

Book Reviews

Sarah Phillips, 1999, **Drama with Children**, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 152 pages (paperback) Series: Resource Books for Teachers.

Reviewed by Rimli Bhattacharya
& Rita Ronita Sen

Drama with Children (hereafter *DwC*) is meant for use at primary and pre-primary levels. The appeal is chiefly to primary teachers, whose needs are largely ignored in India. Sarah Phillips aims to promote teaching-learning of language skills; revising grammatical structures through role play and various other activities.

In this book, there are many innovative ideas, both practical and well explained. Without the stress of putting together large and elaborate drama productions, the book could help teachers with their daily lesson plans, add something unexpected in the classroom to make lessons meaningful. For all these reasons it would be a valuable addition to any school library, although the price might be a deterrent factor for the average school. Also, as we suggest later, it could provide an excellent basis for creating workshops relevant to local conditions.

Imagining the child as a learner

The emphasis is on the 'process' of dramatizing rather than on 'a final product' of performance. Phillips rightly touches on the importance of motivation and how drama can be a great help when dealing with learners who *appear* disinterested, uncooperative or have short attention spans. The different units gradually move the learners from situations to dialogues, and encourage brainstorming to involve

students in preparing the dialogues. Phillips understands that for the teacher, the main aim is the process, while the child may only focus on the final performance. What is *not* addressed though, is how the teacher may draw on the children's own repertoire as there is little or no mention of the range of body language, sounds, songs, and miming capabilities that they already possess and bring to the classroom.

The units foreground the element of fun which a bit of role play or dramatization would introduce into the classroom. The 'language aims' are spelt out quite clearly in each unit. These range from overarching aims such as 'revising and recycling language' (as the units progress), to more specific exercises such as the 'use of prepositions, *must* and the past imperfect' (p. 101).

However, it is not clear what linguistic range of children the book has in mind. Does the 'target' include both native speakers of English as well as those learning it as a foreign language? In what different ways might English work as a foreign language? Would it work in multilingual contexts, or where the child may be fluent in another home language, or for a first generation learner? There are only scattered references to this complex but challenging issue, e.g. 'you can do this in your own language' (p. 32) or 'children can't read English yet' (p. 85). For drama to be an effective mode of everyday pedagogic practices, educators would first need to address the heterogeneity of the latter as a group. In seeking to cover all these diverse possibilities, without really spelling out any one of them, how successful is the book in its language aims?

In addition to the extensive section on mime (with visual, aural and kinaesthetic

reinforcement) DwC dwells on rhyme, rhythm, songs and chanting, so critical to a child's understanding and development of language. In Unit 2.6, p. 40, the author describes the rhyme 'Who Stole the Cookies'. Could there be a better way to relate to sound and movement, and enunciate and move with claps and expressive movements, such as the shrugging of shoulders, swaying, and so on?

The directions and planning are detailed even though some scope for improvisation has been left open. The sample short plays might be used as kernel-texts to be enlarged or adapted. All aspects of drama seem to be covered, including the worksheets with stencils (p. 00), which can be photocopied as well as enlarged for props and costumes. With the pressures of globalization through different media impacting most heavily on the visual culture of children, it would be fruitful to raise questions about the culture or class specific attributes of iconography or visual symbols. For example, the line drawings of castles (turrets), etc., in the Cinderella story may prove to be alienating if the book is followed blindly.

In general, Phillips avoids an over-determined schema, but one still notes an oscillation between the guided/controlled/structured mode, and another, nurturing improvisation. For instance, one wonders why mime words should come with a fixed or designated action (p. 19). How would children's subjectivity find expression if these actions are 'fixed'? Similarly, while one appreciates the emphasis on emotions, how effective would it be to think of and work with 'feelings' *in isolation*? (p. 16). There would be a danger of fostering, both in the teacher and the students, a limited repertoire of stereotypical (television-oriented?) gestures and expression.

In contrast to the rich range of pedagogic approaches, the choice of most of the stories and poems themselves is disappointing (e.g. enormous elephant, p. 20; or big blue fish). Perhaps this is a natural consequence of the attempt to address too-general an audience? Our experience within and outside the classroom shows that given a nurturing atmosphere and some contextualizing, little children are perfectly capable of responding to the unfamiliar.

Sections 3 and 4 on 'Making puppets and props' and 'Using puppets' respectively, have some of the most innovative and imaginative ideas. Phillips details the uses of finger, sock, stick and origami puppets. The vibrant line drawings that illustrate the concepts and contexts, add to the attraction.

The real test of the usefulness of the book however, lies in trying out the activities over an extended period of time in an actual classroom situation. A few of the suggestions sound a tad overconfident, e.g. can the 'ten minute role play' really be done in 10 minutes?

The very forte of the book — its comprehensive treatment of the subject — might lend itself to a cut and copy paste 'application'. Given the logistics of large numbers, the constraints of time and syllabi, and the lack of an intellectual support system in the Indian education system, not every teacher (even if he or she may desire it) actually feels empowered to be creative. As part of a series entitled 'Resource Books for Teachers', it would be most helpful if the author had a section (either as a foreword or afterword) directly addressing the teacher. This could indicate how and where to provide the scope for creative language learning and improvisation in order to:

1. Respect and seek the individual qualities of the child;
2. experiment and not be discouraged by the lack of immediate response; and
3. draw on the local rich performative and visual traditions (especially in South Asia, Africa, etc);

As the punning title promises, *Drama with Children* could also be a splendid resource book for workshops on drama and language learning, if we reconfigure in our multilingual contexts, many of its pedagogic and expressive assumptions.

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Rhyner, Paula M. (Ed.), 2009, **Emergent Literacy and Language Development: Promoting Learning in early Childhood.** New York: Guilford Press, 240 pages.

Reviewed by Aditya Raj

There has been a surge of transdisciplinary research on various facets of literacy in recent times. *Emergent Literacy and Language*

Development is indeed a good addition to this corpus of research as it forms a bridge which tries to establish bidirectional relationships between emergent literacy and language acquisition. The book is a compilation of six essays by leading scholars in the genre of emergent literacy. Early childhood education is the thread which moors the discourse of this collection. The book is edited by Rhyner, who is known for her work on the effectiveness of various strategies in facilitating language learning in early childhood, especially communicative strategies between adults and children. According to the editor, emergent literacy involves knowledge, skills, and attitudes that develop before literacy, but are related to conventional literacy skills. However, there is disagreement on the exact knowledge that defines emergent literacy. The chapters address the early formative experiences of listening and speaking. However, research, from which the maze of discussion is delineated in this edited book, pertains to clinical or social settings. The case studies illustrated are significant and evocative. They guide parents and practitioners towards instructions and practices that contribute to the development of a strong foundation in school readiness.

The framework for emergent literacy is categorized into three perspectives—developmental, components, and child and environmental influence. The different approaches towards emergent literacy are explained in the first chapter. The focus of the next chapter is the importance of the book sharing experience for the child. In sharing words with the young ones we also bring the world to them. The semantically rich cultural atmosphere contributes to oral language development, as well as development of meaning for emergent literacy. The discourse in chapter three looks at how a child's

phonology develops in tandem with other components of language, specifically the lexical and syntactic components, and how a child maintains an awareness of the connection between the sound and its meaning. The focus of chapter four is on children's early writing and spelling acquisition, and their bidirectional influence on early oral language attainment. The interrelationship of children's early language learning, and their early story and expository discourse is discussed in chapter five. The last chapter is significant, and delineates the connection between emergent literacy and cultural and linguistic diversity with regard to assessment and intervention with young children.

Research at the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) and The Institute of Early Childhood Education and Research (IECER) at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, also suggest that early environment and experiences contribute significantly to inequalities in child development. In this context, learning assumes centrality because child development happens in cognizance with learning. Learning begins long before a child starts comprehending a language and expressing. Oral communication is pivotal as well. Nevertheless, the process in which learning is initiated, and the warmth with which the process is conducted holds centrality. It is in the same vein that we have come to accept the necessity of giving due importance to emotional quotient (EQ) along with intelligence quotient (IQ) in the educational process.

Literacy is the baseline of the educational process and conventional literacy is significant since it is the formal marker. However, the talk and the text should attempt to map terrains beyond conventional wisdom to include educative processes, and should also attempt to understand the undercurrent that situates the

possibility of all round human development. A holistic development can be expected to negate learning outcomes located specifically in time and space. Although, there are periods of sparks just as there are crests and turfs, the educative process can best be understood as a lifelong learning. Rigorous research should attempt to understand these interrelated facets as well as the complexity of human experiences.

Reading and oral skills are important for emergent literacy but one has to take into consideration the changing nature of society and the ever emergent complexity of the global age. The role of the technologies of information communication in the everyday experiences of parents and their young ones cannot be overlooked. The involvement with media is another issue that needs to be considered. The media has taken over the role of grandparents--at least in a developing society such as that of India. The young ones hear stories, but from record players at home or in the car in which they travel with their parents. The migratory nature of contemporary society is another case in point. Also, I would have loved a serious engagement with the works of Bourdieu and Bernstein, because of the seminal nature of their work around cultural capital and the codes for the socialization of the young respectively.

The book is commendable. Nevertheless, one has to go beyond scratching the tip of the social convulsion. The problem lies not in the scholarship of this edited collection but in the hold of the formal process of knowledge construction. The grip of modernity is paramount on the research designs and the assumed outcomes. Research under Newtonian-Baconian-Cartesian epistemology has inherent limitations, for they suggest a linear specific diagnostic developmental outcome. A

fine start is important in order to do well in life, and therefore a co-relation is useful. A good milieu for early human development through emergent language acquisition is important. However, it does not mean that children who may have had a comparatively less advantageous start will not be able to make it up later in life. Therefore, while acknowledging the contributions in this edited collection, it is essential to keep other lines of inquiry around language learning in early human development and related aspects open.

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Alan Davies, 2003, **The Native Speaker: Myth and Reality**, Buffalo: Multilingual Matters, pp 237 Hardbound.

Reviewed by Rajesh Kumar
& Amit Sethi

Davies' book is published in the series 'Bilingual Education and Bilingualism: 38' of Multilingual Matters Ltd. This book explores and examines critical questions pertaining to the concept of a native speaker from different perspectives. The idea of a *native speaker* always appears fresh in linguistics. Researchers in various sub-fields of linguistics define *native speaker* with the traits that are typical of a sub-field. *Knowledge of Language* appears as a common thread in most of the working definitions of native speaker. Chomsky's works (since 1965) also contribute to the idea of the *Knowledge of Language*. In fact, most definitions seem to incorporate the idea that the '*Knowledge of Language*' makes a

speaker native to the language. This book is an attempt to look at the *native speaker* in a more comprehensive manner. It is also an attempt to bring several perspectives on native speakers together in one book. It has ten chapters including the introduction and conclusion. Out of this, eight chapters examine the questions and the concepts of native speakers in linguistics from the psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, and language acquisition perspectives. The book effectively argues that the concept of a native speaker is in fact a myth, and concludes that a native speaker is a nothing more than a social construct. The book begins with personal anecdotes that are significant for the discussions on the native speaker. It engages the discussion in the context of many previous works namely Chomsky (1965), Paikeday (1985), Ferguson (1983), and Katz and Fodor 1962 among others. Defining the goal of this book, the author aims to make the concept of a native speaker unambiguous.

With regard to examinations, Davies supports the view in Felix (1987). This position argues in favor of the following: (a) language processing is done by two different cognitive systems, (b) where native speakers know two or more languages, both these languages use different cognitive systems (c) the adult learner primarily uses the problem-solving system in addition to the language-specific system. Davies seems to agree with Felix that the use of two systems makes language acquisition harder for an adult learner. Hence, he seems to be giving due recognition to Chomsky for the technical contributions that define *Knowledge of Language*, and Paikeday for the discussion on 'practical significance' of the term native speaker.

In the first few chapters, Davies highlights how difficult it is to define 'first language' or 'mother tongue', especially in multilingual homes and communities as some people are

mobile by circumstance, and therefore become proficient in multiple languages. There are many similar situations which lead individuals or communities to become multilingual where one could have *many first languages*. It is difficult to discount them as non-native speakers of all that they speak. He argues that language and linguistic identity is more a socio-political tool than a reality. The actual membership of a language is very fluid. In fact, people even fall out of this membership if they do not use a language for a long time.

Chapter 1 of the book explains a readily available definition of a native speaker. Chapter 2 discusses the psycholinguistic aspects of a native speaker. It talks about the language development of the native and non-native speakers, and questions the cognitive aspects involved in their development. Chapter 3 deals with the theoretical linguistic aspects of the concept of a native speaker. It elaborates on the significant question of whether native and non native speakers work with two different grammars of the language. In a sense the first three chapters form the prelude to the discussion of native speakers as a social or sociolinguistic construct in chapter 4. The subsequent chapters (5, 6, and 7) examine the idea of a native speaker from the perspective of his knowledge, communicative competence, and other aspects covering the intelligibility of a native speaker in a given speech community respectively. Chapter 8 looks at the e-identity of a native speaker and chapter 9 deals with the construct of the idea of a native speaker in the second language research. Finally, chapter 10 concludes the argument and the idea of a native speaker.

According to Davies, the proficiency-based definitions of native speakers are problematic. Birth-based definitions are akin to ethnic label and are hard to argue with. They do not seem to serve any practical purposes

as far as the study of language is concerned and for which we need to define a native speaker. He thus supports the notion that it is possible to be a native speaker of more than one language if exposed to them at an early stage. He defines competence in multiple ways including recognition of appropriateness of language constructs, the ability to express an idea in multiple ways, the choice of words grounded in socio-cultural context, etc. Davies rejects the views in Kachru (1985), which sees language speakers as concentric circles primarily based on their place of living. For example, in the case of English, the British, the American, and the Australians form the inner core of 'Native' speakers, followed largely by former British colonies such as India and Singapore in expanding circles, and then the rest of the world in the outer circle. He favours the view where this nativity is defined contextually, based not only on the environment at birth, but also proficiency at the time of speaking.

Overall, this is a well written book with a comprehensive treatment of questions such as "Who is a native speaker", "How can we test nativity in a language" and "How does the membership to the native speaker club change functionally and socially." The author does not short shrift any of the traditional argument in favor of the notion of 'nativity', yet he pulls no punches in demolishing them one by one.

References:

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