

UNIVERSITY THEATER STUDIO IN ENGLISH THROUGH THE LENS OF MODERN STRATEGIES OF HUMANITARIAN EDUCATION

УНИВЕРСИТЕТСКАЯ ТЕАТРАЛЬНАЯ СТУДИЯ НА АНГЛИЙСКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ В СВЕТЕ СОВРЕМЕННЫХ СТРАТЕГИЙ ГУМАНИТАРНОГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ

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The paper describes the activities of Voronezh State University students' theatrical studio in English. The opportunities of developing students' creative potential via participating in the studio's performances are presented.

В статье анализируется работа студенческой театральной студии на английском языке Воронежского госуниверситета и раскрывается потенциал студии как компонента современного гуманитарного образования.

Keywords: enhancement of creative potential, students' theatrical studio, English language, humanitarian education.

Ключевые слова: творческое развитие, студенческая театральная студия, английский язык.

The relevancy to develop humanitarian education at the university level today seems more than up-to-date and this field of concern occupies a very special place in teaching students of non-linguistic specialties. Modern educational programs minimize the most important aspect of work, which is nurturing civic and moral potential of young citizens of the country as well as their striving for traditional. humane attitudes and values [1].

The most important component of the modern strategy of liberal arts education is the development of a student's creativity which has always been one of the priorities of the national higher education. Recently, accompanied by an unprecedentedly rapid development of science and technology, this need seems to be pervasive. Whoever a university graduate may be in the future, he/she must, first of all, be able to creatively approach the work, show initiative and originality in creating new products and solving problems that arise. The entire process of training a specialist in a higher school, including

both educational and extracurricular activities, should be directed to the maturation of these qualities.

An important component of students' creative development outside the classroom could be their involvement in theatrical activities. At Voronezh State University, theater enthusiasts – both, professionals and amateurs - have existed practically from the moment of its appearance on the Voronezh land. Voronezh State University is the birthplace of Voronezh Puppet Theater: the first puppet show in Voronezh took place on October 8, 1925, in the main University Hall.

The Song Theater of the Voronezh State University, founded in 1971 under the leadership of Alexander Smirnov and Anatoly Kaplan, was known throughout the country and far beyond its borders for a long time, bringing together students, graduates and teachers of different universities, researchers, people of various specialties and professions in songwriting. The performances, vocal and dramatic compositions and vocal cycles of this group invariably initiated great public interest, and the troupe itself was a participant and regular laureate of various song competitions. It became a diploma winner of the XII World Festival of Youth and Students in Moscow.

In the 60s - 80s of the twentieth century, the VSU Theater of Miniatures also gained great fame over the country, which became an important milestone in the life and human development of several generations of students and teachers [2].

Unfortunately, due to a number of socio-economic reasons of the 90s of the last century, both of these theatrical societies ceased their work. However, the interest in theatrical activities at Voronezh University has not faded away, and quite recently a new theater appeared in VSU, more precisely, a theater project - a theater studio in English "CATS 'House", a creative group of co-directors-organizers of which is based at the Science Departments' English Chair.

The creation of a studio is an attempt to bring to the work of teachers working with students of non-linguistic faculties an element of artistic and aesthetic practices that allows them to reveal educational, linguistic, creative and moral powers of students and teachers [3].

The decision to create a studio arose as a contribution to the Year of Literature, which started in Russia in 2015. The idea of the first performance was inspired by the works of the famous Voronezh resident - writer, poet, translator - Samuil Yakovlevich Marshak, including his famous fairy tale "The Cat's House" (<https://youtu.be/O5QEvHxYLU>). The result exceeded expectations. The performance brought together about sixty participants, the script was based on the material of more than twenty works of world art, including poetry, prose, music and ballet.

To perform the overture to the play, a small orchestra (violin, flute, domra, guitar, accordion, double bass) was assembled from the VSU students with a musical education. The cartoon "Kitten from Lizyukov Street", the authors and characters of which are associated with the historical and cultural heritage of Voronezh, was translated by students into English, dubbed and included in the outline of the performance.

The song from the cartoon became the final episode of the performance, was performed by the whole audience and marked the beginning of the traditional final song, which sums up the entire performance and work on it. The first production gave the name for the theater studio: "CATS' HOUSE", which now stands for "Creative, Artistic, Talented Students' House" and is confirmed by every new performance of students.

The theater project is a form both pedagogically and organizationally new, but all the participants managed to appreciate its positive aspects. Each new performance is a new project. Starting with the second season, it was decided to present university audiences with the work of famous English and American writers.

Thus, the plays released on the stage of VSU were readings of the following authors' works: in 2016 the name of the performance was "The Club of Oscar Wild" (<https://youtu.be/SEHF9hoB2tw>), in 2017 – "Four Seasons with O. Henry" (<https://youtu.be/BrvbAmQW2Mc>), in 2018 – "Mark Twain or Life on the Mississippi" (<https://youtu.be/llNYIiY48>), in 2019 – "Merry-Go-Round- Maugham". A single performance of about 1.5 hours created each time, was dedicated to the work of the chosen author. It consisted of several plots and was connected by the common idea and text of the presenters. The idea, purpose, educational and upbringing tasks of each plot complement each other, creating a single picture of the versatile artistic endeavour of the writer.

When choosing works for performances, the main criteria are: the significance of the author's contribution into the culture of the country, the quality of the language, socio-cultural characteristics, the value content of the described events and actions of the heroes, characteristic descriptors of the historical era. It also takes into account the opportunities that the selected pieces stimulate the creativity of students.

Note, that students have rather limited opportunities for stage decorations in the hall where the performances are played. After all, this is an assembly hall intended for holding official events, and completely unsuitable for theatrical activities. This is another stimulus for the inventiveness and creativity of students. The directors and actors work wonders for scenography, placing interesting accents and surprising the audience. Several tables, chairs and armchairs are transformed into a ramshackle gardener's

shack from Oscar Wilde's "The Devoted Friend", or a palace from Mark Twain's "Prince and the Pauper", or a busy city street from the story "Love and Money" by O. Henry. The change of scenery on the stage takes place in an organized and dynamic manner in front of the audience, introducing an element of surprise and often provoking the audience's applause [4].

The lack of scenery is made up for by a slide show that reproduces on the screen the changing seasons, the past and future of the heroes, modest dwellings and luxurious apartments. A selection from the Internet, shooting live scenes, clips and photographs – all this is the result of painstaking creative work of a large number of studio participants.

Vocally gifted students participate in the preparation of musical components and selection of musical accompaniment for the performance, which entails viewing and analyzing musical audio and video material from different eras, musical styles and forms.

Theater studio "CATS 'House" is gaining popularity with every production. Participants in the performances are not only students – bachelors and masters of VSU, but also students of the city's schools, students of a special music school, children and grandchildren of university employees, the teachers themselves. All the participants in the performances happily go to rehearsals, play with enthusiasm on the stage and look forward to the next performance. The former VSU bachelors return to the studio with a desire to take up directing.

This is undoubtedly the result of joint creativity, "complicity" in "education by the theater." The studio has a tradition of dedication to the "Active Members of the Studio" of participants who have contributed to the creation of the studio's performances twice. Such participants are awarded special certificates. Those, whose participation is not limited to two years, receive a commemorative medal. The presentation takes place right on the stage, immediately after the end of the performance, before the traditional treat – a huge cake with the cream poster picturing the premiere performance.

A theatrical project involves the most active participation of spectators. To help the audience, colorful program booklets are compiled, which provide a brief summary of mini performances in Russian, the names of the actors and their performers, popular sayings of the author, whose works formed the basis for the production, the names of the musical works accompanying the actors' play are indicated. At the end of the performance, a quiz on the content of the performance is held for the audience, the winners of which receive sweet prizes.

A distinctive feature of the theater studio is that there is no casting in the project, everyone is accepted, and the roles are composed for everyone. Thus, everyone has an opportunity to try themselves on stage and show their

creativity. Although the productions are performed in English, lack of knowledge of the language is not an obstacle to participation in the studio. For everyone there is phonetic training in English, which is carried out both by the teachers and by the studio members who speak English well. As a result, all members of the studio are making progress in learning English.

Inspired by the challenges of the past years, we have made attempts to start a new kind of a theatre project – “Theatre at the Microphone”.

The experience shows that theatrical studio activity motivates the extracurricular foreign-language activity of students, their interest in works of English-language literature, music, visual and theatrical art, gives them the opportunity to creatively interpret the characters portrayed and the events described. We also note the educational potential of this project, as well as the contribution that the theater studio makes to the formation of universal competencies assigned by the Federal State Educational Standard 3 ++ in students.

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