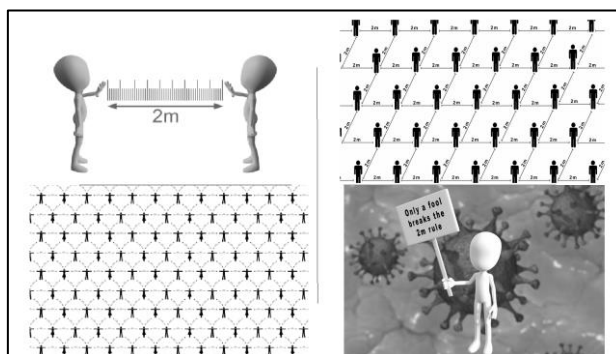


Trentinné Benkő Éva

**BACK TO SCHOOL:  
BUILDING GROUP DYNAMICS IN THE EFL CLASSROOM AFTER  
THE PANDEMIC**

**Introduction**

The coronavirus pandemic and its consequences, such as quarantine, social distancing, and online teaching, have brought many educational changes worldwide in the past two years. Teachers and students had to stay at home, using only digital platforms, tools and applications for teaching, learning, playing and social interactions. Digitalisation challenged teaching at all levels, ranging from kindergarten to higher education.<sup>1</sup> Although emergency online instruction has resulted in paradigm changes and multiple practical developments in most school subjects' methodology in Hungary, it has also had several drawbacks, especially in areas requiring real presence, cooperation, communication and emotions. From time to time in 2020–2021, both children and adults had to long for real-life connections, spending time together and sharing enjoyable moments in the classroom in vain. When teachers and learners could finally return to school, everyone had to relearn how to interact, play, and be active while feeling relaxed in each other's close company.



*Social and physical distancing during the covid pandemic  
Source of selected images: Pixabay  
(Figure created by the author of the article)*

<sup>1</sup> See among others: FENYŐDI Andrea–POROS Andrea–LO BELLO, Maya Jean–KRUPPA Éva–ÁRVA Valéria–TRENTINNÉ BENKŐ Éva: *Online education and 'best' practices in foreign language teacher's education during the 2020/2021 lockdown period*, *Gyermeknevelés: Online Tudományos Folyóirat*, 2021/2. 286–313. and TRENTINNÉ BENKŐ Éva–KOVÁCS Magdolna: *A tanítási gyakorlat alternatív megközelítései: jelenléti, távolléti és hibrid megoldások a koronavírus-járvány idején*, *Gyermeknevelés: Online Tudományos Folyóirat*, 2021/2. 256–285. (=Alternative Approaches to the Teaching Practice: Offline, Online and Hybrid Solutions during the Coronavirus Pandemic, *Journal of Early Years Education*, 2021/2. 256–285.)

The 2022 Summer Academy workshop on building group dynamics at Eötvös József College of Baja aimed to provide a vivid experience of this re-joining in the real-life classroom for all participants. The interactive and practical session offered opportunities to try out various activities that foster holistic development and boost confidence, self-expression, and acceptance. The participants were invited to experiment with several children's songs and rhymes, improvisation, rhythm, drama and movement games as a class or in teams, groups and pairs. The ideas and activities presented may be utilised in EFL lessons as icebreakers, warmers, fillers, and coolers or used at drama festivals, afternoon clubs, or birthday parties. The games and children's literature pieces (see them in the Appendix) are suited for various target audiences to strengthen group dynamics and make the time spent together meaningful and memorable.

In the workshop, the participants were invited to play drama and movement games and enjoy the fun of children's literature while activating their inner child. The present article intends to encourage recalling some memories and aid the reflection on the activities from the perspective of the English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher. Readers are invited to identify the potential of these playful elements in teaching learners of all ages and asked to notice how dynamic and fun activities might develop various linguistic and non-linguistic competencies (knowledge, skills, attitudes and autonomy).

### **Drama games in education**

Authors define drama in several different ways. Some see it as an umbrella or blanket term covering a wide range of oral activities with an element of creativity<sup>2</sup> or as the world of pretend play where students portray others or themselves in imaginary situations and interact with their peers.<sup>3</sup> Maley and Duff<sup>4</sup> point out that the aim and value of dramatic activities lie in the process, what is happening *now*, and what the drama games inspire and offer at that moment of play. Students do their acting not to perform for a passive audience but to accomplish a goal, using their language and imagination. However, they should be given an opportunity to perform the rehearsed scenes to an audience (e.g. to the rest of the class) if they wish.

Davies<sup>5</sup> claims that drama games improve students' concentration, listening, memorisation, observation, interaction and interpretation, while speaking activities also extend their language competencies. These games increase students' agility, fluency, and flexibility in their use of English. Drama activities and games can be utilised in the EFL classroom as „a community happening, a good way of teaching

<sup>2</sup> HUBBARD, Peter–JONES, Hywel–THORNTON, Barbara–WHEELER, Rod: *A Training Course for TEFL*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989.

<sup>3</sup> HOLDEN, Susan: *Drama in Language Teaching*. Longman, Harlow, 1982.

<sup>4</sup> MALEY, Alan–DUFF, Alan: *Drama Techniques in Language Learning: A Resource Book of Communication Activities for Language Teachers*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> DAVIES, Paul: *The Use of Drama in English Language Teaching*, TESL Canada Journal, 1990/1. 96.

beginners and children and of involving the audience in the activities of songs, plays, ... and playing games”.

According to Farmer,<sup>6</sup> drama games are interactive activities with simple structures and clear objectives. In the introduction of his book, he lists the advantages of drama activities. He claims they help groups to work together for a shared goal and encourage a sense of playfulness and creativity. Since they are physical and interactive, they appeal to kinaesthetically inclined learners and develop communication skills while boosting students' confidence and fostering their learning. With the help of drama activities that may take several forms, including mime, role-play, improvisation, simulation, communicative activities such as dialogues and dramatised storytelling, students can learn in enjoyable and memorable ways.

Drama games are beneficial in language teaching and learning since they activate communication at multiple levels. They are suitable for various occasions in and outside the classroom and can be applied for numerous professional and personal reasons. All age groups and students of different language proficiency enjoy engaging in these simple games since they support positive group dynamics and create a relaxed and stress-free environment. By lowering the students' language anxiety level and removing the focus from accuracy using playful situations, students can concentrate on fluency in their communication. Thus, interactions become more genuine and effortless, while drama games provide meaningful contexts for language practice. Drama activities support creating ideal learning conditions and raising and sustaining learners' motivation.

Students of all ages, different levels of language competencies, or other abilities can participate in drama games and take pleasure in them. However, teachers should know their class well and be aware of possible difficulties and problems. The leaders of drama activities should anticipate any social, cognitive or linguistic limitations and recognise if any participants have a negative psychological or emotional status. The teacher's task is to identify any cultural or religious taboos the students may have and alter the activity appropriately. In creating ideal conditions, it is essential to establish a relaxed and friendly atmosphere in the group where free choices and chances of (not) participating are offered to all learners.

I intend to move on to discussing a language teaching method that is closely related to drama games and activities. Total Physical Response is based on listening and movements and is suitable for beginners, young learners or shy students.

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<sup>6</sup> FARMER, David: *101 More Drama Games and Activities*, Drama Resource, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012.

### Total Physical Response in the language classroom

Asher developed the Total Physical Response (TPR) method<sup>7</sup> as a result of his observations of young children's language development. The method is based on the idea that the human brain has a biological programme for acquiring any natural language. His observations revealed that most of the children's interactions with parents or other caretaking adults included and combined both verbal and physical aspects creating a positive feedback loop between the adult's speech and the child's actions.<sup>8</sup> Asher also observed a significant time gap between listening to language and attempting to speak it. Thus, understanding and reacting to even complex utterances may long precede producing the same utterance. From his experiences, Asher formulated hypotheses in connection with his method and language development, emphasising the primary role of listening and internalising the language when responding with physical movement to language input.<sup>9</sup>

TPR displays various benefits in second language education, and one of the many advantages is its stress-free nature. With its physical game-like movements, TPR lowers the learners' language anxiety level, minimises their learning stress, helps to forget about inhibitions, motivates students and thus creates ideal circumstances for language acquisition. Further non-linguistic aims contain using imagination, understanding and expressing various emotions, feeling the rhythm, improving coordination, balancing, stretching, following instructions, imitating whole body movements, and practising gestures and facial expressions. The linguistic benefits include developing listening skills, focusing on the meaning, comprehension of the language input before forcing linguistic production, understanding instructions, and internalising simple grammar structures and vocabulary.

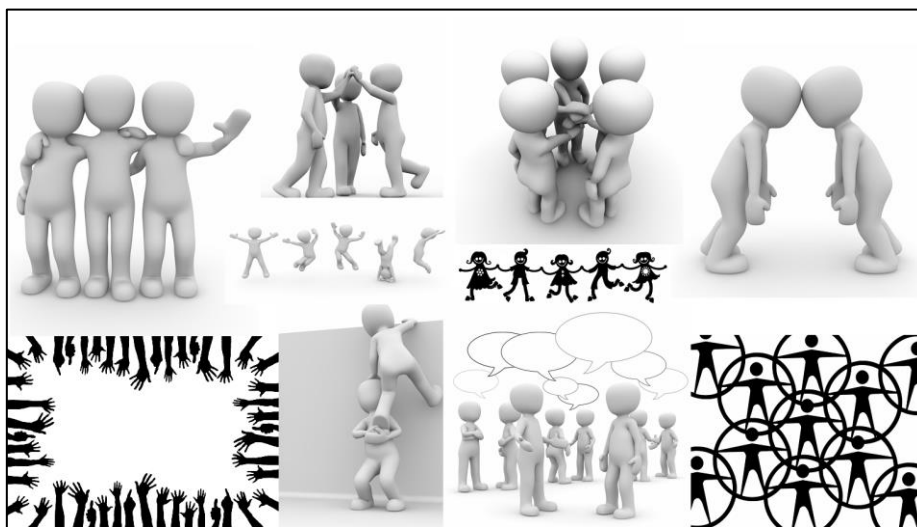
Besides these, TPR encourages learners to join in reciting the poems, saying the commands themselves while doing the actions together with the others when they feel ready to speak. Since they should respond only physically and as a group, no individual is under pressure; TPR is an undemanding and humanistic method regarding linguistic production.

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<sup>7</sup> ASHER, James: *The Total Physical Response Approach to Second Language Learning*. The Modern Language Journal, 1969/1. 3–17.

<sup>8</sup> "Total Physical Response" In: BYRAM, Michael–HU, Adelheid (Eds.): *Routledge Encyclopedia of Language Teaching and Learning*. Routledge. London and New York, 2013<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> See also: RICHARDS, Jack-RODGERS, Theodore: *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2001<sup>2</sup>.



*Being in a group, building group dynamics and playing together*  
 Source of selected images: Pixabay  
 (Figure created by the author of the article)

### **Drama and movement games in practice**

Total Physical Response activities inspire learners to move and prove their active involvement and comprehension by following instructions while miming the meaning of all the verbs, nouns, adverbs and adjectives they can hear in the text. ‘*You are a tree, grow tall*’ is a perfect example of the complexity of TPRs with the wide range of ideas and characters presented in the children’s rhyme. Meanwhile, it offers a simple structure that makes the imitation natural and meaningful (see the text in the Appendix). The verse was a winning entry in a TPR writing competition organised by a magazine for EFL teachers several years ago. The end of the rhyme ‘*Now sit down and just be you*’ makes an ideal and smooth link between playtime and learning.

The games ‘*Find your partner and act it out*’ and ‘*Make the scene*’ belong to the category of image work in drama-based education<sup>10</sup>. In the ‘frozen pictures’, ‘freeze frame’ or ‘image theatre’ activities, individuals, groups or partners create a still picture using their own bodies to crystallise a moment, idea or theme. An exciting dynamics-building activity involving whole body awareness is the ‘*Mirror Game*’, in which two students face each other. One pretends to be a person looking into the mirror, while the other is the mirror image, the reflection copying the partner’s movements as precisely as possible.

Another great way of helping students learn to observe is to play games like ‘*Spot the difference*.’ In this activity, students are in pairs, and they look at their

<sup>10</sup> URL 1: *Glossary of drama terms*. Drama-based instruction.  
<https://dbp.theatredance.utexas.edu/glossary> [30/09/2022]

partners and then stand back-to-back to each other and change three small things on themselves, e.g. untie a shoelace, change hair or clothing or remove an accessory. The challenge here is to notice the changes, while the games' *Run to the other side*, *Fruit salad* or *Find the common features* focus on identifying similarities rather than highlighting differences. In this way, these games make relevant and valuable tasks for fostering inclusion and creating a group identity.

In *Number Dialogues*, students use movements and non-verbal communication but say only numbers to create and act out scenes with dialogues counting from one and on to improvise a situation that involves two or more characters. For example, Student A asks a question (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6?) with the appropriate intonation and Student B answers: 7, 8, 9. Then the dialogue continues with 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15... In this case, the role-playing participants can concentrate on self-expression, communication and meaning because they do not have to worry about making grammar, syntax or appropriacy mistakes.

Some children's rhymes with fun movements like *Jelly on a plate* or *Pick bananas* help relax and release strong feelings or energy. Besides, these two chants might serve as catalysts to talk about a healthy lifestyle or introduce the topic of food. Accordingly, *Coffee, coffee* may be recited to practise to keep the rhythm and used as a train game while practising vocabulary items and playing with the loudness of their voice. Such rhymes with movements all build group dynamics while creating a friendly atmosphere and a feeling of community.

*Going on a lion hunt* is an excellent example of story dramatisation when the teacher guides the group as they bring the characters, dialogues and events suggested in the story or poem to life. There are also simple verses integrating movements and lyrics in action songs and rhymes that young learners adore, such as *Walking, walking* or *This is the way*. Some rhymes or chants are perfect for starting or finishing a lesson, such as the *Way up in the sky* (its message is: *Good morning*) or *I am big, I am small* (with its last sentence: *And that's the end*). This latter one is ideal for inclusion purposes, too, since it shows that we can all be friends no matter how different we are.

### Attention-grabbing in the classroom

Attention grabbers are short mini dialogues between the teacher and the class. The teacher calls out a phrase that invites students to pay attention to the teacher and the next activity. If the teacher calls: *Hocus, pocus*, the class should reply with *Everybody focus*. Attention getters may be needed when there is steady background noise, e.g., in the case of whole class or cooperative activities. Some call-and-response attention grabbers are collected in Table 1.

Teacher's call	Students' response
Hocus pocus	Everybody, focus
Eeny, meeny	Miny moe
Holy Moly	Guacamole
Baby Shark	Do, do, do, do, do, Baby shark

Ready to rock	Ready to roll
Hakuna	Matata
To infinity	And beyond
Hands on top	That means stop
Zip it, lock it	Put it in your pocket
Loud, loud, loud	Soft, soft, soft
Coffee cup	Let's stand up
Macaroni and cheese	Everybody freeze
1, 2, 3	Look at me
Oh, class	Oh, yes
Class, class	Yes, yes
Flat tire	Shhhhhhhh
Chicka, chicka	Boom, boom
Your turn	Let's learn
Are you focused?	Yes, I am
Ready to listen	Ready to learn

*Call-and-response attention grabbers (Table 1)*

Although teachers love call-and-response attention grabbers, it is also advisable to think of different or non-verbal ways of getting children's concentration. A few possible techniques include using an instrument such as a bell, clapping patterns, action patterns, counting backwards from 5 or 10 (using sounds and indicating the numbers with fingers) or doing something unexpected such as switching on and off the lights.

### **Reflection**

The games, rhymes and attention grabbers presented in the workshop may sometimes seem insignificant and not valuable from the perspective of teaching English as a foreign language. However, all parents and educators are invited to reflect on these fun activities and identify their linguistic and non-linguistic benefits based on the advantageous characteristic features of drama and TPR. Readers are encouraged to think of possible variations, particular situations, times and places they could be used in and outside the classroom. I intend to inspire content and language teachers to determine curricular or subject areas and themes where these activities could be integrated into the teaching material. To conclude, I believe that children's literature, TPR and drama develop plentiful competencies in children. I hope that both learners and teachers will enjoy the games, songs and rhymes (see them in the Appendix) and, with their help, build strong group dynamics and enjoy a relaxed, happy atmosphere in their classrooms.

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## Appendix

## Workshop handout: Songs and rhymes

**This is the way we GO to school,**  
go to school, go to school,  
This is the way we go to school  
early in the morning...

*Before covid – moving and singing  
sadly  
After online teaching – going back  
happily*



**This is the way we GO BACK to school,**

back to school, back to school,  
This is the way we go back to school  
early in the morning...

**Way up in the sky**

the little birds fly.  
Way down in the nest  
the little birds rest.  
With a wing on the left  
and the wing on the right,  
The little birds sleep  
all through the night.  
Shhh – they are sleeping.  
The bright sun comes up.  
The dew goes away.  
Good morning! Good morning!  
The little birds say.

**Everywhere we go**

People always ask us  
Who we are,  
Where we come from.  
And we tell them  
We come from BAJA  
Mighty, mighty BAJA!  
If they don't hear us  
We'll sing a little louder ...  
Everywhere we go...  
(*singing louder and louder*)  
..... They are deaf!

**Jelly on a plate.**

Jelly on a plate.  
Wibble, wobble.  
Wibble, wobble.  
Jelly on a plate.

**You're a tree, grow tall.**

You're a small rubber ball.  
You're a scarecrow in the rain.  
You're a bird. You're a plane.  
You're a fork. You're a spoon.

Now you're walking on the moon.  
You're a robot. You're a chair.  
You're a flea in someone's hair.  
You're an egg. You're a frog.  
You're a jelly. You're a log.  
You're a jumping kangaroo.  
Now sit down and just be YOU.

**Walking, walking,**

walking, walking.  
Hop, hop, hop.  
Running, running, running.  
Running, running, running.  
Now let's STOP! (*freeze*)

**Pick bananas,**

pick, pick bananas,  
(You've) got to pick bananas,  
pick, pick bananas.  
(You've) got to peel bananas...  
peel, peel bananas...  
... slice / chop bananas...  
mash bananas,  
eat bananas,  
GO BANANAS!!!

**Coffee, coffee**

Milk and sugar  
Milk and sugar  
Strawberries and cream  
Strawberries and cream  
Chocolate cake and  
chocolate biscuits  
Chocolate cake and  
chocolate biscuits  
Fish and chips  
Fish and chips  
Fish and chips  
SOUP!!!

**Going on a lion hunt.**

Gonna catch a big one.  
I'm not scared.  
Look at all these flowers  
It's a nice day!  
Oh-oh! some mud

a bridge  
a mountain  
a cave ....  
some sticky-sticky mud  
a long-long bridge  
a high-high mountain  
a deep-dark cave...  
I can't go over it  
I can't go under it  
I can't go around it  
I think I'll have to...  
    go through it  
    run across it  
    climb it  
    go in it ...  
Oh-oh, some fur.

Some long-long fur.  
It's a LION!  
RUN! Run home!  
(*miming the route backwards*)

**I'm big. I'm small.**  
I'm tall. I'm short.  
I'm happy. I'm sad.  
I'm good. I'm bad.  
But we are friends.  
And that's the END.

**Goodbye, goodbye.**  
I'm sorry to say.  
Goodbye, goodbye.  
And have a nice day!

### Workshop handout: Games

- Walk, smile, greet and share...
- Line up (according to... names, birthdays, places of birth)
- Count up to 10 (one at a time)
- Run to the other side if it is true for you
- Fruit salad
- Find the person who...
- Find someone who...
- Find your partner and act it out
- People to people: Back to back (in pairs)
- Spot the difference: Change three things (in pairs)
- Mirroring game (in pairs)
- Number dialogue (in pairs)
- Make the scene (in teams)
- Find the common features (in groups)
- Evolution game: Rock, paper, scissors (whole class)

**Workshop handout: Attention grabbers**  
(see the call-and-response attention grabbers in Table 1)

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the times of quarantine and online education, teachers and students had to be socially distant and could not spend time together. All participants in education missed personal relationships and fun. After returning to school, everyone had to relearn how to play, connect, and be relaxed in each other's company. The practical Summer Academy workshop offered various group dynamics-building activities fostering holistic development, self-expression, and acceptance. Participants were encouraged to sing songs, act out rhymes and play drama, TPR and movement games while activating their inner child. Teachers may use the ideas presented here in EFL lessons as icebreakers, warmers, fillers or coolers or outside the classroom. All activities aim to strengthen a sense of group identity and make the time spent together enjoyable and memorable for all participants

**Abstract**

**VISSZATÉRÉS AZ ISKOLÁBA**

A koronavírus-járvány és az azzal járó karantén, szociális távolságtartás és online oktatás miatt tanárok és diákok egyaránt hiányolták a személyes kapcsolatokat és a jelenléti tanítást-tanulást. Az iskolákba, osztálytermekbe való visszatéréskor mindenkinek újra meg kellett tanulnia játszani, együtt lenni és jól érezni magukat egymás társaságában. A Nyári Akadémia interaktív workshopja olyan csoportdinamika-építő tevékenységeket kínált, amelyek holisztikusan fejlesztik a tanulókat, támogatva az önkifejezést és az elfogadást. A résztvevőket gyermekirodalmi, dramatikus és mozgásos játékokba való bekapcsolódásra invitáltuk belső gyermeki énjüket aktivizálva. A kollégák a bemutatott ötleteket, játékokat, dalokat, mondókákat az angol vagy más idegennyelvi tanórákon vagy az osztálytermen kívül is számos fejlesztési céllal használhatják. A tevékenységek erősítik az osztály egységét, az összes résztvevő számára élvezetessé és emlékezetessé téve az együtt töltött időt.