

Romeo and Juliet

Using Drama Methods in the Classroom

Report of a teaching sequence carried out at Sogn and Fjordane College



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Ian Harkness og Elisa Bjersand, lektorer ved Høgskule i Sogn og Fjordane, forteller om deres undervisningssamarbeid prosjekter i dramametoder i forbindelse med et opplegg om Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. Prosjektene har sammenheng med etterutdanningskurset: Metoder i tverrfaglig prosjektarbeid - et kurs som ble ledet av Tove Ilsaas ved ILS, UiO.

Introduction

Using drama methods in the classroom can have many advantages, one of these being that difficult texts such as Shakespeare's plays are made more accessible to teachers,

students and pupils. Using drama methods has for us primarily had a double purpose: it has provided us with an opportunity to teach the play itself, making it more accessible to students; but we have also had a methodological goal in that we have been able to illustrate to student-teachers how they can apply drama methods when they themselves start teaching.

I Plan and timetable

The teaching sequence which follows was planned so that the teachers involved could use their time as economically as possible (it often being the case that projects and other forms of teacher-cooperation are more time-consuming than 'normal' teaching). With this in mind we planned on using two days of four lectures each to cover the play *Romeo and Juliet* using drama methods. Students were given a taste of drama methods, rather than a thorough introduction, so normally more time might be spent on a teaching sequence such as this.

The following timetable was handed out to students some days before the start of the actual teaching sequence.

Timetable: Thursday, January 13th
8.15 a.m. - 12.00

Lecture 1: Introductory lecture on Shakespeare and *Romeo and Juliet* (Elisa Bjersand)

Lecture 2: Drama methods and the use of teacher-in-role (Elisa Bjersand and Ian Harkness)

Lecture 3: Teacher-in-Role sequence (Ian Harkness and Elisa Bjersand)

Lecture 4: Students group-work on dialogue extracts - translating Shakespeare

Friday, January 21st
08.15 a.m. - 12.00

Lecture 1: *Romeo and Juliet*: theme: relationships between the generations (Elisa Bjersand)

Lecture 2: Group work on dialogue extracts (find keywords which express emotions)

Lecture 3: Illustration by the teacher (Elisa Bjersand) of how to create a tableau

Lecture 4: Students prepare and present their tableaux

1.1 Lecture 1: Introductory lecture on Shakespeare and Romeo and Juliet

Before starting on the drama methods proper, we felt it was appropriate to give the students a general introduction to Shakespeare and his times. Little is known of Shakespeare, so the most famous myths about Shakespeare were presented, with a view to try and separate facts from fiction and focus on what can be verified.

Another main goal of the lecture was to throw light on the role of the Elizabethan theatre of the 16th century, and the role of playwrights in Shakespeare's time. Some attention was given to the variety of styles in Shakespeare's language; blank verse versus prose. Finally, one of the dialogues between Romeo and Juliet, which has the form of the sonnet, was studied closely.

2. Lectures 2 and 3: Teacher-in-Role - Romeo and Juliet

2.1 Introductory comments

The teacher-in-role activity can be used by the teacher as a type of pre-activity and is aimed at stimulating interest in a novel, story or a play. The teacher takes on a role from the play or text, often a minor role, and the students are also given a role.

The teacher can inform the students beforehand what he/she expects of them during the teacher-in-role sequence.

2. Lectures 2 and 3: Teacher-in-Role - Romeo and Juliet

In some cases it is important that the students know precisely what they are supposed to do. If this is the case, then it is important that they should be given clear and concise information. The teacher-in-role wants to obtain a response from the 'students-in-role'. The students-in-role should question the teacher-in-role about the play (but as characters in the fictional world) and try and find out as much information as possible, possibly with a particular thematic focus decided beforehand. The activity should be as natural as possible and resemble a dialogue rather than a quiz show of questions and answers. The students should be encouraged to 'go into role' as much as possible. Spontaneity is important.

The aim of the teacher-in-role activity, is to stimulate students' intellectual curiosity and 'to develop and heighten emotion' (Wagner, p. 128). They should want to find out the who, what, where and when of the play. It is important not to give the game away by telling the students too much about the development of the story. The 'teacher-in-role' activity should therefore be limited to the beginning of the play, novel or story, for instance, in the case of a Shakespearean play, the first two acts.

The role of the teacher also involves steering the students in their roles. One of the problems of working with *Romeo and Juliet*, and also other well known Shakespearean plays, is that some students will be acquainted with the plays and may be tempted to use their knowledge of the plot to start asking questions which are 'in the future' in relation to the 'now' moment of the teacher-in-role activity (e.g. the first two acts). The teacher has therefore to steer and guide the direction of the

dialogue between teacher and students, making sure that the fictional world of the teacher-in-role activity remains chronologically within the bounds of the beginning of the plot.

It is important to emphasize, though, that the teacher should be involved in a dialogue with the students, and that the activity should not degenerate into the teacher holding a monologue. The activity will be more spontaneous if the teacher listens carefully to the students-in-role, creatively responding to what they are saying. The teacher should also keep in mind the specific aims (which were planned beforehand) of the teacher-in-role activity.

The teacher can steer the direction of the dialogue by the way and manner in which he/she responds to questions and comments, and in general by the attitude and stance he/she takes. He/she may, for example, wish to ignore some questions, or answer other questions in such a way that the students are 'provoked' into responding. In steering the dialogue the teacher can adopt various strategies. 'Style' is important. If the 'role' requires the character to be from a lower social order then the speaker should use a more 'vulgar' form of speech. The activity should last about ten minutes or more and it is a good idea to sum up on the blackboard afterwards what has been covered.

2.2 Teachers-in-role' based on the play Romeo and Juliet

Preparation for teacher-in-role: role cards for both teacher and students

The teacher will often play the part of a minor role when enacting the 'teacher-in-role'. This year we decided to both be involved in the teacher-in-role activity: Ian Harkness played a minor role, one of the musicians, Simon Catling, and Elisa Bjersand played a medium-sized role, Juliet's nurse. We decided not to be strictly faithful to the text of Shakespeare's play when planning the 'teachers-in-role' sequence (perhaps inspired by the new film,

Shakespeare in Love with Gwyneth Paltrow and Ralph Fiennes, which diverts considerably from the historical truth). In the teacher-in-role sequence it will be assumed that Simon Catling is very friendly with Juliet's nurse (although this is not the case in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*). Juliet, like other young girls of this historical period, does not communicate much with her parents. She seems to have a closer relationship to her nurse. The nurse knows a lot, therefore, about Juliet's problems. The nurse, the 'friend' of Simon Catling, has discussed these problems on several occasions when they have met.

An alternative method is to surprise the students and not give them any forewarning of what is about to happen. This can be done by preparing an overhead transparency with the necessary 'role-card information' on it. This can be set up before the lesson starts, so that when the students arrive they will find the overhead turned on with the role card displayed on the overhead screen. The students are given time to read the role card before the teacher later appears 'in role' (say 5-10 minutes later). In order to signal that something different from the usual run of lectures is about to take place, one or two small props may be placed in the classroom beforehand such as a candle (if the teacher-in-role sequence takes place in a tavern as was the case here).

On the whole, though, it will be best if the teacher informs the students some time beforehand about what is going to happen. To what extent the teacher 'prepares' the students will depend on the age and psychological make-up of the group concerned: whether they are a 'quiet' or an outgoing group. A teaching sequence which 'succeeds' with one group of students may be less successful with another group of students. If teachers are worried about not getting a response from the students, then it is best to prepare the students thoroughly, and if they are

a very passive group, slips of paper with questions written on them may even be prepared and handed out to them. Ideally, it is best if students get into the spirit of things and participate spontaneously.

The teacher appears 'in-role', then, as soon as he/she enters the classroom. It might be of advantage to rearrange the chairs in the classroom. Students and pupils tend to become 'entrenched' in one particular seat in the classroom/lecture hall, especially if they have the same subject taught by the same teacher several hours a week. A rearrangement of the chairs and desks signals to the students/pupils that something different might be expected of them. An arrangement of chairs that maximises contact and communication between the teacher and the students, and between the students individually is to be aimed at. We decided to place the chairs in a horseshoe pattern with the teachers placed at the focus of the horseshoe. This enables the teachers to move easily within the horseshoe and gain contact with the students.

2.2.2 Material and props for teacher-in-role activity

Props, songs, guitar, etc.

This sort of activity should only need simple props. Ideally the teacher should be able to go in and out

of role quickly by merely removing a prop such as a hat. The well known pioneer of drama methods, Dorothy Heathcote, used the technique of stepping in and out of role in order to achieve 'distance and objectivity' (Wagner, p. 128). We chose simple and effective props: the nurse (Elisa Bjersand) wore a rustic headscarf symbolising that she belonged to the lower orders of society, and Simon Catling (Ian Harkness) wore a plain smock, symbolising the bohemian. The smock was quite easy to make, being made from an old bed cover (a hole cut in the middle), and then the appropriate design being made quickly with a felt tip pen. Other props included a candle, a bottle and some glasses. The tavern sign was projected onto the overhead screen (*The Bunch of Grapes*) which we have included in our appendix (not printed here). The painting used for the creation of the tavern sign was taken from the Internet and an overhead was made by adding the name of the tavern and printing it out on a color printer. The painting was chosen in an attempt to combine the English and Italian Renaissance worlds (Shakespeare's foreign plays were not completely authentic and would combine aspects of both English and foreign societies.)

Greensleeves and Romeo's Blues

The first time we used the 'Romeo and Juliet teacher-in-role sequence' last year, we decided that Simon Catling should play *Greensleeves* (an Elizabethan ballad) on the guitar 'in the tavern'. This was done at the beginning of the teacher-in-role sequence in order to create a Renaissance atmosphere of 'unsuccessful love': 'Alas, my love you do me wrong' (see appendix 2 for lyrics - which were also accessed from the Internet).

Although *Greensleeves* seemed to work fairly well last year, it was nevertheless rather a 'quiet' song, and we decided it would be better to be more daring and imaginative, so Ian Harkness composed a song he called '*Romeo's Blues*':

The Capulet's House in Verona town is where my fair Juliet lives. She is my lover child and she fills my every dream.

Now the only thing that lovers need is love and each other.

But our families Capulet and Montague are destined always to fight.

(the whole song with chords is included in our appendix)

This song was written to the melody of *The House of the Rising Sun*. Ian Harkness does not profess to be a songwriter, but he just used the sim-

2.2.1 Role card for the students

Role Card for Students

Simon Catling, a musician, and his friend Juliet Capulet's nurse are sitting in a tavern. Simon and the nurse are sad about what is happening to Juliet. You (the students) are members of a travelling circus and have travelled far. You need to wet your dry throats and are now sitting in the same tavern, *The Bunch of Grapes*, as Simon and his friend Juliet's nurse. You see them sitting in the corner and are concerned that they seem out of spirits - he is playing the sad melody, *Romeo's Blues*. You will all be staying in the town and want to find out if any of the important families in Verona will be holding parties (they might want to pay for circus acts by jugglers, magicians, jesters and clowns), and ask Simon and his friend if they know of any parties in the future. You have picked up some local gossip about a beautiful maiden Juliet who attracts admirers from miles around, and you have also heard about a reckless suitor Romeo who was seen standing under her balcony one night. You feel you want to know more.

You want to know:

- Who are Romeo and Juliet?
- What about their families - and why are they quarrelling with each other?

What happened at the party where Romeo met Juliet for the first time (Act 1 scene 5)?

ple formula of using the correct number of syllables per line to suit the melody. The song gives a mini-plot of the play and was photocopied and handed out to the students afterwards. It was played on a steel string guitar making it more forceful than the rendering of *Greensleeves* on a classical guitar, and the students seemed to like it better than *Greensleeves*.

2.2.3 Student response during the teacher-in-role activity

Both teachers felt that the activity was completed successfully, and received better response than the previous year. Nevertheless, there seemed to be two or three students who dominated the activity, and some students needed to be 'provoked' into responding. In hindsight, the 'guitar performance', using two teachers instead of one and using a number of props tended to turn the teacher-in-role activity into a kind 'mini-play' with the students as an audience rather than as participating players. The dialogue between the two teachers-in-role also tended to exclude the students. Two teachers participating in the 'teacher-in-role' activity have the advantage though of avoiding the danger of holding a long tedious monologue for the students, which a single teacher risks if the students fail to respond. The students seemed to enjoy themselves and clapped heartily after the teacher-in-role activity - but this also seemed to show that the activity turned out to be more of a 'performance' than had been intended. Nevertheless, it is not so important if all the 'aims' of the activity are not achieved. It is more important to carry out the activity and illustrate to students what possibilities exist when using drama methods. If the activity is not completely successful, it is also possible to point out to the students afterwards what went wrong. Once the teachers have demonstrated the teacher-in-role activity and illustrated how to create a tableau, it will then be easier for stu-

dents to carry out their own drama activities.

3. Group work with dialogue extracts

3.1 Lecture: Romeo and Juliet: theme relationships between the generations

The aim of the next lecture was to focus on some of the central themes in the play. The teacher attempted to touch upon subjects that would be relevant to the extracts which were used in the translation and tableau sessions, and that would encourage reflection on these themes.

The modern audience tends to read the play as a justification of young love, and a criticism of the older generations' inability to deal with conflict. The lecture attempted to throw light on this oversimplification by examining adolescence, marriage and domestic conflict in Shakespeare's times. What would Shakespeare's contemporaries think about Romeo and Juliet, their marriage, and their behaviour in general? What were the social conventions surrounding family, marriage and domestic conflict at that time, and in what way would a modern audience react differently? The lecture was based partly on Sasha Roberts's analysis of *Romeo and Juliet* in the series *Writers and Their Work*.

The lecture also addressed itself to the question of the text of *Romeo and Juliet*, the source of the text, and the relationship between the source and Shakespeare's version. The students were encouraged to purchase the Oxford School edition of *Romeo and Juliet*, which contains many useful notes, and an accessible introduction on, among other subjects, the forerunner to the play, Arthur Brooke's *The Tragicall History of Romeus and Juliet*.

Finally, the relationships between the Nurse and Juliet, and Romeo and Friar Lawrence were discussed in some detail, examining the relationship between the young lovers and the adult generation, and the council and guidance which was available to

the lovers.

3.2 Translating Shakespeare and close reading

Students as translators

All the English courses taught at Sogn og Fjordane College include grammar-translation - this is also the case at other colleges and universities throughout Norway. Texts for translation exercises used in language and grammar teaching are often non-authentic, i.e. specially adapted for grammar-translation purposes. More emphasis is now being laid on the use of 'authentic texts' in the National Curriculum for secondary schools. Students can combine their learning of grammar and literature by translating extracts from plays and novels. It is also interesting for both students and teachers to see how English literature has been translated into Norwegian by professional translators and consider what translation strategies they choose. Students will also be able to compare their translation with the original work (in this case, the original text of Shakespeare). Translating Shakespeare also helps to illuminate the difference between translating factual prose and translating poetry: different strategies have to be used. Students will also reach an understanding of linguistic and literary terms such as 'idiom', 'prose', 'poetry' and 'blank verse' when translating Shakespeare. For instance, metaphor and idiom cannot be translated by the 'word for word' method, which is often the technique used in grammar-translation exercises. A thorough understanding of an extract is also necessary if students are to create a tableau from the text extract which they have been given.

4. Creating a tableau

The teachers need to explain what is meant by creating a tableau. A verbal explanation can first be given: students create a tableau by taking a scene from a play (or a novel or story) and by using their bodies, recreate the scene and 'freeze' it for

some seconds. The tableau may illustrate some climax, theme or aspect of a play or any other narrative text. The teacher when explaining what is meant by creating a tableau can mention the example of the Renaissance painters who often 'froze' scenes from the Bible, such as the Crucifixion, the Last Supper, and the birth of Jesus, all of which 'told a story'.

Once a verbal explanation has been given, the teachers need to demonstrate to the students how to create a tableau. With three students and the teacher a tableau was created from a scene using extract 5 (Act 3, scene 1), which contains four characters: Capulet, Lady Capulet, Juliet and her nurse.

4.2 Students create their own tableau

The students were given the following handout:

4.2.1 Dialogue extract 2 (act 1, scene 3, l.1-13) - "The Council"

The students were asked to create tableaux using the dialogue extracts (there were five extracts in all for five groups). The extracts were chosen specially to illustrate the relationship between the different generations in the play. The students discussed the emotions and feelings of the characters they were going to depict. They chose 'key words' which described the emotions of each character. An example of an extract "The Council" is given: (see next page)

In this particular extract, extract 2, the students were given some key words: LADY CAPULET: coldness, gravity, seriousness, estrangement; JULIET: obedience; NURSE: concern, tenderness. They were also asked to find their own keywords. The students are asked to give their tableau a title, in this case, "The Council". It is important that the students freeze their tableau for 10 or 20 seconds in order to give the 'audience' (the other students) time to absorb the scene. Just as important is the evalu-

ation of the tableau by the other students. They should be encouraged by the teacher to give positive comments. Does the audience (the students) 'see' what the group are trying to portray - in other words do the group manage to portray the emotions and feelings which they are attempting to portray? This can be decided in the summing up evaluation of each tableau. If the students know the play well, they can be encouraged to guess the identify of the characters, and also to identify where in the plot of play a scene is taken from (which act and scene). In the majority of cases there seems to be agreement between the intentions (of the group creating the tableau) and the perception (of the students viewing it). The teacher should have a supervisory role and encourage as far as possible a dialogue between the student groups watching and the group depicting a tableau.

5 Conclusion and evaluation

5.1 Evaluation by the students of Romeo and Juliet using Drama Methods

We handed out some evaluation sheets to the students containing four questions. The answers which were rather short, were on the whole similar, and of the positive and encouraging kind. What they left out was perhaps just as important as what they included in their comments. None of the students commented on the difficulty or the inaccessibility of Shakespeare's play. This would not have been the case if the text had not been approached gradually: by first starting with the text in Norwegian, and then translating it into English, and then working with different exercises using the same extract, such as finding keywords, discussing and interpreting the text, and creating a tableau, as well as offering comment on the tableaux created by other students. This involved working in depth and detail. All the students found the written text of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* accessible.

5.2 The results

The complete results of the evaluation are included in appendix 4. In conclusion, we have included the evaluation questions here with some of the students' comments: (se neste side)

1. How did you experience the sequence of lessons on drama methods/Romeo and Juliet?

- It was fun being the actor (active) for a lesson. Also by utilising dramatisation - we gained new knowledge and understanding of a text.

2. What did you learn from the following:

a) 'Teacher-in-role' sequence?

- It helped us imagine what it would be like to live in those times.
- A good way of introducing a text/play. The students (audience) should be more active.

b) Work with dialogue extracts?

- Helps in an understanding and interpretation of the text.
- Showed us how to express emotions and attitudes through body-language, how to cooperate with others to make the image as complete as possible.

c) Statues (tableaux)?

- Showed us how to find the most important moment - and showed us how much can be involved in expressing one look.
- The statues made it easier to concentrate on body-language and facial expressions.
- That a surprisingly large amount of information could be read out of them.

3. Did these methods give you a better insight and understanding of the text?

- Yes, I really think so. But still Shakespeare is THE poet, and this makes it easy to stay motivated.
- Yes, I think the text is difficult to understand some places and this helped to reach an understanding of it.
- Yes, you always get closer to the text when you have to interpret it yourself.

Creating a tableau

1. Working in the same groups as before, using the same dialogue extracts, read the parts aloud first.
2. Discuss how you are going to interpret the extract using the key words which you have prepared. Discuss roles and characterization, positioning, movement, props, stance, etc. Agree on the 'turning-point' in the scene which you are going to depict. Make a simple arrangement. Decide whether or not the characters should stand or sit, and where

they should be placed in relation to each other. Freeze the frame and create your tableau. Groups should have at least one 'dry run' before depicting their tableau for the rest of the class.

3. Decide on a title for your tableau. It might be a title which describes the scene, an abstract concept or one of the lines spoken by one of the characters. What do you want to signal to your audience? What atmosphere are you trying to create? What is the relationship between the characters?
4. If there are more students in the group than characters in the scene

which is going to be depicted, then one or more of you can act as a director(s) of the scene (it is easy for someone not involved to suggest what interpretation and expression best suits what you are trying to aim at).

5. Presentations and positive criticism

After a group has created a tableau, the audience is invited to give positive criticism. The audience describes and interprets what they see. Have the audience seen what the group wished to express?

4. Do you think you might use these methods when working as a teacher?

- Yes, because it makes it more motivating and more «fun» than just reading it/listening to it.

5.3 Concluding remarks

The students were very eager to participate in all of the activities involving drama methods. This is inspiring for the teachers who feel encouraged to use drama methods another time. The students were also given the opportunity to express their creative talents which they did successfully. The students seemed to agree more or less that they reached a closer understanding of the text, and that drama was a teaching method they would like to use when teaching pupils in the secondary school.

Upon request, the authors of this article have generously agreed to send this report (including theoretical aspects of the projects) as well as an extensive appendix.

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Juliet, translated into the Norwegian, Oslo : Gyldendal, 1974.

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Group names: Torgeir, Sigrunn and Rolf Title of tableau: "The Council"

Dialogue extracts

Dialogue Extract 2

Translate the following dialogue extract.

The following two extracts are taken from two different translations of the same text: Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. One is by Gunnar Reiss-Andersen, the other by Halldis Moren Vesaas. Which do you prefer and why?

Translated by Halldis Moren Vesaas Act I, Scene 3, l. 1-13	English translation
FRU CAPULET Kvar er mi dotter? Rop på henne, amme.	
AMMA Heh, ved min møydom - som eg muste i tolv års alderen - eg sa til henne at ho skulle kom hit	
Hoi, lammet mitt, gullhøna mi! - Gu' trøyste meg, kvar held jentungen hus? Julie!	
JULIE (inn) Kva no? Kven ropar?	
AMMA Mor di.	
JULIE Her er eg, kva vil du meg?	
FRU CAPULET Det er ei sak ... Amme, vil du gå, vi må talast ved på to manns hand. Kom hit att, amme, når eg tenkjer etter så vil eg heller ta deg med på rad. Du veit at dotter mi er svært ung.	
AMMA Alderen hennar veit eg plent på timen.	
FRU CAPULET Ho er ikkje fylt fjorten år enno.	
Translated by Gunnar Reiss Andersen	
GREVINNE CAPULET Hvor er min datter, Rop på henne.	
AMMEN Nå - ved min mødom i mitt tolvte år! Jeg ropte nettopp: - sikke, sikke, -sisikk!	
Så Gud forby-, hvor er hun, Julie, hei! (Julie inn)	
JULIE Hallo, hvem roper?	
AMMEN Mor din.	
JULIE Ja, her er jeg.	
Hva vil du, mor?	
GREVINNE CAPULET Jo, saken er-. Hør, amme, la oss være alene. Skjønt-, ånei, bli hvor du er. Du kan i grunnen like gjerne høre.	
Nu har min datter nådd den skønne alder -	
AMMEN Ja, hennes alder kjenner jeg - på timen.	
GREVINNE CAPULET Snart fjorten år-, men ennu ikke fylt.	

Creating a tableau and dialogue extracts - key words Extract 2: Act I, Scene 3

LADY CAPULET: coldness, gravity, seriousness, estrangement

JULIET: obedience

NURSE: concern, tenderness

- After translating from Norwegian to English, and having read the original in English, are there any key words you might want to add to this list?
- Compare the two translations. Which do you prefer? Say why. Which is the closest to the original text?

Group Comment: Concerning keywords:

Comment on the different translations - which did you prefer and why: