

Who Do I Play: Appraising The Impact Of Teacher-in-role With Kindergartners In An Esol Classroom

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WHO DO I PLAY?:
APPRAISING THE IMPACT OF TEACHER-IN-ROLE WITH KINDERGARTNERS IN AN
ESOL CLASSROOM

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts,
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ABSTRACT

Educators employing process drama, a non-presentational dramatic form, establish memorable classroom environments where students co-author their learning with teachers. Process drama facilitators often use the dramatic structure of teacher-in-role to guide and support the students. An instructor heightens tension, introduces new ideas, and encourages participation by engaging alongside students as a character. An educator employing process drama needs to determine the appropriate type of role to impact the development of a classroom drama; while negotiating tension felt between desires for student-led discovery and the necessity of meeting curriculum benchmarks.

Academic studies establish process drama as a tool to aid English Students of Other Languages or ESOL classrooms. Process drama heightens comprehension, whole language usage and ownership of learning. Using the methodology of reflective practice I analyzed my teaching in role to determine how I negotiate diverse and conflicting objectives. I facilitated a six week process drama with four to six-year-old ESOL students at a learning centre in Hong Kong.

This study improved this teacher's understanding and usage of teacher-in-role. The ideals of a process centered classroom were not always realized, but the needs of the population necessitated adaption from expectations. The experiences of the researcher indicate ambiguous character may not be the best way to motivate dialogue among this population of ESOL students. Students' age and English experience suggests using co-participant characters whose motivations are clearly defined. This study contributes to the discussion on what differing "role

types” offer facilitators of process drama and how it may be used to meet demands of curriculum including development of performances. Process drama with very young students presents a field for further research investigating methods and practices to effectively structure process dramas that address their learning.

For my brother,
Andrew Phillip Perkins,
you always were one of my biggest cheerleaders.
I wish that I could have read your dissertation.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS	x
GLOSSARY OF TERMS	xi
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: DEFINING MY PRACTICE	4
CHAPTER TWO: LITERARY REVIEW	8
CHAPTER THREE: THE PROJECT.....	21
Theme/Learning Area	27
Context.....	28
Role	29
Frame	32
Sign	33
Strategies.....	34
CHAPTER FOUR: REFLECTION	38
“Structure operators who weave the units of action together into an artful experience” (O’Neill 6)	41
“Artist, the teacher, collaborating with their students, the co-artist” (O’Neill 6).....	46
“Building a work in process” (O’Neill 6).....	50
“Able to Release from Lesson Plan” (O’Neill 6).....	53

“Capable of finding questions to explore rather than providing answers” (O’Neill 6)	54
“Raising possibilities rather than confirming probabilities” (O’Neill 6).....	56
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION	61
REFERENCES	70

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Typical SCA Class Structure 24

Table 2: Dramatic Structures used in Process Drama..... 36

LIST OF ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS

ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Language
SCA	Speech and Communication Arts
TYA	Theatre for Young Audience

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Classroom Drama:	Improvisational drama occurring in educational environments. Classroom drama places emphasis on participants learning rather than a formal performance. The term includes a variety of informal drama techniques or forms such as story drama, creative drama, and process drama.
Dramatic Play:	Play in which participants assume pretend roles and engage in ongoing interactions from ongoing and participants interact in character.
Meta-Play:	Discussions, planning, and negotiations from the participants about the events of dramatic play sessions outside of role.
Pre-text:	A pre-text initializes a process drama. It may be a picture, an object/symbol, story or artifact that motivates interest and action into the world of the drama.
Process Drama:	Process drama is a non-presentational form of classroom drama. A facilitator introduces a fictional world that students improvise within. Emphasis is placed on learning through critical thinking and problem solving.
Reflective Practice:	Research methodology in which the researcher critically evaluates personal practice in order to engage in continuous learning and developmental insight.
Teacher-in-Role:	Teacher-in-role is when a facilitator interacts with students as a character in the drama.

INTRODUCTION

In Aesop's fable "The Man, the Boy, and the Donkey," a man endures chastisement from observers for his choices about who rides the beast of burden. His experiences lead to discovery the wisdom to trust one's own judgment in the face of many opinions. Teaching artists feel similar pressure to meet the expectations of many parties. A professional teaching artist engages learners through the arts as they negotiate objectives from multiple sources. Goals vary widely depending on the source. Academic organizations stress curriculum benchmarks, parents want observable improvement, students want enjoyment, and teaching artists wish to remain faithful to personal artistic and educational philosophy.

Educators compromise to meet others' expectations, but worry that they betray vital philosophical ideals. All teaching artists have personal educational philosophies that they merge with an institutional teaching philosophy. What are suitable classroom methodologies from which a teaching artist may approach compromise?

Process drama is one flexible methodology to address these goals. Process drama is a non-presentational dramatic form. Students co-author their learning within this practice. A facilitator introduces a fictional world that students improvise. Emphasis is placed on learning through critical thinking and problem solving. The techniques vary but the improvisations generate creative responses from the students.

How do teaching artists elicit these responses? Facilitators participate alongside participants in a process drama. They adopt characters in the improvisation to support,

complicate or challenge participants inside the drama. This process of assuming a role is referred to as teacher-in-role and functions as key element of process drama.

How does a teacher-in-role facilitate the negotiation of goals and propel the project?
How does the type of role create a framework for negotiating balance between student-led learning and the requirements of curriculum? How does a teacher-in-role facilitate the negotiation of goals and propel the project?

The main objectives of a process drama often relate to broad issues or social concerns. These objectives may connect to a curriculum. Research highlights the benefits of process drama for teaching curriculum, including classrooms of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners (Bolton, Heathcote, Kao and O'Neill). Process dramas often relate to social concerns or interpersonal development. In ideal circumstances the work is created for the enjoyment and development of participants. Yet expectations for a finished "product" from a drama class remain. Is child centered learning and discovery lost when the focus shifts toward building a "product" such as a polished final performance?

Teaching artists strive to explore with students to create egalitarian and adaptive classrooms in order to facilitate growth and learning; but does process drama provide sufficient structure to satisfy expectations for a drama class?

This thesis begins by presenting the educational philosophy of one active teaching artist and then evaluates the literature of process drama, socio-dramatic play and its origins and benefits. The different devices and strategies employed in process drama are discussed with emphasis on the roles teachers assume when facilitating a process drama.

Chapter three describes a particular project which faced multiple and perhaps conflicting objectives. Lesson plans, visual recordings, and personal journals from the event will be cited to dissect the praxis during a facilitation of process drama with four to six year-old ESOL students in Hong Kong. Chapter four includes reflections upon the tensions, challenges, breakthroughs, and insights experienced by a facilitator playing roles in an attempt to balance multiple objectives.

This study continues the discussion on how facilitators discern when and how to intervene in classroom. A teaching artist cannot please every objective in every session just as a traditional lesson plan may not address all of world history in a single class experience. This means the teaching artist must make choices. This thesis is a journey that will illuminate the process of selection, the timing of presentation, and the relationship to curriculum goals.

CHAPTER ONE: DEFINING MY PRACTICE

Before a teaching artist can reflect upon personal practice they must understand their personal teaching philosophy. There are visceral responses and personalized decisions made in a classroom that originate from these subjective and internalized epistemological beliefs.

Reflective practice is a self-evaluative research methodology to evaluate a facilitator's actions and decisions. Researchers are also participants in the work of play. Reflective practice provides a structure for analyzing negotiations between theory and procedure. Through subjective critique of one's self while "in" the work and critical self-evaluation "after" the work, reflective practice enables "discovery of self" and empowers teachers to effect personal development and change in educational settings (Taylor Doing Reflective Practitioner 27, 88). Reflective practitioners focus on recording and evaluating the "tacit and known knowledge" affecting decision making (Taylor Doing Reflective Practitioner 28).

Reflective practitioners in the role of teaching artist accept the assumption that all conclusions are interpretations unique to the perspective of each individual. Since subjective point of view is crucial to the reflective methodology of the teaching artist, the work in this chapter will revert to a subjective point of view. Revelations, questions, and conclusions may not profitably be shared without personalizing the discourse.

"As a teaching artist motivated to work with young people in diverse cultural settings, I employ drama as a tool to educate, inspire, and provoke critical thinking. Concentrating on the creative process, I establish environments which challenge young people in their interpretation of the world "(Brantley 1).

I became inspired to use drama as a teaching method rather than the subject when I experienced the accessibility and impact of the dramatic exploration of curriculum. Dorothy Heathcote, a pioneer in process drama, said: “The difference between the theatre and the classroom is that in the theatre everything is contrived so that the audience gets the kicks. In the classroom, the participants get the kicks” (qtd in O’Neill ii).

Drama is accessible to all young people. When utilized in a classroom, children learn through a medium they already enjoy: play. Young people engage in complex associative thinking and glimpse a larger world view when dramatic forms are coopted for this purpose. Teaching more than theatrical skill, classroom drama prompts questioning and stimulates active problem solving in participants which often continues well beyond the time spent in a session. .

Process drama fosters dynamic and egalitarian education. ‘Teacher-in-role’ is a key convention enabling this process. People in educational drama define teaching in role as a teacher who assumes a character or role to improvise with participants. From this collaborative position facilitators motivate action, inject tension, or provide exposition. A teaching artist changes roles many times throughout a process drama. She shifts roles as needed by participants; ‘one of the gang,’ ‘guide,’ or ‘villain’ to name a few. These approaches allow a teacher to motivate, co-participate and provoke action.

Interactions in role contribute to generating equitable communication. Students interact with a participating “character” rather than the teacher as authoritarian figure. A teacher may adopt a character with less inherent authority to better empower students. This encourages them to take initiative in shaping the path of learning.

I learned about process drama through the writings of Cicely O'Neill, Gavin Bolton, and Dorothy Heathcote. Initially, it seemed too complicated, too involved, and too intimidating to be practical, but my reflection revealed that I already used some elements of process drama in my personal learning. For example, I used to pretend to be a NASA employee working on complicated calculations for the space shuttle launch during an Algebra class. This frequent strategy increased my now personalized engagement with the subject matter and my academic career benefited. While these fancies of imagination do not represent a complete picture of process drama, they illustrate a key component of the method. Process drama includes a “real world” imperative beyond the classroom to give tasks a purpose and increase a student’s investment in learning (Heathcote and Bolton 12).

Process drama classrooms are collaborative with dramatic nudges from teachers who may then step aside while students apply their knowledge toward problem solving. In these happy moments, the young people enjoy the struggle to find solutions to obstacles so the challenges themselves enrich the journey of discovery. These moments of inspiration, connection, and insight in the classroom feel magical so I was unwilling to resign these moments to be at the whim of circumstance. I sought an educational tool to give me a philosophical framework to build a more consistent path to creative explosions in an educational atmosphere.

Lev Vygotsky, a developmental theorist, provided me with a framework that resonated with my beliefs. Teachers “are no longer relegated to the status of hovering, full of uncertainty, above children, waiting for them to ‘move on’” in his philosophy (Anning 24). The heart of his research, during the first third of the 20th century, establishes collaborative learning as an active rather than a passive model. Further, a collaborative environment enables students to complete

tasks which individually they could not. This supports models for education with teachers as active participants, such as process drama.

I was now armed with a philosophical confirmation of my own ideals. Yet, when a general philosophy is applied to a specific task, new questions are discovered. Each day requires pragmatic compromises to address the requirements of time, space, curriculum, individual students, context and culture. It is difficult to always discern when goals are met. How do I assess what interventions aid learning? So, I intentionally sought out educational environments that would challenge me, as I in turn wish to challenge my students. I found such a challenge in Hong Kong, China. I put theory and ideal to the test in practice. This thesis addresses how I tried to balance my personal philosophy with expectations in a specific context.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERARY REVIEW

Societies throughout history have placed different levels of importance upon theatre in education. Yet presentational skills such as speech, rhetoric, and theatre have existed in academic curriculum since ancient times. In the 20th century, some drama educators rejected traditional product centered approaches and embraced models with a process centered practice. Process centered practice prioritizes journey of creation over the end product. Vygotsky lived during this shift of focus and made an intuitive leap to applications in the practice of educational drama for children. Vygotsky recognized that it was reasonable to activate children by allowing them co-ownership in creating the dramatic material. He observed that plays “created or improvised by children themselves are vastly more compatible with children’s understanding... the value lies... not in the product of creation, but in the process itself” (Vygotsky *Imagination and Creativity* 72). A view shared by dramatic educators for whom the process determined learning rather than the product.

Movement toward modern theory and practice continued to gather strength, but it did not happen overnight. By the 1970’s, the work of Nellie McCaslin became widely distributed. She coined the phrase ‘classroom drama.’ This became an umbrella term for methodologies which used drama as a medium for learning.

Advocates for classroom drama faced many obstacles as they struggled to gain legitimacy as a theatrical form. Members of the Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) field questioned whether classroom drama was merely education and not “art.” This topic has been hotly contested. Gavin Bolton, drama practitioner and theorist, attempted to relieve these tensions by

offering an inclusive definition targeted at the shared practice he referred to as, “acting behavior.” The definition serves as a theoretical base for both classroom drama and traditional theatrical productions.

“Acting Behavior is an act of fiction-making involving identification through action, a prioritizing of determining responsibilities, the conscious manipulation of time and space and a capacity for generalization. It relies on some sense of audience, including self-spectatorship” (Bolton 270).

Bolton places modes of acting behavior along a spectrum. Dramatic-play, the most informal, exists at one end. On the opposite end of the spectrum is the most structured acting behavior, theatrical performance (Tsiaras 1). Many differing types of activities and practices exist along this spectrum, and dramatic projects fluctuate along this scale. A rehearsal process may employ loosely structured improvisation during early stages, and then move towards establishing structured and repeatable acting behavior.

Socio-dramatic play, the least formalized acting behavior, occurs when a child engages with at least one other individual in “pretend role” (Bolton 269). Socio-dramatic play is “ongoing” and participants speak “in character.” Put kids in a room with a box and they will naturally start to pretend play. This unstructured playing is not part of active practice in classroom drama. Classroom drama requires guidance and interaction with a teaching artist with clearly defined educational goals (Enz and Christie 15). Classroom drama play provides enhancing factors that build development beyond what unaided play can achieve. A young person’s ability to participate in socio-dramatic play is a pivotal developmental milestone. A

teaching artist should study how a child assimilates new information and engages in the process of meaning making.

Jean Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory posits that children are active learners in their world. Young people seek out interactions to gain new meaning, develop complex understanding, and hone life skills. Young people require many experiences to define reality and knowledge according to Piaget and other constructivist theorists. Play provides one format for assimilation of experiences. Piaget regarded dramatic play as important for early developmental stages, but believed older children's enthusiasm for rule based games indicated advancement into the next level of human development (Wood and Bennett 18). While Piaget finds dramatic play to be crucial to human development, he was skeptical of its benefits to abstract thought (Wood and Bennett 18).

Lev Vygotsky diverged from Piaget on this major point. His cognitive developmental theories indicate that learning doesn't always coincide with "developmental process;" instead it creates "zones of proximal development" (Vygotsky Interaction Between 35). Proximal learning asserts that people have a range of learning capacity that is not necessarily done as stages, but may in fact be done in collaborative leaps. One seven year old in a room alone may not be able to achieve a certain task whereas a group may. Vygotsky observed that through collaborative activity with students and adults, young people succeed at tasks beyond their individual capacities. This observation represented a radical departure from previous ideas. It postulated that young people can learn beyond their current developmental level (Vygotsky, Learning and Development 24).

Vygotsky viewed dramatic play not only as the dominant form of learning in pre-school years (1978), but as a highly sophisticated way of organizing thought.

“Action in the imaginary sphere, in an imaginary situation, the creation of voluntary intentions and the formation of real-life plans and volitional motives- all appear in play and make it the highest level of pre-school development. The child moves forward essentially through play activity. Only in this sense can play be considered the leading activity that determines a child’s development (Vygotsky, *Mind in Society* 102-10).

Play was not only a child’s tool for reproducing experiences, but more “a creative reworking of impressions he has acquired” (Vygotsky, *Imagination and Creativity* 11-12). Play propels children forward enabling them to engage in complex and abstract thought (Christie and Roskos 10).

Modern early childhood education theorists built upon the work of human development theorists Piaget and Vygotsky used the work of these theorists to advocate for dramatic play in classrooms. Educational research highlights the importance of dramatic play in the growth and learning of young students in academic capacities and interpersonal learning objectives.

Studies from Williamson and Slivern indicate that dramatic play effectively increases comprehension of books and stories (81). Participation in dramatic play based on books also increased young people’s aesthetic responses to literature (Rowe, *Play and Literacy* 10). The necessity to verbally communicate ideas to others during play indicates its capacity for improvement of verbal skills (Similansky, Berg, Christie Roskos, McCaslin, Cline and Ingerson). The oral language improvement in play correlates to the shared use of symbolic representation in language and dramatic play since both require one thing to stand for something else (Garvey 177). The broad benefits of play lead Gmitrova and Gmitrova to state;

“If children lack opportunities to experience such play, their long-term capacities related to metacognition, problem solving, and social cognition- as well as to academic areas such as literacy, mathematics, and science—may be diminished” (Gmitrova and Gmitrova 246)

Other writings center on the inter and intrapersonal benefits of play. Studies indicate dramatic play helps develop empathy (Berg 19), provides a place to process and combat fears (Smiliansky 5), and increases tolerance and obedience (Slade 24). Play jumpstarts creativity and the symbolic thought necessary for adulthood (Vygotsky, *Imagination and Creativity* 12). Peter Slade postulates that dramatic play serves as a crucial component for development of personal identity.

“Lack of play may mean a permanent lost part of ourselves. It is this unknown, uncreated part, this missing link, which may cause difficulty and uncertainty in later years. For this and other reasons, backward children often respond to further opportunities for play, by which they build or rebuild their inner self, doing at a later stage what should have been done before” (Slade 7).

Lars-Eric Berg shares the viewpoint that dramatic play is a crucial element of development. He theorizes that without socio-dramatic play personal identity cannot be created in “a coherent and integrated fashion” (24). It provides an environment to experiment with “behavior that wouldn’t be tried under functional pressure” (qtd in Anning 22).

Acting out fiction facilitates children determining actual actions for real life circumstances. Participants “acting out” something gain factual understanding and the capacity to personally reflect upon it. Feelings experienced in play enhance the acquired knowledge. This position between “fiction and reality is what creates drama’s potency” (Bolton, *Changes in Thinking* 155).

Drama educators recognize the potency of dramatic play in theatre classrooms. Educator and writer Nellie McCaslin identified a distinction between the natural occurring dramatic free-play of young people and what happens in a drama classroom. McCaslin argued that dramatic play, while beneficial to child development, lacks a beginning, middle and end and “no development in dramatic sense”. She used the term “playmaking” to describe dramatic play occurring in a drama classroom with involvement from facilitators.

“The activity goes beyond dramatic play in scope and intent... Dialogue is created by the players whether the content is taken from a well-known story or is an original plot... the young adult is more likely to label this activity improvisation, which indeed it is, but the important distinction is that creative drama has form and is therefore more structured than dramatic play” (McCaslin, 7-8).

Educator and researcher Peter Slade formed a studio space open for children to come and pretend play. He developed a practice of using creative playmaking he called “Child Drama.” Slade believes that adults should not only provide a place and materials for creative play, but support young people (usually from outside the drama) by heightening tension, focus, and sincerity (Slade 26, 43). Sincerity was a key element of his works with young people, he defined it as:

“...a complete form of honesty in portraying a part, bringing with it an intense feeling or reality and experience, generally brought about by the complete absence of stage tricks, or at least of discernible tricks, and only fully achieved in the process of acting with absorption” (Slade 24).

Participants in Slades’s drama created stories, scenarios, and movement without curriculum or performance objectives. “It was all because we loved it and because we felt (we actually experienced) that we were creating something wonderful and beautiful” (Slade 44).

The non-presentational and dramatic play techniques of Peter Slade and other practitioners, such as Brian Way, were instrumental for the development of contemporary process drama. Slade's commitment to group discovery and group participation inspired the practice of the educator Dorothy Heathcote.

Dorothy Heathcote pioneered an educational technique she labeled "Mantle of Expert." "Mantle of Expert" positions students in role as the "experts" from which they learn within in an ongoing fictional context. The "Mantle of Expert" model allows students to participate in whole curriculum learning. Projects within the drama or supportive projects out of role may address different fields such as literature, math, science and art. Heathcote recognized the connections of this approach to dramatic play.

"I consider that mantle of the expert work becomes deep social (and sometimes personal) play because (a) students know they are contracting into fiction, (b) they understand the power they have within that fiction to direct, decide, and function (c) the 'spectator' in them must be awakened so that they perceive and enjoy the world of action and responsibility even as they function in it, and (d) they grow in expertise through the amazing range of conventions..." (Heathcote and Bolton 18).

Cicely O'Neill's work grew from association with and study of Dorothy Heathcote (O'Neill ii). O'Neill introduced the usage of the term "process drama" to identify the improvisational activities occurring within the classrooms. She identified a group's "active identification with and exploration of fictional roles and situations" as a key element of process drama (Kao and O'Neill 12). O'Neill's belief that process drama is theatre separated her practice from Heathcote's "Mantle of Expert." She believes learning in process drama shares importance with "generative dramatic encounters" (O'Neill 44).

“With an understanding of dramatic tension and structure, it will be possible to achieve the same dynamic organizations that give form to theatre experience. We must recognize that process drama is a significant dramatic mode, springing from the same dramatic roots and obeying the same dynamic rules that shape the development of any effective theatre event. (O’Neill 26).

Building on the work of these teaching artists, contemporary practitioners state that process drama allows students to participate in whole curriculum learning. Projects within the drama, or supportive projects out of role, may address different fields such as literature, math, science and art. Studies validate process drama’s benefits for language arts and social sciences (Schneider). A researcher at Wayne State University concluded process drama could be employed for acting training of university students (Cooney). Bolton agreed that drama assists with cumulative understanding, and postulates that its potency extends beyond its connections to other curriculum.

“Learning in drama is essentially a reframing. What knowledge a pupil already has is placed in a new perspective. To take on a role is to detach oneself from what is implicitly understood and to blur temporarily the edges of a given world... It [drama] supersedes the bodies of knowledge of the disciplines, but is itself rigorously disciplined in a unique subjective/objective relationship with the world” (Bolton, *Changes in Thinking* 156).

The use of teacher-in-role within process drama contributes to the re-framing of knowledge and learning. In a process drama students and teachers assume characters. A teacher-in-role motivates, stimulates and challenges the action. This position quickly allows a facilitator to introduce ideas, model behavior, infuse dramatic tension and motivate without lengthy preambles or set-ups. The teacher, now a fellow player in the action, brings “the students into active participation in the event” (Kao and O’Neill 27).

Operating as participant and facilitator allows teachers to establish a decentralized environment for the classroom, creating a context that is “shared and responsive” (Fels 131). Teacher-in-role provides a safe place for students to engage, question, and even debate with a teacher. This paradigm shift to co-participation may alleviate some of the concerns about feeling ridiculous doing drama, since the teacher also engages in the activities (Liu 8).

Process drama utilizes many dramatic structures including pair work, mime, tableaux, writing in role, hot seating, voices in the head, and dramatic play. Experiences in process drama are “living through drama”; and the inclusion of dramatic play within the method aligns with this philosophy. Dramatic play within a process drama increases connection and sincerity in the fiction. New ideas may be introduced. Improvised interactions progress the drama while participants remain in roles. Students work outside the drama to prepare or plan ideas for improvised encounters; but action and identification emerges from dramatic play.

Older students may require guidance to participate with sincerity in a dramatic play within a process drama. Younger students often "respond easily and immediately to the 'make-believe' offered by a process drama" (Kao and O'Neill 23). Conversely other conventions of process drama are challenging for young students. For example writing in role is difficult for most four-year-olds in a first language and increasingly in a second language. Young students may lack focus for pair or group work, a popular form in dramas with older students. Dramatic play often becomes the primary structure in a process drama facilitated with pre-school children.

The benefits and strategies for process drama are well documented among older children and adults, but little scholarly research exists on process drama with preschool age. Books such as Covering the Curriculum with Stories provides a practical resource including lesson plans and

strategies for creating process drama with three to seven-year-olds. The sample lessons in this practical resource relied on dramatic play supporting its role in process drama with the young. While not specifically focused on ESOL contexts, this researcher found with minor modification following the form laid out in the book did engage language learners in verbal communication.

The field of early childhood education presents substantial body of research advocating dramatic play in education settings including ESOL. Opinions vary regarding what type of adult involvement encourages learning during dramatic play. As stated previously process drama uses teacher-in-role extensively. If a teacher aims to steer the children's play towards coherency, focus on action, make dramatic sense, and engage verbally. How does the teacher's role impact these objectives?

A study of teachers who adhered to Piagetian developmental models found they emphasized child-led activities. This contributed to an avocation for adult observation, but not interaction in the dramatic play (Wood and Bennett 20). Peter Slade promotes a similar position, "Our footsteps are bigger than theirs. Unless we are more or less still we create the wrong rhythm" (43). Teachers in another study prompted free-play to "disintegrate" when they intervened to give directions or redirect (Creaser 61). Adherents of this opinion believe that since adults cannot know what will engage a child and that teacher introduced scenarios will not result in play suitable for the specific needs of participants (Rowe 15).

Other Research contradicts the benefits of a "hands off" approach. Wood concluded that when teachers took a "hands off" approach toward dramatic play they "were often unable to obtain a true picture of the children's capabilities and interest, and where they needed further support" (Wood and Bennett 26). Observations of playtimes in which students showed

engagement and focus occurred when there was teacher input; this led to the conclusion that learning through play was not automatic. It benefits from adult participation. Students with teachers who suggested play themes, modeled activities, and assumed roles in the fiction demonstrated lengthier and more verbal dramatic play sessions (Wood and Bennett 26). If students have a proclivity to create only what they already know, then adult intervention could extend and challenge their ideas (O'Neill 51).

Teacher manuals such as Dramatic Play; a Guide advocate a gentle involvement of adults in the play of children. The authors advise teachers to look for unobtrusive moments to enter the play and assist the children, but remember that they have “the leading roles in all their dramas” (Hereford and Schall 36). The book repeatedly mentions the “rich and fertile” imaginations children possess.

The writings of Vygotsky’s challenge the folksy notion that children have inherently superior imaginations.

“We know that a child’s experience is vastly poorer than an adult’s. We further know that children’s interests are simpler, more elementary, and thus also poorer, finally, their relationship to the environment does not have the complexity, subtlety, and diversity that characterizes the behavior of adults, and these are the most important factors that determine the workings of the imagination. A child’s imagination, as this analysis shows, is not richer, but poorer than that of an adult. In the process of development, the imagination develops like everything else and is fully mature only an adult.” (Vygotsky, *Imagination and Creativity* 32)

If true than adult involvement in play should contribute depth and new material to the story. Gmitrova and Gmitrova found that when teachers entered the playing process they influenced and increased cognitive behavior through the “powerful natural engine of free play” (245). Williamson and Slivern concluded that adult intervention in play increases learning (78).

Many contemporary studies support teacher involvement in play. A study conducted by Billie Enz and James F. Christie determined that a teacher's play style is the key variable for development of complex, focused and engaging play sessions (3). This study offers insight into how a teacher's role may facilitate balance between student involvement and teacher guidance.

Enz and Christie identified four styles of teacher involvement in student dramatic play; stage manager, co-player, play-leader, and director. Stage managers remain outside the play, but actively support it by responding to requests, organizing the play structures and providing materials. Co-player teachers participate in minor roles, and children lead the direction of the drama. As play-leaders, the adult exerts "more control over the course of the play by introducing new elements or plot conflicts" (Enz and Christie 12). Director teachers, the fourth style, assume control over the events of the play. They remain outside of the drama and assign roles, narrate actions and provide dialogue for the children to speak.

Enz and Christie determined the directorial style resulted in primarily "repetitive behavior" and students not "immersed in their roles" (21). The co-player and play-leader style fostered lengthier and more meaningful play sessions (13, 19). Play-leader stood out as a tool for generating intensive socio-dramatic play.

"Since the play-leader interjected theme-appropriate plot conflicts, these dramas tended to have a distinct beginning, crises, and a resolution. This interaction style appeared to stimulate the children's language and literacy production" (Enz and Christie 19).

These findings support use of teacher-in-role. In a process drama the facilitator's involvement guides the action while remaining fluid enough to allow for student contributions.

Teachers new to process drama often assume an authoritarian role. This style helps them feel comfortable in maintaining control of the classroom since it reflects typical classroom with strong teacher in charge (O'Neill 54). Other roles such as the "messenger," the "outsider," the inexperienced, the intermediary, or one of the gang; remove facilitator from a position of direct control and thereby increase student involvement. Less directive roles means facilitator continues to be adaptable. O'Neill does add that these less directive teacher roles are "only one among many such strategies, and used when appropriate" (54).

Literature indicates the importance of dramatic play for language learning and development. Process dramas use dramatic structures, like dramatic play to generate conversation. Process drama's focus on whole language encounters is one reason why it has emerged as a tool for ESOL classrooms. But little has been explored as to how this corresponds to early childhood education. The majority of the research looks at secondary school or adult education learners using process drama for language learning. Since socio-dramatic play appears to be a dominant form in process drama with young students more research is needed to investigate how facilitators negotiate interaction between players.

An understanding of research and methods impacts classroom decision making, but so do the practical concerns of a teaching context. The following chapter will explore the specific circumstances of a process drama facilitated with young children.

CHAPTER THREE: THE PROJECT

Pre-planning a process drama involves assessment of the proposed teaching environment. Location, curriculum goals, and learning expectations must be considered when designing the fictional context for the target student population. There were pre-existing parameters and organizational expectations before application of the process drama. This project involved kindergarten age students living in Hong Kong. The learning environment was a learning centre specializing in teaching English. The institution exists against an intense background of a result driven educational approaches. Education is a business in Hong Kong.

This leads to significant differences in expectation and format for an educator accustomed to an American model. For example, ninety-five percent of students begin kindergarten at the age of three. Students enter a rigid academic culture which continues through university (Li Yuen Ling 332). Often parents of these children are highly motivated (anxious) to see their students admitted into the best primary schools (Yuen 335). This generates stress which permeates academic environments and pushes students into a frenzy of extra-curricular classes. The centre referenced in this document is an example of the extra-curricular educational enrichment sought by parents. The centre specializes in teaching English and communication skills upon a theatre arts platform. Instructors use drama as a medium to allow practice of language and presentational skills.

The centre's courses approach skill development from two key areas; theatrical performances and certification (testing) preparation classes. Examinations are executed by an international third party; England's Trinity Guildhall College. These exams are an accepted

measure of success. The Trinity Speech and Communication Arts (SCA) Level 1 and 2 examinations were the focus of the students involved in this study. The Trinity syllabus defines skill areas for the exam as:

- **Interpersonal Skills**
Develops the student's capacity to relate to others appropriately, with ease, confidence, and awareness.
- **Expressive Speaking**
Develops the student's capacity to interpret a range of texts and communicate them imaginatively in performance.
- **Practical Speaking**
Develops the student's ability to share information interactively with an audience.
- **Personal Copy and Study Journal**
Develops the student's capacity to explore record and reflect upon the content of practical work in written English (Syllabus for Speech and Communication Arts 6).

These points represent the combined goals of the course which I addressed through a process drama.

Process drama is a viable tool in this environment because research indicates it has positive impacts upon the desired language communication skills and assists in building fluency.

“The patterns of communication and interaction in the classroom are fundamentally altered, generating unique possibilities of social, personal, and linguistic development. The focus is on the interactions and encounters among the participants, rather than on the accuracy of their speech. Instead, fluency springs from the motivation to communicate within the dramatic situation and from the emphasis on meaning. Students involved in the rich variety of speech events that drama promotes draw on all their linguistic and paralinguistic resources as they struggle to communicate. Because the talk that arises in drama is embedded in context, it is purposeful and essentially generative” (Kao and O’Neill 20).

ESOL classrooms often concentrate on language accuracy. ESOL students endeavor to “get it right” and teachers “fix” what they say. Students concentrating on being “right” in these environments may struggle to engage with a second language as they would their first (Kao and O’Neill 20). Like natural conversation, interactions with co-players and teacher in a process drama are “meaning orientated” and therefore more dynamic (Kao and O’Neill 63).

Generating meaningful conversations addresses the practical language requirements for the Trinity SCA exam. During the exam, adjudicators evaluate students’ verbal and nonverbal interactions with one another. The Trinity syllabus contains a presentational English component as well. Students formally speak about a personal object and recite a poem. Show and tell and rehearsal of the poems during each classroom session ensures they are adequately prepared for this formal exam element as well. At the conclusion of each eight week term, the poems are presented for parents during an in-class “shareformance.” These curriculum requirements necessitate compromise concerning length of class time allocated to process drama. The following chart represents a typical breakdown of classroom activities.

Table 1: Typical SCA Class Structure

	Duration	Category	Examples
Welcome	5 minutes	Motivation	Hello Song, welcome game,
Show and Tell	10 minutes	Presentation	Students share about personal object, introduce new questions
Physical/Vocal Warm-up	5 minutes	Motivation	Physical warm-ups, Songs, Vocal Warm-ups, tongue twisters, silly rhymes
Story	5-10 minutes	Presentation	Either introducing new material or recapping what has been done so far
Dramatic Activity	5-10 minutes	Presentation	Move as if, Tableaux, Play out story, improvisation, guided improvisation, recreating the story or changing a portion of it
Memorization	5-10 minutes	Assessment	Group work on learning a new section of poem for presentation, individual recitation
Bookwork	5-10 minutes	Assessment	Marking text, writing new vocabulary words, drawing pictures, worksheets
Conclusion	5 minutes	Motivation	Fun game, silly activity, goodbye song, gathering belongings, putting on shoes

Combining the allocated time for story and dramatic activity allowed fifteen to twenty minutes of each session, or one third of class, to be devoted to the process drama. Written or artistic reflection upon the drama was occasionally incorporated during scheduled bookwork time.

The process drama transpired over six lessons facilitated with fourteen students in three different classroom sections. Students typically came to class once a week, but the placement of the Chinese New Year public holidays created a week long gap between lessons four and five.

The students ranged in age from four to six years old. They all attended kindergartens. All spoke English as a second language, but the level of ability varied. Some students study at international Schools which conduct classes completely in English. Other students were just beginning formalized English study. The inclusion of students from mainland China, who often have less exposure to English than Hong Kong counterparts, also contributed to the range of language ability.

The learning centre in this study advocates a process oriented approach to learning and a concentration on development of life skills. The teacher handbook for the company states that the centre's instructors use "creative and innovative methodologies" to "provide a positive environment to advance students' skills and opportunities to showcase their development" (Centre's teaching handbook). However the result orientated educational culture of Hong Kong creates tension with this mission.

Yuen, in her analysis of the Hong Kong kindergarten practice, concluded that the Hong Kong education system prefers learning outcomes over process. None of the teachers she studied discussed how learning process lead to outcomes (337). She speculated that the Hong Kong

educational culture “may be too concerned about academic work and discipline in the classroom and neglect to create a coherent vision of early childhood education” (Yuen 331).

Hong Kong schools tend to have a strong pedagogical framework. Students have many constraints and few choices within curriculum or class structure (Morris and Adamson, marker 2039-42). Three-year old kindergarten students are typically required to sit at desks and do bookwork, including writing Chinese characters in small squares (Lau 4). Although the Hong Kong Guide to the Pre-Primary Curriculum recognizes the importance of “play” in learning; a focus on learning outcomes impacts how teachers interact with their students.

“... Kindergarten teachers perceived their role as managerial rather than scaffolding. The culture of the teaching seemed to be characterized by the adoption of pre-selected activities and an emphasis on outcomes and to be less flexible to changing circumstances” (Yuen 344).

This educational climate impacts student behavior and parents expectations for extra-curricular learning as well. Parents may desire to have tangible evidence of learning in the form of worksheets, exam reports, or performances. This may conflict with a teacher’s vision for participatory and kinetic instruction (Yuen 336). This tension contributes to the “triple task” or the need to “overcome a triangle of potentially conflicting expectations and orientations” (335). This triangle includes the teacher’s vision for early childhood education, the Chinese culture, and local constraints (335).

The learning centre’s financial goal for high student enrollment generates additional complications for the teaching artist. Education is a competitive business in Hong Kong. Many pupils attend numerous art or academic learning centres during the week. The number of pupils enrolled is viewed as a benchmark for a centre’s success. Teachers are pressured to maintain

high enrollment numbers and endure scrutiny from administration if class size drops. Teachers also feel pressured to develop curriculum which aligns with parental expectations.

Preparing for a process drama within this educational culture required generating a clear plan of action for the unit. The book Planning Process Drama by Pamela Bowell and Brian S. Heap provided a framework to define the structure of this process drama. Bowell and Heap list six areas for process drama facilitators to solidify; theme, context, role, frame, sign, and strategies.

Theme/Learning Area

All drama explores elements of the human condition and so will a process drama (Bowell and Heap 21). But process drama also has a curriculum component. A project will likely address many areas, but determining a primary objective and theme establishes basic foundation for the drama.

The Speech and Communication Arts classes emphasize interpersonal skills. Many topics for dramatic exploration exist within this broad objective. This drama focused on how a community responds to people who do not follow the rules, something we often had to address in class. The course operates with open enrollment. New students join at any time. Some incoming students struggle to find place in the environment and structure of the class. Long term students may show signs of frustration regarding newcomer's behavior.

The picture book, Ugly Fish, provided engaging source material. "Ugly Fish" does not want to share his food and hiding place with others and repeatedly eats any fish put in his tank.

He grows increasingly lonesome. He decides to befriend and explain the “rules” to the newest addition to the aquarium. But this bigger fish fails to listen and ultimately eats “Ugly Fish”. The book lacks a typically happy ending. This provided inspiration for exploration of interpersonal conflicts which extended beyond the saccharine “everybody should play nice” didactic messages. The story also generated strong opinions from the children, who were conflicted regarding “Ugly Fish” eating others and then being eaten himself.

Students recite a poem at the conclusion of each eight week unit. I picked one to connect to the fish theme. The vocabulary in the book, poem and process drama reinforced each other. This made it easier to provide parents with identifiable vocabulary lists.

Context

Picking the fictional environment, or dramatic context, defines the specifics and focuses the action. A learning area can be explored in numerous ways, so many options present themselves. Choosing context within cultural understanding is important in a second language classroom (Kao and O’Neill 23). Previous conversations with students revealed a familiarity and interest in fish. They understood requirements of taking care of fish in captivity (i.e. tank, water, food, etc.) although some English vocabulary was new.

As a strategy for reinforcing comprehension of the story and poem, the process drama connected closely to the subject matter. We explored the theme by creating an aquarium where we made the rules for the fish. The character of a hostile fish was later introduced into this fictional world.

Although students possess firsthand experience of interactions with uncooperative people, putting it in the context of the animal world creates distance. Students are familiar with aquariums, but it remains another world. They all interact with real fish to varying degrees, but as observers. “Living” as a fish offered an experience in a foreign world. This presented opportunities for exploring real life conflict, but from a distanced fictional perspective.

Role

According to O’Toole, “Role denotes the process of simultaneously being yourself, and acting as someone else” (35). It is important to pick the appropriate role for the students. They should be engaged and interested, but the character should not be outside their frame of reference. The superficial layering of character traits is not conducive for generating genuine engagement from students within a process drama. Identification for the work takes precedence over mimetic characterization. Sometimes the students’ characters resemble themselves. They certainly make use of their own individual opinions, preferences and style, but they are maneuvering through a fiction as something other than “self.”

At the beginning of the drama students were in role as children looking for a rare fish. In subsequent lessons we assumed the role of these fish. For one session, they were not in role as fish, but instead as humans taking care of the fish tank. Process drama typically employs casting group roles rather than individual characters (Kao and O’Neill 25). Often individualization of character occurs gradually evolving out of the group character.

The teacher's character also requires thoughtful consideration. Teacher-in-role impacts how classes navigate through the material. The teacher's character serves many functions; heightening the tension, negotiating classroom management and propels the action. The type of teacher role varies depending upon the circumstance. Sometimes the teacher is one of the gang, other times in a leadership role or she may complicate the drama through a shadowy figure that may or may not be trustworthy.

The power dynamics inherent in classrooms add another dimension for selection of a teacher's role. Heap and Bowell describe this hierarchical status in the classroom.

“Implicitly, the teacher is endowed with the power. Her status, relative to that of the pupils, is high and can be perceived as a barrier to the realization of the more open, creative learning relationship between pupils and teacher which is needed in a process drama. At its worst, this implicit relationship produces authoritarian teachers, resentful pupils, and sometimes open and direct confrontation between the two. Yet shifting the power structure in classrooms is something that can, and frequently does, happen naturally and almost subconsciously” (51-52).

Authoritarian roles, such as emperors or military captains, tend to reinforce expected norms of a teacher's superior status in the classroom. However using a less dominate role such as a beggar woman may help “develop a more balanced discourse” (Kao and O'Neill 111). Resources suggest a “vulnerable” role will motivate students to make decisions (Heap, Heathcote, and O'Neill). Ambiguous characters can be used to destabilize environment and prompt students to assume leadership roles.

The goal is to choose role(s) that help propel the students into action and encourage their contributions to the drama. Teacher-in-role navigates away from traditional teacher paradigm by employing “the dramatic methodology” to serve an “educational purpose” (Ackroyd ix). Ideally

the teacher's role is observed by the whole class which helps form a cohesive group, as they are involved in speculation and anticipation (Liu 10).

I navigated through several roles during the process drama in a conscious effort to observe my process and how the different roles impacted the students' contributions. Typically I gravitate toward roles with mid to high status when playing with the students. In this drama I assumed mostly co-participant roles. This was an attempt to avoid always embodying an authority figure, although when needed my character possessed special information. Other times I intentionally tried to sidestep a position as a fountainhead of knowledge. During the first lesson I assumed the guise of a less skilled fisherman than the children who had to teach me how to catch the fish. Later, in an attempt at "shadowy character", I portrayed an emissary sent from the 'Fish King' with a message. For the climactic lesson I portrayed the unwanted "Ugly Fish".

The adoption of this final character was an attempt to safeguard students from potential problems if one of them played the role. I knew "Ugly Fish" was going to be an unwelcome figure. I foresaw that if students faced negative comments from classmates-in-role it might be an unsafe situation for them. The idea of representing the character with a sign, failed to satisfy because a symbol could not interact verbally. Students may receive cathartic release being able to vocalize their frustrations with "Ugly Fish", but a symbolic representation cannot respond and would not facilitate pathos or dialogue. Ultimately this role had mixed success. This event is discussed at length in the following chapter.

Frame

The context creates the overall world of the drama, frame narrows its scope. The use of frame is one component that positions process drama as different to dramatic play, since it ceases to be playing “whatever the group wants.” A frame defines boundaries and focuses on a specific area. It facilitates dramatic tension by heightening the circumstances. As in theatre, dramatic tension creates direction for a process drama.

“Momentum can only develop if a state of tension is created that provides a dynamic for the action. Tension is an essential aesthetic element closely linked to time and rhythm. It exists between the situation as it appears at any one moment and completes the action” (O’Neill and Kao 28).

The imperative generated by the frame stimulates the sterility of role-play into active participation. Mimetic accuracy is less important than engaging with sincerity in a process drama. Bowell and Heap caution practitioners that when process drama aligns too closely with natural play behavior, students may lose the nurtured commitment and lose dramatic tension (84). For Bowell and Heap the frame “constitutes a means of laying in the dramatic tension by situating the participants in relation to the unfolding action” (59).

The initial framing of this drama centered on the rareness and therefore special qualities the fish possess. The idea that only a few remained in the world served as a catalyst for generating interest in these fish.

Introducing the character of “Ugly Fish” and his impending relocation to our tank, defined the focus for the drama. Students knew about his previous misdeeds. This tension centered the drama on the preservation of their home from the destructive tendencies of Ugly

Fish. This was a transition from common interest (i.e. being special fish) to a collective concern (i.e. preserving the created world). Within a collective concern the participants share an investment in the events, but hopefully express different opinions regarding methods and outcomes (Bowell and Heap 60).

Sign

Art uses signs or symbols to convey meaning. Artifacts may be practical or symbolic but they work to enhance meaning. A child's ability to attach metaphorical meaning to a symbol or use an object beyond its literal function represents a pivotal transition into abstract and complex thought. This "radically altered" interaction with reality happens through play experiences (Vygotsky 10). Signs help participants bridge "willing suspension of disbelief" and "hook the children into the focus of the drama" (Bowell and Heap 70).

The potency of signs extends beyond generating focus. Well-chosen symbols deepen imaginative investment into the world of a drama. Actors often express that using props or costumes in rehearsal heightens their connection within the world of a play. The distraction of full costumes, props, and sets in process drama, would likely limit play opportunities. Yet a few well-chosen elements provide a tantalizing taste of the drama's world and motivate action.

This drama incorporated different types of signs. Some were for inspiration such as the pictures students created representing the fish in the aquarium or video footage of fish in aquariums to provide information for creating one in class. Other signs were props handled by the participants to represent tangible elements of the drama. A fabricated newspaper article

discussing the arrival of ugly fish to the aquarium generated concern regarding his relocation. Students also used protean props to create various elements in the fishes' home. They employed different objects to signify food, furniture, toys, fire, and walls.

Strategies

Strategies may simply be defined as the actual activities or structures conducted during a class. Process drama structures are more than series of brief exercises. They should knit together to form a series of interconnecting forms overlapping into a “web of meaning” (Kao and O’Neill). Ideally each activity builds upon the previous, although not always linearly, to create a comprehensive dramatic experience. Students should be drawn into a construct which engages and allows for meaning making where they articulate personal opinions on the narratives events.

The young age of the students affected which strategies could be employed during this project. Process dramas often use group work. For students’ age four or five, working unsupervised in groups may lead to confusion, even in first language classrooms. The lack of a teaching assistant necessitated the group participate all together or take turns as audience and participants. Often process drama includes involvement in linguistic and literary activities. Linguistic and literacy activities were incorporated when possible with differing results. Expecting students to engage in dramatic activities requiring advanced verbal skills was sometimes difficult or frustrating. Due to the age and the language ability of the students, this project relied on dramatic play, or play making.

The book Structuring Drama Work, by Jonathon Neelands and Tony Gould, provides terminology for commonly used classroom drama techniques. They divide dramatic structures into four categories; context- building, narrative action, poetic action, and reflective action. This categorization terminology provides a framework to describe the activities used in this project. This following table represents what structures were used in the classroom during the “Ugly Fish” process drama.

Table 2: Dramatic Structures used in Process Drama

Lesson	Dramatic Structures	Description	Students Role	Teacher-in-Role	Sign or Artifact
1. “Going Fishing”	Brainstorm	Come up with what we need to catch fish and how we could go about it	Fishermen preparing for a fishing trip Expert fisherman who had knowledge of where/how to catch them	Person with knowledge about rare fish, but not knowledgeable about how to catch them students needed to show where to go and how to do it	
	Whole-group improvisation	Go on a fishing trip to the illusive Hoochie Koochie Fish lake and fish for them, everyone pick one to bring back to the classroom with them	Fisherman catching the rare fish	Fisherman who needed students instructions on where to go and what to do	
	Drawing Collective	Students draw picture to document the fish they caught.	Fishermen	Fisherman	Creating record of the beautiful fish they saw
2. Preparing the Aquarium		Watched video of fish in an Aquarium and discussed what they do, what they need			Video footage of fish aquariums
	Defining the Space	Used materials provided by teacher (umbrellas, boxes, pillows, dishes, fake fruit, cardboard tube) to build a new home for the fish, decided where to put things, etc.	People who were preparing home for the fish	Not in role operated as stage manager providing materials and asking questions	Students used objects to represent fish tank and household objects Fish pictures they created on wall
3. Play in the Aquarium	Defining the Space	Rebuilt the aquarium	People who were preparing home for the fish		Students used objects to represent fish tank and household objects
	Group improvisation	Entered as fish, explored and played in the environment and used the things the “people” had prepared	Fish	Fish	
	Group Improvisation	Read the first half of the book <u>Ugly Fish</u> to further discussions about	Fish	Fish who had found story	The book <u>Ugly Fish</u>
4 Observing the Fish	Group Improvisation	Used a box to say it was the aquarium (we were people again) and students talked about what they saw happening, separated fish who weren’t getting along	The “people” who had created the fish tank observing the fish	Self- but as a helping to guide what I saw happening in the fish tank and soliciting their ideas	Box
5 Preparing for Ugly Fish	Group Improvisation	Meeting with the King’s Assistant who brought a newspaper article to announce that ugly fish was going to move into the tank. A town meeting followed with discussion regarding what we would do. we created- in role as the fish had a meeting with the King’s helper (teacher-in-role) made signs to protest and warn Ugly Fish that we didn’t like him	Fish in the tank concerned about new arrival	Assistant the President Fish who brought them news of the Ugly Fish coming in and saying they had to come up with plan	Newspaper Article
	Writing in Role	Made signs to post for when Ugly Fish arrived in tank	Fish concerned about Ugly Fish’s arrival	King Fish’s assistant	Poster board signs
6 Create/Play Story	Brainstorming	Brainstormed what could happen when ugly fish showed up, drew the story	Self- then fish	Self- director helping them write the story	
	Moment of Truth	Reenacted as a group the events we decided happened when Ugly Fish arrived in Tank	Fish	Ugly Fish	

This table records activities done during the project. It is important to note that some of these weren't pre-planned. Some arose from thinking in the context of the class and situation, others planned as the drama took new developments. A process drama too overly structured may yield only predictable results and lack surprise (Heathcote, Writings 51). In order to allow for students to have ownership of the drama's development it would be counterproductive to structure every event. However the major milestones/signposts were preplanned. The drama continually evolved and adjustments were made throughout the lesson. The following chapter looks at some of these negotiations within the drama and how my actions as facilitator impacted the event.

CHAPTER FOUR: REFLECTION

How does one analyze dramatic practice? Drama is a transitory art form, existing in the moment and sustained as a memory. But is the remembrance a clear picture of what occurred? Process drama is more transient than formal performance. No audience other than the participants who “lived it” is even aware that the “art” occurred. How does one recall and reflect upon a process drama. Using the research methodology of reflective practice a facilitator combines research, archival materials, and memory to consider and critique the project. Reflective practice requires the facilitator to recall what happened in the classroom. Many decisions in teaching occur in seconds making reflections upon these transitory decisions difficult.

“Most good infant teachers are able to judge when they may venture to join children at play, especially Wendy-house play, but many would be at a loss to explain how they judge” (Heathcote 54).

Lesson plans define objectives, video offers insight into what happened, but both fail to capture the energy of the environment. Journals allow a researcher to record the process and connections, but cannot convey nuances of the event.

So why conduct a reflective practice study if it has these limitations? Reflective practice paints a picture of education in action. Educators are equipped to view their work in the context of the larger frame of study and practice.

Dr. Donald Schon originated the term “reflective practice” in his writings during the 1980’s. But he did not create the methodology. John Dewey advocated that educators should employ experience, interaction, and reflection in their work.

These are the key tenants of reflective practice in education. Critical pedagogist Paulo Freire said;

“... Those who are engaged in critical learning know that their teachers are continuously in the process of acquiring new knowledge and that his new knowledge cannot simply be transferred to them, the learners. At the same time, in the context of true learning, the learners will be engaged in a continuous transformation through which they become authentic subjects of the construction and reconstruction of what is being taught, side by side with the teacher, who is equally subject to the same process (Freire 33).

Reflective practitioners engage in continual learning. Research in action enriches professional practice. The examination of practice “reflectively and reflexively” fosters “developmental insight” and growth in development in the field” (McIntosh 20). For Neelands “teaching is research and research is practice” (25). The cyclical format requires reflective practitioners to continually analyze teaching and learning. Identifying, planning, acting and reviewing provide catalysts for future action.

Reflective practice positions teachers as active research subjects. They endeavor to make sense of complicated and diverse factors impacting the study. A reflective practitioner accepts that what she sees is individual and therefore others may interpret phenomenon differently.

Although not empirical, this research is rooted in evidence. Researchers consider academic material, documentation of process, and experiential evidence to inform understanding of personal practice of teacher in action. I documented the project with video recordings, samples of student’s work, and journal reflections following each session. These materials assisted my analysis of the event and its consequences. Journals and video provided insight into the circumstances influencing my decisions during the drama. Moments of decision in action are hard to document.

Reflective practice shares many ideals of process drama education. Both reflective practice and process drama regard learning as a dynamic process. Reflective practice minimizes the models of teacher in control who imparts learning as if pouring knowledge into receptive vessel. Instead it operates on a dynamic model with teachers as co-learners and students who shape the environment in conjunction with the educator. Jonathon Neelands regards reflection in action, the ability to adjust and adapt in the midst of a process rather than afterward, as a vital characteristic of process drama (19). The shape of a project adjusts continually based on these decisions. The role of the teacher maneuvers between champion, challenger, co-participant, and motivator based on the ongoing circumstances. In Structure and Spontaneity O'Neill lays out six things a teacher should regard her role in a process drama.

“Teachers in a process drama should see themselves as:

- “Structure operators who weave the units of action together into an artful experience
- Artists, the teacher, collaborating with their students, the co-artists
- Building a work in process
- Able to release themselves from their lesson plan
- Capable of finding questions to explore rather than providing answers
- Raising possibilities rather than confirming probabilities” (O'Neill 6).

This framework provides parameters from which to investigate my reflections upon teacher role during this specific project.

“Structure operators who weave the units of action together into an artful experience”

(O’Neill 6)

Weaving “action into an artful experience” involves structuring the components of a process drama to build upon each other. This development is cohesive although not always linear. The episodic nature of process drama facilitates engagement with the material by shifting approaches such as “role playing from an action out of story to an acting as if approach to the narrative” (O’Conner 35). The interconnected activities include initiating a pre-text, context building, and adopting a role (Kao and O’Neill 13).

A pre-text initializes a process drama. A pre-text may be a picture, an object/symbol, story or artifact; and it should motivate action and interest. O’Neill adds;

“A pre-text has a much more precise structural function than merely to propose an idea for dramatic exploration. The purpose of the pre-text is to activate the weaving of the text of the drama, because although the drama may not originate in a text, it always generates a text in action” (O’Neill 25).

The pre-text is the stimulus for the project and should inspire questions, interest, and curiosity rather than answers. The pre-text for this this project originated in the introduction of the rare and illusive “Hoochie Koochie Fish.” Their “specialness” stimulated the participants’ interest for finding them. Following a short discussion we went on a “quest” to catch one.

Reflection revealed this pre-text lacked sufficient strength for an ongoing drama. It failed to generate a compelling imperative beyond the pretend fishing trip. Students’ desire to catch the illusive fish was enough to sustain the exploration of one class period. A more compelling reason for the activities which followed may have resulted in increased engagement with the material.

Students were told the “Hoochie Koochie” fish were rare, but not why this was so. Were they overfished, poached, or simply shy? Establishing a broader context, or letting them determine back story could have added dimension and dramatic tension earlier in the project.

The pre-text generates interest and context building structures define the environment for the drama. They provide opportunities for a group to develop and interact with circumstance of the drama (Neelands and Goode 6). They may help “set the scene” or contribute new information. After catching the rare “Hoochie Koochie” fish students used protean props to create a “home” for them. Students “defined the space” for our playmaking and found alternate uses for the protean props.

I assumed a stage manager role as defined in chapter two for this activity. Giving directions, questioning, offering resources, or suggesting solutions are forms of assistive intervention occurring outside the drama. It is a strategy for adult intervention in play recommended in early childhood resources and theoretical writings (Smiliansky, Piaget and Slade). However in one study these techniques thwarted students’ efforts at play and contributed to its cessation (Creaser 6).

I sought to avoid inhibiting the young people’s learning and play, but found it difficult to remain outside the drama. Students cooperated well with construction of the environment. But they were slow in their negotiations. I desired to intervene and resolve confusion quickly.

Turning students loose to build made me feel disengaged from the drama. Process drama facilitates teachers and students as co-creators. As a stage manager I excluded myself from being part of the context making with them. Conversely providing students with an opportunity to work independently facilitates independent thought and investment in the drama.

I attempted to evaluate my perspective in a stage-managerial role during dramatic play. Reviewing recordings of the classes prompted me to question how much I actually did let them fumble. What felt like minutes in my recollection, video revealed to be seconds before I intervened in debate between the children. A more comprehensive personal definition of circumstance which requires direct intervention would help me anticipate and structure an appropriate level of response in these circumstances.

If I jumped in to help create the space presumably the work could have been completed sooner, but is that better? How should teacher participation add enrichment into the activity and challenge them to go further with the material? Pellegrini and Galda caution adults about intervention in playing “when children and adults interact adults do most of the work” (169). If adults are doing most of the work, children are not learning to full potential and they are not contributing as equal participants. This indicates an ideal approach involves neither standing back as observer nor commandeering the activities.

Working as a structure operator requires ensuring that the situations protect participants. The introduction of “Ugly Fish” into the aquarium was another opportunity to weave action with appropriate form. This was the climax of the drama, and I pondered how to approach this hostile character.

Deciding how to play the role of “Ugly Fish” raised concerns. The circumstance requires that students neither feel intimidated nor engage in damaging behavior to others.

“It may well be that the adolescent mentioned above is perfectly in control of himself in playing a sadistic role as part of the classroom drama, but are the other participants, those at the receiving end of his ‘fictitious sadism’, equally in control of themselves or have they become trapped into an unpleasant drama they were not prepared for” (Heathcote and Bolton 84).

I decided to assume the role of the “Ugly Fish” to prevent this “fictitious sadism”. Prior to “acting it out,” students discussed what they thought would happen when Ugly Fish entered the aquarium and how they intended to handle the situation. These negotiations occurring outside of the drama are what Williamson and Slivern identify as meta-play. Meta-play decreases anxiety for role-played conversations. Pre-planning a play episode allows participants to take ownership for what will happen and propel the story toward a collectively agreed outcome (Heathcote and Bolton 180).

Some students interacted verbally and physically with me when in-role as the antagonistic “Ugly Fish.” Others were unsure how to proceed when “Ms Katie” was not a nice character. The interactions with students confident enough to improvise dialogue were dynamic. As a co-participant in the drama, I eagerly looked forward to what would happen next in the fiction. The engagement of these confident students emboldened others to join the improvisation. A small percentage of the students remained observers. Nervously they remained in proximity to the group but did not communicate in the play with gesture or language. Concern for these youngsters distracted me and I terminated the dialogue before other participants were ready to do so. Perhaps this was a premature decision, since time spent observing the activity could facilitate future participation.

A class with less English experience struggled to verbally interact with me in role as “Ugly Fish”. The lack of response halted the playmaking. I had to leave my role to remind them of the story we created during meta-play and suggest words for them to say. This shifted my role from co-player or play-leader to that of director. They observed my expression and gestures as

“Ugly Fish,” but were reticent to engage with me in role as “Ugly Fish.” Perhaps they wanted to participate but were unclear about what was expected of them.

All classes had some students with limited English or reserved personalities, but unlike the other classes this group lacked peer examples to model the drama. During context building tasks or movement activities, such as initial fishing trip they were quieter but participation was on par with peers. More linguistically complex tasks seemed to confound them.

“Teacher-talk” dominated sessions with this group. The struggle to encourage their verbal participation discouraged me. I was abhorred to see on video a period of time where I disengaged from the students. They were engaged in coloring signs which outlined the rules of the “aquarium” created in our drama. Usually I use these opportunities to talk one on one or with small groups of students about what they are doing, but in this instance I remained silent. Taxed to the end of my resources in soliciting communication I appeared to have given up.

I assumed they did not understand what happened in the drama. It is possible that the students learned and understood more than they communicated back. Future projects could include alternate forms of assessment to evaluate this assumption. They needed more structure initially and in my eagerness to get them talking I was asking them to skip steps of learning. Observing and absorbing was the step of the learning they were in. Some of these children continue studying in my classes and in subsequent projects many demonstrate ability and confidence during verbal role-playing.

“Artist, the teacher, collaborating with their students, the co-artist” (O’Neill 6)

Partnering as a co-artist with students creates rewards and challenges. Participation alone does not automatically create equitable co-playing environments. Teachers committed to classroom exploration cannot escape the established power paradigm between teacher and student. The tension between guidance and control impacts attitudes and behavior of teachers and students. Research indicates a direct correlation between an increase on a student’s participation with a decrease in teacher involvement (Kao and O’Neill 110).

Practitioners desire more student involvement but the balance remains elusive. Those seeking a co-participatory learning environment struggle to negotiate clear line of teacher and student responsibilities. It is easy to say teachers should “learn to withdraw” and intervene when necessary (Liu 18). But how does one know when to withdraw? Most research on this topic has been conducted with teenage or adult ESOL learners. The age of these subjects indicates they have increased capacity for focus and self-management than the four-year-olds discussed in this project. Addressing the needs of young students blurs perspective of appropriate teacher co-participation and intervention.

Through co-playing with students I discerned moments ripe for dramatic exploration. But as the teacher I questioned if my suggestions would result in participation simply because I was the authority. Conversely co-player situations intimidate because children are invested with the authority to say “No” to an idea. Dramatic play sessions generated opportunities to explore these concerns.

After creating the fish tank “home” we played as if we were the fish moving into the new environment. I concentrated on pretending student ideas, but their play only sustained for short periods of time. One girl seemed to want to engage deeper in the play, but her ideas were largely ignored by the others. Personally I wanted to join her. She seemed to have the capacity to play with sincerity. My attempts to interest the other students in her idea met with little enthusiasm. I worried that engagement with only the one girl would remove my focus from the others. I feared that lack of observation the classroom may devolve into chaotic or aggressive behavior.

The appearance of chaos is a big concern at the learning center. Both parents and staff observe classes through the CCTV monitors. A classroom appearing chaotic often confounds and irritates parents and learning centre staff. The camera heightens my responsibility for maintaining order in the classroom. Is that an excuse for lack of trust in the students or my unwillingness to take a risk? Is it fair to assume that play I was not involved in would result in chaos? Studies confirm justification for some of these fears with young children. Play interludes lacking adult involvement tend to be shorter and result in “quarrels and injuries” requiring teacher intervention (Enz and Christie 23).

In this instance concerns for maintaining order contributed to abandoning this girl’s ideas. We continued to play ideas of short duration, while I sought an idea that would capture the group’s imagination and generate lengthier play. I introduced the idea that people were looking into the tank to watch us. The students latched onto this and began to react as if giant people could see what they were doing. I pretended to be shocked seeing the peering “people,” The children’s reacted to the stimulus and continued the drama by generating their own input in the “situation.”

They improvised a strong dislike for being observed by the “humans.” This scenario generated dramatic tension sustaining lengthier play. Introducing a new idea for the playmaking positioned me away from co-player and into the function of a play-leader. This position offered a partial resolution for teacher to participation without forcing students into an activity. A play-leader teacher generates sophisticated plot development with a beginning, middle and end, but remains influenced by the contributions of students (Enz and Christie 19). Heathcote’s writings support the play-leader style of involvement in process drama. She determined the best teacher roles were those which possess a strong sense of history while being able draw upon student guidance (Heathcote and Bolton 24). Play-leader teachers also “stimulate children’s language and literacy production,” and therefore it is of particular importance in ESOL classrooms (Enz and Christie 19).

Engaging with the class as a play-leader provided a platform for redirecting one idea for the stopping the “human observation.” Students initially suggested bursting out of the tank and eating the people. Although exciting, this solution would have halted future exploration within the “tank” and violated the parameters of the drama world (i.e. fish needing water in the tank to survive). O’Neill said that with in the “open possibility” of drama, teachers should not “be intolerant of the independent growth of the process and of their pupils’ independent contributions” (55). I needed to protect the structure of the drama while gently redirecting their ideas. I did not want my redirection negotiations to generate from a didactic point of view. In character as a fish, I articulated my fear that if the tank broke we would not be able to breathe without the water. This provided a solution within the frame of the drama and was shaped within the play, rather than a teacher demanding something from outside the drama.

The students' modified suggestion involved hiding from the voyeuristic "humans." This direction propelled the drama further and resulted in the longest plot-line for this session's playmaking. Students worked together to build a "fort in which to hide. For the rest of the class, recitation and writing tasks occurred in this "fort."

This incident illustrates the effectiveness of negotiation in role. I regret that I did not handle other circumstances from within role. In a different class, a student destroyed the aquarium element created by another child. I felt the confusion of my joint role as co-participant and classroom manager. Immediately I dropped role and intervened as "Ms Katie" to correct the inappropriate behavior and ensure it didn't happen again. This is a common response from adults. Could this incident have been addressed within role? If I approached him in role as a frustrated fellow fish, perhaps the issue could have been resolved from within the fiction.

Vocabulary assessment, like redirection, can be approached within the drama. Simply asking students what they were building during creation of the fish tank "home" solicited few replies. Certainly language ability contributed to lack of answers, but I realized that asking the same questions in role as "fish tank inspector" may generate more answers. This could have been an effective character, but I introduced it too late into the playmaking. The students' interest in building the environment had already waned and an opportunity to engage in character was missed.

These examples illustrate how a co-participant teacher continually adapts roles and tactics. The decision making comes with practice, and activities that do not connect with a group do not always indicate a failed idea. Sometimes a group's struggle with a task illuminates a challenge in its implementation. Whether the exchanges between teacher and student are pre-

planned or spontaneous, in classroom drama they stimulate activity most when providing dramatic tension. Claiming to be a character is not enough. A co-participant teacher should seek to ignite the imagination and spark possibility.

“Building a work in process” (O’Neill 6)

Process drama and dramatic play emphasize the journey of discovery taken by participants. Many assume however that a drama class equals a performance. Peter Slade argued that pre-primary students should avoid performance for parents because it interferes “with absorption and thus sincerity” (63). The requirement for students to participate in recitation at conclusion of the class is an example of expectation for a performance “product.” The process of learning in class may be of interest, but generally parents regard the “work” as the performance not the journey to get there.

One student’s father commented about his disappointment to me about the structure of the class. His concern centered on his son spending time “running around in class” and not enough time “doing drama.” I endeavor to explain to parents how kinesthetic activities and “play” is the “drama.” I elaborate on the ways dramatic play contributes to learning, but parents may be inclined to interpret recitation as more prominent examples of learning drama. If they expect to see traditional school behavior (i.e. reading and writing), than dramatic play may appear to merely be “fun” and not valuable enough to pay tuition for.

Attempts to learn the performance material within the drama without clearly pausing it usually generated challenges for this population. For example one day the elements of the

aquarium setting remained out while doing memorization and we returned to play in it when there was time. But the earlier enthusiasm had diminished. Stopping the drama to learn recitation material broke the flow of their play. Their interactions lacked the earlier sincerity; in order to stay on task we lost an opportunity for dramatic exploration. The play environment distracted them from the formal classroom activities. Clearly designating the end of the play, removing symbols of the activity, and explaining we are leaving the fiction and returning to the “classroom” helped define the transition.

Process drama is primarily about learning through a dramatic experience. However this does not mean that development of a “product” is completely incompatible with this method. Heathcote’s “Mantle of Expert” provides a framework for curriculum tasks and assessment to occur within the drama. In the “Ugly Fish” drama the poem or “product” remained an external element, unconnected to the drama. Perhaps supplying memorization tasks motivation from within the drama could have eased this tension. As two separate elements they competed with one another for priority, but what if learning the poem was part of the “process” of developing the drama?

Other experiences in this project validated this assumption. For example after constructing the “fort” to hide in the fish tank, the sessions writing and recitation were included into the “world” of the drama. The “fort” became a secret place within the world of the drama to rehearse the poem and write in our copy books. Students periodically “checked” to make sure the humans couldn’t see them, but remained focused on the structured tasks. This device felt playful and natural. It used the students’ ideas and it allowed for the drama and coursework to continue in conjunction.

Classes limited in English communication skills highlighted another example for regarding classroom drama as a work in progress. I observed this class engaging in the drama the most when speaking in their native language. While establishing the aquarium they enthusiastically created a home for the fish, but during negotiations with each other they did not speak English. If my priority is to engage students in a drama then their interest and collaboration indicates connection to the work. But if my primary aim is language acquisition than does this behavior neglect language practice? The drama teacher wants identification with the dramatic world, but English language usage is expected from the course. Which goal takes priority?

Kao and O'Neil contend that clarification and planning between students in a first language contributes to the drama and ultimately enriches the ESOL learning (107). But the education centre's focus on English immersion discourages the speaking of Cantonese in the class.

Trying to engage this class in exploring the world of fish further illustrates my difficulty to engage them in verbal communication. They showed little enthusiasm for playing in the aquarium, unlike peers in the other classes. Perhaps they did not comprehend the shift of role into being fish. Or maybe they would have been inclined to participate in dramatic play in their first language, but felt constrained by the demands of interaction in English.

“Able to Release from Lesson Plan” (O’Neill 6)

Often parents and administrators regard written lesson plans as tangible proof of learning. A lesson plan provides a roadmap for classroom activities, but is not a guarantee for learning. Rigid adherence to a lesson plan severely limits fluidity within a classroom. Departures from a lesson plan can result in dynamic learning environments.

A discussion during session four prompted a radical departure from the written lesson plans. I intended to facilitate a town meeting with the class in role as the “Hoochie Koochie Fish.” They were to establish laws for the aquarium society. “Ugly Fish” was going to arrive in the community during the following week’s lesson and violate some of the rules they created.

Before starting the “town meeting” one student indicated a lack of understanding about the vocabulary involved. A box signified a fish tank and I manipulated it to demonstrate some of the unfamiliar aquarium vocabulary. One pupil pretended to see “Ugly Fish” swimming in the box during my explanation. He indicated that “Ugly Fish” was harming other fish in the tank. This mirrored what “Ugly Fish” does in the book we read in a previous lesson. Rather than redirecting his comments, I used it as an opportunity to interact with story. We discussed what could happen next and then “played” it out. This was different than previous playmaking sessions, because we did not assume the roles of the fish. We were “ourselves.” As humans the students had the power to manipulate fish in the tank from a more omnipotent vantage point.

This activity facilitated comprehension of the material and provided cathartic release. Casting themselves in a position where they could directly influence the world of the fish may have

helped them process elements of the story. Some children shared concerns about the death of fish in the book.

Replaying the events in the book Ugly Fish, with different tactics, reinforced students' comprehension of the material. Sometimes they killed "Ugly Fish," other times they found ways to separate or remove him. They tried to introduce new objects into the tank to pacify the fishes' conflict. Occasionally the solution was humorous, such as when the other fish passed gas to prompt "Ugly Fish" to leave them alone.

This event supports assertions that dramatic play based on literature allows participants to "slow down their interactions with the books" and revisit unsettling sections from a position of control (Rowe 13). Rowe also contends that the play episodes are better defined when children orchestrate "their play scripts with supportive adults" (Rowe 14).

Although drastically different from the planned activity, it did address similar aims. Students articulated their ideas and plans dynamically. They identified with the situation and were motivated to find solutions. Although not directly a stair step to the session which followed, the activity was parallel and in line with the drama's overall objectives. Ultimately I incorporated this detour into other classes and the impromptu moment became part of the lesson plan.

"Capable of finding questions to explore rather than providing answers" (O'Neill 6)

In process drama, as in theatre, tension sustains interest in the developing events. Questioning can help insert tension into a drama. "Effective questioning will be the teacher's most important tool, both at the beginning of the drama and at critical moments within the

interactions” (Kao and O’Neill 29). Questions provide a forum to challenge students’ expectations and push for more depth of thought. Kao and O’Neill contend that most questions asked by teachers are merely to test knowledge not initiate ideas (31). I believe in the power of good questions. But analysis of my teaching during this project revealed that I tended to adhere to traditional modes of questioning. I often asked closed ended questions, not the thoughtful inspiring questions I aspired to.

Show and tell, a component of the SCA exam, requires students to talk about a personal object and answer other students’ questions. It is an element of every class session to prepare them for the exam and occurs near the beginning of each class prior to the dramatic activities. One student brought a stuffed dog to show and tell early in the drama. This toy provided an opportunity to initiate conversation about pets and other animal topics related to the process drama.

We spoke about pets for a few moments then I asked “What happens when cats and dogs meet? Do they like each other?” Students responded with “No,” and I followed up the questioning with “What do dogs do to cats?” “Chase them.” Then I encouraged them to “show me.” The result was a simple dog and cat chase around the room.

The students laughed as they ran around the room and displays of character were limited to a few animal noises. The toy dog prop indicated who was which character and students followed the expected actions for the two animals. Cat ran from dog.

Is this an example of children’s play episodes reflecting what they know? Or was I directing their actions? Did they engage beyond a surface level in the moment? I do not believe the children were engaged in deep reflection, but that doesn’t mean it wasn’t useful.

Demonstrating familiar models playing a role may assist in generating confidence for future encounters. They enjoy chasing and playing. But I felt very much in the directorial play intervention style discussed in Chapter 2. It definitely was not the student lead dramatic play I sought to generate from them.

This type of questioning during “Show and Tell” neglected to pursue possibilities. The questions lead the young people’s responses. Instead I could have used questions that would generate thought on how to handle conflict or why people disagree. The leading questions were a missed opportunity for stimulating interest into the central theme of the drama. Good questions should raise possibilities.

“Raising possibilities rather than confirming probabilities” (O’Neill 6)

Process drama and dramatic play allow participants to explore options. The structures impact how broad or open the environment is. The class dynamic also plays a role. Dorothy Heathcote found that a subtle tension, such as “waiting one’s turn to be interrogated, knowing that one from the group will be found guilty” provides a richness and depth for a drama. She also concluded that this device is useless in classes which require “cruder” stimulus for tension (Heathcote 95).

Anxious that the students may lack the English vocabulary regarding items in an aquarium I sought to increase their knowledge base and generate interest in the task. Video footage of a large aquarium sparked interest and dialogue for the fishes’ needs. The film contained no dialogue just the images of all the fish swimming. Students were allowed to talk

though the video and ask questions. I did not comment on anything during the video except what the students mentioned. I sought to clarify their comments and questions. The student-led conversation helped me assess what topical language they knew and which content areas were unfamiliar. The children highlighted the fish they recognized, commented on the scuba diver in the tank, and watched the fish diving, hiding, etc. They asked questions about the different fish and circumstances. Some personified and speculated about the needs and wants of the fish. Others made an effort to try some of the new vocabulary initiated during the conversation. The conversation was student driven, and one in which they had an interest in hearing more about the footage. I was encouraged that it would help them develop creative ideas for building their own aquarium. When I began to ask what the aquarium we made would need, they responded with “correct” answers for aquariums. The students’ ideas were rooted in realism, and knowledge of what things animals actually require.

I hoped their answers would reflect more creative thinking. They hesitated to answer further, perhaps due to unfamiliarity with vocabulary or misunderstanding of the question. I wondered if I was prompting enough critical thought from them, but perhaps they needed more time. And in an effort to challenge, I was impatiently rushing them.

This meta-play activity had the potential to engage. Their predictable responses may be attributed to the model of implementation. The methodology of going from a video to the whiteboard is akin to standard classroom teaching. Did this contribute to the perception that they had to give “right” answers? A factor amplified by the structured academic climate in Hong Kong, which focuses on giving the right answer. Semantics may have contributed to limited the

discussion as well. Language like “home” instead of “aquarium” may have altered the discussion.

Their planning for the fishes’ homes failed to align with my expectations. I hoped they would think outside a literal fish tank. My definition for “good” and creative meant I thought they would create a silly fish house. Perhaps I also was seeking to solicit responses that reflected my ideas, not always those of the children and I imposed my ideas onto the play. I had my own “right” answers. But they don’t share my imagination. The open facilitation I sought to foster was thwarted by prescriptive expectations that the students align with my ideas.

Then again perhaps students needed to be grounded in concrete “real world” circumstances in this early phase of the drama. Heathcote talks about gradually building up to complex levels within a process drama.

“Another aspect of the work that I feel at home with is the concept of empowering students, so that they gradually take over responsibilities for planning their own work. You and I have been conscious as we have written this book that this is a stumbling block for some teachers, because the early stages of the work may appear to be dominated totally by the teacher. The major learning process for the students is that of earning the right to handle more complex decisions- again, not because they are labeled experts, but because they are gaining sufficient expertise to make ‘real’ decisions. If the teacher hurries this process, the student’s judgments will be derived from their labels, not from their minds” (Heathcote and Bolton 189).

By anticipating where I wanted the drama to go, I lost sight of the steps required to get there.

Kao and O’Neill advocate utilizing “ambiguous, obstructive, or untrustworthy” characters as another way to raise possibility beyond the obvious options (29). I intentionally chose to try one in this drama.

I intended that through the role of the “Emperor’s Assistant” I would propel the drama into a realm of possibility. The character arrived unexpectedly, behaved with superiority and carried a mysterious message. He brought news that “Ugly Fish” was moving to the tank. I hoped this ambiguous character would stimulate discussion and speculation regarding the truth and implication of his news. Student interactions were limited with this character.

Attempts to engage them in conversation with the assistant fish were short and unstained. Several factors may have contributed to this phenomenon. I was not fully prepared to “signify” who I was. The video footage shows little investment into performing the character. Also I neglected to use a clear costume piece to indicate the status of the role. A prominent costume element or prop helps define character and serves to indicate when a teacher is “in-role.” Neglecting this step was an unfortunate oversight.

The “Messenger Fish” brought a newspaper article informing the fish about the impending arrival of “Ugly Fish” to the tank. Students showed interest in the prop. This suggests that the artifact provided motivation. But the sign was incongruous to the character that brought it. Why would the emperor’s messenger bring a newspaper article? A messenger from a king would likely carry a letter or proclamation. Newspapers are imbued with their own status and don't need presentation from a royal emissary to be believed.

Although the literature advocates utilizing ambiguous roles to stimulate discussion, more research is necessary to determine if this is applicable to younger students as well. Students may not have been ready to interact with an ambiguous character. Younger students in my classrooms continue to have difficulty understanding complex teacher roles in subsequent process dramas. Even after incorporating costume and expositional meta-play, I remain “Ms. Katie.” They

display confusion when a character I play doesn't know what I know. Certainly language may be a factor, but I find younger students more willing to interact with me in role if the character is "one of the gang" or conversely openly antagonistic. Cognitive development may be a factor. Is an ambiguous character challenging to students in concrete thinking stages? What strategies could help prepare them to understand a complicated character?

This project continues to influence the teaching I do in Hong Kong. The questions raised and conclusions reached through reflection-in-action motivated me to revise teacher practices. The events of this study continue to challenge me to explore possibilities with my students, and I will discuss them further in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

My desire to better articulate how I adapt teacher-in-role styles prompted the research within this study. The specific circumstances of a process drama in an ESOL classroom with young children refined the focus to one of balancing objectives. The project required negotiating multiple interests, including parental expectations, curriculum requirements, and culture. Yet the greatest source of anxiety rose from my attempts to reconcile ideals for participatory interactive classes with personal comfort level for classroom structure and order.

Process dramas develop best in classrooms with a climate of trust, an environment where the teacher empowers students to make choices and help direct the action. An idea easy to espouse, but this project revealed that I do not always trust my students. I praise the capability of young people, but during this study I became cognoscente of how quickly I intervene or direct student interactions. When classroom management concerns arise I tend to interact as a teacher rather than as a character in the shared fiction.

Evaluating a student's language level and stage of human development helps to discern a desired type of interaction with the student. The students in this project were new to process drama. This was the first process drama I facilitated both in an ESOL context and with young children. The teacher driven activities which frustrated me, may have been necessary and beneficial for both the teacher and students level of experience in this context.

My desire for student contributions to drive forward the drama generated concern when participants did not communicate ideas. Directly guiding their actions in the play scenario felt

like an abandonment of my ideal. Yet this is not necessarily true. Closed, formulaic, and structured activities serve a purpose within a drama ESOL class.

“These closed and controlled drama techniques [structured role-plays, games] are useful for learners at the beginning level when they do not possess sufficient knowledge about the target language to deal with uncertainty. However the pre-determined features of these activities restrict learners from progressing to higher levels in using the target language” (Kao and O’Neill 9).

Varied techniques generate better language acquisition, and guiding, prompting or directing a student in class is beneficial in some circumstances. Sometimes a more directive approach within process drama play sessions establishes clear parameters of acting and lays a framework that fosters more participation from students in the future. The directive play style may be of special assistance to students with limited English ability.

“One child, Paco, who was new to class and who could speak little English, did respond well to this style [director] during the birthday party episode. He silently carried out J’s directions and appeared to be enjoying himself. This was the only time that we observed Paco participating in make-believe play” (Enz and Christie 22).

Enz and Christie concluded that directive teacher play style was limiting to most students, but directed toward a specific population provides insight into structuring dramatic activities for different levels of ESOL learners. Every class, like every person, is different. One cannot expect the same results from every group of students. A similar drama conducted with children in their first language would develop differently. A hybrid approach is optimum. Classroom extremes with either all open structures or closed communication forms fail to generate a balanced educational perspective.

Process drama cannot be the only form of language instruction, even within a language drama course. Kao and O’Neill advocate process drama in language learning, but recognize its

limitations. The language acquired in process drama may not align with specific vocabulary required of standardized examinations. Process drama activates the language the students acquire, but students still need to learn vocabulary or grammar rules. Process drama may not be the primary form of instruction in preparation for formalized assessments, such as exams or performances (Kao and O'Neill 123).

Vygotsky understood that children learned the most in drama when it originated from their improvisations. He argued that scripted text “constrains a child’s creativity” (72-73). Process drama can be a methodology for developing performances with young people. A subsequent project I facilitated provided an opportunity to incorporate a process drama into preparations for a performance. The students were similar in age to the ones in this study, but were required to “write” and perform a short play. The course began with a process drama about space exploration, the same theme as the final play they devised. The class began to “write” an outline for the performance story after a few sessions of the process drama. The resulting story reflected elements of the process drama, but was also distinctly different in plot and scope. The process drama continued while the course gradually shifted to more time spent rehearsing the new play. This may indicate that process drama can facilitate comprehension and stimulate ideas for further development in a devised performance. Future studies would contribute to the discussion on using process drama for developing theatrical productions with young children.

Process drama allows participants to reflect upon a story, events, or opinions. Reflection leads to increased comprehension, retention of information, and critical thought. Participants in process drama alternate between being in role and out of role completing supportive tasks for the fiction. This enables them to have moments of reflection in action, a process known as refraction

(O’Conner 6). Process drama may create an intellectual distance similar to Brecht’s Epic Theatre in which participants interact with a performance cerebrally and viscerally. Refraction affords participants the opportunity to both be in the drama and reflect upon it.

Refraction is the personal and internal communication of discoveries made in the process. These can be articulated either privately or to the group, and this serves a variety of purposes. Reflection can help assess progress, plan for the next stage of the drama, and ascertain students’ feelings about the class’s events and topics. Group reflection highlights for teacher and students what learning has taken place (Kao and O’Neill 32).

This study lacked opportunities for students to share or record their reflections on the events. The age and ability of students’ limited written reflection, but this is only one available methodology for reflection. Drawing helps assesses young participants’ perspective and memory of the events. When structured to do so dramatic play within a process drama can also serve as a method for reflection. “Sometimes, the most effective discussion can take place inside of the drama, and reflection does not always need to be carried out discursively” (Kao and O’Neill 32).

A process drama on “The Three Little Pigs” generated an opportunity for students to engage in reflection through the dramatic structures of the process drama. I gradually layered drama structures building to those which were more complex. Near the end of the drama the students participated in “Thought-tracking” as the characters of pigs and wolf. The “Thought-Tracking” structure involves participants verbalizing “hidden” thoughts of their character, like an audible thought bubble (Neelands and Goode 91). This structure provided an opportunity for me to discern their comprehension and critical thinking during the activity. “Thought-tracking” and subsequent discussion revealed the students’ complex decision making and conflicting emotions

regarding the wolf and pig's behavior. The "Ugly Fish" drama in this study would have benefited from similar practices. Students reacted to "Ugly Fish," but I failed to provide a forum for them to discuss and reflect upon his and their actions within the drama. I wanted to generate a scenario for them to explore the behavior of a group toward a hostile member, but neglected to give them the opportunity to ask why they reacted certain ways.

Meta-play provides another opportunity for reflection. Negotiations about a dramatic play session prompt students to be more accommodating with others (Williamson and Slivern 87). A teacher participating in meta-play also facilitates critical thinking about the material (Rowe 22).

Establishing clear characters for a teacher and pre-texts helps create stronger environments for reflections and discussions in process dram. Some of the characters I adopted lacked depth and clarity, perhaps impeding student interaction with them. I also worried that some students required reassurance form the teacher that they were doing things correctly. Often classroom management situations can be handled through teacher-in-role. Would reassurance from a teacher, not a character help an anxious child maneuver through the drama?

A teacher modeling behavior and then inviting students to join in the dramatic play eases anxiety for participants (Corrie and Evans 36). This project would have benefited from an assistant or a second teacher. A second adult provides an example to follow, something particularly helpful in classes with less English experience and lacking peer examples. Experience with an assistant could ease confusion regarding ambiguous character. If students are unclear about how to precede a teacher who remains their advocate may increase confidence for interacting with ambiguous characters. In the future I hope to have an opportunity to try this tactic.

This project revealed practices I continue to adapt for process drama in my courses, and is an example of technical reflective practice. Technical reflective practice allows a researcher to focus on applications for her specific context. Yet “the problem identified by the practitioner may not in fact be the real problem” (Neelands 33). Conclusions have value for an individual teacher’s praxis, but when problematized for the broader context it becomes critical reflective practice. Critical reflective practice contributes to the wider discourse regarding educational drama.

Critical reflective practice extends beyond merely understanding how a teacher constructs a classroom environment, into making it an emancipatory method. It broadens discourse and contributes to reaching conclusions applicable to the wider field. Critical reflective practice proposes “ways in which the patterns of power, which regulate their worlds, might be changed (Neelands 25). By engaging in life-long reflective practice reflective practitioners problematize and broaden investigations of classroom drama increasing scholarship and activities in the field.

Critical research helps practitioners to reflect upon why and how they teach. There is a need for this comprehensive research in the field of classroom drama. The field warrants scholarly investigation, and a demystification of process. Many reflective practitioner writings on classroom drama address philosophy of teacher-in-role with poetic imagery.

“Thus the director alternates between carefully guiding the children’s playmaking and encouraging their free creative expression. Like a parent helping a baby learn to walk, the teacher’s guiding hands sometimes hold the classes in the most advantageous position for learning and, at other times open to let the children experiment with their creativity. If the children stumble, she then closes in with her hands again, helping the class regain its balance” (Cline and Ingerson 6).

This sentiment metaphorically conveys the transformative power of drama, but neglects to take a critical look at who's, why's, how's and theory of process drama. Teaching artists need to critically reflect upon projects with honest examinations of theory and method. Process drama remains inaccessible to many theatre artists and educators when it remains a mysterious educational practice. How can process drama establish itself as an effective methodology for education when relegated to the fringes? Hong Kong kindergarten teachers will not employ methodologies they lack confidence in (Yuen 335). Presumably administrators and parents will remain skeptical if unable to clearly understand the technique. Process drama remains an intimidating methodology for many in educators and theatre artists, tried by only brave and experienced teachers.

The writings of Heathcote, O'Neill and Bolton present a theoretical approach and reflect on the trials and triumphs of the form. Practical writings such as Planning Process Drama, Covering the Curriculum with Stories, and Drama Structures assist with planning process drama. The current generation of drama reflective practitioners should aid in the demystification of the process when contributing research in the field. O'Neill wrote that drama research will never simply be cataloguing data, but should generate "outgrowth", stretching and developing the field. Just as drama is about widening perspective, the theories and practices of process drama should "bring about change- changes in practice and changes in insight and understanding" (139).

One avenue for "outgrowth" is more investigation in process drama with the very young. The project revealed avenues for future exploration in the world of educational drama. It confirmed for me that process drama with young students generates interest and engagement. But I have much to learn regarding the opportune ways to structure it for them. I set out to investigate

how I determined what teacher-in-role devices to use. Play-leader type roles prompted the most conversation and positioned me in a place to participate and help negotiate the project.

Ambiguous character, although popular in process drama to problematize a situation, is difficult for young children to interpret and process. The existing studies look at process drama with upper primary to adult students. Using process drama with a significantly younger population, I observed that many practices I had been taught as staples of process drama, such as ambiguous character, were either beyond pupils' understanding, or require modification to be effective. Perhaps this is only a challenge due to the second language and in their first language students may interact with ambiguous characters. Further exploration may help determine if the focus needs to be on modification of the language or into how the teacher "performs" this role. Further exploration into how human developmental stages may provide insight into how students react when certain structures are introduced.

The United States and Hong Kong educational standards advocate dramatic play in the classroom (Rowe, Anning, and Luen). Teachers are encouraged to include curriculum into the play. Since dramatic play is the primary structure for process drama with preschool students, use of process drama may provide a solution into how educators can work on curriculum through play. Instead of merely theming classroom dramatic play areas to coincide with curriculum topics, process drama offers the potential of curriculum work existing within drama. Additional research into the overlapping benefits of these practices is needed.

To return to Aesop's fable, ultimately the man had to learn that he could not please every person with an opinion on the subject. He needed to ascertain which methodology was appropriate for the situation and in order to accomplish his goal he had to be at peace with his

decisions. Projects have flaws and mistakes but as a reflective practitioner I have the ability to review, reevaluate, and try again. For both, the language student and the teacher in role it is the “doing” which provides opportunity, experience, and knowledge to apply for the next time.

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