

WHEN THE HURLY BURLY'S DONE: EMIRATI ENGINEERING STUDENTS PERFORM SHAKESPEARE TO LEARN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

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Abstract

Drama enhances students' ability to acquire not only the verbal skills associated with language, but the pragmatic skills needed for communication (Janudom & Wasanasomsithi, 2002; Miccoli, 2003). Additionally, students gain an understanding of the cultural nuances that are reflective of the characters in a play. Stage movement can help students interact with the characters by placing them in an appropriate physical context and then manipulating their movements. This connection with the text through the performance of literature can serve as a form of reader response which, in turn, can increase students' reading comprehension (Eliot, 1990; Amer, 2003). Despite these benefits, primary school teachers are often more receptive to the inclusion of drama-type activities in their language learning program (Royka, 2002).

The adaptation and performance of Shakespeare's Macbeth by first-semester Emirati engineering students at the Petroleum Institute (PI) in Abu Dhabi showcases the use of drama as an innovative tool for English language learning at the university level. The Macbeth production was developed as a pilot project in the Fall semester of the 2012-2013 academic year with one class of advanced ESL students on the male campus. This presentation will elaborate on the pedagogical techniques used to adapt the play to an all-male cast, including the development of stage directions and music selection. The challenges of producing a theatrical project that is culturally different from the learners' experiences will also be discussed. A short video highlighting the students' performance will be shown to provide a cultural context for the topic and reflections from students who appeared in the play are included to showcase the influence of the Macbeth production on their lives as engineering students one year after their landmark performance.