



DRILLS AND DIALOGUES IN ENGLISH LESSONS

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Abstract:

The article is about drills and dialogues and the usage of them in the non-philological groups. Drills and dialogues are among the most traditional materials used by language teachers. The content of drills and dialogues and how much we use them has changed considerably over the years. This is because teachers and materials developers have been paying more and more attention to ways of providing students with meaningful materials and content that allow them to engage in “real” communication.

Key Words: Drills and dialogues, repetition drills, substitution drills, and transformation drills, interactive methods, learn, analyze, role-play, drama, movies, cartoons and pictures, independent

Drills and Dialogues in English Lessons:

A Lesson Never Forgotten:

Teaching children is a challenge. They are fidget. They like to play. Let them play though they are students. Let them be children as even teacher is a child in the heart. As I have been working as a teacher I understood what it is to be creative and communicative, well-educated and intelligent. Yes, teaching helps to understand it. If teacher wants children to learn English or to be interested in English she must work hard and try to use new methods of involving students. As we know year by year students are getting independent, full of energy, but not knowing how to use this independence and energy is bringing to the loss of very “genius” children. Most members of the language teaching profession realize that their students’ learning potential increases when attitudes are positive and motivations runs high. And it is on the hand of teachers.

My future plans are to search interactive methods myself and also designed by our respectable colleagues, learn them, use them in my practice, in my lessons. Teacher is able to do everything to involve a child and it is teachers’ aim.

While learning and analyzing the usage of methods in the education of developed countries we can divide the methods into several groups:

- ✓ Perceptive methods which help to learn, analyze and understand the information and to practice knowledge:
 - lecture, story, explanation
 - performance, illustration and video method.
- ✓ Reproductive methods which help to acquire, inspire and practice knowledge:
 - working with books
 - laboratory works
 - exercise (tasks)
- ✓ Methods which help to develop student’s skills:
 - educational conversation
 - circle conversation
 - debate
 - brainstorm
 - role-play
- ✓ Methods which help to analyze problems, solve problems and strengthen students’ studying independently:
 - tasks with problems
 - individual practice
 - projects

So modern educational methods are so various and many-sided that is closely connected with teacher’s ability of using them in the lessons effectively.

Let’s take role-play or drama in English lessons. Drills and dialogues are among the most traditional materials used by language teachers. The content of drills and dialogues and how much we use them has changed considerably over the years. This is because teachers and materials developers have been paying more and more attention to ways of providing students with meaningful materials and content that allow them to engage in “real” communication.

Role plays and plays, which are often forms of extended dialogues, are part of the repertoire of practice activities and materials. This chapter includes:

- ✓ the advantages and limitations of drills and dialogues in language development
- ✓ various types of drills and dialogues
- ✓ how to design and adapt drills that are meaningful rather than mechanical
- ✓ how to make and adapt dialogues for your class
- ✓ how to prepare role plays suitable for your students and teaching objectives
- ✓ the advantages and uses of role plays (including plays, simulations)
- ✓ how to involve students in developing dialogues and role plays (including plays, simulations)

Drills as Language Teaching Material:

Definition and Uses of Drills:

A drill is “A type of highly controlled oral practice in which the students respond to a given cue. The response varies according to the type of drill.”¹ Drills are used usually at the controlled practice stage of language learning so that students have the opportunity to accurately try out what they have learned. Drills help students to develop quick, automatic responses using a specific formulaic expression or structure, such as a tag ending, verb form, or transformation.

Drills can be either mechanical or meaningful. Mechanical drills are controlled by the teacher who provides drill cues to which Drills, Dialogues, and Role Plays students respond. These drills can give beginning students a chance to articulate the new language fluently. Meaningful drills are controlled by the teacher as well as by the students who must understand the drill cues in order to respond. Meaningful drills are more desirable than mechanical drills because they provide a reason for speaking and are thus more engaging and motivating. These requisites for meaningful drills are pointed out:

- ✓ They should look like real language, containing hesitations, proper social reactions such as exclamations, questions, or comments that require a response. They can even consider register and nonverbal elements.
- ✓ The response should not be totally predictable; a variety of responses should be incorporated.
- ✓ They should involve genuine reactions between or among the speakers.
- ✓ They should be purposeful and based on topics of relevance to students
- ✓ They should be sufficiently controlled and allow the teacher to observe how well learning has taken place.
- ✓ They should allow for sustained language practice.

Types of Drills:

A drill is a drill, right? Not so! They come in various forms-repetition drills, substitution drills, and transformation drills are among the main types. Each type of drill can be meaningful or mechanical, depending upon how you develop it. We will explain several types of drills on the following pages.

Repetition Drills:

Repetition drills are useful for familiarizing students quickly with a specific structure or formulaic expression². The teacher’s language is repeated with no change. Be sure to teach the meaning of the utterance first. For example, if we learn the degrees of comparison, the example that follows illustrates this type of drill:

In Positive Degree:

Teacher: She is a beautiful girl.

Students: She is a beautiful girl.

In Comparative Degree:

Teacher: She is more beautiful than her sister.

Students: She is more beautiful than her sister.

In Superlative Degree:

Teacher: She is the most beautiful girl in the class.

Students: She is the most beautiful girl in the class.

Because repetition drills are extremely mechanical, they should not be used for prolonged practice. It is good when you use them to practice the new theme or to revise the new words you have written on the board. Students repeat after the teacher and it helps them to memorize the new words.

Substitution Drills:

Substitution drills are slightly more interactive than repetition drills because they usually give students practice in changing a word or structure in response to a prompt or cue from the teacher or another student. The teacher’s prompt can be a whole sentence, a word, a phrase, or a picture. Here is a mechanical substitution drill using a single-word prompt:

Teacher: You’re a student, aren’t you?

Farmer

Students: You’re a farmer, aren’t you?

Teacher: You’re a farmer, aren’t you?

accountant

Students: You're an accountant, aren't you?

Teacher: You're an accountant, aren't you?

mechanic

Students: You're a mechanic, aren't you?

Teacher: You're a mechanic, aren't you?

Here is an example of a mechanical substitution drill using a phrase as a prompt:

Teacher: Where were you born? Can you tell me?

was your husband

Students: Where was your husband born?

Teacher: Where was your husband born? Can you tell me?

was he

Students: Where was he born?

Teacher: Where was he born? Can you tell me?

was your daughter

Students: Where was your daughter born?

Teacher: Where was your daughter born? Can you tell me?

Transformation Drills:

Transformation drills involve changing the structure of a sentence. If the cue is *I like ice cream*, for example, the response in a positive to negative statement transformation drill could be *I don't like ice cream*. Types of transformations are listed³:

- Statement to question: e.g., *I like ice cream. To: Do you like ice cream?*

This example is given to change positive to negative and interrogative:

Positive	Negative	Question
Jane was tired		
	Sean did not work	
		Did I have a cat?
	Mary did not sing	
		Did she see us?

Another statement is to ask for the bold part of the sentence:

- ✓ Billy ate an apple.
- ✓ The children played in the garden.
- ✓ Laura came home at six o'clock.
- ✓ The boy read a book.
- ✓ The girl wrote five letters.
- ✓ One tense to another tense: e.g., *I'm going shopping. To: Yesterday I went shopping.*

Put the Sentences into Simple Past:

- ✓ *We open the door. →*
- ✓ *You write poems. →*
- ✓ *Richard plays in the garden. →*
- ✓ *Kerry does not speak English. →*
- ✓ *Do you see the bird? →*

Active to passive: e.g., *The teacher gave them the answers. To: They were given the answers by the teacher.*

Singular subject to plural subject: e.g., *The woman sings well. To: The women sing well.*

You will find it relatively easy to develop substitution and transformation drills to provide students with practice in automatic manipulation of a form. However, students often forget what they have learned in drills. Drills have also been criticized because students can repeat drills without understanding what they are saying⁴. Yet, short periods of drills can be useful during the early stages of a lesson, and you are advised to move on after five or ten minutes to other oral practice activities or to drills that are more meaningful.

It is best to do mechanical drills before you begin meaningful drills, which are more difficult because students have to provide information in addition to the correct language form. Meaningful drills still involve repetition or substitution of structures in response to prompts, but they are more relevant and motivating. This is because students have to think about and understand what they are saying and express meaning through their responses. Because meaningful drills are somewhat unpredictable, they are more like real language so there is more reason for students to listen attentively than during practice with mechanical drills.

As we see drills can be useful teaching-learning material because they provide practice of small, manageable chunks of language. This helps to build confidence and automatic use of structures and expressions that have been drilled. Also, they can be part of a teaching or learning sequence that progresses from more towards less controlled practice.

References:

1. [Matthews, Spratt, and Dangerfield 1991, 210]¹
2. [Doff 1990, 71]²
3. [Raymond Clark (1987, 84)]
4. <http://www.press.umich.edu/pdf/0472032038-web.pdf>