

Applying Drama in English Language Learning: Balancing creative processes with creative language teaching

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Abstract

The term ‘creativity’ is a term that has been used in many different contexts, carrying with it as many different meanings ([Starko, 2005](#)), from the Renaissance definition of being able to imitate works of art ([Weiner, 2000](#)) to its contradictory meaning we generally apply today, described by Perkins ([1988, p. 311](#)) as: “(a) A creative result is a result both original and appropriate, (b) A creative person – a person with creativity – is a person who fairly routinely produces creative results”. In this article I attempt to explore its application in language teaching and learning through the use of drama in English language learning, where it will reflect on two drama units from two research projects, one in New Zealand and the other in Malaysia. I will then propose a model that explores some of the complexities found in the relationship between drama and creative language learning, and suggests reflective questions a teacher can use to be critical of his or her teaching practice.

Creativity in everyday teaching

In theory, the development of creativity can be seen at the heart of almost any education system. For example, in the New Zealand curriculum document, the first key competency is thinking, which is about “using creative, critical and metacognitive processes to make sense of information, experiences, and ideas” ([New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 12](#)). In Malaysia, educational emphasis also stresses on thinking skills, which can be seen in the language syllabus, where “critical and creative thinking skills are incorporated in the learning outcomes to enable learners to analyse information, make decisions, solve problems, and express themselves accurately and creatively in the target language” ([Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2002, p. 3](#)).

However, although the principle of developing creativity exists across the board, it is the practice that is left wanting. Without intending to do so, schools have been known to quash creative thinking, whether through the applied curriculum, school policies, or even the teaching practices themselves ([De Backer, Lombaerts, De Mette, Buffel, & Elias, 2012; Peters, 2006; Robinson, 2006](#)). In an age where the numbers on a piece of paper have the power to determine one’s likelihood to succeed in life, the emphasis on convergent thinking takes a toll on one’s ability to be non-conformist, to be able to think outside the box ([de Bono, 1992; Peters, 2006](#)). When teaching under these conditions, the teacher becomes afraid of trying something creative and different for fear of not teaching according to specifications ([Steers, 2009](#)), and this could eventually contribute to the forming of a vicious cycle, where uncreative teaching results in uncreative learning, which then results in a lesser rate of the

development in creativity. As these students grow, their underdeveloped creativity is applied to their own teaching, and the cycle starts anew. This therefore leads to the obvious conclusion – one that our educational policy makers are all aware of – creativity needs to be inculcated into our teaching, so that we can produce creative students; the people who think outside the box, who dare to dream of divergent thoughts who go on to become the shakers and movers of this world. Without Tesla and Edison, perhaps we would still be reading under candlelight. Without Ford, perhaps we would still be riding carts, still drawn by horses. It is due to the creative spark in these visionaries that we are able to stand where we are today. Like it or not, as educators who are supposed to teach in line with a prescribed curriculum that emphasises the development of creativity, we do not ask *if* we should teach creativity, but *how much* creativity we should teach.

Yet, how much creativity remains a delicate question. Would it be realistic to insist on teaching with the objective of producing creative individuals who are capable of “creative acts at the highest level, that is, with the best and most valued works of artists, scientists or scholars” ([Hayes, 1989, p. 135](#))? Though it is posed as a question at the extreme end of the spectrum, it can reveal an expectation that may be placed on the shoulders of the teachers. Consequently, how does this notion of creativity affect the domain of the teacher? For one, it may put an additional unnecessary amount of pressure on the teacher to think of earth-shattering lessons in every single class, where they have to burn the midnight oil night after night trying to insert aspects of creativity that would change history. Force a teacher to go through with it long enough and she may just douse herself with the (figurative) midnight oil, leading to the deep, dark place known as teacher burnout ([Brouwers & Tomic, 2000](#); [Friedman, 1991](#); [Hayes, 1989](#); [Kyriacou, 2001](#)).

Instead, we could benefit from looking at creativity from different perspectives. Yes, we acknowledge the creative geniuses and their contributions to the world, but we must also be aware that there is a tendency to forget about the creative processes that occur every day in our lives. Vygotsky ([2004, p. 10](#)) was a strong advocate of the everyday acts of creation, where creativity was not only in the domain of the Einsteins and Edisons of the world, but also found “whenever a person imagines, combines, alters, and creates something new, no matter how small a drop in the bucket this new thing appears compared to the works of geniuses” (pp. 10-11). In view of this statement, teachers may find the pressure on them relieve somewhat, where the burden on them would not so much be on trying to produce geniuses who will score perfect A’s in their final exams. Instead the onus would be to set off even the littlest spark of creativity in the students for them to start utilising their brains for creative processing.

The next question that arises is how? Vygotsky makes connections between creativity and imagination, where “the creative activity of the imagination depends directly on the richness and variety of a person’s previous experience” ([2004, p. 14](#)). For this, one of the tools that exist at the disposal of the teacher is drama, where new worlds can be created at the snap of the fingers, having the power to be as real as the mind wants it to be.

Igniting the spark through drama

There exists a great body of knowledge on using drama in the classroom (see Heathcote and Bolton, 1995; Miller and Saxton, 2004; Greenwood, 2005; Kao & O’Neill, 1998; O’Toole

and Dunn, 2002; O'Connor, among others), and the application of drama in language teaching has been acknowledged and practiced, though albeit in the past with a limited number of practitioners who focus on the learning of a second or foreign language ([Kao & O'Neill, 1998](#); [Maley & Duff, 2005](#); [Stinson & Freebody, 2006](#)). However, recent developments in the field of drama in English language learning are starting to consolidate its place in the repertoire of a language teacher's arsenal (see Cheng & Winston, 2011; Dunn & Stinson, 2011; Kao, Carkin & Hsu, 2011; Nteliglou, 2011; Piazzoli, 2011; among others). To initiate a discussion on using drama in creative language learning, I shall use two drama in English language learning units taken from two different research projects, one carried out in New Zealand, and the other in Malaysia.

Project 1: Drama in English Language Learning (New Zealand)

The project was carried out by both Abdullah Nawi and Janinka Greenwood ([Greenwood & Nawi, 2011](#); [Nawi & Greenwood, 2012](#)), in which drama was used to teach English to low- to medium-proficiency ESL/EFL learners. The core group comprised of Korean (majority) and Chinese EFL speakers that were chosen by the principal, and as participation was not mandatory, the students were given the choice to stay with the research group or drop out. The original group consisted of 12 students, but two dropped out after two lessons. The participants were mostly 11 years of age, and of lower proficiency in English. Additionally, they mostly belonged to families of medium to higher socioeconomic status, with their parents being professionals who had migrated and brought their families to New Zealand anywhere between three to seven years prior. All of the participants spoke their mother tongues (L1) at home and English at school with their teachers and friends, except if they were talking to friends who were from the same country as them.

Drama Unit: The Silence Seeker

This unit was designed as a reading unit based on the book *The Silence Seeker* by Ben Morley ([2009](#)), where the central premise of the story is that Joe meets a new boy in his neighbourhood, and it seems that the boy does not speak. Later, when Joe asks his mother about the boy, the mother answers that the boy is looking for *asylum*, which Joe mishears and takes to mean *silence*. And so Joe takes it upon himself to help the boy find a silent place; until the next day when he finds out the boy has disappeared, and the story ends. Vocabulary building was the core language focus of the drama unit, in addition to unpacking the other elements in the story. The students were tasked with remembering 5 lexical items they had learnt on a particular day, and were tested on them the following week.

Activities:

The table below illustrates the name of the activity, method and rationale for the activities used. The rationale, in particular, reflects on three types of objectives, being i) language objectives, ii) drama objectives, and iii) creativity objectives, though not all three may be present for any one activity. The language objectives are based on the language curriculums, the drama objectives are based on the drama skills to be inculcated, and the creativity objectives are taken from Vandeleur, Ankwicz, de Swardt & Gross' ([2001](#)) indicators of creativity.

Table 1: Activities for *The Silence Seeker*

Activity	Method	Rationale
Setting the Scene reading aloud.	Teacher reads aloud first few pages of the book to gain the students' interest.	Activating schemata Raising students' interest Language objective: Building vocabulary
Noises in the city	Teacher gets students to think about noises they might hear in a big city (some noises may correspond with noises found in places described in the book) Students asked to write the words down. Teacher elicits the sounds and the proper words for vocabulary. Students write down the words and share with friends.	Language objective: Building vocabulary Creativity objectives: Ideational mobility, critical thinking
Hunter-hunted	Builds from 'Noises in the city'. 2 students are blindfolded. 1 becomes the hunter, 1 becomes the hunted. Other students form circle and make city noises when one of them comes close. The hunter/hunted use the noise to capture/escape the other. Discussion ensues – idea of safety, leading to word 'asylum'	Anchoring of the word 'Asylum'.
Blind in the city	Builds from 'Noises in the city'. Students asked to take positions in various parts of the room, except 2 students. 1 student is blindfolded. 1 student is the guide through the city. Other students become the	Language objective: Building vocabulary Drama objectives: Empathy Building sensitivity of senses

	<p>noises in the city, and try to create a ‘threatening’ environment as they see fit, based on what they read in the book. Blindfolded student is led through the parts of the city and exposed to all the noise and chaos.</p> <p>Roles are exchanged until everyone has had a go at being blindfolded.</p>	<p>Building more vivid mental imagery</p> <p>Creativity objectives:</p> <p>Ideational mobility, critical thinking, enjoyment</p>
Writing	<p>Students are instructed to do timed writing. They are given five minutes to write as much as they can on the story so far. Focus is given to content and creativity, not the language.</p> <p>However, this does give an insight on the students’ language proficiency.</p>	<p>Language objectives:</p> <p>Production and consolidation of lexical items learnt</p> <p>Drama objectives:</p> <p>Engaging with different levels of the story</p> <p>Creative objectives:</p> <p>Ideational mobility, critical thinking</p>
Hot-seating – Backstory	<p>The boy’s (the character’s) mother is called in to answer questions.</p> <p>Students’ investigate where the boy has disappeared to, and also what may have happened to him.</p> <p>The boy’s grandmother is also called in for the students to get more backstory on what may have happened at the boy’s home country.</p> <p>Students are then asked to think of one more person they would want to put in the hot seat.</p>	<p>Language objectives:</p> <p>Question forms</p> <p>Drama objectives:</p> <p>Engaging in backstory</p> <p>Creative objectives:</p> <p>Critical thinking</p>
Danger in the dark –	<p>Students are put in flashback of the final moments of the</p>	<p>Language objectives:</p>

backstory	<p>boy and his family escaping from their home.</p> <p>Task 1: Students are asked to save only one item they hold dear. They have to imagine they are in the boy's home country, with the limitations that go with it.</p> <p>Task 2: Students are then put into the urgency of the situation when they are told that the 'bad men with guns' are at the front door, and banging hard on it. How are they going to escape?</p>	<p>Negotiation, persuasion, and justification.</p> <p>Drama objectives:</p> <p>Engaging in backstory</p> <p>Creative objectives:</p> <p>Ideational mobility, critical thinking</p>
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Project 2: Drama in English Language Learning (Malaysia)

Similar to the first project, this project utilised drama to teach English to low- to medium-proficiency ESL learners, but with a variation in the parameters. First the classes were to be taught in tandem with the normal English classes, to be taught alongside the class English teacher, who will be labelled as the native teacher collaborator (NTC). Secondly, unlike in New Zealand, the students were not exposed to English every day. In fact, in the rural community where the project was carried out, there was a certain stigma attached to speaking English. People who spoke English were often perceived to be 'putting on airs', which consequently could have added a learning barrier for some of the students.

Drama Unit: Bullying

This unit was originally created for the Christchurch intermediate school in the New Zealand research context, where the principal of the school noticed an increase in aggressive play in the students after the Christchurch Earthquake of February 2011. The design of the drama unit was originally intended to harness this aggression and channel it into a teaching and learning tool. In order for the student-participants (the terms students, student-participants and participants are used interchangeably in this article) to become familiar with my presence in the classroom and the sort of activities that they would be involved in, I (Abdullah) started with basic introductions, breathing activities and drama games.

Next the students were introduced to the concept of working in role, and working with the teacher in role (TIR). The details of the drama are as follow:

Setting: The students are in a school that has a bit of a problem with discipline, and has a stern principal who seems to think that all discipline related problems are under the jurisdiction of the school counsellor.

TIR characters:

1) Mr Mark, the neurotic and troubled school counsellor. He has the principal breathing down his neck and is always paranoid that he is going to lose his job. Mr Mark has a knack for losing things, and does not think it wrong to ask the students for help. At the same time I wanted to make him endearing enough so the students would sympathise with him and help him with his work. This would then be the basis of any task or activity within the context. I chose to use Mark's character to put the students in a situation where the students would be empowered by the increase in their agency.

2) Mr Boutros, the gourmand translator. He is foreign and has a rather peculiar accent, loves food and making jokes. He is fond of wearing hats, and can usually be found in the school cafeteria. Students can call him whenever they require something to be translated, but to avoid over-dependency, they were limited to only three callouts per lesson.

Activities:

Table 2: Activities for drama unit on bullying

Activity	Method	Rationale
Introduction to working in role	Teacher introduces characters that will be used throughout the unit – 1) Mr Mark, the troubled school counsellor, and 2) Mr Boutros – the gourmand translator. Students are introduced to the concept of working in role	2 Building drama repertoire – Working in role
Introduction of fictional character	Students are divided into 6 groups. Teacher in Role (TIR) as Mr Mark. Context – Mark has misplaced the names and profiles of 6 'troublesome' students. Step 1: Students have to use this context to make their own characters. Students are instructed to make up characters that have nothing to do with themselves, as the context is about other people. Step 2: Character adjectives are elicited and revised. NTC assists in the revision of adjectives. Step 3: Students list adjectives for their characters.	6 Language objectives: adjectives, language for discussion Drama adjectives: Teamwork, using imaginative frame Creativity objectives: Ideational mobility, originality, critical thinking

	Students present characters and their attributes.	
Developing fictional characters	Students are divided into previous groups. Students are given paper and markers and told to draw the fictional characters from previous lesson. Characters are to be given depth and students are required to give additional information: Members of family, what he/she likes doing, character adjectives.	Creating giving more context for dramatic frame later on. Language – Subject + likes + verb (ing)/ to + verb. To infinitives. Creativity objectives: Ideational mobility, critical thinking
Open/Close tableaux (freeze frames)	Students are introduced to open/close tableaux technique.	Building drama repertoire
Open/Close tableaux – Playfight	Students are divided into 2 groups. 1 person is the director/open/close operator. Each group is given a scenario to act out. Scene 1 – School playground. 1) 2 characters from previous activity have a playfight. 2) A beating B. 3) B falls down. 4) Everyone, including B is laughing and having a good time. Teacher questions students – What is going on? – Students playfighting and having a good time. What happens next? Scene 2 – School playground. 1) Characters resume playfight. 2) B beats A. 3) A falls down, but lands in a strange	Practice drama technique Building frame Creativity objectives: Ideational mobility, originality, critical thinking, risk-taking, aesthetics & enjoyment

	position. 4) Everyone, except A is laughing. A's eyes are closed. Mouth open. 5) Everyone looks scared. Try to revive A.	
Open/Close tableaux 2	<p>What do you do? – Students make open/close tableaux – maximum 3 frames.</p> <p>(ideas – tell teacher, try to find out what is wrong)</p> <p>Each frame has to have a caption, written on A3. The word 'fought' has to be inserted into at least one of the captions.</p>	<p>Practice drama technique.</p> <p>TIR engages Teacher in the dramatic frame.</p> <p>Use of irregular verb 'fought'.</p> <p>Creativity objectives:</p> <p>Ideational mobility, originality, critical thinking, risk-taking, aesthetics & enjoyment</p>
Writing activity: Writing letter to parents.	<p>TIR asks students to help to write a letter to parents, as he is too distraught to think.</p> <p>NTC will teach basic format of informal letter:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Name, Address, Greetings and salutations Body Closing Signature <p>To put in letter:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What happened at the playground Student is now in hospital Apologise 	<p>Students are introduced to format of letter-writing. Students will collaborate to write letter to parents.</p> <p>Practice irregular verb 'fought'</p> <p>Creativity objectives:</p> <p>Ideational mobility, originality, critical thinking, aesthetics</p>

* 1 letter to a pair.

The following section discusses salient sections of creative teaching and learning and relates them to the students' language learning experience.

Experience and holistic engagement

To bridge the connection between drama and creative language learning, we begin by looking through the lens of Vygotsky's (2004) theories of imagination and creativity. To begin with, Vygotsky states that imagination lies at the heart of creativity, and that children are unable to imagine things that are outside of their realm of experience. Drama and experience cannot be separated from one another. From the drama techniques of Maley and Duff to the immersion of Heathcote's Mantle of the Expert, when students are engaged in a dramatic activity, they learn to experience the world not only through what they see on the desk and whiteboard, but also what they do, hear, see and feel. Mirroring the actions of a friend requires copious amounts of concentration and engagement of sight and touch (even if the participants' hands are not actually touching, if the activity is carried out correctly they should be able to feel each other's proximity). Slithering on the floor as a snake looking for its next meal requires physical dexterity, and the confidence to carry the role without capitulating to the fear of looking silly. Preparing for a board meeting to prepare for a bank merger requires a working knowledge of the processes involved, the team of willing participants in the drama, and no small amount of imagination. Ultimately, these experiences stack upon one another, becoming the building blocks of a student's creativity. In both drama units, one of the key elements in their design was experiential learning, where the students are thrust into dramatic situations that they would not be able to access in their normal everyday lives, albeit in simulated conditions. It is this richness of experience that is tapped to supplement students' understanding of the world around them, enriching their imaginations and creativity as they do so.

Furthermore, engagement in drama is not meant to be one-dimensional. A good drama lesson should be able to encourage the participants to engage themselves intellectually, creatively and emotionally. Students who are emotionally engaged in the subject they are learning generally become more invested in the content or story of the drama, leading to a higher level of agency. A student who connects with a character in the drama may develop better empathy for what is being faced by the character, resulting in a deeper level of learning that can be utilised by the teacher.

For example, in order to get the students more attuned to the emotional layer of the drama in *The Silence Seeker*, we carried out the *Noises in the City* and *Blind in the City* activities (refer to Table 1), where a student is blindfolded and led through the 'city' while the other students make noises of things they inferred from the book. This was designed to transport the students to the feelings of being under threat, not being able to control one's immediate environment and dependence on Joe, the protagonist of the story, although this layer of meaning was not explicit in the book.

An example of this can be seen through the use of role, where the student is able to delve into the characters and gain new insights through the power of their imagination. In the ensuing writing task in *The Silence Seeker*, students are told to write anything they liked on the story

so far in 2 minutes (though these 2 minutes were adjusted accordingly, as per teacher tradition). To encourage the free flow of creativity they were told not to worry about grammar, and only concern themselves about what they wanted to write. Two samples have been provided in the following paragraphs.

Boy

I was ... scared

If ~~fell~~ feel I'm in danger.

I was thank to Joe.

I'm sorry because he ~~doing~~ finding hard for me. I'm felt I'm stupid...

I miss my parents.

Joe

I was sorry to that boy.

If I was he maybe I will scared...

I hope he will<inserted> find. safety place with me.

I felt he ~~th~~ scared, or want to crying.

I was thanks for ~~few~~ following me.

Sample 1: The Silence Seeker – Olivia

Nervous

Scard

AFraid

Shoked

I was walking through the street with Joe an I was scared of the people singing and I'm shoked of people ~~hi~~-walking infront of me and hitting me, I'm AFraid ~~Fm~~ I might be lost and Joe will leave alone and I'm very nervous of how nousi people they are and they ming hurt me. I feel very sad of how I can't found a place of silence and safety. I try to not think about them. and their face is in my mind and I want to run away.

Sample 2: The Silence Seeker – Matthew

The above texts have been faithfully transcribed as closely to the original writing as possible, with the transcription matching the spacing, punctuation and changes. The morphological and syntactical errors are evident, and a detailed language analysis will be useful in future studies. Nevertheless, in Sample 1, Olivia (pseudonym) starts by writing about the boy's feelings. Even though it was done in six sentences, the message that Olivia wishes to convey is very clear. She talks about how scared the boy is, his sense of danger and helplessness, and his dependence on Joe, revealing an inner understanding and emotional connection she has managed to gain with the boy. In Sample 2, Matthew (pseudonym) also deals with the heightened emotions experienced by the boy through his walk in the city. Matthew strategically writes down the key words he wants to use in his story in the top left hand corner of his paper, which were nervous, scar[e]d, afraid, and sho[c]ked. He goes on to describe in comparatively great detail, not just his emotions but adding on the incidents he perceives to have experienced in his walk in the city.

Additionally, it is interesting to note that both Olivia and Matthew have chosen to write from the viewpoint of the boy, although the story is totally told from Joe's perspective. It can be conceived that the purpose of this was to gain a new insight into the story. Moreover, Olivia goes a step further and steps in and out of the roles of the boy and Joe, signifying a use of her creativity to gain ideational mobility.

The experience of undergoing the journey, which was done in a simulated drama context, enabled the students to imagine a new experience, which was then able to be transferred to a creative act of language production.

Conductivity of drama and creative language teaching

An interesting observation that was made throughout the research process was how some students found it difficult to carry out the given tasks when they had to: i) understand the task in English, ii) discuss the task in English, and iii) prepare output in English. This was particularly noticeable in the Malaysian research group, where some of the students had even reported not being able to do anything because of their lack of proficiency in English to carry out the tasks mentioned above. Thus, it was hypothesised that the main problem was that the lack of understanding of English words negatively impacted on the students' creative processes, which in turn negatively impacted on their language production.

Consequently, in order to overcome this, I (Abdullah) created a TIR role that was known as Mr Boutros the translator. The reason for including Mr Boutros as a character was because I wanted to work within the confines of a second language classroom, where the main mode of transmission would be in English. Given that the research context was that of a rural school, it was decided that the students should be able to have a tool to utilise if they required help in understanding words or concepts they had difficulty with. In this event, Mr Boutros would be 'summoned' from the 'school cafeteria' to provide the translations required. However, the students had to be thrifty and strategic when using this resource as they were only allowed to summon Mr Boutros up to a maximum of three times. This measure was taken to ensure that the students did not depend too much on translations to proceed in their work.

However, it was found that the students did not call upon the translator at all, which had struck me as rather perplexing. It was revealed later that the students were calling their class English teacher (the NTC) and asking her to translate for them. It was also revealed that this

was the modus operandi of their usual classes, where the teacher would translate items that they did not understand, and also translate the tasks into their native language (L1) in order for them to be able to complete the tasks. This approach goes against many of the applied theories of language learning ([Krashen, 1988](#); [Krashen & Terrell, 1983](#); [Pica, 2002](#); [Richards & Rodgers, 2001](#)), and in the end could end up being detrimental to the language acquisition process. The over-dependence on teacher translation by the students illustrates a worrying trend in students who are to face the national examinations in the following year, with university and working life also soon to follow.

Moreover, although this was evident in the Malaysian study, the participants of the New Zealand study also experienced similar problems, but varying in degree. Unlike the Malaysian students who were polite and did not defy orders overtly, the New Zealand students had no qualms about talking to each other in their L1, even though they were told not to do so. Additionally, when one of them misunderstood the task, or produced language that was not accurate, they were chided, teased and sometimes corrected on the spot in their L1. This did not allow for a more definitive analysis of their creative and language processes, but it does highlight a concern for the level of dependence on the students' L1.

Nevertheless, with the comprehensible input they get from their classes and their social interactions in L2 ([Krashen, 1985](#)), and their immersion in their target language (Harley, Cummins, Swain & Allen, in Lyster, 2002), the New Zealand students were in a significantly better position to acquire the L2 more naturally both inside and outside the classroom setting, and at a significantly better pace than their Malaysian counterparts. However, this still remains a conjecture at this point in time, and the reality is that L1 appears to form a great part of how the students in both contexts learn language.

As a result, this is where the drama in English language learning teacher has to tread the fine line between the language lesson and the drama lesson. In the past, I have played with the notion of a slider where the drama in English language learning teacher has to decide the weightage between drama teaching and language teaching, where a focus on one will take from the other ([Nawi, 2011](#)). A conventional drama class focuses more on the content, such as the activities, the roles, the story, where students apply their creative processes to develop these areas. For the purpose of this article, I will express the relationship as:

‘Drama —> Content/Creative Process’

A conventional language lesson, on the other hand, focuses on the areas of language to be learnt, using content or creative process as a vehicle to teach the language. The relationship can be seen as:

‘Content/Creative Process —> Language’

Combining the two teaching disciplines, on the hand, would result in be using drama to teach language, which can be expressed as:

‘Drama —> Language’.

At first glance it may appear to be a simple juxtaposition of three different components, if imagined in a linear relationship, resulting in:

‘Drama → Content/Creative Process → Language’

In this flow drama medium will course through the content, resulting in language learning. Imagine if you will three highly sensitive light bulbs placed side by side, lighting up as the electrical current flows through them. Now imagine the electrical current being unable transfer itself between the light bulbs, or only able to transfer a very small amount, due to an unsuitable conductor between the contact points. This conductor would be the language of transmission and operation, used by the students in understanding the required task, using the language to discuss the task, and using the language to produce the desired outcome of the task. At the moment, for lack of a better term, I will label this as the ‘conductivity’ of the operational language. To add an extra burden to the circuit, the additional resistance found in the second light bulb could also affect the amount of electricity that remains to power the third bulb. This would mean that a) the teacher may find the students less able to meet language learning objectives as they are engrossed in the content or creative objectives of the drama; and b) the teacher may find that because the students are so focussed on not only getting the language right, but even as far as groping for basic words to make sense of the task, they become less able to meet the content or creative objectives of the drama.

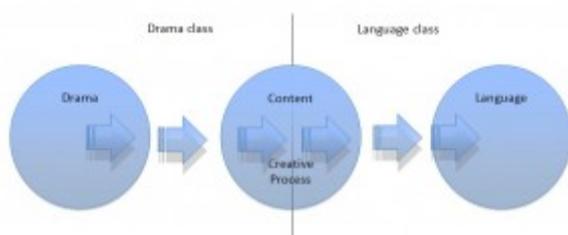


Figure 1: Conductivity of drama and creative language teaching

In order for the electrical current (transmission of knowledge and skill) to be pushed through the resistance found in the connection, two options can initially be considered. First, the intensity of the second bulb can be reduced, resulting in less resistance to the final flow. This may result in the teacher simplifying the content or creative objectives to better accommodate the gap between the students’ existing language and their target language. The better the scaffolding of the students’ language proficiency, the smaller the gap becomes. The smaller the gap between these points of language, the more demanding the content or creative objectives can be. Greenwood suggests the use of the term *strategic artistry* (Greenwood & Nawi, 2011b; Greenwood, 2012) where the teacher employs specific strategies within an arts-based setting to scaffold the learning. Secondly, the conductivity of the connections can be increased, resulting in a stronger current flow. This would entail that the more operational language that the student has at his disposal, the better he or she will be able to carry out the required task. Nonetheless, the dilemma that a teacher who teaches low proficiency students may ultimately face is the fact that much of the language they have at their disposal would be their L1, and allowing too much of L1 use could negate the language learning objectives altogether.

This leads to the following questions that only the drama in English language learning teacher could reflect on: how much of the students’ L1 do I allow in the drama task? How much of

the drama itself should be in the students' L1 and their L2? How much content or creative objectives should be paired with how many language learning objectives?

Conclusion

The development of creativity is most certainly important, and the onus falls onto the teacher to make lessons as interesting as possible, engaging the students in creative processes which would form the building blocks in the formation of a holistic individual. Drama is a teaching tool that can form a formidable arsenal at the disposal of the teacher, in which one of its greatest assets would be providing the students with multiple experiences that they can use to form their imagination and creativity. However, for an ESL/EFL teacher, there is a delicate balance that must be adhered to, where too much focus on content and creative processes may result in too little language development, and vice versa. At the end of the day, it is the teacher who has to make the call on how to balance creative processes with creative language teaching.

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Biography



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