Process Drama: Using Social Issues to Move Beyond English as Mathematical Code

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An Ethnographer at Large

In February 2007, I was interviewed for a position in the English Department of the *School of Human Welfare Studies* (HWS) in *Kwansei Gakuin University* (KGU). The HWS interview panel were looking for someone with a back-ground in sociology. They agreed with my interpretation that drama can be seen as a method to highlight social issues and explore darker issues of society in a psychologically safe environment. On the understanding that I would use my back-ground in process drama for teaching, I was hired.

Introduction to Process Drama

Globally, drama is recognized as having the power to rehabilitate – in prisons and mental health institutions – and has been used for many years in education for both performance (product) and experiential social learning (process). The *Drama-in-Education* (DiE) movement came out of the 1960's primary school system in Britain. However, the adaptation of DiE into Drama in *Second Language Acquisition* (SLA) is relatively new. Process drama in SLA emerged with the ground-breaking work of Kao and O'Neill in 1998. In process drama, students are both performers and audience. As Bowell and Heap (2001: 7) explain,

…in the genre of process drama, the participants, together with the teacher, constitute the theatrical ensemble and engage in drama to make the meaning for themselves.

Process Drama in Japanese University EFL

The average Japanese student has good test-taking skills, excelling in grammar and grammar-translation in particular. Unsurprisingly, the repetitive nature of this type of learning has left many Japanese students demotivated and jaded towards English when it is taught as if it consisted of complicated mathematical formulae. When language is taught as a scientific equation in which there is no room for creativity or ambiguity, only correct or incorrect answers, Japanese students react in different ways, but adhere to cultural norms: from polite passive-aggressive disinterest as individuals to open hostility as a class-group.

Given the needs of Japanese university EFL learners, process drama projects facilitate:

• a move from an accuracy to a fluency-based model of <u>second language acquisition</u>, *through* English rather than *for* English.

• the development of <u>critical thinking skills</u>: from understanding contemporary Japanese-ness to a broader worldview and the place of Japan in it.

• A CLIL-based approach (*Content and Language Integrated Learning*) which promotes <u>intercultural knowledge</u> in tandem with language competence and oral communication skills as well as developing multilingual interests and attitudes.

The *Jo-Ha-Kyu* Narrative Arc

In accordance with the *Jo-Ha-Kyu* (*Enticement -Elaboration-Consolidation*) narrative arc of Japanese Noh theatre, the number "3" was significant in the three curricula that I designed. From 2008 until 2010, there were three process drama projects based on social issues *(see below)*. These were run over a period of three semesters.

The executive committee chose the first theme of "bullying" while students chose the subsequent two on "emigration" and "homelessness". There were 3 sections to the macro-curricula and micro-curriculum, each designed with a 3-step formula.

Because it was learner-centred, the curriculum was subject to change, so it was necessary to have contingency plans at all times. Sometimes more scaffolding was needed as students were unable to grasp the nature of the tasks through poor explanations on my part and unfamiliarity with process drama. However, as time passed, students.

Level	Theme	Topics & Tasks	Role	Frame	Sign
Eng. Com II Autumn 2008	Bullying	Research bullying locally and globally, then devise an anti-bullying campaign	Student Council	Human Rights	Letter
Eng. Com III Spring 2009	Emigration	Kasato Maru Passenger Ship (Japanese emigration to Brazil)	Family Members	Human Rights	Poster
Eng. Com IV Autumn 2009	Homelessness	Japanese-American Internment Camps in the United States during WW II	Family Members	Human Rights	Mementos

realized that their creativity was necessary for the success of the project. Sometimes, they took the topic and went far beyond it. By distributing the class-by-class schedule at the beginning of each semester, the students had a basic sense of a journey with a defined beginning, middle and end.

1 *JO*: Enticement (Research Phase)

In the first class, students were given the case of a homeless girl in a US context. In randomly assigned discussion groups, they were asked to consider how and why this girl had become homeless based on knowledge gained in the earlier emigration project about the 3 basic reasons for emigration: personal, economic and political. As homework, they read four articles on homeless-ness, then formed opinions based on research. They posted their reactions in paragraph format in the class online discussion Google Group.

2 *HA*: Crux

The homelessness project progressed through tableaux, withholding of valuable information by the teacher, online research and data-gathering on the class Google group before moving into the role-plays below. In addition to studying the historical context of this homelessness roleplay (Japanese-American internment), they linked their learning to the topic of homelessness today.

After role-plays #2, #4 and #8, the students did a 500 word writing-in-role assignment, and submitted these, along with a 500-word piece about how the project had impacted on their lives.

3 *KYU*: Consolidation

The success of the emigration project allowed the homelessness project to move far beyond what I had envisaged. In Class 1, about 80% of the course was conducted in English while Japanese was used to enable weaker students to take part. In Class 2, there was a greater tendency to talk to the teacher in English and to one another in Japanese. However, there was a marked improvement in English speaking and writing skills.

In their final reports, students in both classes wrote favourable comments about the project and reported development with respect to Byram's five *savoir* factors of intercultural communication: attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpretation and relating, skills of discovery, and education.

Summary: Reflections

Throughout the homelessness project, classes became highly learner-centred and learner-led. My role became more like that of a sports trainer than an English teacher, as students' confidence and determination to communicate through English grew. There were setbacks and sometimes parts of the course fell behind and were abandoned. The students compensated for this by engaging with the topic at a deeper level and showed compassion and understanding for those who become homeless.

On a personal level, the students taught me through the "Your Language is Dead" role-play that an English-only policy in the classroom can be frustrating and demotivating. Because I'd attended drama workshops in Japanese, I had naively assumed that students would relish the opportunity to communicate in English in a psychologically safe environment. Despite my course being an elective, many students were there not because of high levels of motivation, but rather because the Japanese sign language course was oversubscribed and they didn't want to start a new language such as Korean or French. In summary, this process drama project taught me a great deal about student motivation and personal empathy.

Student Comment

I found discrimination or war will cause hurt one's heart, and be lost everything. At present wars are still occurring on the world. So I wish more people to be thinking better that than before. And I believe wars will disappear in the world someday.

References

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This article is based on a presentation given at JALT 2013.

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Role-play Situations: "Homelessness" (Japanese American Internment Camps)

Role-play 1	My Home	Role-play 5	Your Language is Dead
Role-play 2	FBI Agent Calls, Get on the Bus	Role-play 6	Dealing with the Americans
Role-play 3	Arrival at the Camp	Role-play 7	Life in the Camp II
Role-play 4	Life at the Camp I	Role-play 8	Returning Home