for Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (UPM) TESL matriculation students:

(a) Letters to the Author

Students wrote letters to the author of the text they had been studying, informing him of their responses to his work, the treatment of certain theme(s), asking him any questions his work may have raised, etc.

(b) Creating a New Viewpoint

Students created a new character into the literary text and presented a viewpoint from this character with regards to an event or another character. For example, the character of Jabez Stone's mother-in-

law was introduced in S.V. Benet's short story, "The Devil and Daniel Webster." Students expressed the mother-in-law's opinions on her son-in-law's sudden wealth.

(c) Writing an Epitaph

An appropriate activity should a major character or protagonist die. This activity was carried out for Paul, the protagonist who committed suicide in Willa Gather's short story, "Paul's Case."

(d) Creating an Imaginary Scene

Students wrote a scene for a play. This could be for a subplot or anything that students wish to elaborate on. This was done for Terrence Rattigan's play, "Adventure Story." The scene where Alexander meets Roxana before their marriage was given as an assignment. Students were asked to imagine that both characters could speak a language that both understood and could therefore carry out a conversation.

(e) Interviews

Students assumed the roles of journalists and characters in the play. Interviews were conducted in relation to certain events in the literary text. For example, students played the role of imaginary European journalists who arrived at the scene of Okonkwo's suicide (Achebe's "Things Fall Apart") and interviewed his friends and members of his family.

(f) Psychiatric Clinic

Students assumed roles of different characters in a literary text. One student played the role of the psychiatrist. Group therapy was then carried out. This simulation proved interesting for D.H. Lawrence's novel, "Sons and Lovers."

(g) An Alternative Rescue Plan

Students assumed the roles of characters in the literary text and attempted an alternate plan which could result in some or all the characters being saved. This activity was carried out while reading Stephen King's short story, "The Raft."

(h) Mock Trial

This activity was carried out for George Orwell's "Animal Farm." The use of mock trials is discussed in detail in this paper.

A Study on the use of Mock Trials as an Extension Activity

Background to the Study

The novel, "Animal Farm" by George Orwell was taught to a group of 53 third semester TESL matriculation students at Universiti Pertanian Malaysia. They were given lectures and tutorial work as usual. Students also carried out activities which required them to work on the text. Besides these, the writer incorporated an extension activity - a mock trial. As there were two tutorial groups, each group was given a different case (see Appendix) to work on. Both cases were related to the novel of study. The students were given a choice of roles that they could play for the activities. Students who did not have any specific roles were required to assist in the preparation of the case by doing library research and any other work related to the case.

The students were given a week to prepare their cases. The trial was to be a three hour activity. The students were told that both the prosecution and the defence would be given an hour each to present their respective cases. The third hour would be used for the lawyers to do the summing up and allocate time for the jury to arrive at its decision.

Writer's Observations and Study Activity

Preparation Stage

From the start, the students showed much enthusiasm for the activity. They were immediately interested in finding out more about courtroom procedures and the functions of the various court officials. The students were all involved in library research and they also approached senior students and members of staff for information and advice.

During their preparation, students held a number discussion sessions to prepare their strategies and worked out their cases. The lawyers then prepared questions for their own team's witnesses and also worked out the cross-examining strategy for the opposing team's witnesses. The lawyers then worked out their summing up speeches.

Although Orwell used animals in his satire, the students imposed their own sense of reality and presented the characters in the novel in near human form. There were some situations in the novels which allowed the students to treat the characters as human while other situations did not. The students made the necessary adjustments as they saw fit.

Presentation Stage

The classroom was reorganised to resemble a courtroom. The students attempted to initiate courtroom procedure as closely as possible. Although there were some slip-ups, the students' enthusiasm carried the activity through.

Though the lawyers and their witnesses had attempted to provide foolproof cases, there were contradictions at times and even bouts of silences at the witness stand. This, however, did not mar the mock trial. Students continued to improvise and eventually managed to complete the trial.

Throughout the trial, the students showed a keen sense for justice and fairness, with regard to the characters on trial and also for the roles they played. This was seen through the students' diligent vigilance on the close following of the text as the basis of the trial and also in their responses to the judges' decision to either over-rule or sustain any of the lawyers' objections.

The jurors were attentive throughout the trial and many were seen taking notes. When the verdict was given to the judge, the students accepted it in good grace.

The trial lent itself to the formation of two teams and throughout the trial, there was rivalry but it was kept within the bounds of healthy competition. Once the verdict was announced, these rivalries were soon forgotten and there was much laughter and an easing of tension.

Post-Presentation Stage

A post-mortem was held with the students and they were given the opportunity to express their opinions and feelings towards the mock trial.

Feedback from Students' Responses to the Mock Trial

The feedback from the students during the post-mortem indicated that the students generally enjoyed participating in the extension activity. They found it to be both an enjoyable and a valuable learning experience. The writer has categorised the students' feedback according to the preparation stage, presentation stage and the students' overall impression regarding the extension activity.

Preparation Stage

The majority of the students stated that the activity provided them the opportunity to do an in-depth study of the novel -with particular reference to character study. Some students indicated that if not for the activity, they would not have carried this out. The students indicated that they had to reread the novel a number of times as they wanted to cite incidents and give quotations from the novel to support their case.

Some students said that it gave them a chance to do group work and had encouraged cooperation. However, at times it had also brought some friction when certain students did not do their share of the work. Generally students seem to have enjoyed working together. The students indicated that they felt responsible towards their assigned roles and did their best to help their teams.

Students also added that the mock trial actually provided them the opportunity to find out about courtroom procedure. They again indicated that had it not been for the mock trial, they would not have bothered about it.

Presentation Stage

Most students complained of initial nervousness. They claimed that because of this, they could not express themselves effectively. However, many said that they soon became more relaxed and rather involved in their roles.

Students claimed that they were generally excited to be part of the mock trial and actually assumed roles as characters from the novel. The students also said that they liked the idea of having a mock trial because they were given the opportunity to get involved in the plot of the novel. They were actually given a chance to impose their views on the characters in the novels.

The students who played the role of lawyers complained about some of the judges' decisions and also questioned the opposing lawyers' line of questioning.

Overall Impressions

Most students claimed that, through the extension activity, they were able to gain more insight into the characters in the novel. They also stated that they liked the idea of having specially created the character "Snowball's Grandson" (see Appendix) in the trial. They claimed that since this character does not exist in the novel, it gave them the opportunity to put their ideas into the trial.

Some students said that the activity had actually made them aware of how an individual is actually responsible for his freedom. The students said that when they started building their case against Napoleon, they discovered that the animals were responsible for allowing Napoleon to take advantage of them (the animals).

Most students were of the view that the mock trial had been beneficial in their study of the novel and even indicated that more activities of this kind should be carried out.

Conclusion

The above study indicated that extension activities can be useful in the literature classroom as they encourage: rereading of literary texts, in-depth study of literary texts, learner interaction, critical thinking and the use of imagination and creativity. Extension activities can also indicate whether the students understand the text. In addition, they provide impetus for students to generate language and are also a means of bringing the outside world into the literature classroom. Finally, extension activities not only help students improve their fluency and accuracy skills, they also help students develop their personalities through individual and group work.

References

Byrne, Doun. (1984) Five Approaches to the Classroom. In Holden, Susan (Ed.) *Teaching and the Teacher* (The British Council 1984 Bologna Conference). Hongkong: Modern English Publications.

Appendix

MOCK TRIAL

Assignment: Choose the players for the following roles. Discuss the case among yourselves and present the trial.

Trial One

There has been a coup d'etat in Manor Farm. Napoleon has been overthrown. There is a new leader and he wants to prosecute Napoleon for his 'crimes'.

Napoleon's Team

Defence's Lawyers (2)
Napoleon
Squealer
A dog
A sheep

New Leader's Team

Prosecution's Lawyers (2)
Clover
A hen
Snowball's grandson
Benjamin

Judge, Court Official, 13 jurors

Trial Two

Snowball has been captured and he is brought back for trial.

Prosecution
Lawyers (2)
Napoleon
Squealer
A sheep
A dog
Boxer

Defence
Lawyers (2)
Snowball
A hen
Benjamin
Clover
A pig

Judge, Court Officer, 13 jurors

Members of the class who have not been given any specific roles may join any team of their choice.

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