

LEARN ACTIVITIES CAN INJECT LIFE INTO WHAT OTHERWISE  
MIGHT BE A STERILE LANGUAGE TRAPPEL WITHIN THE  
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13

# PROCESS DRAMA AND TEACHING ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

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*Drama and English Teaching: Engagement*  
*Action and Engagement*  
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This chapter focuses on the use of drama as a vehicle for English language learning, in particular in classrooms with bilingual and multilingual students. It reports approaches and rich tasks that, according to research, have demonstrable benefit to the language enhancement of bilingual and multilingual students in secondary schools in Singapore. However, these strategies will prove useful to teachers in any country that has students from diverse language backgrounds.

## AN ACCOUNT FROM SINGAPORE

Since I came to live and work in Singapore in 2002 as a lecturer in drama, I have had to think much more carefully about the issues of language and language acquisition in a bilingual and multilingual society, and how these might affect my drama teaching practice. Singapore is an interesting place to work as a drama teacher and language teacher. The language of schooling and business is English, but the diversity of the population means that, for many of the inhabitants of Singapore, English is a second or third language.

Many of the countries in the South-East Asian region recognise the connections between the capacity to communicate in English and the development of social and economic capital. Language education policies in China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam make direct connections between the capacity to communicate in English with international relations and trade (Nunan, 2003). In Singapore, where English is the medium of instruction at all levels of schooling, English is also upheld as an interethnic language, fostering ease of communication across Chinese, Malay, Indian and other ethnic groups who share no other common language.

In this country, it is easy to see the importance of English for economic and social capital. The ability to communicate effectively in English is emphasised at every level of society, from the buses that drive the streets emblazoned with 'Speak Good English' and the plethora of advertisements for English tutors to the school curriculum itself, where all classes are taught in English and where students are tested, nationally, in both oral and written English at the end of primary school and the junior years of secondary school. The Ministry of Education English Language syllabus states that, by the end of their secondary education, students will be expected to be able to:

...speak, write and make presentations in internationally acceptable English that is grammatical, fluent and appropriate for purpose, audience, context and culture (Ministry of Education, 2001:3).

Students sit for both written and oral English examinations, and the results of these high-stakes tests have a direct and long-lasting impact on their educational and life paths, because they influence the placement of students in ability-related 'streams' of schooling at all levels

**DRAMA AND ENGLISH TEACHING:**  
IMAGINATION, ACTION AND ENGAGEMENT

of education. In my work as a drama lecturer at the only teacher-preparation institution in Singapore, the National Institute of Education, I teach students with very fluent written and spoken English and, when on teaching practicum, am required to observe pre-service teachers and grade their English competency as part of their report. It is easy to forget that English is the second, or third, language for many of these pre-service teachers and that, outside the lecture theatre or tutorial room, they will rarely elect to communicate in English as their first choice of language.

I'm a drama teacher, and have been so for more than 30 years, though I started my teaching career as a primary teacher, and have also worked as an English teacher in secondary schools. In my classroom practice, I have always been conscious of the connection between language, register, vocabulary, grammatical structures, and communicative capacity and agency, and in my drama practice I have tried to work within forms that allow the students to contribute to their own learning, collaborate and learn from each other, and find ways of making and expressing meaning about their own lives through the art form.

In 2004, I was given the opportunity to research the impact of drama on the oral language outcomes of students from the Normal Technical (the lowest ability level) stream in their Secondary 4 year. Secondary 4 students are approximately sixteen years old, and are in their last year of secondary school. This may be their last year of formal education, unless they continue to study in Junior Colleges (academic track) or Polytechnics (vocational track). The research project (Stinson & Freebody, 2006a, 2006b) gave us the opportunity to research with students and their teachers in four separate high schools in different locations in Singapore. We wanted to teach drama with a particular focus on structured activities in which the students *needed* to use spoken English, and to measure what impact, if any, the drama classes had on the students' oral communication examination results.

The language-focused activities were embedded throughout the dramas, with each learning strategy emerging from the previous one and providing the basis for those to come.

The dramas were planned to offer diverse and imaginative opportunities for *meaningful* talk in the specific drama context. The results of this research, and others like it (Kao & O'Neill, 1998; Liu, 2002), may lead us into developing an understanding of how process drama and English language learning can work hand in hand to improve language outcomes for ESOL students.

## THE SINGAPORE DRAMA AND ORAL LANGUAGE PROJECT (DOL)

We planned a series of ten sessions of one-hour classes, and taught these to the four facilitators who were each to work with one of the research classes for the entire ten hours of the drama workshops. I and my colleagues conducted pre- and post-tests, and results showed a reliable

and significant improvement in oral communication results for the students who participated in the drama classes as compared with the classes who had no access to drama.

In addition to the favourable results of the test scores, the students and teachers were unanimously enthusiastic about the drama classes, and reported that the students showed evidence of increased confidence in spoken English communication, greater enjoyment of lessons and improved racial relationships within the class. The last may have been a result of the practice of regularly changing the groups, with deliberate mixing of race and gender, so that the students did not easily fall back into familiar roles and 'mother tongue' language. The strategy of deliberate and regular shifting and mixing of groups to enhance intercultural sensitivity is supported by similar findings in Tara Goldstein's *Teaching and Learning in a Multilingual School* (2003).

We drew on the reports of research by Shin-Mei Kao and Cecily O'Neill (1998) and Betty Jane Wagner (1998) to support our belief that drama develops proficiency in the widest range of language functions, and allows students to experiment with vocabulary, register and speech patterns. During the ten hours of lessons, the students participated in four process dramas, and in each drama the students *had* to communicate orally in order for the drama to proceed.

Each drama included the following components:

- Every student had to have at least one significant opportunity to talk in every lesson.
- Students were required to react and respond to questions or situations without any prior preparation.
- A variety of language demands was planned to allow for the active engagement of students with the full range of language proficiencies in the class.
- Every drama incorporated group work, and students worked in diverse groups. This ensured they were not always collaborating with members of the same race or their usual friendship group, and gave them opportunities to work with classmates with whom they would not normally associate.
- An 'English only' rule was imposed for the period of each drama lesson.
- A range of different language registers and purposes was required by the communication contexts within the dramas. Students had the opportunity to be persuasive and evasive; to create their own narratives; to build on the narratives of others; to be angry, happy, sad and scared; to create and solve mysteries; and to have fun and enjoy speaking in English.
- Reflection time was allocated at the end of each of the drama lessons. During this time the teachers encouraged the students to talk about how they felt about the class and what they had learned. In particular, the focus was on identifying the varied types of language demands that the drama offered and which the students therefore had the opportunity to practice.

In each lesson the teacher worked with an emphasis on building confidence and feelings of security within the group. We tried to emphasise the collaborative co-creation process,

rather than putting students 'on show', where they might feel insecure and in danger of failing to communicate effectively. This is a key component of process drama, where an external audience is absent but an internal audience is essential (Bowell & Heap, 2001:6).

## LANGUAGE ACQUISITION THEORY

Teachers of ESOL draw on a range of theories to support their practice. Goh and Silver (2006) classify these under the headings of behaviourist, innatist and interactionist.

*Behaviourist* theories support modelling, practice and reinforcement from a language user proficient in the target language (such as a native speaker), and rely on teaching practices based on imitation and habit formation. Grammar and vocabulary are taught explicitly. Drama activities used in this approach could include language games, reading aloud, readers' theatre and scripted role-plays.

*Innatist* theorists, following Chomsky, believe in an innate mental capacity for language learning and a universal grammar (UG). The UG suggests that a child is born with a blueprint for language and 'exposure to, or input from, a particular language sets the specific rules of a child's language' (Goh & Silver, 2006:45). Innatist theories support *Immersion* and similar 'natural' approaches to language learning. Drama activities used in this approach would incorporate language games, reading of scripts and structured improvisations.

*Interactionist* theorists are often coupled with communicative language teaching approaches (CLTAs) (Goh & Silver, 2006:58). Interactionist theorists propose that language is acquired through social interactions, and that it requires diverse opportunities for language input, negotiation and output as essential processes for language acquisition. CLTAs are learner-centred rather than teacher-centred classes, and include the contextualised teaching of vocabulary and grammar, meaningful interactions through pair and group work, and an emphasis on language for communication. Structured and unstructured improvisations and process drama are strategies that support this approach.

Most current language acquisition theorists endorse the concept of a continuum of learning that is, predictable and sequential stages of language development; in which the learner progresses from no knowledge of the new language to a level of competency closely resembling that of a native speaker. These theories have resulted in the identification of several distinct stages of second language development, any or all of which may be evident within a single class. These stages (adapted from Reed & Railsback, 2003) are:

- 1 *Silent/preproduction stage*: students have up to 500 'receptive' words; that is, words they can understand but may not be comfortable using. This stage often involves a 'silent period'

### Immersion

An approach to language teaching where all instruction, interaction and activities are in the target language.

- during which students may not speak, but can respond using a variety of including gestures, nodding or responding with yes or no.
- 2 **Early production stage:** students have close to 1000 receptive words; they are able to understand and use. During this phase, they usually use two-word phrases, and give answers to simple yes/no, either/or, or what questions.
  - 3 **Speech emergence stage:** students have approximately 3000 words and use phrases and simple sentences to communicate. They begin to use dialogue and ask questions. They may produce longer sentences, but often with grammatical errors that can interfere with communication.
  - 4 **Intermediate language proficiency stage:** students typically have 6000 words; beginning to make complex statements, state opinions, ask for clarification, share thoughts and speak at greater length.
  - 5 **Advanced language proficiency stage:** students have developed some specialized area vocabulary and can participate fully in grade-level classroom activities, but use occasional extra support. Students can speak English using grammar and vocabulary comparable to that of same-age native speakers.

Many language acquisition theorists endorse Stephen Krashen's *comprehension hypothesis*, which suggests that learners acquire language by 'in-taking' and understanding language that is a 'little beyond their current level of competence' (Krashen, 1983:163). This additional hypothesis is the *affective filter hypothesis*, which suggests that an individual's emotions can either interfere or assist in the learning of a new language. According to Krashen, learning language is different from learning other subjects because it *requires public practice*. Speaking out in a new language can result in anxiety, embarrassment or anger, and these emotions can create a kind of filter that blocks the learner's ability to process new or difficult words. Classroom environments that are engaging and nonthreatening enhance a student's ability to learn by increasing motivation and encouraging risk-taking. These qualities scaffolded language activities, a safe space for learning and the use of language purposefully to make meaning and communicate with others are essential components of process drama.

## WHY USE DRAMA WITH ESOL STUDENTS?

'Language is above all a means of communication, not an abstract body of knowledge to be learnt' (Dougill, 1987:5). I am not suggesting that all language lessons in the ESOL classroom should be drama based, or even *necessarily* include drama; however, the strategies and skills

**DRAMA AND ENGLISH TEACHING:**  
IMAGINATION, ACTION AND ENGAGEMENT



that are a part of the drama teacher's repertoire can be valuable additions to the repertoire of the ESOL teacher. But why should we bother?

Drama and language are closely connected because they both require the skills of communicating and expressing meaning through words. There is a substantial amount of research that provides evidence that drama contributes to improving vocabulary, expression, retention, imagination and language usage (Podlozny, 2000; Schaffner, 1984; Wagner, 1998). Research into drama and second-language learning (Hoskisson & Tompkins, 1987; Kao & O'Neill, 1998; Wagner & Barnett, 1998; Wilburn, 1992) has also suggested that there are a range of benefits in:

- the contextualisation of language
- the motivation, confidence and enthusiasm that drama promotes
- the encouraging and safe atmosphere of the drama classroom
- the shift in power from teachers to students.

## Contextualising language

There is a notable difference between the world of the classroom and the world outside. If language development activities are constrained to formal classroom contexts, then language opportunities will remain narrow and restricted. However, as Ionothan Neelands (1992) points out, the opportunities to work in a range of roles and situations offer infinite possibilities for language use. Involving students in the negotiation and constructing drama through the medium of role allows them insights into the relationship between context and language, and between the language that they are learning, their own lives and the lives of those around them. Classroom language activities can tend to be formal and contrived, and emphasise correctness. These structured exercises may not best prepare students for the fast-paced, and frequently ungrammatical, conversational skills the outside world requires. As David Crystal (1975:3) explains:

People in textbooks do not get all mixed up while they are speaking, forget what they wanted to say, hesitate, make grammatical mistakes, argue erratically or illogically, use words vaguely, get interrupted, talk at the same time, switch speech styles, manipulate the rules of the language to suit themselves, or fail to understand. In a word, they are not real.

The opportunity to communicate in role and in a dramatic context shows us that 'speaking another language involves acting in that language' (Schaernguivel, 1989:2), since speaking a language involves paralinguistic vocal cues and features such as gestures, facial expression and nonverbal sounds. We should ensure that language is contextual and 'real' by putting students in drama situations where they must focus on meaning (Hui, 1997), and where the strategy encourages natural unrestricted talk that allows students to communicate in a useful and relevant way. Contextualising language learning through the drama process reminds us that

communication is more than just using the right words in the right order. It is about getting your message across.

Employing a dramatic fiction to provide contextualised language learning experiences allows students to focus on meaning rather than being overly constrained by correctness.

## Confidence and motivation

The belief that drama helps students to develop confidence and motivation by encouraging self-expression, initiative, enthusiasm and cooperation is shared by much of the literature in the field. Kao and O'Neill state that confidence levels increase when students have 'something to talk about and, most importantly, when they know how to express their ideas' (1998:94). Al-Saadat and Afifi (1997) report on teachers in Iran using role-play as a means of bringing girls 'out of their shell'.

Improvement in confidence to participate and communicate is supported during drama processes because the students are working in the 'safe space' of drama. Here, some of the rules of time and permanence are suspended: if you make a mistake you can rewind and fix it. The flexibility of time, roles and relationships within the 'as if' of the drama event allow students to construct and reconstruct a communicative text, either oral or written, by crossing out, rephrasing and editing without fear of failure as they enactively shape and reshape the text to communicate intended meaning. Because students move, speak and interact in roles, the cognitive, kinaesthetic and affective dimensions are harnessed to deepen and strengthen learning.

Drama reduces the fear of making a mistake by allowing us to rehearse and rephrase as a natural part of the process.

## The safe space of drama

When working in role, students become more comfortable with the taking of risks to participate and express ideas. The implicit drama contract reinforces that they are working as an 'other' and not themselves. The role they play protects them and supports language decisions as they access their mental dictionaries, drawing on vocabulary that they may not use in general conversation. The incentive to uncover reasons and make decisions within the drama further prompts examples of risk-taking in language situations.

Also, the participants are not put 'on show' via the task of performing to an audience. Instead, their audience is themselves, and each other, as they collaborate to create the dramatic text from within the group. Flexible groupings and co-creation of scenes, monologues, dialogues and character profiles allows students to contribute as much as they are able, and still feel included, in spite of lower language proficiency levels. These activities, intrinsic to drama, encourage students to take risks and hypothesise language structures as they gain confidence in their use of language (Hughes, 1991).

**DRAMA AND ENGLISH TEACHING:**  
IMAGINATION, ACTION AND ENGAGEMENT



One of the main aims of a drama class is to give students something to talk about and a safe physical, cognitive and emotional space to figure out the best way to express their ideas.

## Shifting the power from teachers to students

Studies of student participation in language classrooms have shown that teachers do about 70 per cent of the talking and perform twice as many interactive acts as the students (Kao & O'Neill, 1998:41). In these teacher-dominated classrooms, students:

- 1 seldom address questions to the teacher
- 2 almost never address questions to other students
- 3 seldom react.

It is difficult to change the status relationship between teacher and student so evident in the traditional classroom. One way of doing this in drama is for the teacher to take on a 'lower'-status role than the students. The students can be the 'ones who know', while the teacher-in-role is confused or needs help. The teacher can be the 'go-between', who will take the messages or instructions from the group to a higher authority outside the drama frame. Norah Morgan and Juliana Saxton (1987) have written a wonderfully helpful book that discusses role and status in detail.

Drama allows the teacher and students to reverse their traditional status roles, thus assisting students in developing their capacity to lead and take control of the learning situation.

The benefits of using drama activities for second-language learners are enhanced when drama provides a framework for learning and a context for communication. This makes the communication purposeful and meaningful, allows connection to the real world context and provides intrinsic motivation when students have something to say and a reason for saying it. The 'as if' world of drama offers opportunities to practise and rehearse language in a way that mirrors the unpredictability of language use in the real world. It allows for many right answers and many opportunities to refine the 'rightness' of communicating those answers. It supports imagination, and requires the students to apply knowledge acquired through more formal classroom practices in new and creative ways. Students are involved physically as well as intellectually and emotionally in the learning process, which leads to greater retention of learning in the long term (Marzano, 2003).

## Drama activities from 'Cinderella'

I like to use traditional stories as the basis for drama in the English language classroom. The familiarity of the story helps students feel confident that they can contribute to activities, which may start by simply recreating the narrative of the story, which is useful for reinforcing

narrative structure, grammatical structures, pronunciation and language register. I decided to use the well-known tale of 'Cinderella' as an example, but these activities can easily be adapted for many traditional tales. The activities are not sequenced in any particular order, and can be used singly or sequenced to match the aims of the learning.

## TEACHING STRATEGY

### ESTABLISHING THE NARRATIVE

- The teacher tells the story, and models variation in pitch, pace, tone and volume as the story progresses.
- Students, in a circle, retell the story in complete sentences. Once a sentence is finished, the next person in the circle picks up the narrative.
- Readers' theatre: the story is rewritten with an emphasis on dialogue, and read aloud with minimal movement.
- The class creates a timeline of events from the story. This can be done first in a series of freeze-frames, and then recorded in writing.

Narrative structure is just *part* of what can be learned and explored through drama. One of the great strengths of drama is that it can move beyond processes of reproduction and imitation, such as simply reenacting the narrative, to more complex and challenging activities that engage students' imaginations more deeply as they explore untold aspects of the story.

## TEACHING STRATEGY

### UNDERSTANDING PLACE

- The students can create a guided tour of the palace and/or Cinderella's family home. This is easily done in small groups, with each group taking responsibility for one area of the palace or home. It requires the students to use descriptive language, and can highlight the contrast between the two locations.

or

- Students can create a guided tour of the 'working' locations of the palace/ Cinderella's home (such as the kitchen, the laundry and the garden), allowing alternative perspectives to be considered, and reminding us of the workers that support the household.

#### Still image

A convention by which members of a group use their bodies to make an unmoving image or tableau, capturing an idea or moment in time.

**Still Images** (also called freeze-frames or tableaux) can be used to highlight key moments in the story. By reflecting on features such as proximity, gesture, stance and facial expression, we can explore the communication of relationships, mood, tension and symbol.

## UNDERSTANDING KEY MOMENTS

## TEACHING STRATEGY

- Students create photos from the family album by making still images of significant events (for example, Cinderella with her father and mother when she was small; the wedding party when Cinderella's father remarries; a family portrait of father, stepmother, stepsisters and Cinderella; and the families together in a wedding portrait with Cinderella and Prince Charming).
- The inner thoughts and feelings of the characters can be revealed by using the strategy of *tapping in* (when one of the characters in the freeze is tapped on the shoulder, he or she speaks aloud a word or phrase that reveals his or her true thoughts). This can reveal contrasting or hidden feelings (such as the Queen Mother: 'My new shoes are killing me!')
- Students who are more confident in English can step out of the still image, when tapped, and speak a spontaneous monologue that gives more information about their usually unspoken feelings. They then step back into the frame.

With drama we are not limited to reproducing the familiar narrative, as drama allows us to delve deeper and go beyond the accustomed understanding of key characters and events. We can use familiar strategies, such as the 'hot-seat', where someone (either the teacher or a student) sits in the hot-seat and is questioned by the group. For beginning-language students, it is useful to allow time to prepare questions, but you will find that further questions will spontaneously emerge in response to the answers given by the person in role. Writing tasks can include letters (formal or informal) or diary entries, which allow new information and understanding of the events to be explored.

### In role

Taking on of the attitude of someone other than yourself while within the dramatic context.

## UNDERSTANDING CHARACTER

## TEACHING STRATEGY

You may choose to hot-seat:

- Prince Charming, who reveals that he is not really interested in getting married except to produce an heir to the throne
- Cinderella, who reveals she will do anything to escape from her unbearable family
- The chief cook, who is angry at having to prepare food suddenly for hundreds of guests for the Prince's ball
- The nervous page boy, who has found the shoe Cinderella left behind but is too scared to tell the Prince, so he has come to ask the students for advice. This is a low-status role that requires the students to construct language models of how a simple page boy might address a prince.

Or write a letter:

- from the Queen to her sister inviting her to the wedding, and saying she is that Prince Charming is finally getting married
- from one of the sisters to a school friend, giving her version of the events
- from the King to another head of state with an invitation to the wedding

Drama also allows us to highlight the marginalised and untold stories that are familiar narrative.

## TEACHING STRATEGY

### Meeting in role

A convention by which students participate in role in a formal meeting. The expectation is that the class will maintain the roles for the duration of the meeting and interact according to the characteristics of those roles.

## EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE POINTS OF VIEW

- Hold a **meeting in role** during which the kitchen staff and the chief meeting with the union organiser to discuss how they can improve their working conditions.
- Write a diary entry (as any of the characters) five years later that shows this is a fairytale and everyone 'lives happily ever after', or that their life is not perfect as they had hoped. You can ask the students, either individually or in pairs, to write from both points of view.

# WORKING IN ROLE IN PROCESS DRAMA

Others in this book have defined and explained process drama, so I won't repeat that information here, except to emphasise its collaborative and episodic nature, by which meaning is built up through the layering of activities over time (O'Neill, 1995) and the necessity for an internal rather than external audience (Bowell & Heap, 2001).

This form of drama allows students to work in role and explore new and different language possibilities in a specific context. If the roles and contexts are chosen well, the structured drama process can lead students to ask and answer questions, to solve problems, to offer both information and opinions, to argue and persuade, and generally to fulfil the widest range of language functions' (Kao & O'Neill, 1998:25). 'Taking on roles also provides students with the opportunity to experiment with vocabulary, register and speech patterns (Wagner & Barnett, 1998). It is ideal for English for Specific Purposes programs (ESP), where students learn the vocabulary, grammatical structures and language demands of specific work contexts, such as English for Engineers, English for Business and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). These programs target specific kinds of English that students may need for education or jobs.

**DRAMA AND ENGLISH TEACHING:**  
IMAGINATION, ACTION AND ENGAGEMENT

Working in role in drama allows students to explore the language demands from the 'inside' rather than through discussion and reproduction of language from textbooks.

## THE DOL DRAMAS

Let's look at some of the dramas that were used as part of the research discussed earlier in this chapter. I have clustered the activities under the four macro skills of *reading, writing, speaking and listening* to highlight the learning purpose of the activities. They are not presented in order in the sequence of the planned dramas, but I hope that the sequence will become evident as you read. Space in this chapter restricts me to only two of the process dramas, so I chose to elaborate the first and the last, and just sketch out the second and third.

### The missing girl drama

This drama started with a newspaper article as a pre-text. The language and grammatical structure were simple, and the article told the story of a girl (the same age as the students) who had disappeared for three days but returned to her family safe and unharmed. However, she would not, or could not, speak about the time she was gone. The class was engaged to participate in the drama by playing the roles of journalists of a teen magazine who were preparing a feature edition focusing on the pressures experienced by young people.

### READING

Students read the article for information, about the missing girl, such as her name, age, that she had not returned home from an after school tutorial, and that her brother was usually with her. To assist beginning and intermediate-level students, the teacher modelled the reading, which was projected on a large screen; the students highlighted key words or phrases on their written text, and then spoke their own selected words or phrases in chorus with the teacher when she reread the text.

The students then suggested questions that were inferred but had not been answered in the article, and that they thought would be interesting to explore. The class was asked to suggest and list the names of people who might be able to shed light on the events and who could be interviewed (hot-seated). Both the questions and the list of possible interviewees were listed on large sheets of paper or the whiteboard to provide resources that could be referred to throughout the drama.

Later in the drama, the more confident and articulate students were given role-cards with particular information to reveal when they were hot-seated by the other students.

## TEACHING STRATEGY

### Role-card

A card or other document providing key characteristics of the role that a student is to play. It may include contextualised information about the situation, details of events or facts that will be shared while in role.

**Caption**

Words or phrases added to a freeze-frame as a label for the image.

**WRITING**

In pairs or small groups, students wrote 'good' questions that journalists might ask in the hot-seating activities.

They wrote captions for the freeze-frames they prepared as they explored the events leading up to the girl's disappearance.

They collaboratively (individually, for more advanced students) wrote headlines and the possible first sentence of an article derived from the story.

Finally, they wrote, either individually or collaboratively, an article to be published in the special edition of the magazine.

**SPEAKING**

In role as journalists they spoke with the editor (teacher-in-role) to plan the investigation they would undertake; they spoke with each other as they partnered up to conduct 'good' questions and to write the article; and they spoke with their peers in their elected hot-seat roles as they asked the questions in order to elicit information about the events that had preceded the young girl's disappearance.

In role-plays they improvised the events that happened prior to the girl's disappearance.

Out of role, they spoke to the teacher and to each other to decide on what to do for the next part of the drama; for example, if they were to travel back in time and see what happened the day before she vanished, which events might be important (these would become the improvised role-plays mentioned above)?

And, importantly, they spoke to each other and to the teacher during the reflection time at the end of the lesson. *The reflection phase was used to reflect both on this drama and the language demands of the drama.*

**LISTENING**

Students listened to the teacher model the reading of the pre-text. They listened purposefully, to elicit information and to identify the information that was missing, and which they would need to uncover as part of their investigation as journalists.

They listened to each other in pairs and in small groups as they planned and questioned and advised each other during activities.

In role, they listened to the answers their peers gave when in the hot-seat to find out new information, or when they believed information was being hidden or given falsely.

This drama is relatively simple, and does not demand much prior experience of drama from the students. It was the first in the series of lessons that were provided. An interesting aspect of the students' responses was the diversity of issues that they focused on during

**Improvisation**

Drama work during which players do not use a script or fully predetermined scenario, but make up the words and/or action; includes role-play, rehearsal exercises, *fracture plays*, standup comedy and performance story-telling.

**Out of role**

Discussion or planning related to shaping or modifying dramatic action. Once the next stage or dramatic event is decided, the students continue the drama in role.



... investigations. It was clear to the teachers that the students drew on their own lives and personal contexts to create the girl's story and provide reasons that she might have run away. Some classes emphasised parental pressure to do well in exams (a dominant thread in students' lives in Singapore); others drew on incidents of bullying that made her feel it was impossible to return to school and/or home, and this became the focus of their investigation; and others decided it was about boy-girl friendships that were not approved of by the family and the society at large. This shows that, despite the preplanned structure of the process drama workshop, there was sufficient flexibility within the activities for input from the students to be woven into the drama. They were able to tell their own stories safely by employing the individual framing and role distance that the drama offered.

## The lost civilisation

The first drama was the 'lost civilisation' drama. This drew on television, film and computer games and connected with the fantasy and science fiction genres with which young people nowadays are so familiar.

When the students came to class they were met by their teacher-in-role, who thanked them for coming to the meeting, and with her introduction made it clear that they were archaeologists on a dig. She played a digital recording, explaining that it had been found only a few hours ago at the bottom of a cliff. The recording was in the voice of one of their colleagues, saying:

SOS! SOS! This is Susan Lim. I seem to be stuck. The ground beneath me is crumbling and I cannot hold on much longer. Aah! ... I am going to fall! I need help. Can anyone hear me? Please come to find me! Eh? There seems to be light and sound coming from underneath the ground. Wait. I can see something. Oh my goodness! That cannot be right!

Then the message was cut off.

In this drama the students played two roles. The first role required them to be the archaeologists who set out to find and rescue their colleague and, in the second, they were the members of the 'lost civilisation' who had retreated from society years ago in fear of nuclear destruction and environmental havoc.

## The spy drama

The third drama in the series started with each student finding a note, 'Sleeping Spy made active. Report for duty at ... hours [the time of their drama class]. Location: ... [the place of their drama class]. When they arrived at class, they were met by their 'briefer', who gave them a folder of notes on a nearby (fictional) country that was in a state of political unrest. The 'agents' were charged to work with particular colleagues, and together to travel undercover to

the country (a second layering of role, as they had to create roles and reasons for their travel) to find out what lay behind the assassination of the chief minister. During this drama they needed to make passports, fill out immigration forms, respond to questions by 'immigration officers', meet with people who knew what was going on and report back to 'M'.

## The Bukit Merah drama

The last drama in the series was based on a legend familiar to students in Singapore. It explains how Bukit Merah (Red Hill, or Hill Red as a direct translation) came to be named as such:

A long time in the past Singapura was attacked by legions of swordfish which leapt out of the sea and stabbed to death anyone on the beaches. As Singapura was a port and relied on the sea for food and trade this was a major problem, but neither the Sultan nor his advisers could think of a way to stop the swordfish from attacking. Fortunately a young lad thought of the solution. He told the Sultan to place the stems of banana trees all along the sea shore. They did so and as the swordfish attacked, their swords stuck in the trunks of the banana trees and the Sultan's soldiers could slaughter them. The young boy was so praised that the Sultan became jealous and sent his soldiers in the middle of the night to the boy's home to execute him. They did so and the boy's blood flowed and flowed until the soil became stained red. It is still red to this very day.

A version of this story was used as the pre-text for the drama. The students were enrolled as historians, who were charged with the task of preparing an exhibition of local myths and legends for the National Museum.

Let's see how the macro skills were woven in.

### TEACHING STRATEGY

#### READING

Students read a longer version of the story that had been rewritten using simple language and sentence structures. The story was reproduced on one page. They were asked to highlight key text. For classes at lower levels of reading comprehension, use the teacher-modelling and student-chorusing strategy described in the *Missing Girl* drama.

In small groups, the students were given a section of the text to read, discuss and prepare a freeze-frame that showed the essence of that section.

Advanced students can be asked to research the historical context.

#### WRITING

The students mapped out a plan of the village and marked where each family lived. They listed 'persons of significance' to the Sultan who may have been able to influence his decisions or his behaviour (such as the Captain of the Guard, Chief Adviser, Chief Wife and Young Son). More advanced classes could have been asked to record a role description for each of these, including attitude to the event, power to persuade and attitude to the Sultan.

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They wrote short monologues for the key people in the story to speak as part of the living display that became part of the exhibit.

They wrote captions, in the form of short paragraphs, that provided explanations for sections of the exhibit.

**Living display**

Still images, simple props and set that are used to create diagrams of events. As the audience observes a particular image, the participants (or a participant) briefly 'come to life' and speak aloud key information.

**SPEAKING**

While the students were in the freeze-frames, the teacher tapped in, and the selected students spoke aloud a word or phrase that expressed their thoughts or feelings at that point. More advanced students could be asked to bring the frame to life on a signal by the teacher, then improvise and speak in role for about thirty seconds to a minute, until they froze again on the teacher's signal. In role as villagers, they gossiped about the Sultan trying to solve the problem of the swordfish attacks; and repeated this strategy later, when his increasing jealousy became apparent through his changed behaviour.

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Out of role, students discussed the sorts of arguments that could persuade the Sultan to allow the boy to live. They rehearsed the arguments that they chose to use with the purpose of influencing the selected person of significance to the Sultan, such as the captain or his wife or son. They then participated in a rotating hot-seat in small groups, and in role as villagers. Each group tried to persuade one of the chosen persons of influence to change the Sultan's mind.

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After the 'story' of the drama was concluded, the student spoke about their feelings of shock and betrayal when the Sultan went ahead with the murder despite agreeing not to do so. They planned how to incorporate those feelings and some of the villagers' and soldiers' stories into the museum display.

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**LISTENING**

The students listened to the teacher model the reading of the pre-text, as well as the narration that took them back in time to the existence of the village itself. The teacher gave clues about the community members and likely daily activities that would have been a part of village life so long ago, while the students established the village in the space of the classroom, using movement and simple language interactions.

They also listened to the teacher-in-role as the Chief Adviser to the Sultan, who warned them of the Sultan's plans to kill the boy and offered to help them try to reason with the Sultan. The Chief Adviser offered to set up meetings in the palace with significant people who may have had influence with the Sultan. Then either the teacher-in-role or selected students-in-role were questioned and listened to as they were hot-seated. Significant persons included:

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- the Captain of the Guard
- a senior adviser
- the Sultan's chief wife
- the Sultan's young son.

This was the final drama in the sequence of prepared lessons: the final listening to a narration, as the soldiers, following the Sultan's orders, climbed the hill and the boy, as in the original tale.

## DRAMA AND THE ESOL TEACHER

'Drama provides a reason to use language,' says Miccoli (2003:123), but that may be sufficient justification for many ESOL teachers to use process drama to teach language. There are a number of challenges for language teachers wishing to use process drama (Liu, 2007: 67), including:

- *Time:* process drama can be time-consuming in both preparation and implementation and the most effective drama is slow enough for deep inquiry and intriguing enough to sustain interest. Additionally, students unfamiliar with working in this way may need time to become familiar with the strategies used. In the DOL research project, an intriguing comment on time arose from several of the facilitator's journals and from one of the observing teachers: after the sixth lesson the students seemed to 'get the hang' of what was that they were being asked to do and then became much more involved and efficient in their work. We need to allow sufficient time to develop familiarity and confidence with the processes and forms of the learning medium.
- *Enjoyment versus effective learning:* the playfulness of the drama event does not always give prominence to the learning that is taking place, and some students may not value this way of working. Drama is based in play and, while learning in drama can be serious and seriously hard work, it also draws on our capacity for playfulness in the creation of the fictional worlds that our role-playing inhabits: the 'as if' and imaginary space. Play is not part of the pedagogy in traditional Asian classrooms, and some students may resist drama activities because they do not understand that learning is taking place.
- *Teacher training:* the traditional authority role of the teacher is often overturned in the improvisatory drama classroom, and many ESOL teachers are not trained for this way of working.

Each of these challenges is certainly surmountable, but needs to be acknowledged and considered when planning to incorporate drama into the ESOL classroom.

## CONCLUSION

I hope that the ideas and strategies discussed in this chapter, and in the other chapters in this book, will encourage more ESOL teachers to embark on the adventurous and exciting

pedagogical journey that drama can provide. There are certainly challenges in introducing new ways of working into our teaching repertoire, but it is usually worth persisting through moments of discomfort.

Recently I was working with a Normal Technical class of forty students in their first year of secondary school at a nearby school. None of the students had experienced a drama lesson before, and responses ranged from delighted to apprehensive. Before I started the lesson I had explained to the class that my pre-service teachers and I would work with them every two weeks for a term. A small group of boys were the most nervous and resistant, and this manifested itself in their reluctance to participate and laughter at each other during some of the activities. Most class members were so evidently enjoying themselves that we persisted through the lesson, even though I was convinced the small group of boys hated every minute of it. After class, as we were saying our farewells, one of the boys, the ringleader, came up to me and said, 'Ah, Miss ... aah ... two weeks, ah?' I replied, 'Yes, two weeks.' He grinned and nodded. Two weeks later, when we turned up for our next class, I could not say that he had shifted completely along the continuum from apprehensive to enthusiastic, but he did participate more readily, and in the ensuing weeks grew in confidence and began to contribute positively both in and out of class time. It was enormously rewarding to be in a position to watch him, and his friends, as they learned to communicate more confidently and effectively while being supported by safety of working in the 'as if' of drama.

## RECOMMENDED READING

Liu, J. (2002). 'Process Drama in Second- and Foreign-Language Classrooms', in Brauer, G. (ed.), *Body and Language: Intercultural Learning Through Drama*, Westport CT: Greenwood, pp. 51-70.

A publication that argues for more complex forms of drama, such as process drama, to be used in second-language classrooms. The chapter, which is backed by a range of research, discusses both the benefits and challenges for TESOL teachers.

Kao, S. M. and O'Neill, C. (1998). *Words into Worlds: Learning a Second Language through Process Drama*, Stanford: Ablex.

A detailed discussion of the theoretical framework for using process drama in second-language teaching. The book, which draws on research in Taiwan, offers practical advice for planning and evaluating drama-orientated language programs.

Morgan, N. and Saxton, J. (1987). *Teaching Drama: A Mind of Many Wonders*, Cheltenham: Hutchinson Education.

A rich and thorough text, with plenty of advice on planning and implementing drama lessons, with a particularly useful chapter on the diverse possibilities of teacher-in-role.

Neelands, J. and Goode, T. (2000). *Structuring Drama Work: A Handbook Of Available Forms In Theatre And Drama* (2nd edn), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

An invaluable and accessible book, with detailed explanations of a range of drama strategies and examples of their use.

Stinson, M. and Freebody, K. (2006). 'The DOL Project: An Investigation into the Contribution of Process Drama to Improved Results in English Oral Communication', *Youth Theatre Journal*, vol. 20, pp. 27–41.

A report of the research undertaken in Singapore by the author of this chapter.