

USING READERS' THEATRE TO PROMOTE
INTERCULTURAL LANGUAGE TEACHING
AND LEARNING

A dissertation submitted by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the use of Readers' Theatre for enhancing intercultural language teaching and learning (ILTL) with a group of international students preparing to study at an Australian university. ILTL is gaining increasing recognition as a powerful orientation to second languages education. It emphasises the need for learners to look beyond their own worldviews and to develop the capacity to negotiate meaning across and between languages and cultures in order to participate successfully within a multicultural and globalised world. ILTL also underpins the *Australian Curriculum: Languages*, consistent with the nationally agreed goals of education, and is a core curriculum priority across all subjects in the Australian Curriculum. Readers' Theatre (RT) is a type of process drama that assists learners in exploring language and culture through engagement with authentic texts in performances that help them to understand other worldviews. Sometimes referred to as 'Theatre of the Imagination', it makes minimal use of sets, props and costumes; the performers act their parts while holding their scripts, thus embodying the script through vocal expression and physical movements. Learning occurs through participation in, and observation of, verbal and non-verbal behaviour. A key affordance of RT lies in use of whole class discussions in relation to ideas and themes presented in performances, which provide important opportunities for intercultural language teaching and learning.

This study involved 13 students from China, Taiwan and Saudi Arabia learning English in a university centre for English teaching. These students have a pressing need to develop linguistic and cultural competencies, which can enable them to make optimum use of both their study opportunities as well as intercultural experiences extending well beyond the academic context. The students participated in five RT sessions, which were video-recorded over a three-week period. Data were collected from multiple sources – from focus group discussions prior to the RT sessions, from the five RT sessions and from a series of post intervention interviews with three students who participated in interviews. Part of an ILTL orientation requires that teachers recognise themselves as mediators of culture and as participants together with their students in critically examining their own preconceptions. Therefore, the researcher also recorded

her own observations and reflections of the process of RT and of the development in intercultural understanding in both her students and herself.

Students' post RT reflections are analysed using three models of intercultural language learning: Byram's (1997) '*savoirs*', Bennett's (1993) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS) and Liddicoat et al's (2003; 2009) principles of intercultural language teaching and learning (ILTL).

Findings from the pre-intervention focus group discussion revealed that students had been provided limited opportunities for intercultural learning in their language learning experiences. Analysis of the RT sessions and the post-intervention interviews showed that RT provides important opportunities for peer learning, especially the sharing of ideas and feelings about one's own culture and the cultures of others. These opportunities appear to be powerful contributors to the students' developing capacity to decentre and consider alternative worldviews in relation to their existing cultural and linguistic framework(s). Perhaps the most important finding was a significant shift towards taking greater personal responsibility for developing intercultural competence post RT intervention. Interviews with three participants demonstrated that they were taking initiatives to develop their own intercultural perspective, through engaging in conversations and asking questions about culture, and through viewing themselves as mediators of languages and cultures. For these reasons, RT promises to be a valuable pedagogical addition to programs for second language acquisition and for international students studying abroad.

Certification of Dissertation

This thesis is submitted to the University of New England in fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Education with Honours.

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis and all sources used have been acknowledged in this thesis.

Signature of Candidate

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Supervisor's signature

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