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Facilitating English Communication Skills and Interpersonal Competence through the Medium of Educational Drama

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キーワード : English communication skills (1), interpersonal competence (2),
educational drama (3)

Abstract

This article expands on previous studies relating to the pedagogical use of drama (educational drama) in the foreign language classroom. In the present article, in addition to the facilitation of English communication skills, particular reference is made to nurturing interpersonal competence. For the purpose of this case study, a one-act play (for four young females of university age) written by the author was used in one class session to explore the concept of friendship (the complexities of maintaining friendships between young, female students in their late teens and early twenties and managing conflict resolution) using both English (L2) and Japanese (L1). Through the implementation of educational drama as an active learning approach and key methodology (in keeping with the UNESCO directive for the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development), this study suggests that there are real world (world building) benefits to teaching drama through English to Japanese female university students as a dynamic medium (engaging both verbal resources, and nonverbal communication resources such as emotions,

tone of voice, movement and gesture) in order to encourage and motivate learners to cultivate linguistic, personal, and intercultural skills of benefit both within and beyond the classroom environment.

Introduction

Both English and drama, as creative language art subjects, deeply value as well as promote the role of the imagination, creativity, story and the search for meaning in human experience... (Manuel et al, 2008: 2)

Educational drama (also known as applied drama and process drama) is characterized as a medium that can enhance learning in ways that traditional paradigms of education relying on listening, reading, writing and computing cannot. This belief was echoed in the UNESCO directive for the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) 2005-2014 where educational drama was considered to be one of a range of useful active learning approaches that equip learners in preparation for global citizenship. To this regard, Manuel et al, (2008) specifically contend that educational drama has the capacity to 'enliven' and 'transform' learning because it lends itself to the externalization of faculties such as creativity, imagination and expansiveness, which enhance learning and understanding of the real world (life skills) through more diverse dynamic avenues for both input and output. Wessels (2007) frames this argument succinctly by drawing a clear distinction between direct experience and surface reality and contends that:

In so much of our teaching, we fail to realize the importance of providing our students with direct experience. We present them with only surface reality and then wonder why they forget the lessons so easily. But the direct experience that drama offers can encompass both realities ... Drama is what happens when we allow our students to explore the foundation of the surface reality ... (Wessels, 2007: 8)

There are, therefore, significant psychological and social benefits to introducing educational drama in tandem with English in the curriculum as a valuable pedagogy for language learning (Fleming, 2001; Kempe and Nicholson, 2007; Winston, 2012). This study discusses and extends this concept further through the report of a ninety-minute Drama Workshop (演劇ワークショップ) class with 47 female English-department sophomore students using the theme of friendship as a means to exploring intercultural communication through the medium of both English (L2) and Japanese (L1). Friendship is understood, defined and characterized in this article as a process of development consisting of a number of key, dynamic stages (adapted from Trenholm and Jensen: 2004):

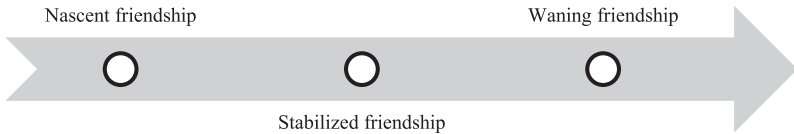


Figure 1. Dynamic stages of friendship (adapted from Trenholm and Jensen, 2004).

- Nascent friendship/friendship initiation (the crystallizing stage where partners participate actively in relevant activities and group-specific topics of conversation).
- Stabilized friendship/friendship maintenance (bonding rituals leading to trust, trustworthy behavior, and the assimilation of beliefs and values).
- Waning friendship/friendship challenges (negative impact on the bonds due to neglect, lack of support, violations of trust, competition, etc.).

Interpersonal competence (represented in figure 2) is herein defined as verbal and nonverbal communication that is contingent on building relationships based on sensitivity to differences and a genuine desire to establish common ground (Trenholm and Jensen, 2004). In essence, at

the heart of interpersonal competence is the notion that building relationships leads to both improved human relations at a micro level and to a platform for world-building skills at a macro level. Exploring the nature of friendship through educational drama allows students to hone this competence by examining closely the processes involved in managing healthy friendly relationships and the individual communication skills that are required to resolve conflicts within the dynamic stages of this relationship structure.

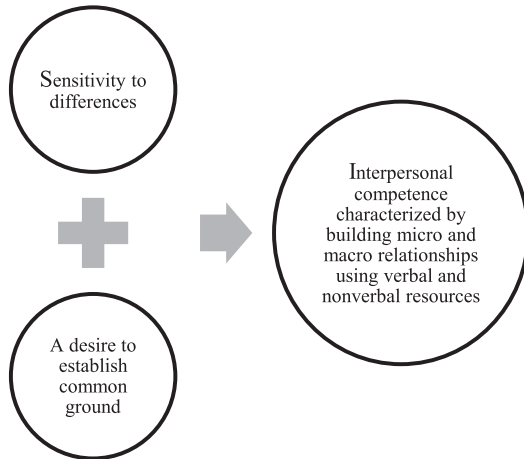


Figure 2. Interpersonal competence (adapted from Trenholm and Jensen, 2004)

Educational Drama as Expansive, Transformative, World-building Pedagogy

Drama takes language and context and transforms it from the written, viewed or heard word into action. It makes itself a learning medium where the student becomes the doer of language, taking risks to both understand and produce. It uses the body, the mind, the soul in combination where the student becomes the protagonist of the speech act and actually experiences something of the role of the real or the imagined speaker ... (Hillyard, 2015:30, in Roman and Nunez, 2015).

As mentioned earlier, it has been suggested that educational drama can enhance learning in ways that traditional paradigms have fallen short (Manuel et al, 2008). The authors convincingly argue that drama in itself has the capacity to 'enliven' and 'transform' because it fosters creativity, imagination and expansiveness, thus challenging these traditional 'formulaic' and 'predictable' methods by enhancing learning and understanding of the real world through more dynamic avenues and learning strategies (ibid: 9):

The power (of drama) lies in the capacity for this kind of work to reveal to its participants significant insights into human behavior, learning and feeling. These insights are not necessarily accessible to conscious, verbal, rational thought, but can be signaled and realized through the more fully enacted, symbolically and spontaneously patterned expressions of the engaging role-play world. The power of role-plays arises from emotions, tone of voice, movement and gesture.

Within the content and language integrated learning (CLIL) movement, teaching a content-based subject such as drama in English has many benefits not least because natural use of language (English as a medium) can boost motivation within a natural situation which allows for language development to occur. As Coyle et al (2010) contend:

... CLIL not only promotes linguistic competence, it also serves to stimulate cognitive flexibility. Different thinking horizons and pathways which result from CLIL, and the effective constructionist educational practices it promotes, can also have an impact on conceptualization (literally, how we think), enriching the understanding of concepts, and broadening conceptual mapping resources. This enables better association of different concepts and helps the learner advance towards a more sophisticated level of learning in general.

In this respect, according to Manuel et al, educational drama (English through drama) correlates with these holistic features:

- the development of critical academic skills, including literacy;
- enhanced social interaction and behavior;
- personal growth: life and decision-making skills such as self-confidence, motivation, self-directed learning and self-esteem;
- improved cognitive skills;
- transferred learning and behavior in a variety of other contexts and situations.

For clarity, Hillyard (2015: 33) streamlines the above into a set of interrelated human developmental processes (physical, emotional, socio-intellectual, and creative) within the growing person (represented in figure 3).

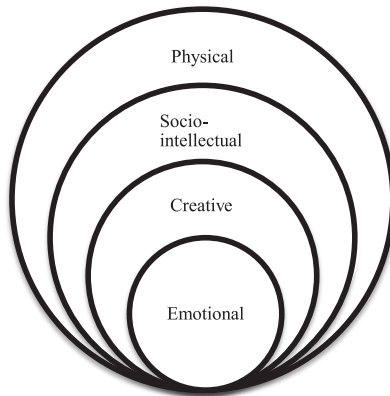


Figure 3. Human developmental processes (adapted from Hillyard, 2015)

Educational drama therefore allows learners to explore, shape and represent the various facets of the human condition in symbolic and metaphorical dimensions (socio-physical, intellectual, creative, and emotional). This reflects the widely accepted definition of drama, which in ancient Greek (*dram*) means *do* and *action*. When drama is introduced to EFL/ESL students as a subject or course in its own right (English-through-drama) students demonstrate that they are capable of ‘doing’ a

number of things: they can be imaginative and creative, they can develop confidence, and they are given ample opportunities to hone their English communication skills in a supportive environment.

Within the framework of this dramatic, supportive structure, students are encouraged to engage with language at various levels. O'Toole (in Anderson et al, 2008: 18) explains this further by delineating five functions of language and paralanguage within the process of drama that help learners to interact in successful ways in the classroom (represented in Figure 4):

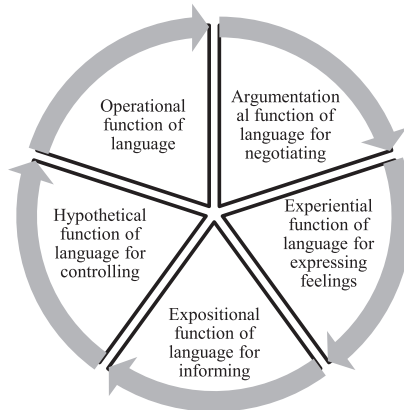


Figure 4. Five functions of language (adapted from O'Toole, 2008)

The five functions of language above provide a platform for learners to develop the following cognitive, kinesthetic and affective characteristics to consolidate their learning (also endorsed by Baldwin, 2012, who stresses that drama has a direct impact on social and personal growth):

- confidence;
- cooperation.

- creativity;
- enthusiasm;
- initiative;
- learning;
- memory;
- motivation;
- self-esteem;
- self-expression;
- thinking skills.

Readers' Theatre (RT): Motivating, Creating, and Cooperating

Drama has been recognized by many educators as a powerful learning tool across curriculum areas. Many English educators have also recognized that it can be used to enrich learning in the English classroom... The focus is not on finished theatrical performance, but on drama approaches and strategies that can enhance learning. (Anderson et al, 2008: 10)

Within educational drama, readers' theatre (RT) is a strategy dealing specifically with oral interpretation. In this technique, learners are not required to memorize play scripts. Instead, they use paralinguistic means to exploiting the written word in dramatic ways. The benefits to the learner include reading fluency and comprehension. Fernandez (2015: 145-147) argues that RT is a "catalyzer of learning" in the classroom because it responds to Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory (1999) by focusing on content, communication, cognition and culture/community. Consequently, motivation, creativity and cooperation are the strengths of this strategy.

RT develops students' empathy and understanding (by taking on roles and placing themselves "in the shoes" of others) and develops their

linguistic ability by enabling them to use the language (and paralanguage - prosody), and all four skills in the process of expressing themselves and negotiating meaning in cooperation with others – intrapersonal and interpersonal skills (represented in Figure 5):

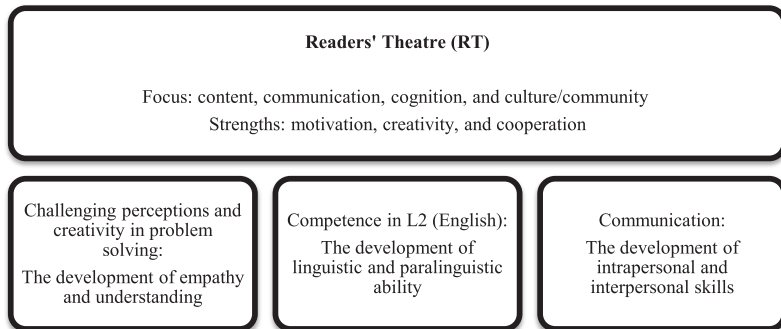


Figure 5. The benefits of RT

In my adaptation of RT, students are also encouraged to translate the play scripts into Japanese in real time (in pairs/groups) after several read-throughs in English. This enables students:

- to negotiate between the two languages, practice their translations skills, and check their understanding of the story in English;
- to obtain an in-depth understanding of the nuances of the storylines and their cross-cultural implications;
- to explore and compare the emotions and physicality of the characters from different socio-cultural perspectives.

Classroom Procedure

Drama Workshop is offered as an elective course to all second-year students in the Department of English Language and Literature at

Yasuda Women's University. For the purpose of this case study, one specific class will be examined and discussed. The ninety-minute class in question, offered during week seven (25 March 2017) deals with the topic of friendship as a means to nurturing students' interpersonal competence and to exploring the complexities and inner workings of human relationships. Educational drama is employed as a vehicle for this exploration as it enables students to approach the topic both verbally and nonverbally (emotions, tone of voice, movement and gesture), and by using both L1 and L2 to compare and notice the differences and subtle nuances in their communication processes in each language. Towards the end of the class, an open forum is created to give students the opportunity to give feedback on this and other issues concerned with the class. The lesson flow is represented below in figure 6.

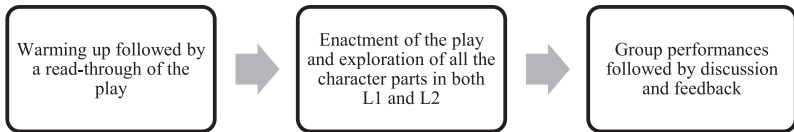


Figure 6. Lesson flow

Following some vocal warming up and drama activities to explore the physicality of space, students are given a one-act play script entitled *Friends Forever*, written by the author (see appendix) and both the teacher and the students read through the parts together in a whole-class approach to obtain a general understanding of the narrative, the creative tensions in the plot, and the nature of the characters. Following this read-through, the teacher and students enact all four character parts to gain a more thorough understanding of how the characters develop, experience conflict, and ultimately work together to resolve the

negative impact on their friendship. The setting is familiar to the students as it involves a very popular local Italian restaurant close to campus and the city Astramline transportation system which is an overhead light railway connecting the university to downtown Hiroshima.

Students are then asked to form groups of four and to start using the reader's theatre technique to perform the play. Students are given free range to create spaces for themselves in the classroom by moving furniture in order to explore the physicality of the play using nonverbal resources. After a few practices, students are asked to perform the play in Japanese (L1) in their groups by reading the text in English (using RT) and translating the dialogue in real time into their native language. Students are also encouraged to help each other to find the best possible words and expressions in their own language that successfully convey the feelings, emotions and body movements of the characters in the play. Students explore the conflict within the play and work towards a resolution using both verbal and nonverbal means. Here is an excerpt from the play that deals specifically with the conflict between the four friends:

Risa: But we're friends. How could you break up with me?

Mina: It happens sometimes. It's part of life.

Nami: Yes, friends just drift apart.

Sari: That's the way it goes in life!

Risa: *{Sad and upset}* But why are WE breaking up? I don't understand.

Mina: Friends sometimes fall out after a fight.

Sari: That's life, I'm afraid.

Risa: {*Very confused*} but, we haven't had a fight!!!

Sari: I know it's hard to understand. We didn't want it to end this way!

Nami: Please try to understand.

Risa: {*Becoming angry*} UNDERSTAND? What's going on here?

Nami: It's hard to explain. The THREE of us are getting off at the next stop.

Mina: At Yasuhigashi. Just, Nami, Sari and me!

Risa: Why? What's happening? Why?

Sari: We're having lunch together in the area.

Risa: {*Angry and confused*} Without me?

Mina: Take it easy!

Nami: We knew this wouldn't be easy.

Sari: You're taking this the wrong way!

Risa: {*Angry*} THE WRONG WAY? My best friends are having lunch without me. I don't believe this!!!!

Mina: Please stay calm!!!!

Nami: These things happen in life!

Sari: You'll get over it!

Risa: {*Very angry*} What? How could you do this to me? You are all so mean!!!

Mina: Just try to stay calm!

Risa: Stop telling me to stay calm! My friends are breaking up with me. How can I stay calm?

The ending provides a happy resolution to the conflict between the friends (having explored the nascent, stabilized and waning stages of friendship). Students are again encouraged to explore a different side to

their characters as they work towards a satisfactory finale to the piece.

Risa: *{Laughing}* You guys are always playing tricks on me. I really thought you were leaving me!

{Mina, Nami and Sari hug Risa}

Mina: No way!

Nami: We're best friends!

Sari: We love you so much!!

Mina: Nothing can separate us!

Nami: Together forever!

Risa: You all really scared me.

Mina: Sorry!!

Nami: Sorry, Risa!!

Sari: So sorry!!

Mina: So ... are you hungry?

Risa: Hungry? Yes. I'm really hungry now after that shock!

{Mina, Nami and Sari laugh}

Sari: I think we're all hungry. It's lunchtime.

Nami: Good. Today, we are treating you to a wonderful Italian lunch at Papas Mamas for your birthday. And we have some presents for you!!

Risa: Really? Really? I'm so happy!

Sari: Come on, let's go! Pasta and Tiramisu are waiting for us!!!

Risa: I can't wait. Thanks so much!!!! It's going to be a great afternoon

... with my wonderful friends!!!

The feelings and emotions within brackets give students an opportunity to work creatively with the characters in a three-dimensional way and to engage nonverbally and physically in the ongoing action. Within this dramatic framework, the enactment process becomes a student-centered and student-led venture in an environment conducive to exploring human feelings and relationships and to learning collaboratively (world-building pedagogy).

In the next step, students perform the play in front of the class with the support and encouragement of their classmates. Students invariably feel nervous. However, this kind of tension and positive stress is a useful and beneficial dynamic, especially as students will be required to interact confidently in English with a wide range of people and make class presentations in English when they join a six-month language and culture program with homestay in either the U.S.A. or in Canada in the second semester.

Finally, when all the students have performed the play, students are encouraged to share their thoughts, feelings and observations in an informal, interactive open forum. This allows students to voice their opinions about having to perform in English in front of others. Students also give feedback regarding how they felt about performing the play in L1 (Japanese) and L2 (English) during the practice phase and what differences they noticed and experienced. This concludes the ninety-minute class. Other classes in the fifteen-week semester follow a similar lesson flow but deal with other aspects of human relationships. Due to limitations of space, these will not be discussed here. Ultimately, this remit of this article is to elucidate procedures and processes contained

within a single class, a “snapshot” as it were, that is both relatable and transferrable in terms of content to other Drama Workshop classes.

Conclusion

This article has examined and reported on the nature, structure and implementation of a single lesson in a Drama Workshop course. It focuses on an active-learning approach to facilitating English communication skills and nurturing interpersonal competence on the topic of friendship through the vehicle of educational drama as a transformative world-building pedagogy (drawing from UNESCO'S directive for the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014). Post-course feedback reveals that students feel comfortable expressing themselves through drama and are willing to explore complex human relationships and feelings using both the verbal and nonverbal resources at their disposal in both L1 and L2. The particular class chosen for this case study is representative of other classes in the Drama Workshop course in terms of philosophy and methodology, and the findings of this study are therefore both relatable and transferrable. As an active, practical pedagogy, it is hoped that educational drama may allow students to reap the benefits of these life (world building) skills not only in this class, other classes, or when spending six months abroad on one of the university programs, but also in the future in their personal and professional lives.

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Appendix

Friends Forever: A One-act Play by Richard Gabbrielli

Characters

Four university friends (Mina, Nami, Sari, Risa)

Setting

On the Astramline

{Mina, Nami, Sari and Risa are sitting in a row in a compartment on the Astramline train }

{Mina, Nami and Sari stare at Risa}

Risa: Why are you staring at me?

{Mina, Nami and Sari turn away}

{Mina, Nami and Sari stare at Risa again}

Risa: Why are you staring at me again?

Mina: Sorry.

Nami: Yes, sorry.

Sari: Risa ... It's over!

Risa: What? What's over?

M/N/S: We are!

Risa: What? What are you talking about?

Mina: It's over between you and us!

Risa: *{Shocked}* What? Are the three of you breaking up with me?

Nami: Yes. Good bye. We're going in different directions.

Risa: *{Confused}* What? We're all going to Hondori, right?

Sari: That's not what we mean.

Risa: But we're friends. How could you break up with me?

Mina: It happens sometimes. It's part of life.

Nami: Yes, friends just drift apart.

Sari: That's the way it goes in life!

Risa: *{Sad and upset}* But why are WE breaking up? I don't understand.

Mina: Friends sometimes fall out after a fight.

Sari: That's life, I'm afraid.

Risa: *{Very confused}* but, we haven't had a fight!!!

Sari: I know it's hard to understand. We didn't want it to end this way!

Nami: Please try to understand.

Risa: *{Becoming angry}* UNDERSTAND? What's going on here?

Nami: It's hard to explain. The THREE of us are getting off at the next stop.

Mina: At Yasuhigashi. Just, Nami, Sari and me!

Risa: Why? What's happening? Why?

Sari: We're having lunch together in the area.

Risa: *{Angry and confused}* Without me?

Mina: Take it easy!

- Nami: We knew this wouldn't be easy.
- Sari: You're taking this the wrong way!
- Risa: *{Angry}* THE WRONG WAY? My best friends are having lunch without me. I don't believe this!!!!
- Mina: Please stay calm!!!!
- Nami: These things happen in life!
- Sari: You'll get over it!
- Risa: *{Very angry}* What? How could you do this to me? You are all so mean!!!
- Mina: Just try to stay calm!
- Risa: Stop telling me to stay calm! My friends are breaking up with me. How can I stay calm?
- Nami: You'll get stressed out!
- Risa: What?
- Sari: Yasuhigashi's the next stop.
- Nami: Mina, Sari and I are getting off. Bye!
- Risa: *{Angry}* No! Tell me you're not doing this!
- Mina: It's not about you. It's about us. Sorry!
- Nami: Don't worry. You'll make new friends.
- Risa: *{Crying}* New friends? Why?
- Mina: People you can enjoy being with.
- Risa: But I enjoy being with the three of you!!
- Sari: Yes. You're young and pretty. You'll have no problem making new friends.
- Risa: But why? Tell me why? What did I do to you? I don't understand!!
- Mina: Because ... we don't like your ... hairstyle.
- Risa: *{Takes out a mirror and checks her hair}* What's wrong with it?

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Nami: OK. Yasuhigashi Station. Let's get off.

Sari: Yes. I'm so hungry!!

*{Risa watches her friends about to leave the train. She is very sad.
She holds her head in her hands and begins to cry}*

*{Mina, Nami and Sari pretend to leave. They rush back, grab Risa, and
then leave the train with her}*

Risa: What's going on? I don't understand. I thought you were
breaking up with me!

M/N/S: Happy birthday, Risa!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Risa: *{Starting to smile}* What?

Mina: It was just a joke!

{Mina, Nami and Sari laugh}

Nami: Of course it was! Why would we want to break up with you?

Sari: We love you so much!! Happy birthday!!!!

Risa: *{Laughing}* You guys are always playing tricks on me. I really
thought you were leaving me!

{Mina, Nami and Sari hug Risa}

Mina: No way!

Nami: We're best friends!

Sari: We love you so much!!

Mina: Nothing can separate us!

Nami: Together forever!

Risa: You all really scared me.

Mina: Sorry!!

Nami: Sorry, Risa!

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Mina: So ... are you hungry?

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{Mina, Nami and Sari laugh}

Sari: I think we're all hungry. It's lunchtime.

Nami: Good. Today, we are treating you to a wonderful Italian lunch at Papas Mamas for your birthday. And we have some presents for you!!

Risa: Really? Really? I'm so happy!

Sari: Come on, let's go! Pasta and Tiramisu are waiting for us!!!

Risa: I can't wait. Thanks so much!!! It's going to be a great afternoon ... with my wonderful friends!!!

{They all leave the scene happily}

